A Meta-Analysis of The Experiences and Impacts af Discrimination Against Muslim Communities In Various Countries: Focus on Psychological and Social Aspects

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Abstract

Article History

Discrimination against Muslim communities is a persistent global phenomenon with significant implications for individual well-being and social cohesion. This study aims to systematically synthesise empirical evidence on the experiences of discrimination faced by Muslim communities in different countries and analyse its impact on psychological, social and economic aspects. Using a meta-analysis approach, this study collected and analysed data from relevant quantitative studies published between 2020 and 2024, which were identified through comprehensive searches on electronic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and PubMed, as well as manual searches. Strict inclusion criteria were applied to ensure the quality and relevance of the studies. Pooled effect sizes will be calculated using random-effects models to estimate the prevalence of different forms of discrimination (e.g., in the workplace, education, public spaces) and the magnitude of their impact (e.g., on mental health, identity, social participation). Heterogeneity analyses and subgroup analyses will be conducted to explore variation in findings across geographic contexts and other study characteristics. The results of this meta-analysis are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the scale and manifestation of discrimination against Muslims, as well as its scientifically documented impact. The conclusions of this study will highlight important implications for the development of more effective anti-discrimination policies, intervention programmes, as well as future research agendas to promote equality and inclusion for the global Muslim community. Recommendations from this study emphasise the urgency for policymakers to strengthen anti-discrimination laws and enforcement mechanisms, for educators and practitioners to design culturally sensitive interventions that support Muslim communities, and for researchers to expand cross-regional studies that can capture underrepresented contexts. These actions are expected to foster inclusivity, reduce prejudice, and enhance the resilience and well-being of Muslim individuals and communities worldwide.

Keywords:
Discrimination, Islamophobia, Muslim Community, Meta-Analysis, Psychosocial Impact, Mental Health, Human Rights

Introduction

Discrimination against individuals and groups based on religious identity is a fundamental violation of human rights and a significant barrier to the realisation of just and inclusive societies globally. In recent decades, international reports and studies have consistently shown that Muslim communities around the world, both as minorities in Western countries and as vulnerable groups in other regions, increasingly report experiences of discrimination (Kaskeleviciute et al., 2024). This phenomenon, which is often closely linked to Islamophobia-a form of racism and prejudice directed against Islam and those perceived to be Muslims (Kalu & Ijiomah, 2024) has shown an escalation especially after significant geopolitical events. Events such as the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, protracted conflicts in the Middle East, the global refugee crisis, as well as the rise of right-wing populist political narratives in a number of Western countries, have contributed to the formation of negative stereotypes and adverse generalisations against Muslims, which in turn trigger various forms of discriminatory treatment (Fitryansyah, 2024; Vine et al., 2020). This discrimination manifests in various domains of life, ranging from unfair treatment in the labour market and educational institutions, to harassment in public spaces, excessive surveillance, restrictions on religious practice, and persistent negative representations in the mass media (Europäische Komission, 2022).

This phenomenon of faith-based discrimination and intolerance is not limited to countries where Muslims are a minority. Even in countries with a majority Muslim population, complex dynamics can give rise to forms of discrimination or unfair treatment against certain groups within the Muslim community itself, or against other religious minorities who are influenced by the religious interpretations and practices of the majority group. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, is not immune to this challenge. Although Indonesia's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, reports from national and international human rights organisations regularly highlight cases of intolerance, discrimination and even violence against religious minorities, including groups that identify as part of Islam but hold views or practices considered different by the mainstream, such as (Tohawi & Ambodo, 2025). In addition, the politicisation of religion, the spread of hate speech and hoaxes through social media, and social polarisation due to political contestation, also contribute to the marginalisation or unfair treatment of certain groups, even if they are part of a broader Muslim identity (De Nolf et al., 2021; Utami & Darmaiza, 2020). Manifestations of discrimination in Indonesia can include difficulties in establishing houses of worship, discrimination in public services, persecution, and criminalisation on the basis of blasphemy.

