

Muslim Women: Beyond Perceptions

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November 2004

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The Canadian Council of Muslim Women gratefully acknowledges the financial support for this study provided by the Women’s Program, Status of Women Canada and the Multiculturalism Program, Department of Canadian Heritage.

Executive Summary

This report provides a demographic portrait of Canadian Muslim women. Its aim is to illuminate the discussion and issues and to provide inputs to strategic planning for the community.

Islam is the principal non-Christian faith and seventh overall among all denominations. In terms of numbers, however, it is still small; the 2001 census counted 579,645 Muslims, 2.0 per cent of the population. Just under one-half, 276,075 were women. It is the fastest-growing religion in the country. The number of Canadian women affiliated with Islam increased by 140 per cent in the 1990s. Native-born Muslim women are the single largest group, outnumbering Canadian Muslim women born in the Middle East or South Asia.

The Muslim community is a blend of the descendents of families that settled here more than a century ago and the newcomers. Nearly one-half of the Muslim women in Canada today immigrated in the 1990s and about one-third as recently as the second half of the 1990s. Community organizations ease their transition but adjustment can be slow and sometimes arduous, depending upon the help and attitudes of their families.

The community has evolved with the society. From an overwhelmingly European base, it has grown to be a vibrant representation of the Canadian pluralist society. In 1871, almost all Muslims traced their lineage to Scottish ancestors; Muslims of Scottish descent now comprise only a small minority in a mosaic that includes cultures and ethnicities of all the continents. Although South Asian and Middle Eastern communities dominate, French, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Inuit, Métis, etc. are integral parts of the Canadian Islamic tapestry. A vast majority (86 per cent) is identified as visible minority.

Muslim women are an important building bloc of the knowledge society. There are enough doctoral degree holders among them to staff the entire academic faculty of a medium-size university. They are not only highly educated but also specialized in leading edge technologies. Nearly two-fifths (37 per cent), as compared with 31 per cent of all women, specialize in a field directly related to the Internet, biotechnologies and health care.

In the domestic market, they offer services in both official languages; Muslim women have the highest percentage of workers using English and French at work, along with the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox women. For Canadian firms conducting business in the global markets, they offer knowledge of a wide variety of languages and cultures.

Yet this human capital is seriously unutilized or underutilized. Rigidities in the labour market and rules and regulations as well as cultural constraints and social norms play an important part. More than 16 per cent, more than double the national average, are unemployed. When they land a job, more often than not, it is not in their field of specialization and likely to be term, casual or part time. Only 38 per cent of Muslim worked full year, full-time in 2001. The rest worked either part-time or only for a portion of the year.

Contrary to the perception, shared by many Muslim men, the majority of Muslim women in the labour force are not single women. Over one of the Muslim female labour force is comprised of mothers with preschoolers and school-age children. For many, it is the realization of their full potential as a person. Others are forced by necessity, i.e. the husband is either unemployed or does not earn enough to support the family. This represents a significant change from the traditional Muslim family in which the man was supposed to be the provider.

While the dual earner family phenomenon has imposed an additional burden on Muslim mothers, there is little evidence of a perceptible change in the traditional spousal roles concerning the housework and childcare. As a result, Muslim mothers with young children have far less – by one-third or more – leisure time than Muslim fathers, to engage in activities such as reading, hobbies, watching television. And they devote, on average, one-half of that leisure time to their preschool and school-going children as compared to less than one-third of the fathers' leisure time being spent with them.

Muslim Women: Beyond Perceptions

1. Introduction

The existing literature about Muslim women is largely based on focus group discussions, interviews and opinion polls. It provides useful insights, but lacks in factual information. This report tries to fill the gap. Statistical facts presented here complement the subjective analysis but also challenge the perceptions.ⁱ

This report is not meant to be a critical reading. It does, however, illuminate the issues. It captures in numbers the numerous -- and difficult -- adjustments Muslim women face and make: blending their religious traditions with the Canadian experience; balancing their native cultures with the demands of living in a different society; pursuing corporate careers while providing a nurturing environment at home; struggling with traditional housework-sharing arrangements between spouses while coping with the demands of being dual income earners and sometimes the only earner in the family, etc. Being new in the country and a member of the visible minority adds another dimension to the process of adaptation and adjustment.

