

# Poor labor market performance amongst Muslims in Britain is not due to cultural and religious habits, study finds

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New research has discovered that Muslims' so-called "sociocultural attitudes" cannot explain their poor labor market outcomes in the British

labor market.

The findings, published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, challenge a pervasive narrative that problematizes Muslims and their faith, providing empirical evidence that comparatively high Muslim unemployment and inactivity rates cannot be explained by their so-called "sociocultural attitudes." In doing so, the study lends support to the overwhelming evidence from field experiments that shows anti-Muslim discrimination towards Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim to be a significant barrier to their accessing work.

Samir Sweida-Metwally, doctoral researcher at Bristol's School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies and author of the paper, explained, "It is well established that Muslims experience the greatest faith penalty in the [labor market](#) relative to any other religious groups even after adjusting for factors that are likely to impact employment, such as education, age, region, language proficiency, and health. While some academics argue that discrimination is likely to be an important driver of these penalties, others suggest that factors related to cultural values are the cause, particularly among women. In the context of Muslims, these 'internal cultural factors,' namely 'tastes for isolation,' and particularly for women, a supposed commitment to 'traditional gender norms,' are assumed to stem from their religion."

In the paper, Mr. Sweida-Metwally analyzed 10 years of data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study, one of the largest surveys of its kind, which gathers information on the socioeconomic situation and cultural contexts from around 40,000 households. He explained, "I wanted to know if the Muslim penalty, among men and women, really disappears once so-called 'sociocultural attitudes are accounted for, as some have suggested. Specifically, are religiosity, traditionalist views, and lower civic participation associated with a higher risk of unemployment and inactivity?"

The paper found no such association. Another important contribution is that the paper questions the contention that amongst men, the ethnic penalty is best understood as resulting primarily from two penalties—color and religion—and suggests that a country-of-origin penalty may also be at play.

The risk of a penalty, particularly in terms of [unemployment](#), was also found to remain considerably high for Black African and Black Caribbean men regardless of whether they practiced or identified with a religious faith, providing strong evidence in support of previous research that established that the British labor market is hierarchized based on skin color.

Mr. Sweida-Metwally now aims to advance a more complete view of religious and ethno-religious inequalities in the British labor market.

**More information:** Samir Sweida-Metwally, Does the Muslim penalty in the British labour market dissipate after accounting for so-called "sociocultural attitudes"?, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2022.2097887](#)

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