

# Rebuilding Lives

Young Muslims from the  
Criminal Justice System to  
Community Resettlement



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## Rebuilding Lives: Young Muslims from the Criminal Justice System to Community Resettlement

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**Osmani Trust** is a youth and community organisation based in Tower Hamlets. The Trust offers a wide range of community, health and sporting initiatives tailored to the needs of the community. It aims to provide a holistic service, which helps people, particularly those living in disadvantaged urban communities to re-engage with mainstream society and improve their quality of life.

Through its provisions, Osmani Trust seeks to address issues impacting the community including substance misuse, racial tensions, criminality and anti-social behaviour, territoriality and gang-related violence, unemployment, overcrowding, and lack of training and employment opportunities. It also places strong emphasis on the health and social welfare of the community [www.osmanitrust.org](http://www.osmanitrust.org)



## About the Barrow Cadbury Trust

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## Foreword *from* Rushanara Ali MP

One in five prisoners in the UK is Muslim, yet only 6.5% of the population identifies as Muslim. That stark figure raises huge concerns about Muslims within the criminal justice system, and the place of Muslims in wider society.

It raises some urgent and significant questions about why Muslims are so egregiously overrepresented in prisons and the need to better understand what actions are required to prevent such high offending and re-offending levels. When we consider that the proportion of Muslims in prison has doubled in a decade, we rightly ask - what is going wrong within the system and our society?

This report *Rebuilding Lives Young Muslims from Criminal Justice System to Community Resettlement* highlights a range of issues from islamophobia within the criminal justice system, to the systemic and chronic disadvantage faced by many in the Muslim community. It is impossible to divorce the rise in Muslims in prison from broader social trends: the collapse in government support for youth services, the rising levels of crime, the rise in Islamophobic attacks, racism within the police and criminal justice system, and the cost-of-living crisis which disproportionately hammers poorer communities.

Social and economic conditions play a role in the rise in crime. If our contemporary society turns its back on, and stigmatises, a generation of Muslim young people, we should not be surprised if a minority turn their back on social norms and are seduced into criminal activity. We must always tackle the causes of crime as well as crime itself and ensure policies are put in place to reduce re-offending among this group as well as others who commit crimes and end up in the prison system.

As the report makes clear, once young Muslims enter the criminal justice system, they face discrimination and racism, further exacerbating feelings of alienation and disengagement from society.

One lesson I have taken from my work with young people over the past two decades through organisations such Tower Hamlets Summer University, UpRising Leadership and One Million

Mentors, is that it is vital to provide early intervention to support young people while they are in the education system, with employability training opportunities, access to positive role models such as coaches and mentors and a circle of support around them as they make the transition from teenage to adulthood. They need ladders to climb out of whatever situation they find themselves in. Young people from diverse, disadvantaged backgrounds do not lack energy, drive, intelligence, courage, or ambition. They lack the opportunities afforded to more affluent youngsters, who can call on the resources of their families, and tap into existing social networks for internships, work experience, and job opportunities. Our work with young people shows that even those with friends who have ended up joining gangs and entering a life of crime - can be diverted away from these influences if they have access to career opportunities and positive influences from trained youth workers and mentors.

For those who have committed offences, the key is a multidisciplinary approach, with all aspects of the national and local state working together, not in isolation or even contradiction. The education, courts, police, prisons, probation, and health systems need to work together.

Nor can we ignore the vital role of social enterprise and the voluntary sector. This might be the preventative work of sports, boxing, and youth clubs; it might be the work of charities in getting offenders into work, training, or education, and away from the clutches of organised crime gangs. The fact is that small, lean, local third sector organisations can often have more impact, especially where they are working in partnership with the prison and probation services. To tackle the rise in the proportion of young Muslims being convicted and imprisoned, organisations rooted in the British Muslim communities can make a hugely positive difference. I have seen this first hand in my own constituency, where the work of youth organisation and charities have played a hugely positive role in supporting young people.

This report makes a serious and significant contribution to the debate. Alongside analysis of the issues, it proposes a range of remedies. As such, it should be widely read among policy advisers and lawmakers, and even more importantly, acted upon. I hope Ministers see that the system is failing, and a targeted, multi-agency approach is urgently needed.

## **Rushanara Ali MP**

Bethnal Green and Bow

## Introduction *from* Leroy Logan MBE

Equality is a crucial part of our programme of work here at T2A (Transition to Adulthood). We've funded a number of projects over the years that explore the experiences of Black and minority ethnic young adults, but there is less research available on the experiences of young Muslims.

This is particularly concerning as the number of young Muslims in the criminal justice system has risen year on year since the 1990s – representing 17% of the prison population, but only 6.5% of the general population. Young Muslims deserve much better. We must act now to ensure the equal and fair treatment of every individual in the justice system. Too many have been failed for far too long.

What struck me first when reading the Osmani Trust Rebuilding Lives report was how faith was such a powerful tool for rehabilitation in many young Muslims' lives. When I started to write my autobiography, I reflected on the different anchors that have helped me remain resilient and motivated throughout my life – especially when seriously challenged in hostile environments. These anchors have come in the form of close family, good friends, and my faith. It is one of the reasons why my autobiography is a spiritual journey, which has helped me to be respectful of, and learn from, other faiths. That's why this report resonates so strongly with me. I fully and warmly welcome it, especially in my role as Chair of T2A.

Young Muslims, like all young adults, are at a pivotal stage in cognitive development where they have an innate capacity for change with the right interventions. But this report makes clear that young Muslims are not receiving the support they need to make positive changes in their lives. Nearly all the young Muslims interviewed for this report felt that they were not treated the same as other groups in prison and found it challenging to access professional support.

This is not surprising when we consider that how people view race and faith has historically been slow to change. Young adults interviewed for this report spoke of the transformative power of faith, and how it helped them to build resilience and make positive changes in their lives. However, many also reported that practicing their faith meant they were viewed as a risk, and that staff had limited cultural understanding of their faith-based needs.

The Osmani Trust recommends implementing staff training programmes that will allow practitioners to better understand Islamic belief and practice, as well as provide culturally competent services. It will also help staff to recognise and challenge religious discrimination and implicit bias. Ensuring access to Friday prayers, copies of the Quran, and providing more contact time with Imams from the Prison Chaplain Service, will help young Muslims make positive progress in custody too. These recommendations are not radical, but they could facilitate transformative change.

This report also contains key insights on how developing partnerships between probation and local Muslim-led services and mosques can deliver better outcomes. By developing a network of local faith-competent support services, young Muslims will receive tailored resettlement support from practitioners who understand their needs and experiences. Where gaps exist, Muslim-led organisations should be commissioned to deliver faith-competent services for young Muslims in their communities. Setting up local roundtables where knowledge of service provision is shared among different partners is a great way to solidify these networks.

Embedding cultural and faith competent services throughout the justice system is the catalyst for systemic change – a change that will ensure that the Islamic faith is seen as a protective factor that plays a vital role in the rehabilitation of young Muslims in the justice system.

We hope that HMPPS and policy makers consider the value of these recommendations and make the worthwhile investment to deliver real, substantial change for young Muslims.

## **Leroy Logan MBE**

Chair, T2A



# Executive Summary

## *The aims of the research were:*

1. To investigate the experiences of young Muslims offenders (18-25yrs) in the CJS including the following issues.
  - a. The reasons that led them to offend, their experiences and views about the support services available in prison and before release and its subsequent impact.
  - b. Training needs of young Muslim offenders and their families about the CJS in order to be better prepared to advocate for the best outcomes through pre-sentencing reports etc.
2. To identify enablers that can help sustain young Muslims ex-offenders progress towards rehabilitation, reintegration, and desistance from re-offending after release from prison or at the end of community sentencing through providing:
  - a. An examination and better understanding of enablers and barriers for the successful resettlement of young Muslim ex-offenders
  - b. An increased understanding of the experiences of young Muslim offenders/ex-offenders in being accepted in wider society and its systems and how that impacts on successful rebuilding of their lives
  - c. A better understanding of what role families can play in supporting resettlement, their training/awareness needs and how better to engage them.
  - d. An increased understanding of the potential positive role of faith and how faith-based organisations/faith communities and their resource structures can better support the rebuilding of lives of young Muslim ex-offenders and improve integration and acceptance in local communities

We interviewed 25 young adult Muslim ex-offenders aged 18-30, mainly from East London and 5 professionals from the CJS and related services. The majority of the ex-offender respondents were Bangladeshi (76%), and the remaining were Pakistani, Black and Indian.

Our findings and recommendations are based on these interviews as well key literature available on Muslim offenders.

Muslims are overrepresented in the Criminal Justice System (CJS), the numbers of Muslims entering the CJS is increasing annually. Currently 17% (13,858) of prisoners identify themselves as Muslims (MoJ 2022) however Muslims make up 6.5% of the overall population of England and Wales (Census 2021). The figure has seen a significant increase in the past decade since the last census when Muslims accounted for 13.4% of prisoners and has more than doubled in percentage points from 8% since 2002.

Although this trend and its features have been noted in various research, there remains a research gap in terms of causes, experiences, and potential solutions for Muslims in the CJS.

Whilst in the CJS BAME<sup>1</sup> offenders experience differential treatment compared to their White counterparts. BAME offenders are more likely to be given tougher punishment due to their lack of understanding of the CJS and how it works (The Lammy Review 2017).

## Key Findings

### Reasons for Offending

**1** Socio-economic inequalities, unemployment, living in high-crime areas and the social pressures to acquire a certain lifestyle were highlighted as drivers leading these young people to start offending.

### In Prison – Unequal Treatment

**2** Nearly all felt they were not treated equally in prison and a significant number reported being subjected to Islamophobia and/or racism from prison staff. Muslim offenders highlighted differential access to prison regimes and reported the difficulty of getting good jobs in prisons, as all good jobs and opportunities seemed to have been offered to White offenders.

**3** A lack of Muslim and BAME staff representation within the CJS at various levels was highlighted as a problem that needs to be addressed if the CJS is to better understand and meet the needs of Muslim offenders.

**4** Muslims offenders suffering from mental health issues, depression and suicidal thoughts found it challenging to access any professional support in prison, felt ignored and felt they received differential treatment compared to their White counterparts

### In Prison – Faith Needs

**5** Faith, Islam, was highlighted as a positive factor that helped offenders who chose to practice their faith to resettle in the community and desist from reoffending. They wanted much more support with their faith related needs and education whilst in prison as they believed this would have strengthened their resilience to reoffending

**6** Whilst most praised the support they received from Imams in prison they highlighted the very limited contact times available due to high demand and lack of Imams from the Prison Chaplain Service made available. They felt this could have been an important source of support and positive motivation to change their lifestyles and desist from reoffending after release.

<sup>1</sup> BAME is reluctantly used here for want of a better term, but we recognise this is an unhelpful and lazy one-dimensional categorisation of a huge range of races, cultures and faiths that are clearly not identical.

**7** Muslim offenders reported being hesitant to practice their faith fully in prison due to fears of being labelled as an extremist and reported to the 'Anti-Terror team.' They felt this stereotype was fueled by media and reinforced by some prison staff.

**8** Most respondents said prison staff do not understand Muslims and their faith related needs and with the exception of dietary needs, prisons fail to adequately meet their broader faith and cultural needs.

### **Leaving Prison and Resettlement Needs**

**9** The majority of respondents said they did not receive any preparatory support with regards to resettlement needs before release from prison.

**10** Lack of housing and employment are the two most crucial challenges facing offenders when leaving prison and can be a significant factor in determining the success or failure of desistance from reoffending.

**11** The majority reported that Probation services didn't meet their needs or offer anything useful. Most felt Probation officers were just doing a 'processing tick box' exercise with them.

**12** The CJS does not sufficiently engage and support families of prisoners. Some reported not having visits in prison due to families' lack of information on how to arrange visits, language barriers or unable to afford transport. Families are a crucial element in the lives of most Muslims and just under half of respondents were living with their parents at the time of entering prison. Nearly all respondents stated that their families were supportive and instrumental to their resettlement journey and could have benefited more through a collaborative approach.

### **Third Sector And Faith Organisations Support**

**13** Local Muslim/BAME led third sector organisations that have cultural competencies are important and effective enablers of desistance and ongoing support for Muslim offenders resettling in the community.

**14** Most Muslim offenders would welcome better information and access to support and education from local Mosques and Imams to help their journey of change and resettlement after prison.