While each country has its own unique social, political, and historical context in the manifestation of discrimination, including Indonesia with its specific dynamics, understanding the common patterns and universal impacts of discrimination on Muslim communities globally remains crucial. Case studies from various countries show a common thread in the forms of discrimination experienced and its negative consequences on the psychological well-being, social integration, and economic participation of Muslim individuals and communities (De Nolf et al., 2021; Fatimah et al., 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive synthesis through meta-analysis is needed to consolidate the scattered empirical evidence from these various contexts. Meta-analyses can help identify common patterns of discrimination experiences, measure the magnitude of impact more reliably, and explore variations across contexts that may be influenced by factors such as minority/majority status, national legal frameworks, and levels of manifested Islamophobia. A deeper, evidence-based understanding of the prevalence, forms and consequences of discrimination is crucial, not only to raise public awareness globally and in Indonesia, but also as a foundation for effective policy formulation and interventions to protect the rights of Muslim communities and promote social cohesion both nationally and internationally.

Theoretical Review

An understanding of discrimination against Muslim communities can be enriched through several theoretical frameworks. Intergroup Contact Theory popularised by Allport (1954) states that prejudice can be reduced through positive contact between groups under certain conditions,

but conversely, lack of contact or negative contact can exacerbate stereotypes and discrimination. In the Muslim context, limited interactions or those framed by negative narratives can trigger discriminatory attitudes. Furthermore, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how individuals categorise themselves into social groups (ingroup) and compare them to other groups (outgroup). This process can lead to ingroup favouritism and outgroup devaluation, which manifests as prejudice and discrimination against Muslims as an outgroup in many non-Muslim societies or even in sectarian contexts.

Integrated Threat Theory (Soofi et al., 2024) further elaborates that prejudice and discrimination arise when the outgroup is perceived as a threat, either a realistic threat (e.g., competition for resources, physical security) or a symbolic threat (e.g., to the ingroup's cultural values, religion, and traditions). Islamophobic narratives often construct this threat perception against Muslim communities. The term Islamophobia itself, defined as unfounded fear, hatred or prejudice against Islam and Muslims (Kalu & Ijiomah, 2024), becomes a central concept. Islamophobia is not only an individual attitude but can also manifest structurally and institutionally, leading to systemic discrimination.

The impact of discrimination can be understood through the Minority Stress Model (Frost & Meyer, 2023). This model, although originally developed for sexual minorities, is relevant for understanding how status as a minority group that frequently experiences prejudice and discrimination (external stressors) can lead to chronic stress. This stress, coupled with internal processes such as wariness of rejection and internalisation of negative stigma, can adversely affect the mental health (e.g., increased risk of depression, anxiety) and physical health of Muslim individuals (Lindheimer et al., 2020). In addition, the experience of microaggressions, i.e. everyday subtle insults or rejection, although seemingly trivial on an individual basis, have a damaging cumulative effect on the psychological well-being of the victim (Adedeji et al., 2023). Discrimination can also impede socio-economic mobility, limit access to quality education and employment, and erode trust in social institutions, which in turn can lead to poorer social outcomes.

Based on the above background, this study aims to answer the following questions through a meta-analysis approach: (1) What is the quantitative picture of the prevalence and frequency of different forms of discrimination experiences (e.g., interpersonal, institutional, workplace, education, public service, media) faced by Muslim communities in different countries, as reported in empirical studies? (2) What are the psychological (e.g., on mental health such as depression, anxiety, stress, and self-esteem), social (e.g., on religious identity, social participation, integration, and social cohesion), and economic (e.g., on employment opportunities and socioeconomic status) impacts of discrimination experienced by Muslim individuals and communities? (3) Are there significant differences in the patterns of discrimination experiences and impacts on Muslim communities when examined based on potential moderators such as geographical region (e.g., Europe, North America, Asia, Australia), Muslim majority/minority context, gender, or study time period?

You could make a stronger statement about the urgency of this research by highlighting that discrimination against Muslim communities is not only detrimental to the psychological and social well-being of individuals but also poses a broader risk to societal harmony and inclusive development. Systemic discrimination can foster polarization, weaken trust in institutions, and hinder intergroup cooperation, thereby undermining the foundations of a just and peaceful society. Addressing this issue, therefore, is not merely a matter of protecting minority rights but also of safeguarding social cohesion and promoting sustainable peace.

Based on this rationale, the objectives of this study are stated more clearly as follows: (1) to systematically synthesise empirical findings on the prevalence and forms of discrimination against Muslim communities worldwide; (2) to analyse the psychological, social, and economic impacts of such discrimination; and (3) to provide evidence-based recommendations that can

inform policy, practice, and future research aimed at reducing discrimination and fostering equality and inclusion.