The principal purpose of this report is to inform the contemporary discussion of issues facing Muslim women which, in the absence of accurate information, has been confounded and often distorted by misconceptions and misunderstanding. The reader will note the gap between perceptions and the reality about Muslim women; appreciate their enormous potential as a human resource for the knowledge economy, in the globalizing marketplace; and learn about the difficulties they overcome in smoothing the passage of their children from family to society.

2. Basic facts

Religion may not be an integral part of the Canadians' everyday life, but most of them identify themselves with a faith. They balance material pursuit with spiritual fulfillment through one of about six dozen faiths and codes of spiritual conduct, making the Canadian religious landscape rich like its cultural mosaic -- absorbing, changing, and growing.

Our religious landscape was not always so diverse. It has evolved over a century and changed significantly in the last three decades. Some of the religions practiced today barely registered at the time of Canada's birth. They were introduced to the country by the large waves of immigrants from Europe after the Confederation. Over the years, more religions became part of our collective spiritual life. Some of them have grown, others did not. Some faith communities that were hardly mentioned three decades ago now occupy a place on the country's religious map. Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist communities are among those that have been added to the country's religious typology in the recent past.

Islam only seems new to Canada because it came to the people's attention in 1981 after Statistics Canada resumed publishing data on them in the census publications following a break of four decades.ⁱⁱ Canadians practiced Islam in the pre-Confederation

days. Agnes Love – the first known Muslim woman, who was of Scottish origin, was raising, with her husband James, a family of three daughters and five sons when the Fathers of Confederation were still trying to conceive Canada.ⁱⁱⁱ

Over the years, more and more Canadians have been seeking spirituality through Islam. The growth was particularly strong in the 1990s. Both demographic and social changes contributed to it. The substantial gender imbalance that marked the Muslim community in the 1980s meant that it was only a matter of time that young women in their twenties and thirties would come to Canada from other countries to be united with their spouses or marry their fiancés, in addition to those who come to pursue professional careers. It also meant higher birth rates. The decades of the 1980s and 1990s were also a period of considerable social and religious change. Many young people forsook their parents' faith in search of spiritual fulfillment elsewhere and some of them found it in the Islamic tradition.

Islam is now the second largest of the three Abrahamic faiths and the seventh overall among the six dozen faiths listed in the 2001 census.^{iv} In terms of numbers, however, it is still small; the 2001 census counted 579,645 Muslims, 2.0 per cent of the population.^v Just under one-half, 276,075 were women.

The Muslim community is a blend of the descendents of the families that settled here more than a century ago and the women who made Canada their home in recent years. Nearly one-half of the Muslim women in Canada today immigrated in the 1990s and almost one in three as recently as the second half of the 1990s. Community organizations facilitate their transition and help familiarize them with the country's institutions, but adjustment can be slow and sometimes arduous, depending upon the help and attitudes of their families and friends.

It is also a very young community. On average, a Canadian Muslim female is about a decade younger than the total female population in the country.

Although Islam in Canada is associated with the Middle East and South Asia, it is a Canadian religion. The native-born Muslim women are the single largest segment. Accounting for one-quarter of the Muslim population, they outnumber those Canadian Muslim women who were born in the Middle East or South Asia.

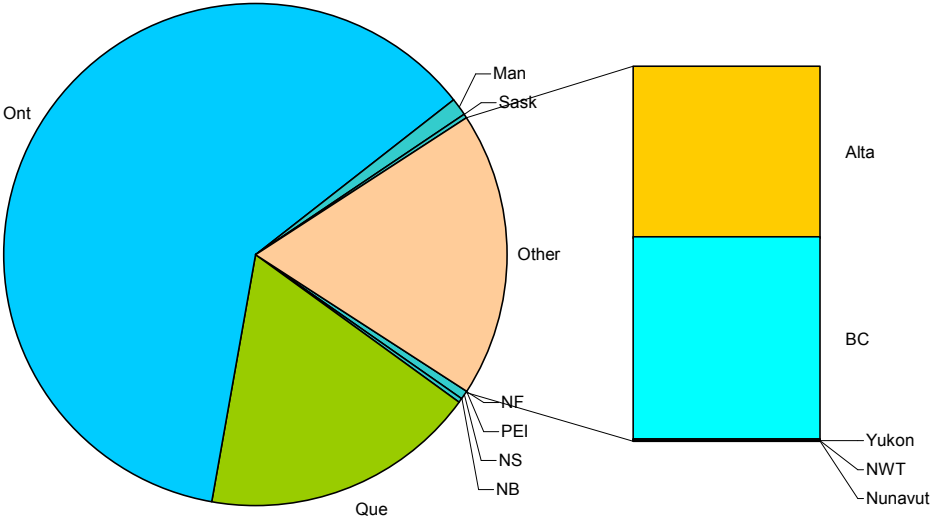
3. Geographical concentration and dispersion