## **Recommendations**

### **Government, Local Authorities and Policy Makers**

**1** Central and local government must have strategic plans to urgently tackle social and economic inequalities in inner city Muslim communities to prevent further increases of Muslim over representation in prisons and the CJS.

**2** Policy makers including the Home Office, Local Authorities, and local Violence Reduction Units, must urgently undertake joint strategic needs assessments in inner city areas with high Muslim youth population to reduce the number of young Muslim men becoming first time offenders and entrants to the CJS.

## HM Prison Service

- 3 It is critical that the HM Prison Service recognises the significant role that faith and faith related needs play in the lives of Muslims and harnesses its positive potential in the rehabilitation and resilience building of service users who currently make up 1 in 6 (17%) of the UK prison population.
- 4 Whilst some prisons do better than others, all prisons must ensure basic amenities such as prayer garments and mats, clocks, access to Friday prayers, copies of the Quran (in different languages), hot meals to break their fast (Iftar) in the month of Ramadan and ablution facilities etc are available and accessible.
- 5 Prisons must increase availability and contact time with Muslim Prison Chaplains as well the range of support and Islamic education offered by Muslim Prison Chaplains for Muslim service users.
- 6 Faith must be viewed as a positive strength, one that helps to build resilience to desist from reoffending and returning to prison. The HM Prison Service must facilitate a culture whereby Muslims can practice their faith without the fear of being labelled an 'extremist' or 'terrorist'.
- 7 Stop discriminatory practices, where it exists, such as the use of access to Friday prayers or other basic religious rights as a reward and punishment for behaviour.
- 8 Review and develop compulsory staff training programmes that enable prison staff to
  - understand basic Islamic belief and practice
  - understand race and religious discrimination and its impacts,
  - provide culturally and faith competent services
  - be confident in discussing racism and Islamophobia and challenging both
  - eliminate bias in decision making
  - understand difference between normative Islamic beliefs and practice and its contradistinction to extremist behaviour
- 9 Equality and diversity training including Islamophobia awareness should involve co-design and delivery with Muslim led organisations.
- 10 Considerable work needs to be done to prepare Muslim service users for life after release. The majority of respondents say they did not receive any preparatory support with key needs such as housing, employment, benefits, and mental health issues.

## Mental Health

- 11 Equal access to professional support must be provided to Muslim service users with mental health and well-being issues. Training needs to be provided to staff on how Mental health arises and presents differently for Muslims due to their cultural and religious contexts and expectations.

## Support for Families

- 12 HMPPS must encourage family involvement and support for Muslim service users at all stages of their CJS journey and especially at pre-release from prison.
- 13 More information about the CJS, how it works and how families can get involved to support their family members must be made available to affected families.

## HM Probation Service

- 14 Undertake local needs assessments to improve trust and meaningful engagement with Muslim service users to reduce disadvantage and ensure culturally appropriate services.
- 15 Set clear recruitment diversity targets to ensure workforce reflects local communities' race and faith backgrounds.
- 16 Improve connections and referral pathways with local Muslim-led support services, communities, and Mosques that can support Muslim service users' needs.

## Resettlement and Local Partnerships

- 17 To reduce re-offending rates and improve re-settlement success, improvements to accessing local housing and employment must be made. This needs to be planned and arranged before release as the gap between release and finding accommodation and employment is where many service users' relapse and re-offend.
- 18 There should be a co-ordinated effort led by the Government at national and local levels to better promote existing offender employment schemes to Muslims exiting the CJS
- 19 Support resettlement of Muslim service users after leaving prison by building stronger and more effective local partnerships.
- 20 The MoJ/Probation Services has commenced a targeted commissioning/grants programme for Ethnic Minority groups. Targeted commissioning, capacity building and further investment must be made to Muslim led organisations that offer resettlement support in local communities.

## Mosques and Imams

- 21 MoJ and other relevant Government departments should work closer with Mosques and national Mosque networks and provide resources to improve their capacity to support Muslim service users and their families during custody and when resettling into local communities.
- 22 Mosques and Imams should improve their understanding of the CJS and improve connections and referral pathways with local probation services, prisons, prison Imams and local third sector support services to support Muslim service users' faith and resettlement needs.
- 23 Mosques and Imams should help in the overall effort of reducing Muslims entering the CJS by raising awareness of offending, its causes, and its consequences in local communities



# Introduction

Interest in Muslims in the CJS has increased significantly in the last few decades driven by the growth of the UK Muslim youth population and their over representation in prisons. The number of Muslims in British prisons has trebled since 1994 and doubled over the last 10 years (Qasim 2020). According to the Census 2021 Muslims account for 6.5% of the general population, however, they account for 17% of the prison population (MoJ 2022).

In 2022, 27% of the prison population were BAME men and women despite only making up just 18% of the UK population (MoJ 2022). May et al (2010) attributes four main areas causing this over-representation of some ethnic minority groups in particular the youth justice system: Demographic factors – that there is a disproportionate number of young people from ethnic minority groups. Differential involvement in crime – that these groups commit more crime, or more serious crime. Social exclusion and involvement in offending – that certain ethnic groups are more likely to experience poverty, deprivation and disaffection and are therefore more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. Differential policing - that these groups are subject to more intensive forms of policing, or otherwise discriminated against by other agencies involved in youth justice.

Despite the Lammy Review (2017) into the treatment of and outcomes for Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals in the criminal justice system, the disproportionate numbers of Black boys and young men at all stages of the system continue to rise (Robertson et al 2020). Whilst in the CJS BAME offenders are more likely to be given tougher punishment due to their lack in understanding of the CJS and how it works (The Lammy review 2017).

BAME offenders are less likely to agree to a guilty plea due to the lack of trust into the system and government funded solicitors thus likely to receive harsher punishment when found guilty through a trial in comparison to the same offence committed by their white counterparts. Opportunities for purposeful activity that would allow them to work towards enhanced status were not equally distributed across prisoners of different ethnicities (Mullen et al 2014). Therefore, Muslim offenders, the majority who are from BAME communities, are more likely to receive custodial sentence and stay longer in the CJS.

The Young Review (2014) identifies a common thread amongst Black and Muslim offenders. Nearly all the offenders they met with, said they experienced differential treatment, either in decisions made about their regimes while in prison or because of the attitudes of staff and other prisoners, due to their race, ethnicity, or faith. Black prisoners felt they were stereotyped as drug dealers, and Muslim prisoners stigmatised as extremists (Mullen et al 2014). This highlights the stark relationship between stereotypes and attitudes and how these feed into the inflated representation in the CJS.

Outcomes for BAME offenders within the CJS are poorer. Comparative research measuring outcomes between ethnic groups over time reveal that disparity between black people and white people in the CJS is also widening (Ministry of Justice 2018), therefore BAME offenders do less well than their White counterparts in when it comes to positive outcomes. Black adult offenders had a slightly higher reoffending rate of 31% in the year ending March 2019 compared to white offenders at 28.9% (MoJ 2021) The BAME proportion of young people reoffending rose from 11% year ending March 2006 to 19% year ending March 2016. (Lammy Review 2017)

Research also highlights that discrimination continues for BAME groups when they leave the CJS (Stacey 2019). A survey of 221 BAME individuals found that over three-quarters (78%) felt that their minority ethnic background in addition to a criminal record exacerbated their challenges, with the vast majority (79%) citing employment as an example of one of the key difficulties they experienced because of their criminal record and ethnicity (Stacey 2019)

Qasim (2020) also argues the point that BAME offenders are simply returned to society unskilled and without family support and with stigma of a prison record which often leads to psychological and social problems. Mullen et al (2014) highlights the importance of acknowledging cultural and religious values. Clear et al (2000) highlights the importance that religion plays in dealing with the guilt of crime amongst offenders.

### **Rationale For Research**

Current research specifically focusing on Muslims, their experiences, outcomes and the reasons why they are overrepresented in the CJS is limited. There is a fair amount of research concerning BAME offenders in general, however until recently Muslim experiences would have to be assumed to be included to some extent due to the overlap between the categories of BAME and Muslim.

BAME communities are complex with differing religious and cultural values therefore recognising and identifying these differences is important and may improve the engagement and success rate amongst these groups.

The lack of a deep understanding on the part of politicians and policymakers of the multiple ways that cultural difference is played out in institutions and agencies needs urgently to be addressed (Mullen et al 2014).

There is a lack of evidence and limited information regarding Muslims and their experiences of the CJS and their outcomes. If we are to strategically address the significant and ever increasing over representation of Muslims in the CJS, there needs to be a better, more precise understanding of Muslim offenders, their narratives and experiences, challenges, and outcomes.

### **Methodology**

A total of 25 Muslim men aged 18-30 who had previously been to prison took part in this research. Their ethnicities varied; however Bangladeshi young men were the overwhelming majority (76%). Both a qualitative and a quantitative approach was adopted to ensure we captured their experiences of the CJS in detail. All interviews were recorded long one to one interviews, which were then professionally transcribed. Each respondent also completed a questionnaire after the interview. 5 professionals from the CJS and related services in East London were interviewed in person using the same method.



# Findings and Discussion

## Experience Of Young Muslims Of The CJS Before Prison

### Reasons for offending:

*"Financial hard times."*

*"It was financial really, just money. I wanted to buy nice things".*

*"Greed, so I just wanted quick money."*

*(sample quotes in this section and following are from respondents)*

1. When respondents were asked about what led them to crime, 62% mentioned the main reason for committing crime was financial need. When explored further some talked about initially wanting money to fund a better lifestyle and to have what others have. Respondents talked about the need to accessing quick money and saw crime as the easiest route.
2. Only 12% of respondents were in employment at the time of their offence and 32% were in education, mainly school and college. 60% of respondents were not in employment education or training (NEET).
3. Qasim (2020), Reid (2022), and others have highlighted the correlation between inner city poverty amongst BAME communities and high levels of crime. The type of crime reported amongst this group varied from fraud, firearms, and street crime. The supply of drugs came up several times.

### Support Received When Entering The CJS:

*"I reckon there's none in there. Hardly any to be honest."*

*"I do remember I was still praying, I was practicing, so I asked the prison officer at the time to wake me up for prayers".*

*"I think young people are not supported in the best way possible".*

4. When asked about whether they received support when entering the CJS i.e. (from arrest and then up to prison) and whether there was any particular support offered around their faith, the majority (68%) said they hardly got any kind of support. 12% of the respondents talked about being given access to legal aid.

5. Only one of the respondents spoke about how his experience was different and he felt his religious needs were supported. On his request, he was woken up at prayer time, offered a prayer mat, let out of the cell to make ablution, and offer his prayers. He adds this was probably due to the fact the prison officer was Muslim himself.

#### **Advice And Support About Charge And Its Consequences:**

*"I had my solicitors but to be completely honest with you I wasn't really happy with my legal team anyway."*

*"Yes, so they said if you go guilty you get a third of your sentence reduced".*

6. When asked about whether they were advised about their plea and the consequences of pleading guilty or not guilty, 82% said they did get some level of advice. One participant talked about how he did not know or understand the consequences of pleading guilty as this was not explained to him. He says he pleaded guilty under the advice of the solicitors however this had a negative effect in court, and in his view, he received a harsher sentence.

7. 25% of respondents talked about how they did not trust the duty solicitors as they thought they worked for the police or government. Therefore, they didn't feel they could trust their advice. Some also added how they felt the solicitors were only interested in making money instead of looking out for what was best for their clients.

## In prison

#### **Challenges Faced As A Muslim In Prison:**

*"In prison with the white kids, just as an example suicide prevention, there was a lot of things being pushed for the white youths for suicide prevention. But a Muslim or black youth, it's like, nice, we don't need to offer that to him because he's tough".*

*"Prisons don't understand Muslim people".*

*"Yeah, like the food was challenging a bit because I was quite far out so there was not much halal options"*

8. When asked about the challenges faced as a Muslim in prison, 75% of the respondents felt the prison system including staff do not understand Muslims and their needs in some way or another. One respondent spoke about how the prison staff did not know that Muslims needed to pray 5 times a day. He says he also had to figure out for himself which way the Qibla (direction of prayer) was. One mentioned how there was always a shortage of prayer mats and Qurans. He adds that for months he used to pray by placing his jacket on the floor as a prayer mat.