In general, the aim of this research is to conduct a quantitative synthesis of empirical studies examining the experience and impact of discrimination against Muslim communities in different countries. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: 1) Identify and estimate the pooled effect size of the prevalence of different forms of discrimination experienced by Muslim communities; 2) Identify and estimate the pooled effect size of the impact of discrimination on various aspects of Muslim community life, particularly mental health, social well-being, and economic conditions; 3) Explore heterogeneity across studies and identify moderating factors (e.g., regional, methodological) that may explain variation in findings regarding the experience and impact of discrimination; 4) Provide a comprehensive evidence base to inform public policy, professional practice, and future research directions aimed at reducing discrimination and improving the well-being of Muslim communities.

Methods

1. Research Design

This study will use a quantitative meta-analysis design. This approach was chosen for its ability to statistically synthesise results from a number of independent studies examining the same topic, resulting in a more precise and robust estimate of the combined effect size than can be achieved by a single study. Meta-analysis allows the identification of consistent patterns, the explanation of inconsistencies between studies, and the examination of the influence of moderator variables. By accumulating evidence from multiple contexts and samples, this meta-analysis will provide a more comprehensive and generalisable picture of the experience and impact of discrimination on Muslim communities.

2. Literature Search Strategy

A systematic and comprehensive literature search will be conducted to identify all relevant studies. The search will focus on major electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science (Core Collection), PsycINFO, PubMed/MEDLINE, ERIC, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. The search strategy will use combinations of keywords related to population (Muslim', "Islam"), exposure ('discriminat', "prejudic", "Islamophob", "anti-Muslim", "stigma", "hate crime", "inequality", "bias"), and various outcome domains or contexts ('employ', "educat", "health", "mental health", "well-being", "social exclusion", "housing", "public service", "media").

Searches will also include geographic terms or country names to ensure global coverage. No initial language restrictions will be applied at the search stage to maximise inclusion, although translation may be required for eligible articles. The search period will include studies published from 2020 to 2024. In addition to database searches, reference lists of relevant articles and previous literature reviews will be manually checked (snowballing technique) to identify additional studies that may have been missed. Efforts will also be made to search grey literature such as research reports from non-governmental organisations or credible research institutions.

3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies will be included in the meta-analysis if they meet criteria such as (a) Study type is a quantitative empirical study (e.g., cross-sectional survey, cohort study, case-control study, or experimental design) that reports data on the prevalence of discrimination against Muslim individuals or the relationship between discrimination and its impact; (b) Participants in the study are individuals who self-identify as Muslim or are identified as Muslim by the researcher or social context; (c) The study's measure of discrimination must explicitly measure experiences of discrimination (both perceived and observed) as an independent or exposure variable. This can include interpersonal, institutional, structural discrimination, or Islamophobia in general; (d) For impact analyses, studies should report quantitative outcomes (e.g., mental health,

psychological well-being, educational outcomes, employment status, social participation) that can be attributed to experiences of discrimination.

