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Canadian Council of Muslim Women  
Conseil canadien des femmes musulmanes

## MUSLIM WOMEN IN CANADA: FACT SHEETS

NUMBER 1

### Introduction

Muslim women in Canada are diverse and distinct, one from the other, yet stereotypes and myths about Muslim women abound in the popular media and within the larger Canadian society. The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) is committed to promoting Muslim women's identity in the Canadian context and to contribute to Canadian society the knowledge, life experiences and ideas of Muslim women for the benefit of all. To meet these objectives we are pleased to issue a series of fact sheets that attempt to dispel the myths and stereotypes and provide facts that will acquaint the broader Canadian society and Muslim women themselves with the diversity and potential of this growing segment of the Canadian population. This fact sheet is the first in the series and provides comprehensive data based on the 2001 Census of Canada. The data are extracted from the CCMW report entitled, *Muslim Women: Beyond the Perceptions*, by Dr. Daood Hamdani. For the complete report, click on <http://www.ccmw.com/>. Watch for future releases of our fact sheets on our website.

### Basic Demographics

- Islam is the second largest of the three Abrahamic faiths and the seventh overall among the six dozen faiths listed in the 2001 census.
- 2001 census counted 579,645 Muslims – 2.0% of the Canadian population; just less than one-half, 276,075 were women – 1.8% of all women in Canada.
- Nearly one-half (48%) of Muslim women immigrated to Canada in the 1990s and 30% arrived here during 1996-2001.
- Almost one-quarter of Canadian Muslim women were born in Canada, which is more than those Canadian Muslim women who were born in the entire Middle East, Africa or entire South Asia.
- Average age of a Muslim Canadian woman is 27, compared with 37 for all women in Canada.

### Geographical concentration and dispersion

- While Muslim women live in all parts of Canada, the largest concentration of Muslim women (62%) is in Ontario, followed by Quebec (18%), British Columbia (10%), and Alberta (8%).
- All but 3% of Muslim women live in the eleven largest metropolitan areas.
- Largest concentration of Muslim women is in Toronto (46%), followed by Montreal (17%), Vancouver (10%), Ottawa-Hull (8%), Calgary (5%), and Edmonton (4%).

## Ethnic and cultural diversity

- Women of certain Asian and African origins form the majority of Muslim women in Canada: 40% are from West Asia, Middle East and North Africa; 35% are from South Asia; 9% are from other parts of Africa; 5% are from Europe; and 2% are from the Caribbean.
- All but 14% of Muslim women belong to a visible minority group.
- Most Muslim women in Canada speak more than one language and many along with Roman Catholic women, are also the largest users of both Canadian official languages at work.

## Family structures

- Muslim families hold on to the tradition of marriage. In 2001, 74% of the Muslim women above the age of 15 years were or had at some time been married.
- In 2001, 60% were still married, to the same spouse or a second or a third one.
- Compared to all women, incidence of divorce among Muslim women was less than one-half the national average – 7% compared with 17%.
- The incidence of separation was almost the same for Muslim women as all women at close to 7%.
- Close to 4% of the divorced, separated, widowed and single (never married) Muslim women lived in common-law union with a Muslim or non-Muslim partner.
- Muslim women marry at a younger age – over 18% of them compared with 5% of all women, were married before reaching the age of 24 years.
- Incidence of marriage breakdown in the age group 18-24 years was higher, with some 1.4% of Muslim women in this age group being divorced or separated, as compared with 0.7% of the women in all other faith communities.
- Although Muslim women tend to marry at a young age, 13% of those aged 25-44 had never been married.
- Common-law unions were twice as common among Muslim women aged 25-44 years as the 4% average for all Muslim women.

## Life cycle representation

- Those between the ages of 25 and 44 years, considered to be prime age, are the largest component of the Muslim women's population at just over 37%.
- Muslim schoolgirls are the second largest component at 24%. They consist of girls between the ages of 6 and 17 years.
- Muslim women in their mid-life stage, those between the ages of 45 and 64 are the third largest group at 15%, followed by those between the ages of 18 and 24 years who are in the postsecondary education stage.
- Senior citizens are the smallest cohort among Muslim women at about 3%.

## Educational Attainment

- Nearly one in three Muslim women has a university degree, compared with one in five among all women.
- 19% reported having at least a Bachelor's degree compared with 11.5% of all women.
- Twice as many Muslim women hold master's (5%) and doctoral degrees (0.8%) as all women in Canada.
- Nearly two-fifths (37 per cent) specialize in a science or engineering discipline compared with 31 per cent of all women.
- Twice as many adult Muslim women compared to all adult women were enrolled in educational institutions for improving and upgrading their skills and qualifications.

## Labour market participation

- Less than one-half (49%) of the eligible Muslim women participate in the labour market compared with the national average of 60.5 per cent.
- The rate of unemployment (16.5%) among Muslim women is more than double the rate of 7.2% for all women.
- In spite of their higher levels of education, Muslim women are concentrated in lower paying clerical and sales and service occupations.
- Over 57% of Muslim women in the labour force are mothers of pre-school and school-age children compared with 49% of all mothers in the labour force with children in this age bracket.
- Only 38% of Muslim women in the labour force worked full-time, full year in 2001, compared with 48% of all women who worked full-time, full year.
- Close to 9% of Muslim women are self-employed, which is comparable to all women in Canada.
- Close to 1% of the Muslim Canadian female population is engaged in family businesses and receive no pay for their work, compared with the Canadian average of 0.6%.

## Income

- The average annual income from all sources of a Muslim woman was \$16,010, compared with \$22,885 for all women in Canada.
- The majority (84%) of Muslim women earned less than \$30,000 compared with 72% of all women.
- Only 5% of Muslim women had an income of \$50,000 or more, compared with 9% of all women.

For the detailed report click on [http://www.ccmw.com/publications/Muslim Women\\_Beyond the Perceptions.pdf](http://www.ccmw.com/publications/Muslim_Women_Beyond_the_Perceptions.pdf)