9. One respondent talked about how he felt very embarrassed when his mother was searched by a male prison member of staff when she came to visit him. He explained that nowadays where Muslim population has grown so significantly in the UK, they are part of British society, therefore prison staff should have known that a Muslim woman shouldn't be searched in such an intrusive manner by a man.

10. Several respondents relate from their own personal experiences and from other prisoners they met, about how in prisons in London and other major cities with high Muslim populations there were fewer challenges. Whereas in prisons outside of major cities with predominantly white, non-Muslim population, the challenges are far greater.

**11.** The impact on mental health due to being locked up in cells for up to 23 hours and the lack of support offered to address this was also highlighted. Several related that reports of suicidal feelings amongst Muslim and BAME prisoners was not taken seriously by prison staff. Muslim and BAME offenders who would report suicidal thoughts were simply told to 'deal with it.' No support would be offered to them, and they were left to themselves to deal with these thoughts. On the other hand, white prisoners who reported having suicidal thoughts, allegedly, were taken very seriously and support offered immediately. White prisoners would be let out of their cells, were able to speak with staff, and walk around outside of their cells to ease their tensions.

#### **Ease Of Access To Support Services In Prison:**

*"Not really. To get support in jail to show that your suicidal, that's the only time that someone will take you seriously."*

*"I mean the only thing we had access to is we had Friday prayers and obviously during Covid that got stopped".*

*"No, you can apply for it but then the waiting list is long".*

**12.** When asked about how easy it was to access support in prison some of the respondents' referenced difficulties caused by Covid restriction. Covid restrictions meant many support services were limited if not completely suspended. Reference was made to weekly Friday congregational prayers and how that was also stopped due to Covid restrictions. Some of the respondents said that often they were able to have one to ones over the phone or face to face, but they felt they were not meaningful at all. Often it was all closed questions therefore the discussions were futile.

**13.** Worryingly one respondent spoke about how in prison to get support you must show you are seriously suicidal, otherwise, you are not taken seriously, or you will not get the level of support you require. He adds you must make a lot of noise to get any support otherwise you are left on your own with no support at all.

#### **Accessing Education, Training, Behaviour Management, Or Work Programmes In Prison:**

*"The education is very limited".*

*"There's a massive waiting list".*

*"Yes, they gave me some courses to do"*

**14.** When asked about whether they were informed or given access to any education, training, offending behaviour, or work programmes in prison, 93% of the respondents reported that they did access some educational courses.

**15.** Covid had a significant impact on the availability and access to educational courses. Covid meant that education classes were either on hold or the numbers significantly limited. Nonetheless respondents added that even before Covid, accessing some courses was very difficult as there was a huge waiting list especially with accessing Islamic studies. Respondents say that often they had to wait many months to get onto Islamic courses.

**16.** Some of the respondents further added that often the courses they accessed were not of a high standard and were very basic and easy to pass. Courses provided by external providers were much better and more meaningful than the ones offered by the prisons. According to respondents, external educational / training providers simply showed more care and sympathy and genuinely wanted the offenders to do well compared to prison staff.

17. According to one respondent the education/training provided in prison was of little benefit and of poor quality. They added that this could possibly be due to lack of funding. Only a few respondents reported ever receiving education or training to address offending behaviour and how to manage it. Of those who did report participating in an offender behaviour management programme they found it useful.

### **Accessing Chaplaincy Service In Prison.**

*"It's hard because the Imam is not around every day. So, that was hard".*

*"The Imam used to work only Thursday and Friday..."*

18. Although respondents report it being relatively easy to access the chaplaincy service and imams in prisons, they say difficulties were present in prisons where there were high numbers of Muslims. Respondents say that prison Imams, at best, only work part-time a couple of days a week and therefore don't have the time to see them all as regularly as they would've liked. Imams had waiting lists due to limited time and high demand. A majority of respondents report seeing Imams once a week during Friday congregational prayers. We understand that many chaplains/imams are now full-time however they also have substantial caseloads.

### **Usefulness Of Chaplaincy Service In Prison**

*"Yeah, it was quite good..."*

*"You can talk to chaplaincy at any time you want I think."*

*"The Imams were good there; they supported a lot".*

19. When asked about how useful they felt the chaplaincy service in prison was, 70% of the respondents rated the Imams as being fair to good. They said in some prisons Imams were good as they had good knowledge and showed care for prisoners and so were able to keep prisoners motivated to be positive and not get into altercations. A few report that in some prisons Imams lack the knowledge and understanding and therefore not very helpful.

20. One respondent spoke about how he felt the Imam was not helpful and was on the side of the prison system. He felt the Imam did not represent him and the needs of other Muslim prisoners. The issue of the lack of trust between Imams and offenders was raised by 25% of the respondents. They felt the Imams were employees of the prison system and therefore, they could not be fully trusted.

### **Support Services Received To Prepare For Life After Prison:**

*"No, not really. You got nothing to help you prepare for release".*

*"No, nothing like that. There's nothing about how your life could be and the changes".*

*"literally was there one day, the next day I'm being released and I'm back out in the environment and not wanting to change"*

21. When asked about what support services they received in prison to prepare them for life after release, 68% report they did not get any support to prepare them for life after prison. One said that only during the end of his sentence he received some support with CV writing and that was it.

22. Another respondent spoke about how it wasn't the prison service that supported them instead it was an outside education provider who spoke to them about the services they can access upon release to address housing, benefits health, and other related needs. Other

than that, they report no other support was provided.

### **Unmet Needs That Were Not Supported:**

*"If the Imam was around and giving you that advice or representing from a mosque or something, your background, it would have helped me a long way".*

*"There was an Islamic class that I went to one and then they stopped it. Yes, they stopped it without any reason".*

*"There was a lot of stress, first time in prison, mentally it was really bringing me down emotionally"*

**23.** Some of the respondents spoke about how they would like more Islamic classes to help build their identity and character whilst in prison. Several spoke about how an Islamic class they were attending was suddenly stopped without any reason, when asked for an explanation they were told by the Imam the matter was confidential and could not be discussed. They found this very frustrating as nothing could be done about it.

**24.** One of the respondents explained how in custody it would've really helped if they had a prayer mat and a Qur'an to read as it was a very difficult and stressful time. This respondent says he has been suffering from mental health problems for many years and therefore being able to pray and read the Qur'an would've helped him to manage this. He adds that in prison he started to develop mental health problems but could not speak to anyone. He says it would have really helped if he was able to speak to an Imam however, they were not around.

**25.** One respondent spoke about how his family did not know how to arrange visits in prison. This was creating anxiety and stress for him as his family could not come to see him. He would've liked for someone to explain to his family how the system of visiting a prisoner works and in general how the CJS works. Furthermore, they did not have the financial means to travel to prison to see him therefore financial assistance would've really helped in his case.

**26.** One spoke about how he was unable to play his Qur'an loud in his cell. He was told this was against prison policy. However, he added, that playing loud music was ok and no one had issues with that. He could see what he called 'the brazen double standards' but did not want to cause any trouble as he feared how he may be judged when going in front of the parole board.

### **Recognition Of Faith And Culture In Prison:**

*"Just in terms of halal food, I think. So, they asked what's the dietary requirements, what's this and that. So that yeah. And I think just they asked about Friday prayer, that's about it."*

*"It is when you go into prisons, so one of the first questions they will ask you is, what religion are you, and you say, Muslim".*

*"Yes, when I started to practice after 3 years in Prison"*

**27.** When asked about whether their faith or culture was recognised or talked about in prison, 75% of the respondents report this did not really happen in any significant way apart from in the beginning when entering prison. Other than that, offenders were not asked about any faith related matter later. The respondents added that the questions around their religion are all around their dietary needs and providing halal food and accessing Friday prayers.

28. Respondents in general said that the majority of faith related discussions happened with other prisoners which they found helpful. Respondents report that they didn't feel their religion is given any importance. They said discussions around faith comes across as a mere processing thing. One individual says that his faith was only recognised and talked about when attending Friday prayers. He adds, it was solely left to the prison Imam to address his faith related needs.

29. A few respondents said they were offered a Qur'an and prayer mat upon entering the prison. One individual says he was asked about his religion after 3 years of serving his prison sentence when the guards saw him praying. Other than that, they were not interested about his faith related needs, he adds.

### **Support Of Faith Needs In Prison:**

*"They're not supportive of our faith, are they, they don't, they just don't"*

*"No, it was just, the only support was there, if you're Muslim there's going to be an Imam".*

30. When asked about whether any support was offered to them with regards to their faith needs 68% of the respondents report not getting any support to practice their faith when they wanted it. Some talked about how only during Ramadan basic needs such halal food, prayer mat and prayer timetable were provided. This however was not for everyone; some didn't get anything at all. One spoke about how they were expected to get everything else done before doing anything related to faith like doing their prayers. Many also spoke about how faith related needs were mainly looked after by prison Imams.

31. A number of respondents also felt prison staff were there just to open and close the cell doors and nothing beyond that. On the other hand, one spoke about how one non-Muslim prison staff was very considerate and would respect him. However, there were others who were not so friendly and did not understand that when someone is praying, they cannot talk to them as this invalidates their prayer and therefore, they would have to perform the prayer all over again.

32. Some said they wouldn't speak to prison staff about their faith, because they felt they will not be understood. One spoke about how he had to be very careful because once he was visited by the 'anti-terror team' in prison. He says he witnessed this happening to other prisoners who have been very helpful and supportive to him. He elaborated that it was common knowledge that everyone had to be very careful because if they were seen to be overly practicing their faith, they risked being reported to the 'anti-terror team.'

### **Experiencing Negative Treatment In Prison**

*"I go through it, I got called all of the Paki stuff, you terrorist, blah, blah, all of that but it happened more again when I moved out of London"*

*"prisons are racist places, anyone from an ethnic minority definitely has a worse experience than the white counterpart"*

*"So, I did – not like physical racist abuse but like with the officers I could sense that they didn't like Muslims. "*

33. 75% of respondents report being subject to some form of racism and/or Islamophobia from prison staff. They said this is more prevalent in prisons outside of major inner cities with high numbers of white prison population. One reported being called a "Paki, terrorist" and jokes being made about them like "have you got anything hidden under your bed" referring to bombs and explosives. One says he felt bullied by a white prison staff member and

couldn't do anything as this was his first time in prison. The difference in the way they were spoken to, looked at and the difference in how they were treated in general and the harsher treatment they received gave them this impression. One mentioned how white prisoners who complained about having suicidal thoughts were shown greater care and attention.

**34.** Respondents added how they would often feel the undertone of Islamophobia and general dislike of Muslims by prison staff. They felt this is due the false depiction of Muslims as terrorist in the media and how this narrative was being accepted by staff who in return were taking this out on them. They mentioned how prison officers would regularly walk into the prayer hall with their shoes on, even after being explained to and knowing they should not do this. One respondent talked about how his cell door would be the last one to be opened for times outside of the cell. He felt this was because he was Muslim. He felt this was a punishment for him being a Muslim. One also added how he was not allowed to listen to Quran loud but if it was music being played loud that was fine.

**35.** According to a number of respondents allowance to attend Friday congregational prayers was treated as a privilege for those who behaved. As for those who misbehaved they would be denied the privilege. One respondent added how Muslim foreign nationals/migrants got a harder time in prison from staff compared to others because of their difficulties in understanding and speaking English.

**36.** Another respondent spoke about how for BAME prisoners it was very difficult to get good jobs in prison, especially in prisons with a high white prison population. He says this was due to racism and adds that BAME prisoners were always allocated low end jobs. However, white prisoners got better and more prominent jobs. They were trusted and privileged to get jobs that would see them work at the receptions and induct new prisoners into prison. He adds that the only way to get a good job was to log your request in writing as this would mean you know how the system works and the staff feared you may come back to them if they did not respond or justify their positions.

**37.** One also spoke about the racism he experienced in that support was always offered more to white prisoners than those of BAME background. In his opinion any opportunity that was presented was offered to white prisoners first.

**38.** All of the above findings in this sub section reaffirm conclusions drawn earlier by the Young Review (2014) and the Lammy Review (2017) and point to a lack of progress or improvement in these areas.