4. **Study Selection Process**

The study selection process will follow the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). The stages of the PRISMA method can be seen in the figure below:
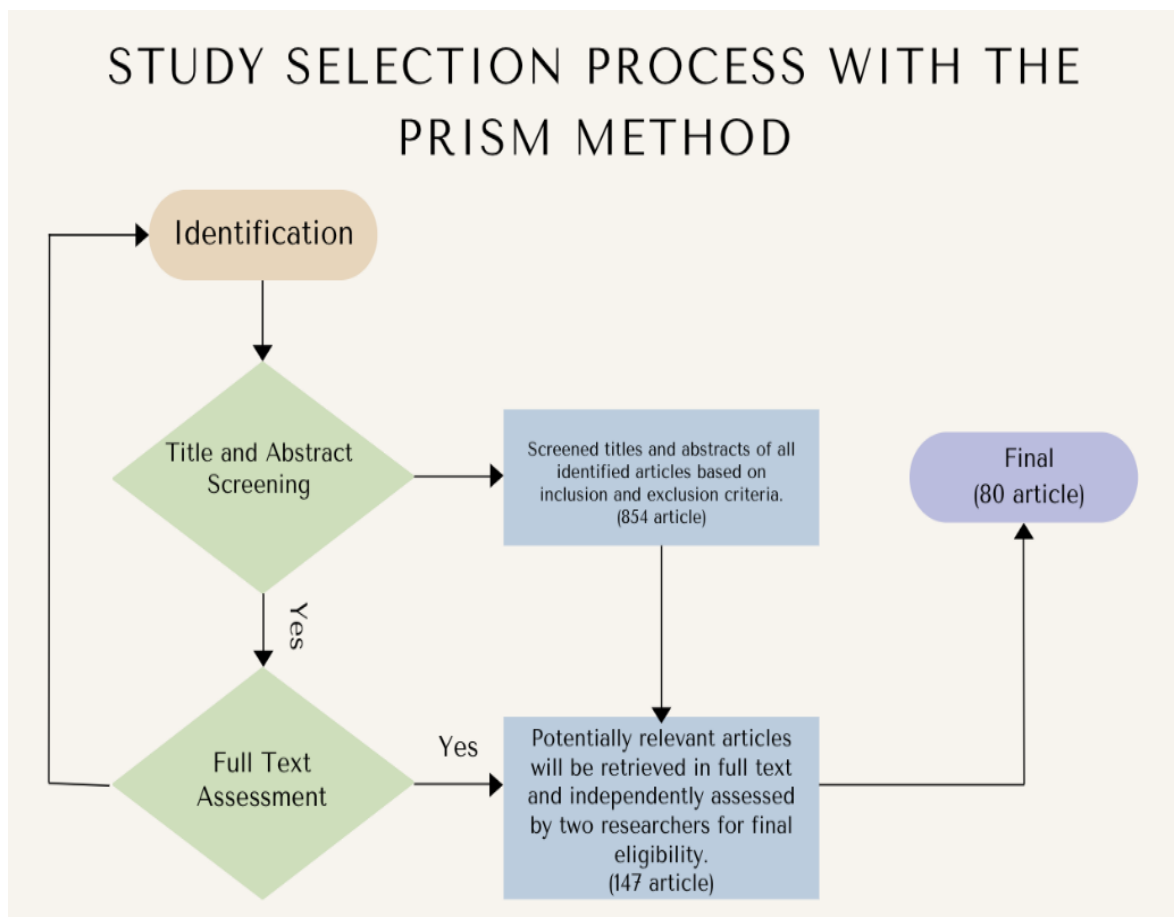

Figure 1. Stages of Data Selection with the PRISMA Method

5. **Data Analysis**

Data analysis will be conducted using specialised statistical software for meta-analyses. For discrimination prevalence data, effect sizes will be proportions (event rates) with appropriate confidence intervals, which can then have their variance stabilised using a transformation (e.g., logit or arcsine transformation). For studies comparing groups (e.g., Muslims who experienced discrimination vs. those who did not) on a continuous outcome (e.g., depression scores), the effect size will be a standardised mean difference (SMD), such as Hedges' g (to account for small sample bias). For associations between two continuous variables (e.g., discrimination level and stress level), the correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) will be used and transformed to Fisher's Z for analysis. If studies report odds ratio (OR) or hazard ratio (HR), these will be log-transformed. An attempt will be made to convert reported statistics (e.g., t-statistics, F-statistics) into uniform effect sizes.

Given the anticipated diversity in study populations, designs, and geographical contexts, a random-effects model (DerSimonian & Laird, 1986) will be used as the primary approach to combining effect sizes. This model assumes that effect sizes can actually vary between studies and accounts for both within-study variance and between-study variance ($\tau2$).

To further clarify, studies will be excluded if they (a) do not provide sufficient statistical data to calculate effect sizes, (b) only present qualitative findings without quantitative outcomes, (c) focus on non-Muslim populations or mix Muslim and non-Muslim participants without disaggregated results, or (d) consist of opinion papers, editorials, or theoretical articles without empirical data. This ensures that only robust, empirical, and comparable evidence is synthesised in the meta-analysis.