Geography is an important indicator of the issues a community is likely to face and the influence it can have in the administrative and political life of the community. It has implications for the type of social infrastructure needed and regional allocation of resources. As well as being an indicator of the issues, the geographical pattern of a community's settlement is also a reflection of its social and educational backgrounds, its preferences about lifestyles, access to educational, social and religious institutions, and of the degree to which it is isolated from or is a part of the society.

Like Canadians and most faith communities, a vast majority of Muslim women live in the populous provinces. The largest concentration is in Ontario. Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, which has a very well established Muslim community with long historical roots in the province, follow next, in that order. These four provinces are home to all but 2 per cent of Muslim women. Concentration notwithstanding, they have settled in all parts of the country, including the relatively less accessible areas such as the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut. Dispersion of population over a

vast area presents challenges for strategic planners. While Muslim women living in large, high-income provinces have access to social and community networks and other support systems, those living in smaller centres are disadvantaged, making a smooth adjustment more difficult in areas where the help may be needed the most.

Figure 1: Muslim females across the country



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, <http://www.statcan.ca>

A logical consequence of concentration in the large provinces is the high degree of urbanization. All but 3 per cent of the Muslim women live in the eleven largest metropolitan areas, and Toronto and Montreal together have more Muslim females than the rest of the country. Vancouver, Ottawa and Calgary are the other large centres.

Whether gender plays a definitive role in the Muslims’ settlement pattern is premature to say, but significant differences are evident with respect to choices women and men make. Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa have much larger concentrations of Muslim women, as compared with men, as they offer greater professional opportunities for career women and social opportunities for single women. Montreal and Quebec are the significant exceptions perhaps because of the language. Further, cities located far from the main centres of educational and cultural activity and based on industries traditionally regarded as the male domain, such as Sudbury and Thunder Bay, also rank low on their list of places to settle.

City populations have their distinctive age profiles, determined by many factors including personal choices, natural endowment of the area, historical family settlement

patterns, economic opportunities, and the provincial and local government policies. For example, Montreal has nearly 17 per cent of the total Muslim female population, but only 2 per cent of the elderly (aged 85 years and over). On the other hand, Vancouver with a smaller population has 10 times as many elderly as Montreal. Calgary and Edmonton are the other cities with disproportionately higher shares of the elderly population. Meanwhile, preschool and school age children stand out in the Ottawa-Gatineau region.

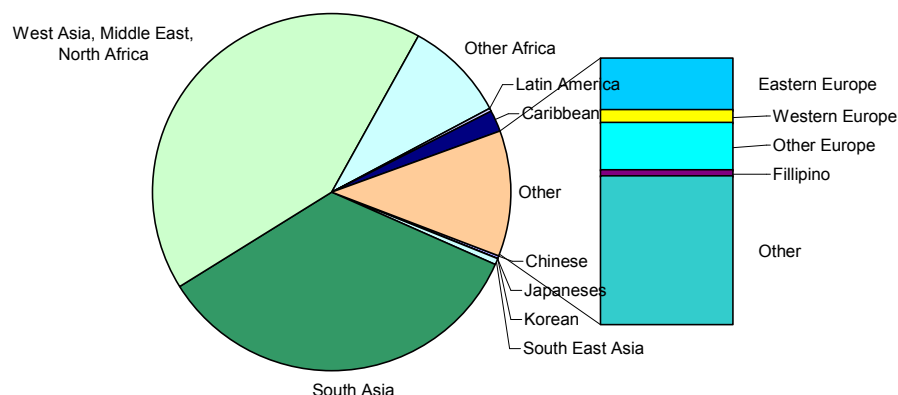
Where the cities have similar demographic profiles of Muslim women, the underlying reasons are different. Moderate climatic conditions explain the attractiveness of Vancouver for the elderly but Calgary and Edmonton reflect the established Muslim family roots and the elderly there are largely those who settled there decades ago. Distinctive city demographics point to city-specific needs and priorities.