### **Knowledge And Understanding Of Prison Staff About Religious And Cultural Needs.**

*"They'd be in the prayer hall with their shoes on, everything on. They didn't care. Yeah, imagine the prayer room, this is the prayer room yeah".*

*"So, their knowledge was a bit basic".*

*Yes, ignorance and I think lack of training is probably some of it.*

**39.** When asked to describe knowledge and understanding of prison staff about their religious/cultural needs, the majority (68%) said prison staff lacked knowledge and understanding and rate staff knowledge as being basic or nothing. Respondents say that knowledge and understanding also differed depending on which prison they were in. In prisons with higher Muslim prisoners the knowledge and understanding of staff was better in comparison to prisons with low numbers of Muslim prisoners.

## Mental Health and Well-being

40. Unaddressed mental health conditions were raised by 25% of the respondents, although the percentage may be higher due to the reluctance of men to acknowledge or discuss mental health issues. The onset of depression and anxiety due to incarceration and isolation was reported to prison staff but according to respondents this was not addressed and there was no opportunity to even talk about these issues. They didn't feel they were listened to in prison or later by probation officers when they raised their concerns around mental health and well-being. One respondent described how he started self-harming in prison, and he knew of others who were also self-harming. Others said they simply had deal with it themselves.

## Probation Service

### Usefulness Of Probation Service At Release:

*"1 out of 10. No, my probation worker is useless."*

*"It's been alright. I do get a lot of threats, as in "ah if you do this, I'm going to recall you."*

41. When asked about how useful they felt probation service was at release from prison, majority of the participants say their probation workers were not useful at all. They say they expected more from probation, but their expectations were not really met. One respondent spoke about how he felt his probation worker simply wanted him out of their case books as soon as possible and not providing the level of support he really needed. Another spoke about how he was unable to relate to his probation worker. He felt they had no life experience and simply read books to be in that position. Another spoke about how judgemental his probation worker was as the first thing he said was how he thinks this respondent is likely to reoffend.

### Support Offered By Probation Service

*"I felt like probation was literally nothing, I just go there, you ask me a few questions, I'm never telling him the truth because I don't trust him."*

*"Not really, it's just been phone calls once every six weeks".*

*"Nothing. They don't give you support; I've been here for a year and a half"*

42. 80% of the respondents said they did not find probation useful at all. 68% of the participants report that Probation services got involved with them just before, at or shortly after release. When asked about what kind of support they received from probation, 25% talked about receiving just phone calls from their probation worker. This, however, may be due to Covid related restrictions and policies of working from home at the time. Some reported having face to face contacts and attending appointments.

43. Respondents also report that contacts were irregular, and they would simply check in on them to see how they were doing. The engagement wasn't very meaningful as most of the times they were asked closed questions like are you offending? Have you been attending appointments? etc. Hence, they felt engagement was a tick box exercise.

44. One respondent spoke about how he would simply say what he believes his probation officer wants to hear as this made his life easier. He said he could not trust her as he believes they were looking for ways to recall him. Another respondent talked about how he developed mental health problems in prison due to the long hours in isolation. He opened



up about his issues in meetings with his probation officer however he did not get any support to address this.

### **Probation Support Meeting The Needs Of Offenders:**

*"Completely useless, no, my probation worker is useless."*

*"It's been alright, it's just like, these are her questions she asked – it's been nothing that I've requested for"*

45. When asked about whether they thought the support offered by the Probation services was useful and met their needs, 75% of the respondents said the support offered did not meet their needs. Some respondents felt they were not heard and their request for help ignored. One spoke about how he was lumbered with and asked to read books and attend appointments. He felt this was not meeting his needs at all. Another spoke about how he is still with probation and gets phone calls from them but says this makes no difference in his life at all.

46. One respondent spoke about how he was not contacted at all for months after his release from prison. Another spoke about how in the beginning he was honest about his situation and opened up to his probation officer about having alcohol problems. He said this was used against him and restrictions were imposed on him even though he explained things were improving. This affected his willingness to be honest and open thereafter. He could not trust her anymore and had to always be careful about what he says. This further affected his relationship with the probation officer. Respondents say they need opportunities to be opened around housing, employment, and finances. They said these are some of the toughest challenges they faced when coming out of prison.

47. Some respondents were positive about probation services. 18% of the respondent felt their probation worker was helpful. One reports how his probation worker helped him get his GCSE'S and another says his probation worker helped him stay away from reoffending.

### **How Can Probation Support Muslim Offenders:**

*"Religious activities. Hook them up with the Imams, get in touch with the local mosques."*

*"If it was more relevant to me it would have been better."*

*"Help me find a job and also offer some vocational courses on the outside."*

48. When asked about what they feel the probation service could have done better to support Muslim offenders, 56% Of the respondents spoke about how they would have liked for probation to open more opportunities for them like providing help with jobs. Several also talked about how they started to practice Islam in prison which was a positive thing in their life helping them in desisting from offending behaviour. They would have liked more support in this and for their probation workers to connect them with faith-based organisations / Islamic classes including Imams and mosques. Yet, this was not the case, even though their faith was helping them to desist from committing crime.

49. Several talked about how having more Muslim and BAME staff represented in the probation service would be helpful as they will be able to relate to them. One spoke of how he thought his probation worker was good, but he puts this down to her being from a Muslim BAME background. He believes she was good as she showed empathy towards him because she understood where he was coming from.

# Family

## **Imprisonment And Impact On Family:**

*"Yeah of course, heavily impacted yeah. They were sad, I missed a couple of weddings, family weddings because of that".*

*"Quite heavily, I definitely think it's played a part".*

*"My mum was very stressed because I got banned from my area, so my mum had to do a lot of things"*

50. When asked about whether offence and imprisonment impacted their family, perhaps unsurprisingly, all the respondents agreed their offence and imprisonment had an impact on their families, with the majority citing their mothers being the most impacted. Many spoke about how they missed many family weddings and events. Others missed funerals of loved ones who they lost during Covid. Some also talked about how their imprisonment had brought about a level of shame and embarrassment on the family as they were the eldest and first child from the family to go to prison.

## **Keeping In Touch With Family:**

*"Oh no, they didn't care".*

*"No, never, they don't care less what relationship you have with your family or not, it doesn't make a difference to them"*

51. When asked about whether they were encouraged to keep in contact with their family, 75% of the respondents say they were never told or encouraged to maintain contact with their family. Several talked about how they felt the prison service didn't care whether they were in contact with their family or not. Only 19% of the respondents said they were encouraged to stay in contact and staff members spoke about how important this was.

## **Help From Family In Resettling:**

*"letting me come back home..., just said "settle down now, find a job and what try to get married and..."*

*"The family was, for me, I was privileged enough, my family was supportive."*

52. When asked about whether their families helped them to resettle back into the community, 68% said their families did support them. The respondents said just having family there at release was very helpful. They further added that receiving financial and emotional support was also helpful and made a difference. Having a family home to go to after release was very important, otherwise they would have been homeless. Some felt they didn't get much help as their families didn't know how to help and support them. According to one individual his family didn't know what he was going through thus were not helpful at all.

## **Family Receiving Support From Criminal Justice System:**

*"Not really, no."*

*"No organisations apart from my solicitors, no"*

53. When asked about whether their family received any support during their custody, 93% of respondents said no. One respondent felt that it would have been useful to offer support

to families even more than himself. He adds that his family lack the understanding of how the CJS works, it would have helped when it came to prison visits. He says how his mum appeared in court but because English was not her first language, she did not know what was going on. One respondent says only his solicitor offered support to his family.

**54.** The general need for more family interaction and support for families highlighted by respondents concur with existing research which has shown that despite some progress much work remains to be done to implement fully the recommendations from Lord Farmer's reviews and that families largely remain unsupported. This is despite the evidence that chances of reoffending are 39% lower for a prisoner is who visited by a partner or family member than for a prisoner who is not. (Centre for Social Justice 2022)

### **Could Families Have Done More?**

*"Not really. My mum did all she could."*

*"No, my family have done the best they can."*

*"Not really to be honest".*

**55.** When asked whether there was any support they didn't receive from their family that would have been helpful, 93% say they couldn't ask anything more of their families. They feel like their families had done enough. One on the other hand spoke about how the family could've helped with finding employment. He felt this was holding him back from resettling into the community.

## Resettlement

### **Challenges Encountered In Resettlement.**

*"Employment, I'd say definitely".*

*"Yes. When I came out, I thought I had nothing, literally, I was sitting there, no money, nothing"*

*"I mean this place is quite helpful, Osmani Trust. I think if this place wasn't around a lot of the other people would possibly be a little bit lost. They do try their best and one of my mentors he's been calling me. He's been trying to help me."*

**56.** Housing, employment, and finances were the greatest challenges encountered by 75% of the respondents at release. One spoke about the frustrations of continually being rejected by employers due to having a criminal record. Being repeatedly rejected for jobs had an impact on their confidence and self-belief. This meant that many were at hostels with nothing constructive or positive to do.

**57.** Many praised Osmani Trust and the genuine efforts of the staff who supported them with various resettlement needs. They felt staff listened to their concerns, assisted them with attending housing appointments, finding jobs, and making CV's. Some were able to successfully gain employment and be in a steady financial position. Some said if it wasn't for the staff at Osmani Trust they would have gone back to a life of crime.

**58.** A few referred to Switch Back and Drive Forward Foundation as organisations that they found helpful in meeting some of their resettlement needs. The Job Centre Plus was also mentioned as a place some found helpful for their advice and support around employment vacancies.

## What Mosques And Other Faith-Based Organisations Can Do To Support Ex-Offenders

59. 63% of the respondents report they did not access mosques or other faith-based organisations after their release. One spoke about how he felt mosques in his experience are judgemental as they are run by elders he refers to as uncles. On the other hand, a few reported how they accessed mosques, and they feel it was very helpful as they were at peace there. One added how he felt his local mosque was an open place that was accommodating to the needs of all members of the community.

60. 38% of the respondents would like to see mosques and other faith-based organisations provide support to ex-offenders. They believe mosques should be more dynamic and deliver workshops around knife crime, domestic violence, and should have specialist services like counselling to address mental health needs. One talked about how he would have liked to continue the Islamic learning started in prison and join up with likeminded positive people in the community however this was not possible. He didn't know where to start in his search and simply gave up.

## What Can Community Organisations Do To Better Support Ex-Offenders:

*"person centred support rather than generic"*

*"If I had someone to talk anonymous, or an organisation".*

*"youth work as in like come do these play sessions, spend your time here (Osmani)"*

61. When asked about what community organisation can do to better support Muslim ex-offenders, a number of them said there should be more community organisations like Osmani Trust. They feel Osmani Trust was non-judgemental and accepting of them and went out of its way to provide support and guidance. One expressed his gratitude and said even after his case was closed Osmani Trust staff made follow up calls to see how he was doing.

62. Many of them said accepting ex-offenders with an open arm, one that is non-judgemental and helps in addressing the real issues such as accommodation, employment, social, family, faith and others is key to supporting them.

## Positive Thing That Is Helping You To Desist From Crime:

*"To be honest, because of jail I started praying five times a day".*

*"I think for me it's family. My family that's helped me".*

*"My family, myself and my faith."*

63. 37% of the participants talked about how their faith, Islam, has been the positive factor in their life that has helped them to resettle in the community and desist from offending. They refer to the fact that it's the strength they can draw from praying five times a day and knowing that committing crime is wrong and should be avoided at all costs. This has helped them to build resilience and strength to stay focused and not re-offend. Attending the mosque, being in a calming environment and with positive people was also reported to have helped in staying positive and hopeful.

64. 31% of respondents talked about family and how family support has been a major positive factor in their life. Having a supportive and loving family to go to after release was key. Having housing and financial support is vital but not forgetting the simple things like someone to speak to, hot cooked meals, being able to wash clothes etc. were also very important.

### **Negative Things That Made It Hard To Resettle:**

*"Obviously, at the beginning when I got out, as in I lost all hope that I can get a job".*

*"Housing, I've had that issue ever since I have been out".*

*"No I think that's the only one. Just not having a job"*

**65.** When asked about what they found difficult after release from prison, 31% spoke about the lack of opportunity when it came to employment and housing. They report feeling disadvantaged, as one respondent put it, "who wants to employ a criminal". Not having accommodation when coming out of prison was a key issue was raised. One spoke about how he did not know what to do as he did not have a place to go to after being released.

**66.** 14% spoke about the difficulties they had with mental health issues. One spoke about how difficult it was as a man to admit he had mental health issues. He explains that's never made easy when you are an offender as often services and institutions do not take you seriously.

### **Respondent Recommendations**

**67.** When asked about what their recommendations would be to the criminal justice system to improve support for Muslims, several themes emerged.

