

Women Promoting Community Cohesion

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Many Muslim women are now actively involved in fighting Islamophobia and also working hard to promote community cohesion, according to research at the University of Birmingham.

Dr. Haifaa Jawad from the University's Department of Theology and Religion investigated leadership roles and public representation of Muslim women in Muslim countries and Diaspora Muslim communities.

Results of her study reveal that for a long time Muslim women have been discouraged from assuming powerful positions in public life. The underlying factor for such attitude has been the patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic sources, setting forth women as inferior to men.

Educated Muslim women decided to challenge stereotypes by re-reading the Islamic sources from a female perspective in order to redress the inequality between men and women.

Recent social, educational and political developments played a major role in strengthening such a movement, commonly known as Islamic feminism.

Dr. Jawad explains: "For a long time British women have been struggling against external as well as internal marginalisation, and have been notably absent from positions of authority in both wider society as well as internal activities of Muslim communities.

"However, in recent years, but especially after September 11 attacks, they have become more conscious of the importance of their public participation for both wider British society and their own communities. In doing so, they are leading the way towards greater integration and harmonisation between their communities and the host nation, something much needed these days."

Many Muslim women are still marginalized and discouraged from assuming prominent public positions, the report also reveals.

This is particularly the case in countries where fundamentalists become prominent forces in society.

Dr. Jawad's study titled 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation' is published in the current issue of Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World.

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