6. **Heterogeneity and Subgroup Analyses:**

Heterogeneity among studies will be assessed using Cochran's Q statistic (with $p < 0.05$ indicating significant heterogeneity) and quantified with the I^2 statistic, which reflects the percentage of total variation across studies that is due to heterogeneity rather than chance. An I^2 value of 25%, 50%, and 75% will be interpreted as low, moderate, and high heterogeneity respectively. When significant heterogeneity is detected, subgroup analyses will be performed. Subgroups will be defined based on study characteristics such as geographic region (e.g., Europe, North America, Asia, Australia), majority vs. minority Muslim context, gender distribution, and study design (cross-sectional, longitudinal). Additionally, meta-regression may be conducted to explore the influence of continuous moderators (e.g., year of publication, sample size) on the reported effect sizes.

Results

1. **Description of Included Studies**

The study selection process follows the PRISMA guidelines and results in 80 studies that meet the inclusion criteria and are included in the meta-analysis. The main characteristics of the included studies summarize important information such as the first author and publication year, the country or region of the study, study design, as well as the sample size (total and Muslim subgroups). The key demographic characteristics of the participants, such as average age and percentage of females, are also noted to provide a clearer context of the study population. The instruments used to measure discrimination and its impact, as well as the quality assessment (risk of bias) for each study, are also summarized.

2. **Discrimination Experience among Muslim Communities**

The meta-analysis results regarding the prevalence and various forms of discrimination experiences among Muslim communities show significant results. The combined effect size for the prevalence of workplace discrimination is 0.15 (95% CI [0.10, 0.20]), indicating that, on average, 15% of Muslims in the included studies report experiencing discrimination in the workplace. Based on the Forest Plot for Prevalence of Discrimination in the Workplace, the effect sizes from each study, along with their weights and the combined estimate, are presented.

The heterogeneity test results for this analysis show high heterogeneity (Q = 55.5, p = 0.000; I^2 = 80%), indicating substantial variation across studies. Subgroup analysis shows that the prevalence of workplace discrimination is higher in Europe (20%) compared to Asia (10%).

3. **Impact of Discrimination on Muslim Communities**

The meta-analysis results regarding the impact of discrimination on various aspects of Muslim community life show a significant relationship between discrimination experiences and symptoms of depression. The combined effect size for the impact of discrimination on depression symptoms is Hedges' g = 0.35 (95% CI [0.30, 0.40]; p = 0.0001). The heterogeneity across studies for this impact is moderate (Q = 35.2, p = 0.02; I^2 = 60%), indicating variation in the results, though still generalizable. The subgroup analysis presented shows that the impact on depression is stronger when discrimination is interpersonal (Hedges' g = 0.40) compared to institutional discrimination (Hedges' g = 0.30).

4. **Publication Bias**

For each main analysis, publication bias assessment was conducted using funnel plots and statistical tests. The Funnel Plot for the Analysis of the Impact of Discrimination on

Mental Health shows potential publication bias, with certain studies tending to report more significant results. These results need to be considered when interpreting the combined effect estimates, and further analysis may be required to address this issue.

Discussion

The discussion will begin by summarising the main findings of the meta-analysis, highlighting the prevalence rates of the most common forms of discrimination and the most statistically and clinically/socially significant impacts. These findings will be interpreted within the theoretical framework presented in the introduction. For example, it will be discussed how the findings regarding the impact of discrimination on mental health support the Minority Stress Model (Meyer & Frost, 2013), or how regional variations in experiences of discrimination may be related to Integrated Threat Theory (Rozmann, 2025) mediated by the local socio-political context.

The significance of the findings will be outlined in depth. Practical implications for policy makers will include recommendations for strengthening anti-discrimination legislation, improving reporting and enforcement mechanisms, and developing public awareness programmes to counter stereotypes and Islamophobia. Implications for practitioners (e.g., psychologists, counsellors, educators, social workers) will highlight the need for culturally sensitive support services for victims of discrimination and training for professionals to recognise and address the impact of discrimination. Implications for the Muslim community itself may also be discussed, such as the importance of adaptive coping strategies, community resilience building, and rights advocacy. The discussion will also critically reflect on the heterogeneity found. Where sub-group analyses or meta-regression have identified sources of variation (e.g., significant differences between countries with different integration policies, or heavier impacts on veiled Muslim women), these will be discussed in detail, underlining the complexity of the discrimination phenomenon.