#### **Faith and cultural awareness training for staff**

**68.** Overwhelming majority (81%) spoke about the lack of knowledge and understanding of prison staff around faith (Islam) and culture. They would like to see this training provided regularly to all front-line staff who directly work with Muslim offenders in prisons. This, they believed, will help raise their awareness and upskill prison staff so they can better meet the needs of Muslim prisoners

#### **More Islamic classes**

**69.** 70% would also like to see more Islamic courses offered to Muslim prisoners. They spoke about how this would help them to deal with the issues of shame and guilt. Shame and guilt not just related to their crime but also the fact that their actions have brought shame and embarrassment onto their families and how they have let their family and friends down. They believed their faith would provide a route to a closure to their feelings and with peace and tranquillity. They further added that providing Islamic classes would help them to build a positive character, one that keeps them focused in prison and helps them develop understanding and will to desist from a life of crime when they are out of prison.

## **Mental health**

**70.** 19% spoke about how mental health should be recognised and appropriate measures should be in place to address depression and suicide. One reports White prisoners getting better care and attention when it comes to suicide prevention compared to BAME prisoners. According to him when there were concerns around White offenders and suicide, they would be let out of their cells and allowed to walk outside freely whilst BAME offenders were simply told to deal with it.

#### **Respect people's faith**

**71.** 25% of the respondents' report being subjected to racism and Islamophobia in prison. They would like to see more respect for Muslims, their culture and faith and just to be respected as fellow human being like other non-Muslim groups. There was specific

reference made about how respondents felt prison staff perceptions of Muslims was influenced by negative portrayal of Muslims in the media as extremists and terrorists. They report an environment of suspicion and awkwardness in the way they were being treated.

### **Imams should be more involved.**

**72.** 44% of the respondents' spoke about how they feel Imams should be more involved with prisoners. Respondents say they would like Imams to be more available to speak with them, advise and guide them and to be available throughout the week instead of the current limited days. They say Imams can play an integral part as they keep them focused and help build their resilience to desist from crime in and outside of prison.

### **Recruit more BAME workers.**

**73.** 19% felt the CJS needs to recruit more staff from BAME/ Muslim backgrounds. They say this will mean that offenders are better understood and supported, as they will be able to relate to the staff more. They add that this should not be tokenistic but representation of BAME staff at all levels including management and leadership.

## Views of Professionals

**74.** This section represents views from 5 professionals interviewed who were from local CJS, Local Authority and the third sector who all have direct experience of working with Muslim offenders in a professional capacity.

### **Why Young Muslims Are Increasingly Entering The Criminal Justice System**

*"I think it all comes down to finance opportunities".*

*"communities are deprived of resources and opportunities"*

*"I feel it's to do with over-crowdedness. I have come across people, or families, large families, living in small accommodation".*

**75.** When asked about what they think the key reasons for young Muslims entering the CJS are, the majority spoke about deprivation and poverty that young Muslims face living in inner cities that can lead to an offending lifestyle. Living in overcrowded conditions, poor educational achievements, being brought up in estates and the lack of equal access to wealth was also mentioned as factors.

**76.** Several professionals also spoke about poor decision making by young Muslims in lifestyle choices such as choosing to use drugs and alcohol leading to a cycle of addiction and negative peer influences. Lack of appropriate parenting and minimal parental engagement with young Muslims was also raised.

**77.** Identity issues amongst young Muslims was mentioned. Some young Muslims are confused or feel the pressures of conflicting expectations and values of home, religion, culture, media, and wider society. Thus, some who develop familial conflicts go on to rebel which can translate into committing crime and other associated behaviours.

### **Challenges faced by Muslim offenders in the CJS.**

*"when Muslims go for Friday prayer, right, everyone gets that opportunity in the prison, they'll strip-search you before"*

*"I experienced different attitude towards a different race".*

*"I think the criminal justice system, maybe they need to become more acquainted with the cultural background, the sensitivities of young Muslim men"*

78. When asked about challenges faced by Muslim offenders in the CJS, one professional spoke about how he saw Muslim offenders being subjected to strip searches regularly when attending Friday prayers in prison. This made attending Fridays prayers very difficult and time consuming. Muslim offenders felt this was done deliberately to make it difficult for them to attend Friday prayers.

79. Another spoke about the difficulties Muslim offenders faced during fasting months. Although food was provided to offenders to break their fast (at sunset), it was always cold as it would be packed in containers from lunch times. The problem was worse during summer months when offenders would be fasting for long hours due to longer daylight hours.

80. The lack in understanding and awareness of Muslims and their faith related needs amongst staff was also raised even though prisons have high numbers of inmates who identify themselves as Muslim. According to one professional this lack of understanding has deprived Muslims of spiritual growth opportunities whereby they could have developed stronger motivation, strategies, and skills to desist from reoffending.

#### **Discrimination in treatment in the CJS:**

*"I think you get that a lot in terms of young people being stopped, they're stopped because of their colour, they're stopped because of their race, they're stopped because of the identity they have"*

*"I've heard individual police officers, or the clients saying individual police officers targeted them"*

81. When asked about whether they had received any reports of discrimination of Muslims in treatment in the CJS (custody, prison, probation) due to their faith and/or race, the majority talked about anecdotal reports they had received of the disproportionate numbers of stop and search of BAME/ Muslim clients. Some said they had seen how Muslim/BAME young people are stopped and searched more than others.

82. One professional talked about how when he used to work in a prison, he witnessed Muslim prisoners being regularly strip searched before they were able to enter the prayer hall. He adds this was not the case for non-Muslim prisoners when attending church service. He also says there was heightened security during Muslim Friday prayers.

83. Another professional talked about his own experience of stop and search and how one morning when attending prayers at 6am he felt frustrated having to explain to police officers why he was attending mosque at that time. He says often when people try to explain to police officers that they are attending early morning prayers they are met with a reaction of bemusement or disbelief.

#### **Does The CJS Adequately Meet The Needs Of Muslim Offenders And Their Families.**

*"No, they don't, because in my experience, I haven't really seen anyone in the criminal justice system working with families"*

*"from what I can see in terms of engagement with the family, I'm not sure if they do justice"*

*"I'm not sure if the criminal justice system makes enough effort to actually physically go to the families with their interpreter, because there are language barriers"*

84. When asked about whether they felt CJS adequately meets the needs of Muslim offenders and their families, one professional stated that the system does not understand Muslims and their needs. He refers to one of his clients who was always given appointments during Friday prayer times. This was frustrating as the client knew he had to attend Friday prayers as this has been keeping him strong and focused but on the other hand if he did not attend the appointment, he runs the risk of being recalled into prison. In his opinion Probation could have scheduled appointments away from Friday prayer times and could have considered the faith needs of this client and work around them. Small adaptable practices like this can have a profound impact on the success of a client.

85. Others highlighted that they feel the CJS does not make enough effort to engage with families especially as there are many challenges like language barriers, knowledge of how the CJS works etc. They felt more meaningful engagement needs to happen with families and family support to be part and parcel of the services offered by the CJS especially as we have seen the efficacy of how it can help and support ex-offenders to desist from offending.

### **Resettlement Challenges/Barriers That Muslim Offenders Face When Exiting The CJS And Wanting To Stop Offending**

*"There's a lack of opportunities, job opportunities, when you've got a criminal record"*

*"...experience and qualities for it, but they'll still be judged on their criminal conviction"*

*"Accommodation"*

86. When asked about what they felt are the resettlement challenges/barriers that Muslim offenders face when exiting the CJS, the majority spoke about accommodation and employment. They added that often they have seen young people exit from the prison service without any accommodation arranged therefore they are left homeless and vulnerable to reoffending.

87. There have also been times when Muslim families are not prepared to take back into their homes an ex-offender due to the fears of the bad influence this person may have on the other children. Other reasons why families often refuse to take back an ex-offender are the reputational damage done to the family and the fear of being isolated if they took that person back.

88. Majority of ex-offenders find it difficult to get employment due to having a criminal record. Without an income they can easily turn to reoffending to generate income.

### **Difference In Success Rates Of Muslim Offenders Compared To Others In Terms Of Resettlement And Desistance From Offending:**

*"90 percent or plus of my clients are Muslims, and, yeah, all of them have some way or another resettled back"*

*"you know, they are in employment, and they are continuing with that, and have not reoffended yet"*

*"I have seen successes at times, but it is phases"*

89. When asked about whether they noticed any difference in general success rates of Muslim offenders compared to others in terms of resettlement and desisting from offending? If so, why they thought this was the case.

90. Majority say they see young Muslims doing well because when they come out often, they have strong family support, one that provides housing, financial and emotional support.



Some professionals also talked about how offenders who engage community support also do better. An example of a community organisation cited was Osmani Trust, who employ local staff who understand the local community. Offenders can relate to them as they are from the same community thus engage better with them. Muslim ex-offenders say they are understood by them, and their needs are better met.

### **Does The CJS Need To Improve On Any Services Areas To Improve Outcomes For Muslim Offenders**

*"Yeah, it does, because it is – probation service, for example, needs to have more Muslim/BAME probation officers"*

*"When we work with probation and stuff, we see that some of the work that's been done is very tokenistic"*

*"I think they need to map out when they're released... that transition has to be a smooth transition, not just left in a limbo"*

91. When asked about whether the CJS needs to improve on any service areas to improve outcomes for Muslim offenders, a few spoke about how there needs to be more Muslim representation in the criminal Justice System especially in Probation and the prison services. Recruitment strategies need to target and employ Muslims across the board from front line to senior management. They report that often Muslim offenders say they find it difficult to build trust with CJS staff as they can't relate to them.

92. One professional was of the view that despite many years of work and strategies implemented to improve relations between police and Muslim/BAME youth it has failed. He thinks this is due to the continued disproportionate stop & search and heavy handling of Muslim/BAME young people by the police. The perception of double standards in how the police service handles Muslims was also highlighted.

93. A few also mentioned how often young offenders are released into society without a proper path or a plan. They are released back into the community without much help or support, some with undiagnosed mental health problems, who then end up reoffending. They suggest greater work needs to be done between the prison service, probation and third sector voluntary organisation so a smooth transition can take place when an ex-offender is released back into the community. One also spoke about how the CJS needs to also engage with institutions like Mosques. He feels that this partnership can bring about better support for ex-offenders who want spiritual support.

### **Whether There Are Adequate Support Services Available To Meet The Needs Of Muslim Offenders When Exiting The CJS And Resettling In Communities**

*"Not that I know of, to be honest, yeah"*

*"Not specifically for Muslim offenders"*

*"At this moment I am not too sure if there are specific services for Muslim young men to cater for their needs"*

94. When asked about whether there are adequate support services available to meet the needs of Muslim offenders when exiting the CJS and resettling in communities, the consensus answer was in the negative. They say that although there are generic support services, there aren't specific services that really understand Muslim offenders and their needs. One gives an example in the drug and alcohol field. When he referred a client for treatment the whole treatment philosophy was based on Christian values. So, there were

some conflicts with the client's own religious beliefs and the approach of the service. In addition, they were promoting harm minimisation as opposed to abstinence. For a Muslim, using any type of drugs or alcohol is prohibited, however when his client was attending that service, he was being told it is ok to use drugs as long as it's done in a controlled manner. This was clearly contradicting his faith and values.

### **When Exiting The CJS What Support Services Would Improve Outcomes For Muslims And How**

*"community-led approach which is more centred around the individual".*

*"engagement prior to coming out of prison".*

*"having that dedicated prison exit team going into prisons and making that contact, and making sure that whatever needs that individual has is drawn up on an action plan"*

95. When asked about when exiting the CJS what support services would improve outcomes for Muslims and how, majority spoke about the need to have professionals and services that understand Muslims and their needs. They point to the fact that there is a lack of training of staff around different religions. In his opinion this would help as professionals would then be able to design pathways around that person's needs.

96. Another spoke about the lack of services for Muslims. The one glove fits all does not work as it excludes many from effective solutions. According to his feedback often Muslims find it difficult to talk about their faith and spirituality due to the fear of not being understood or being judged. So having a service that specifically engages with Muslims would help, one that is welcoming to others too.

