

One of us?

The experience of Jews and Muslims in City Law

IN SUMMARY

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DIVERSITY
RECRUITMENT
EXCELLENCE

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020 alone, 6,822 religious hate crimes were recorded in the UK. 50% of those were against Muslims and 19% were against Jews, making Muslims and Jews the most targeted religious groups for hate crimes. Whilst the number of religious hate crimes recorded in 2020 fell by 5% from the previous year - a figure no doubt lowered by lockdown - the proportion of total hate crimes recorded against Muslims and Jewish people increased by 3% and 1%, respectively. Since the Home Office began reporting religious hate crimes by perceived targeted religion of the victim, Muslims and Jewish people have consistently been the most targeted religious groups.

The Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 1,308 anti-Jewish hate incidents in the first half of 2021 – the highest recorded incidents reported in the first half of any year, and a 49% increase from incidents reported in the first half of 2020. Last year, a Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) survey, commissioned by King's College London, found that 45% of UK adults hold antisemitic views, and 44% of Jewish people said they hide visible signs of their identity due to fears of antisemitism.

A 2018 report and survey published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission stated that 70% of Muslims had experienced prejudice as a result of their religion, and 22% of people openly expressed negative feelings towards Muslims. The Singh Investigation report, published earlier this year, investigated 1,418 complaints relating to over 700 incidents within the Conservative and Unionist Party in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and concluded that anti-Muslim sentiment remains a problem.

Evidence shows that antisemitism and islamophobia remain entrenched in the UK today. The following report will draw on the lived experiences of Jewish lawyers, Muslim lawyers and Jewish business services professionals at top law firms and provide a series of recommendations to support firms in cultivating inclusive environments for all employees.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Jews and Muslims experience antisemitism and islamophobia at city law firms

71% of the Jewish interviewees reported experiencing antisemitism at their firms. 64% reported implicit experiences of antisemitism and 14% reported explicit experiences. It was the experiences of explicit antisemitism that resulted in Jewish interviewees leaving their respective firms early or strongly considering leaving.

50% of the Muslim lawyers interviewed reported experiencing islamophobia. All of those lawyers experienced implicit islamophobia and 29% reported experiences of explicit islamophobia. Interviewees who have now left private practice stated their experiences of implicit islamophobia as a contributing factor to their decision to leave the firm.

To protect the identities of the individuals concerned, we have chosen to limit the examples of implicit antisemitism and islamophobia shared in this report and chosen not to include any examples of explicit antisemitism or islamophobia.

2. Experiences are different for people who visibly express their religion

43% of the Muslim lawyers interviewed explicitly stated that the experience of women who wear a headscarf is very different to those who do not visibly express their religion.

3. Lack of acknowledgement for the rise in antisemitism and the impact this has on the Jewish community has left Jewish employees feeling unsupported by their firms

21% of interviewees reported British Jews feeling scared about the rise in antisemitism and many felt firms could have done more to support employees after the widely reported antisemitic abuse in North London in 2021.

4. Lack of education and awareness around Jewish culture and religion creates feelings of exclusion

35% of Jewish interviewees reported lack of awareness and education as an issue at law firms. Many interviewees felt the lack of understanding of Jewish culture and community meant that Jewish people were often excluded from social events and prime networking opportunities held on sabbath days.

5. Lack of flexibility during Ramadan and when fasting is a problem at firms

43% of interviewees reported lack of flexibility during Ramadan and when fasting as a problem at their individual firms. Several of the Muslim lawyers interviewed felt firms could be more proactive with their communication and expectations during Ramadan. 14% of the Muslim lawyers interviewed also reported difficulty with taking time off to pray.

6. Representation at a senior level helps make partnership feel achievable

86% of the Jewish lawyers interviewed said they felt partnership was achievable and reported being aware of several active Jewish partners at their firms. As such, they stated partnership was not unachievable on the grounds of their religion or race. For those interviewees that received it, the support and intervention of a senior person created a sense of solidarity and promoted inclusion. Conversely, whilst those who reported not feeling supported still felt comfortable raising any issues with a senior leader or partner, upon doing so they felt their concerns were not taken seriously.

Prior to joining their firm, 50% of the Muslim lawyers interviewed aspired to make it to partner. Upon joining, 36% of those still hoped to make partner. 21% of interviewees who said partnership did not feel achievable prior to joining the firm now feel partnership is achievable. For those that no longer aspired to reach partnership upon joining the firm, lack of representation at the senior level was cited as one of the primary reasons.

7. Alcohol remains a barrier to success for Muslim lawyers

71% of Muslim lawyers interviewed reported that the importance placed on alcohol limited their chances of progression and success. Interviewees reported alcohol being the focal point of many social events which meant individuals who did not drink, or want to be around alcohol, missed out on prime networking opportunities with clients and senior individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educate your workforce and facilitate open, honest discussions about the lived experiences of Jewish and Muslim people at the firm

- Hold mandatory training and workshops on race, culture, religion and inclusion, and ensure the experience of Jewish people and Muslim people is spoken about in those sessions.
- Do not ask Jewish and Muslim employees to speak up, defend or provide an explanation for the geopolitical events going on in the world.
- Do not hold all social events and networking opportunities on a Friday or at the weekend.
- Develop and support a Jewish network and a Muslim network, and ensure they are led and championed by senior leadership.

2. Develop clear protocols and policies on religious/cultural heritage and ensure these are communicated across the firm

Policies should:

- Clearly explain why the firm wishes to collect data relating to religious and cultural heritage and outline the importance of having this data.
- Provide clear communication on the firm's flexible working policy surrounding Shabbat and Ramadan and other key religious events. Ensure all employees who wish to observe holy days such as Shabbat and Ramadan are able to, and know they are able to.
- Ensure all employees who wish to take time off to pray are able to, and know they are able to.
- Ensure all employees are allocated religious leave days and understand they can, and should, take them if they wish to.

3. Senior role models should lead by example

As emphasised in our *Closing The Ethnicity Stay Gap* report, senior role models are key. The leadership team set the pace and should be heavily involved in all conversations about diversity.

Leadership should:

- Clearly communicate the firm's zero tolerance position on antisemitism and islamophobia.
- Support the development of, and attend, all training sessions on race, religion and culture, ensuring the experience of Jewish and Muslim individuals forms part of the training.
- Act as personal role models to ensure people feel comfortable being themselves at work.
- Regularly review, assess, and analyse the data.

4. Gather the data and monitor attrition rates

Monitor and track on an annual basis the progression and attrition rates for all Jewish and Muslim employees at the firm, lawyers and business services.

5. Monitor and track partnership promotion rates for Jewish and Muslim lawyers

In order to truly understand the progression and promotion of Jewish and Muslim lawyers at firms, we need to collect the data. Firms should monitor and track partnership promotions for Jewish and Muslim lawyers on an annual basis.

6. Allow people space to be themselves

Do not try and fit how people describe themselves into a one-size-fits-all box. Being Jewish means different things to different people. For some it is a race, to others a religion, and for others a culture. For many, it is all three. People should feel able to define what being Jewish means to them without others imposing their own limitations in response.

7. Ensure social events are not centred around alcohol

Do not hold all social events in bars. If possible, try and base social events around an activity or food rather than alcohol. If it is food-based, make sure the menu is inclusive of religious dietary requirements. If you do choose to hold an event in a bar or where alcohol is served, ensure a good variety of non-alcoholic drinks are available, and employees who do not feel comfortable being around alcohol know they are not obliged to attend. This should be clearly communicated throughout the firm.

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