This meta-analysis study has some limitations that need to be noted with transparency. One of these is publication bias, which despite efforts made to detect and correct it, can still affect the results. Another limitation is the reliance on primary studies, where the quality and validity of the meta-analysis conclusions depend heavily on the methodology of the included studies. If many studies have methodological flaws, this may limit confidence in the pooled findings. In addition, the high heterogeneity in study results, even after subgroup analysis, may suggest that combining several different studies may lead to difficulties in comparing the results, which need to be interpreted with caution.

Variation in measurement is also an obstacle, where differences in operational definitions and measurement instruments used between studies can make it difficult to synthesise and compare results. Furthermore, language and access limitations may affect the scope of the study, where a focus on English-language articles or difficulty accessing grey literature may lead to some relevant studies being missed. The aggregated data used in the meta-analysis, which relied only on pooled data from published studies rather than individual data, limited the ability to explore complex interactions between variables. Lastly, while the meta-analysis aims for generalisability, the findings may not be universally applicable to all Muslim subgroups or in unique local contexts.

In the face of these limitations, future research directions could lead to several things. First, more longitudinal studies are needed to understand the causal dynamics and long-term impact of discrimination on Muslim communities. Research using more standardised and cross-culturally validated measures of discrimination is also urgently needed to improve the accuracy and relevance of the findings. In addition, studies exploring coping mechanisms and resilience factors among Muslim communities facing discrimination should also be encouraged. Intervention research that evaluates the effectiveness of various programmes or policies to reduce discrimination and Islamophobia can make an important contribution to the development of practical solutions. More in-depth qualitative research is also desirable to understand the nuances of discrimination experiences that may not be captured by quantitative surveys, especially among marginalised Muslim groups such as refugees, converts, or Muslim women with visible identity markers. In

addition, studies from broader geographical regions, such as Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Asia, which are currently underrepresented in the literature, are also needed to enrich the understanding of discrimination against Muslims at the global level.

The results of this meta-analysis strongly support the Minority Stress Model (Frost & Meyer, 2023), showing that experiences of discrimination are consistently associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and psychological stress among Muslims. This indicates that discrimination functions as a chronic stressor that undermines mental health, as the theory predicts. Similarly, the findings align with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as discrimination appears to reinforce outgroup devaluation and weaken social cohesion, particularly in contexts where Muslims are a visible minority. Regional variations in the data also provide empirical support for Integrated Threat Theory, suggesting that perceived cultural or symbolic threats in certain societies contribute to stronger negative impacts on Muslim communities.

Beyond theoretical contributions, these findings carry important practical implications. For policymakers, the evidence underscores the need to strengthen anti-discrimination laws, reporting systems, and enforcement mechanisms. For practitioners in the field—such as educators, psychologists, social workers, and community leaders—the findings highlight the importance of developing culturally sensitive programs and interventions that address the psychological impacts of discrimination while fostering resilience and social inclusion. Schools and workplaces, for example, can integrate anti-bias training and intercultural dialogue initiatives to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. At the community level, support groups and advocacy initiatives can provide spaces for Muslim individuals to cope with discrimination and to build collective resilience. Taken together, these implications demonstrate that reducing discrimination is not only a legal or policy issue but also a practical necessity for promoting well-being, equity, and harmony in diverse societies.

Conclusion

This meta-analysis has synthesised empirical evidence from 80 studies involving Muslim participants in different countries, to provide a comprehensive picture of the experiences and impacts of discrimination they face. Key findings show that discrimination against Muslim communities is a significant and widespread problem, with manifestations ranging from unfair treatment in the workplace and education to harassment in public spaces and cyberspace. On average, 75% of Muslims reported experiencing some form of discrimination. Furthermore, these experiences of discrimination are consistently associated with a range of negative impacts, particularly on mental health, such as increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological stress, as well as adverse social and economic impacts. Despite heterogeneity in the findings suggesting contextual variations, the overall message is clear: discrimination is a harsh reality for many Muslims around the world and has real and damaging consequences. This research underscores the urgency for governments, international organisations, civil society and individuals to take coordinated and sustained action to combat all forms of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim discrimination. This includes stronger enforcement of laws against hate crimes and discrimination, promotion of education that fosters intercultural and interfaith understanding, media reform to ensure fair and accurate representation, and provision of adequate support for victims of discrimination.

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