### **Key Enablers That Helped Clients To Successfully Resettle Into Communities.**

*"employment, training, or something that is going to give them the opportunity to succeed in their life, and the family, the family is supporting them"*

*"mentoring, coaching someone so they can look up to someone, they could – who could empathise with"*

*"family being there for them".*

97. When asked about key enablers that helped their clients to successfully resettle into communities, many cited family and community support. Having family that understands the impact of prison, providing support like housing, accommodation, financial and emotional has been key. In terms of community, having positive role models, key workers that check in on clients, reference was made to the mentoring project at Osmani Trust. They also say that partnership work with statutory and voluntary organisation to be key.

### **How Can Existing Voluntary Sector/Community Orgs Better Support Muslim Offenders?**

*"They could do partnership work with other organisations who are doing similar work".*

*"Better facilities"*

*"be aware of the cultural needs".*

98. When asked about how existing voluntary sector/community organisations can better support Muslim offenders, the work of Osmani Trust was highlighted especially its work with ex-offenders. Some suggested that Osmani Trust and other organisations should further develop partnerships with statutory organisations and faith-based organisations including Mosques as part of that to provide joined up services. They should also go into prisons and

speaking to individuals about desisting from crime and developing clear paths for when they come back into the community. One talked about gender specific services as often females are left out of the equation even though there are many women and girls in the CJS.

### **What Role And Effect Do Muslim Families Have On A Family Member Who Is In The CJS**

*"the family needs to be there and offer that support".*

*"the family needs to be confident enough to go and engage with the community as well"*

*"I think they play a massive role to the individual".*

99. When asked about what role and effect Muslim families have on a family member who is in the CJS, all professionals agree that Muslims families play a vital role. They explain that families need to be there and understand what an individual has or is going through in the CJS. They need to be balanced and offer a hand of support and hope. They all say that family is a key enabler to someone who succeeds in desisting from crime and be able to rebuild their lives hence family support is crucial.

### **Needs Of Muslim Families To Enable Them To Better Support A Family Member In The CJS.**

*"families need to be able to accept that it's not something that's degrading on your honour that your child is in prison"*

*"First and foremost, understanding about the laws".*

*"I think they need to be aware; they need to learn about the criminal justice system".*

100. When asked about what the needs of Muslim families are to enable them to better support a family member in the CJS, majority talked about how there is a serious lack of understanding of the CJS amongst families. This is made more difficult for family members who also have language barriers. More information and awareness need to be provided to families about the CJS and how it works. Families would then be in a better position and have the right knowledge to support their family member through this difficult period.

### **Role, If Any, That Faith-Based Organisations/Mosques/Imams Can Play To Support Muslim Offenders In The CJS And When Leaving.**

*"the mosques need to definitely encourage young offenders to come in for these workshops".*

*"Yeah, so I think imams play a key role. So, the right guidance advice is really important"*

*"Mosques, they can play a very important role".*

101. When asked what role if any could faith-based organisations/mosques/Imams play to support Muslim offenders in the CJS and when leaving, all the professionals agreed that Mosques and Imams can potentially play a crucial and positive role. They suggest that mosques and Imams need to be accepting and provide classes/workshops to ex-offenders and help with personal development and resilience that will help them to desist from reoffending. Often ex-offenders find it difficult to deal with the issues of guilt and shame which can lead to developing mental health problems. Imams can address these issues and provide the emotional support often needed.

They also say that mosques need to be open and hold workshops for parents and talk to them about community/social problems such as substance misuse, crime, violence, and related issues. A mosque should be a place that is open and welcome to everyone.



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# Appendix: Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 1. **Age**

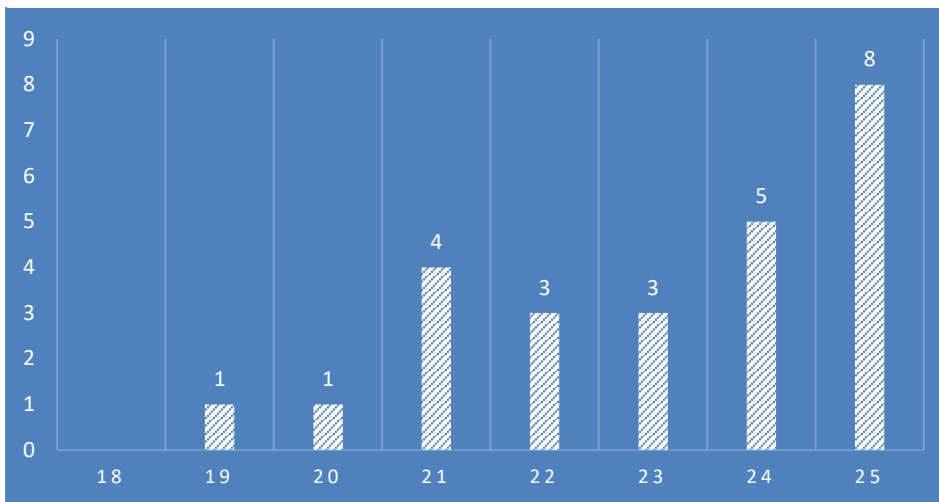


Table 2. **Ethnicity**

■ Bangladeshi ■ Pakistani ■ Indian ■ Mixed Asian ■ Black ■ Mixed Black ■ Other

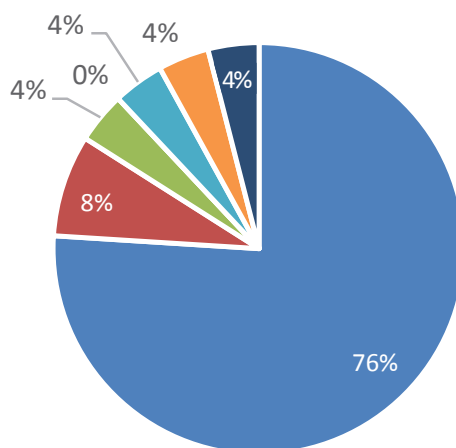


Table 3. **Living with parents**

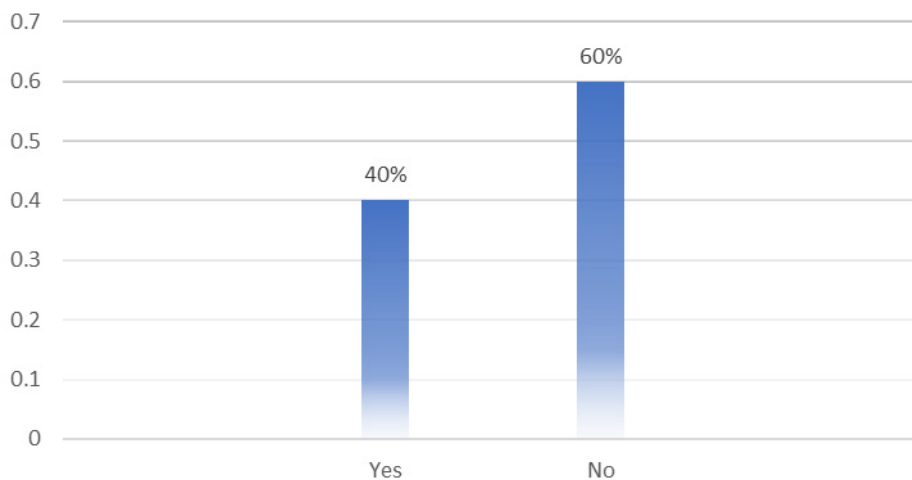


Table 4. **Borough of residence**

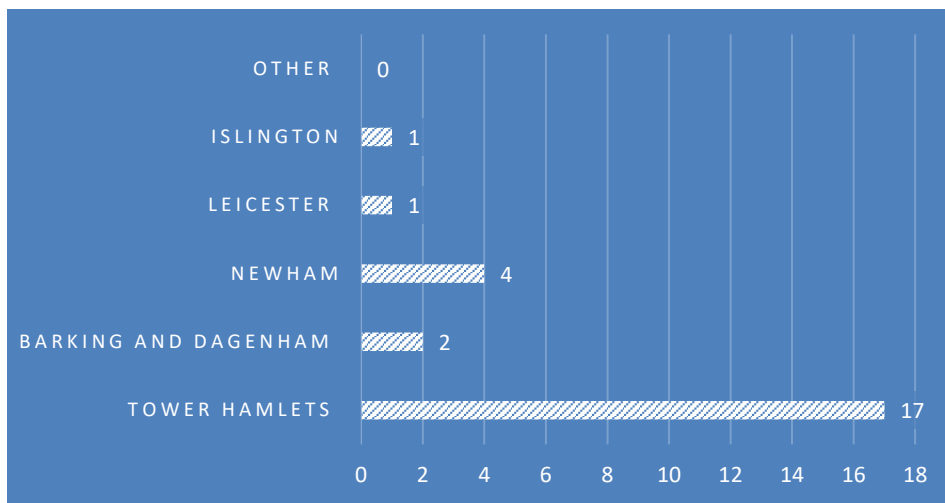


Table 5. **Marital status**

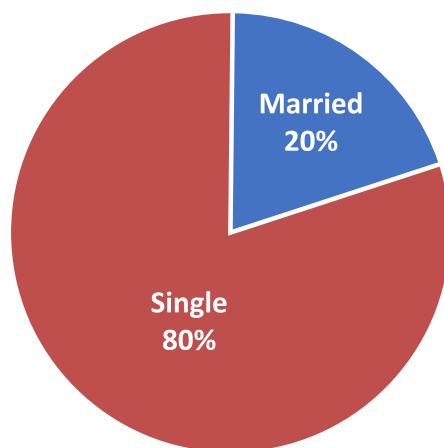


Table 6. **Number of times in prison**

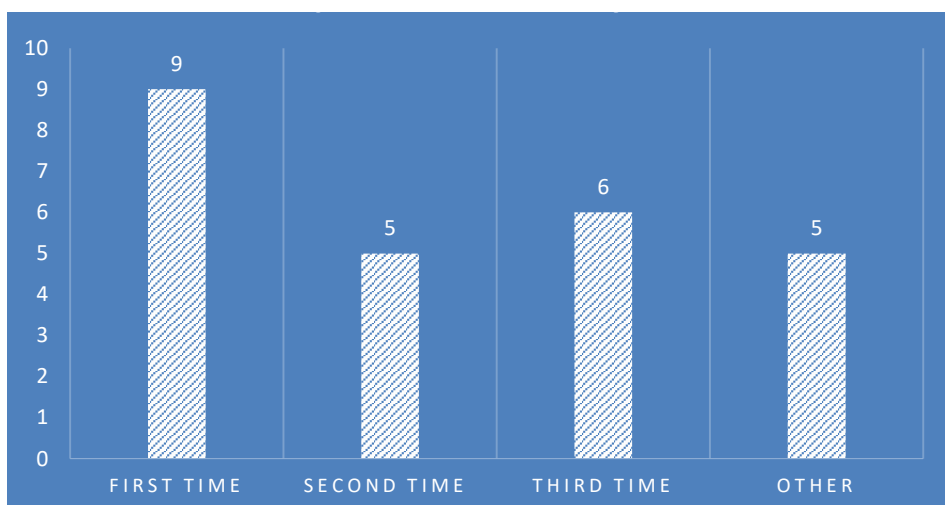


Table 7. **How long were you in prison for?**

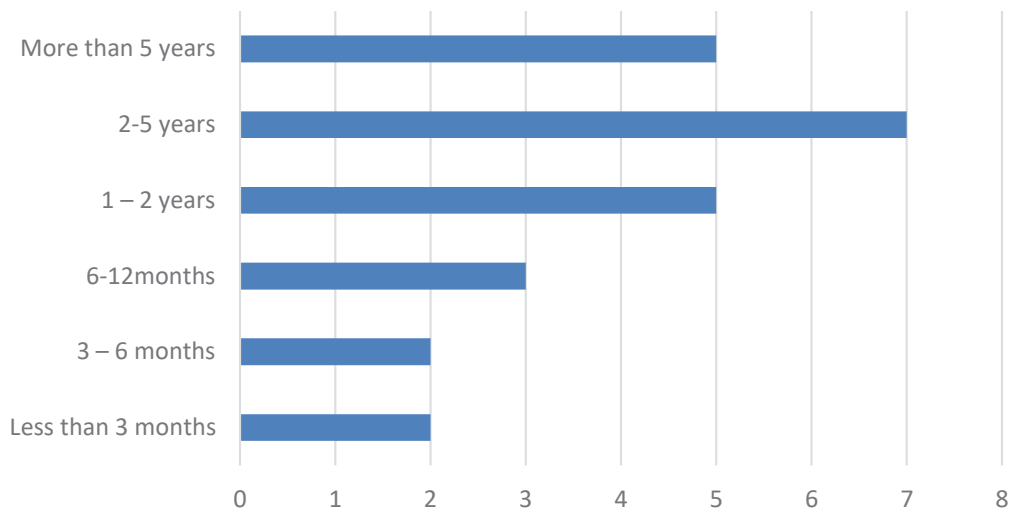


Table 8. **Whilst in Prison which of the following did you have?**



Table 9. **When leaving prison had the following needs**

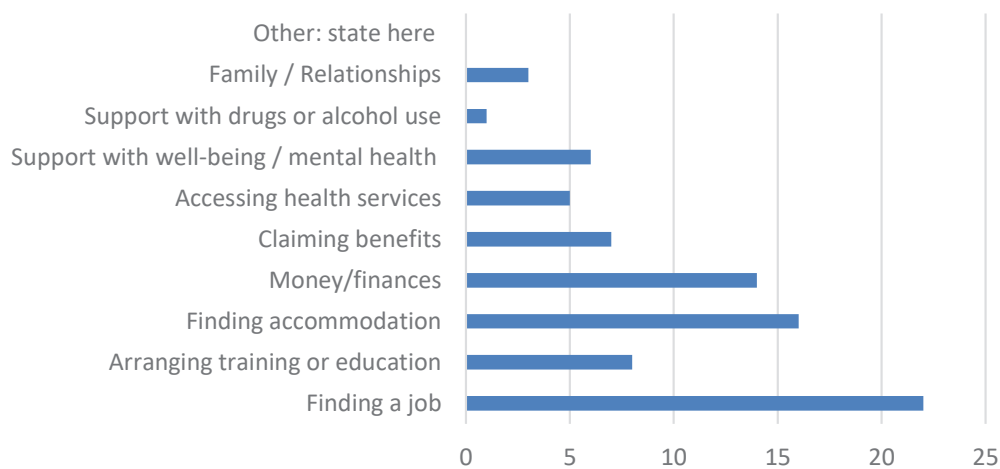




Table 10. **After prison received the following support for my needs**

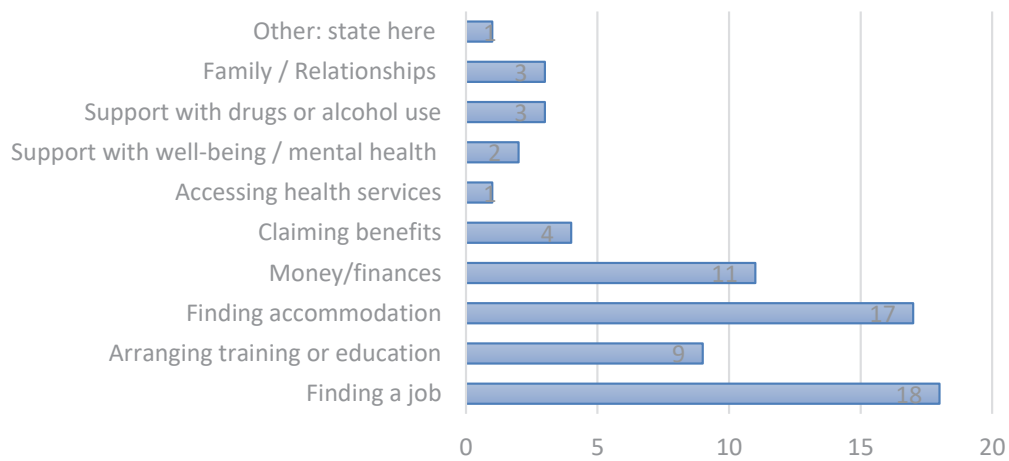


Table 11. **Rating for the support received throughout journey in the Criminal Justice System**

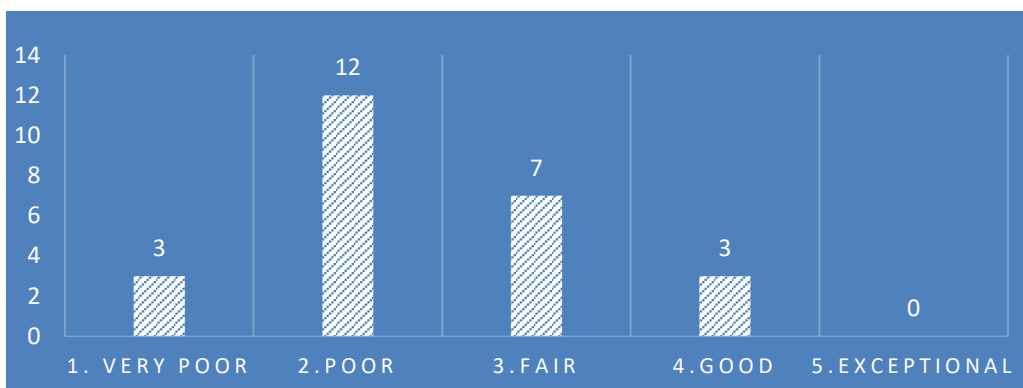


Table 12. **Rating the support services available to Muslims in prison**

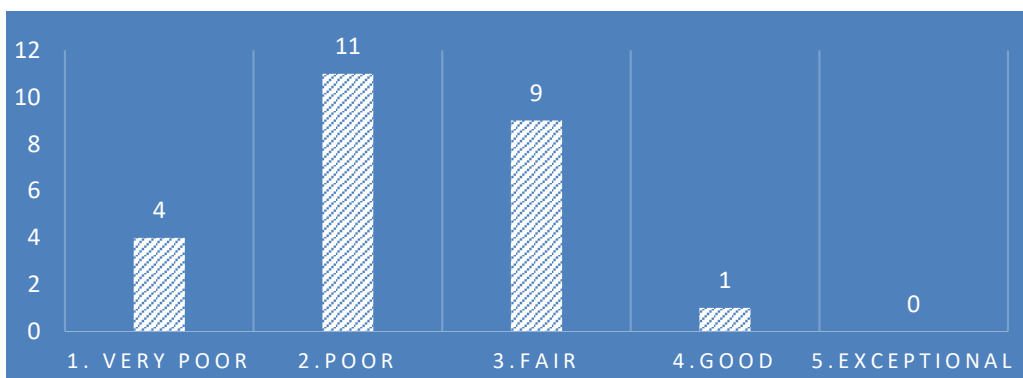


Table 13. Rating the support of prison staff to meet religious needs of Muslim prisoners

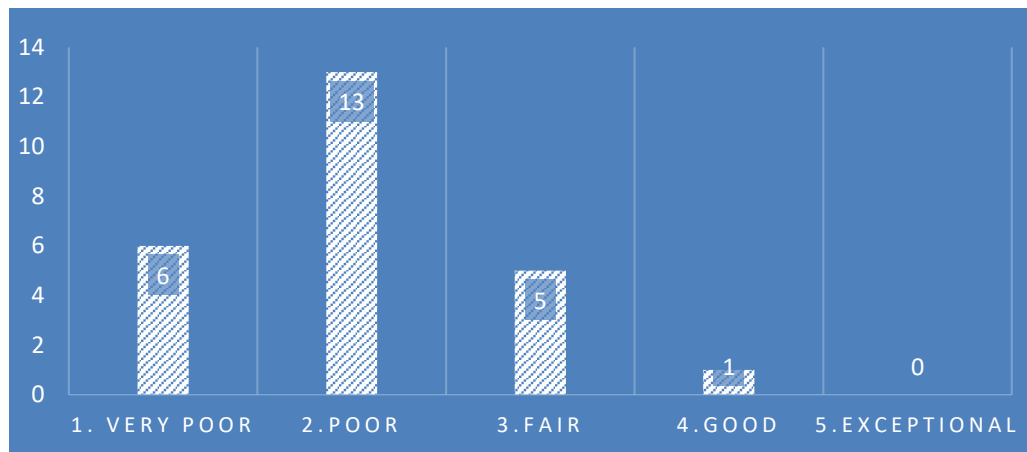


Table 14. Rating the accessibility to Imams/Chaplains in Prison when needed

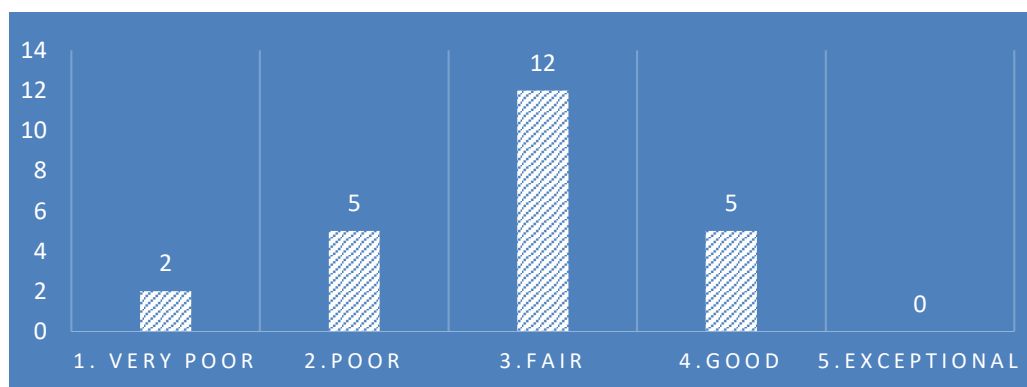


Table 15. Rating the support services of the chaplaincy service in prison

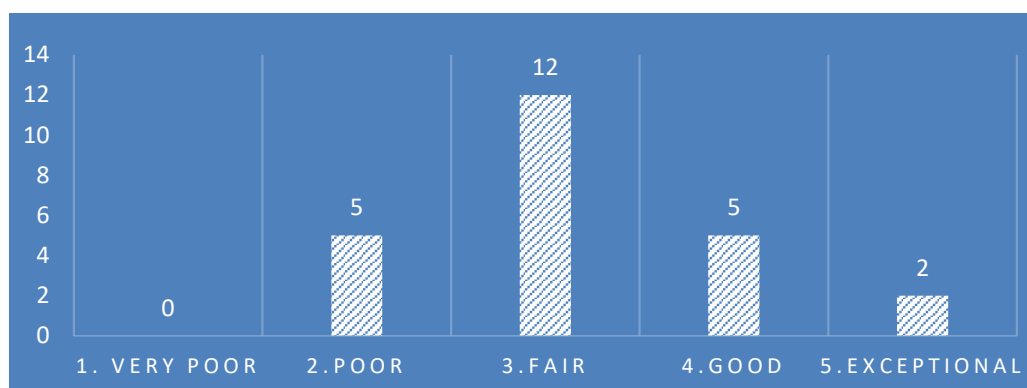


Table 16. **Rating the support received from the probation service**

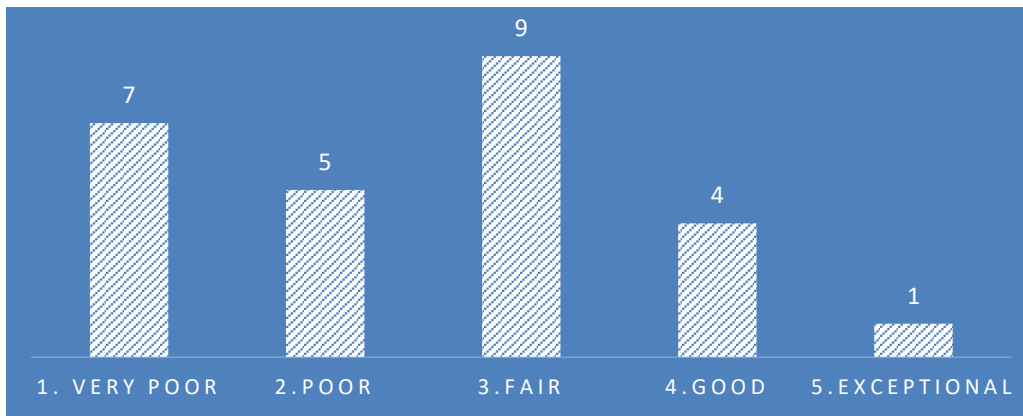


Table 17. **Rating the support received from your family**

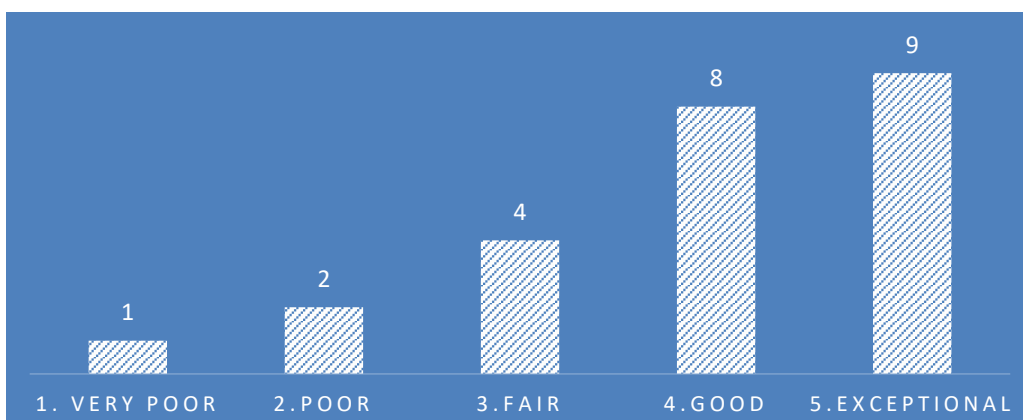


Table 18. **Rating the support family received from Criminal Justice System**

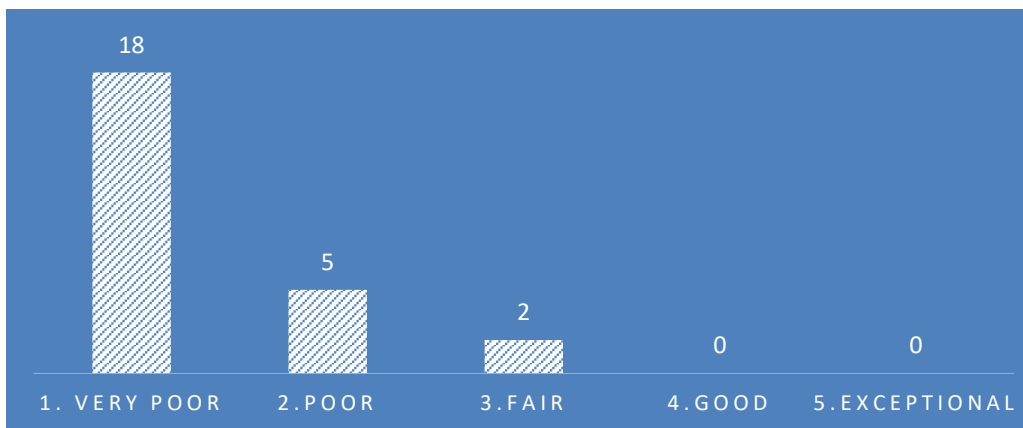


Table 19. Rating the level of support received from community organisations?

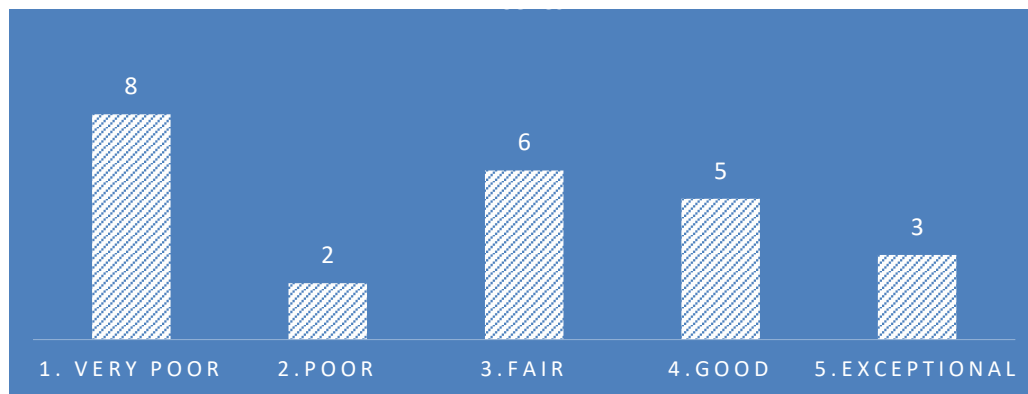


Table 20. Rating the amount of support (housing, employment, training, health and other) that was made available when resettling back into the community

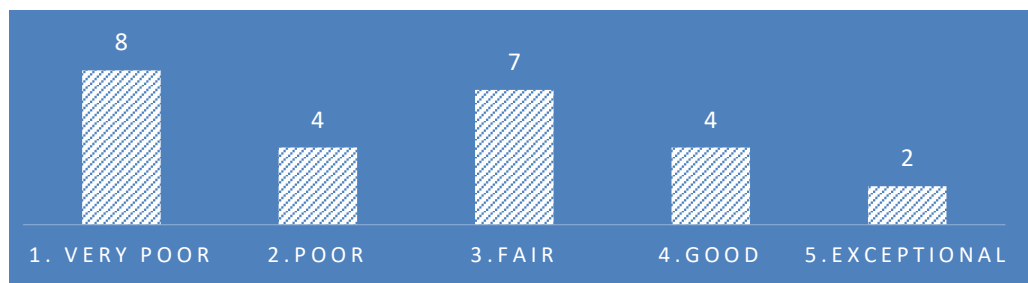


Table 21. Whether religious beliefs were respected in Prison?

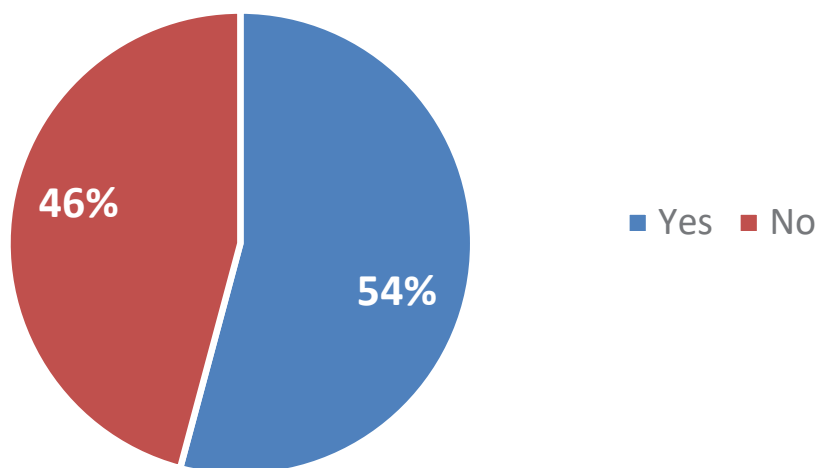


Table 22. **Whether they felt victimised because of race or ethnic origin**

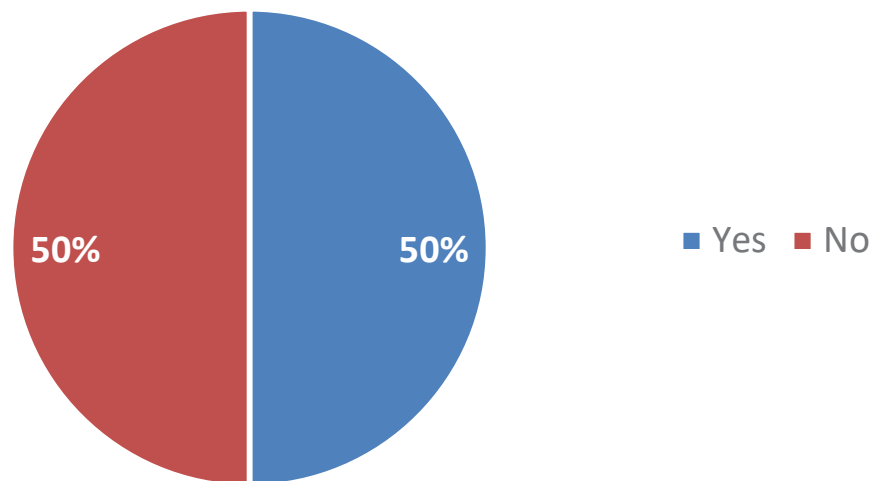


Table 23. **whether prison staff victimised because of religion/religious beliefs**

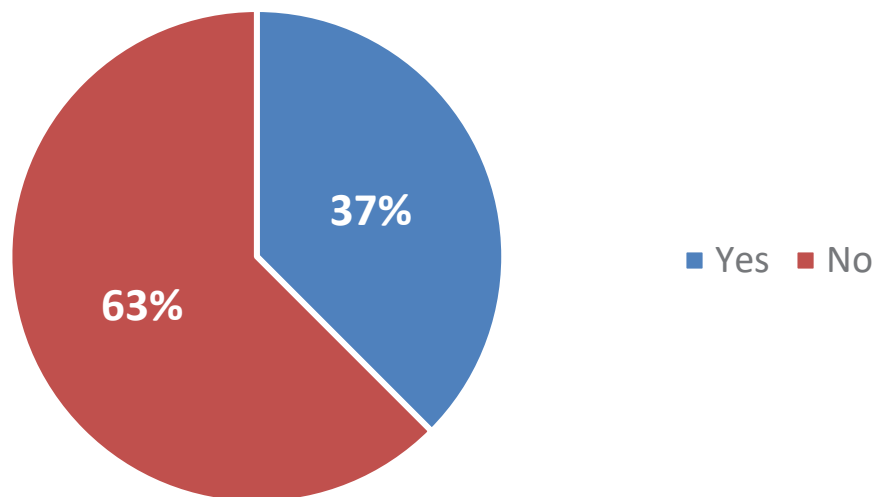


Table 24. **Whether other prisoners victimise you because of your race or ethnic origin?**

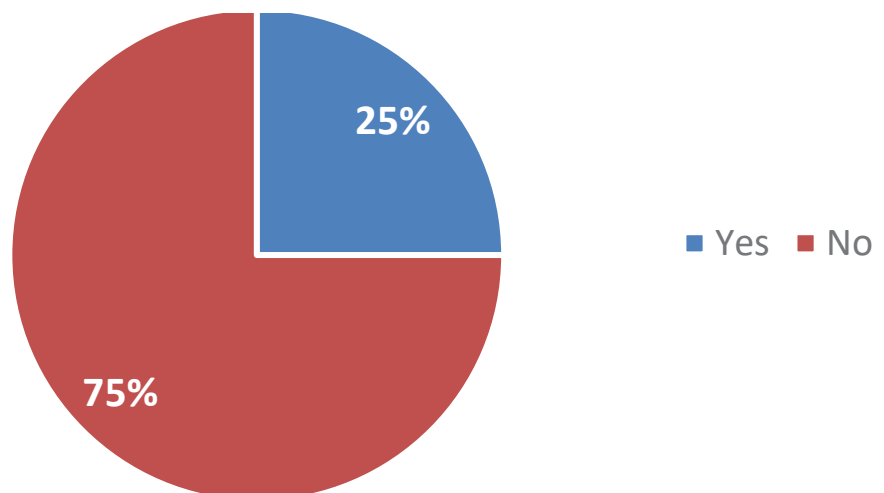
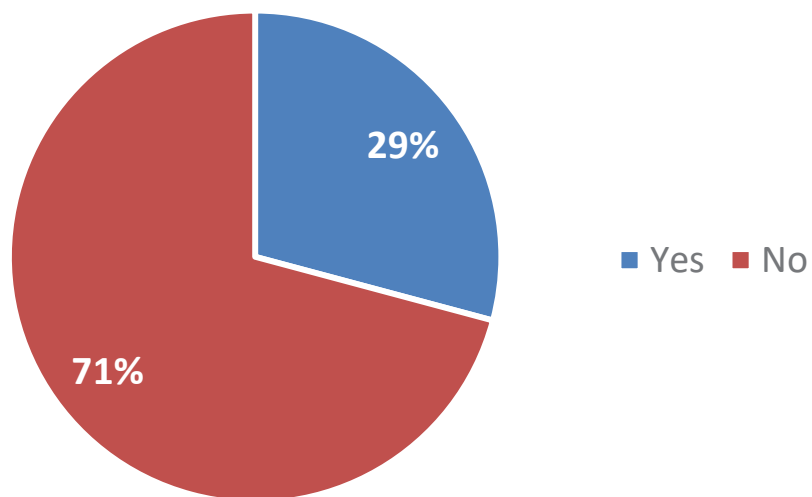


Table 25. **Whether prisoners victimise you because of your religion/religious beliefs?**







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