4. A representation of Canada's pluralist society

In the 1970s, close to three-fourths of all Canadians could be described as having British or French ancestry. The cultural landscape changed significantly in the following three decades. Not only did this neat classification become inadequate to describe the richness of the Canadian culture, it also became progressively more difficult to classify increasing numbers of Canadians into compartmentalized cultural and ethnic typologies that had served the social scientists and policymakers well, for so long. Intermingling of people as a result of the international movements and intermarriages among Canadians were resulting in offspring of multiple origins, and it was happening at a rather brisk pace. By 2001, 38 per cent of the Canadians had multicultural, multi-ethnic heritage. This has unnerved a small minority of people who want to cling on to a romanticized view of the past^{vi}, but an overwhelming majority of the people sees it as a source of pride and the basis for building an even richer future. Responding to a large survey done in 2003 – whose findings led to the *Globe and Mail's* highly popular series *New Canada* -- which asked what made them feel proud, Canadians ranked multiculturalism as a source of pride after the beauty of the land and the quality of life. Moreover, 92 per cent of the Canadians agreed that "every Canadian has a responsibility to make sure that people from different races and cultures feel welcome in this country".^{vii}

Muslim community has evolved with the society. From an overwhelmingly European base, it has grown to be a vibrant representation of the Canadian pluralist society. In 1871, one hundred years before multiculturalism was adopted as the official policy, almost all Muslims traced their lineage to Scottish ancestors; Muslims of Scottish descent now comprise only a small minority of a few hundred people in a mosaic that includes cultures and ethnicities of all the continents. Although South Asian and Middle Eastern communities dominate, French, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Inuit, Métis, etc. are integral parts of the Canadian Islamic tapestry. And this mosaic also contains blends: 13 per cent of the Muslim women have multiple cultural and ethnic identities.

Figure 2: Ethnic and cultural diversity of Muslim female population (% distribution)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, <http://www.statcan.ca>

Diverse cultural backgrounds suggest just as many mother tongues and languages spoken in Muslim households. Although belonging to numerous cultures, each with its own language, Muslim women demonstrate that multiculturalism is compatible with bilingualism. They show a keen desire and aptitude to speak both official languages, in addition to their mother tongue. Among the two dozens or so faith communities with significant populations, Muslim along with Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox women, are the largest users of both official languages at work, according to the 2001 census, confirming the findings of opinion polls that those who support the principle of multiculturalism tend to be more, not less, supportive of bilingualism.^{viii}

5. Muslim, women and visible

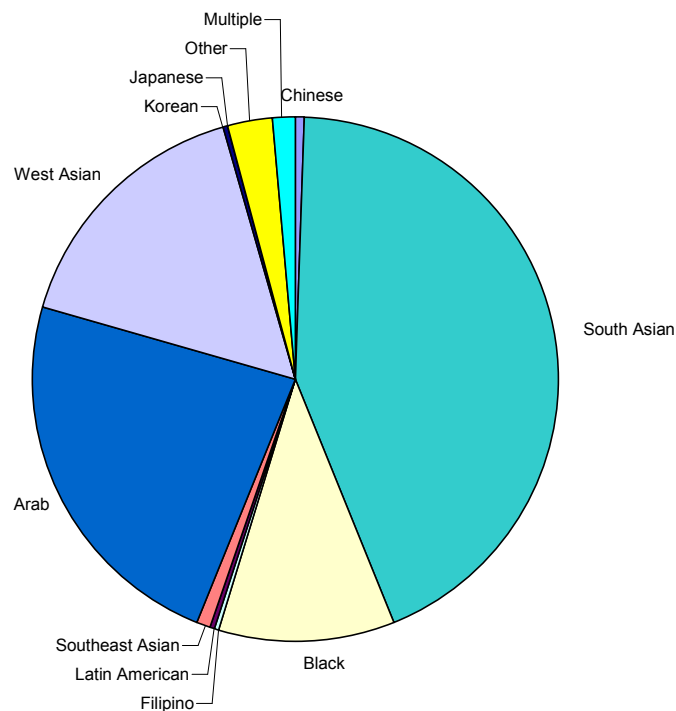
While the Muslim community is culturally diverse, a substantial segment belongs to visible minorities. Visible minorities are defined in the Employment Equity Act as persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are “non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour”. In light of the evidence that visible minorities and certain other designated groups were disadvantaged in terms of higher unemployment and underemployment, lower pay for equal qualifications, and lower participation in positions of authority, the Employment Equity program strives for a workforce that reflects the diversity of Canadians, and a system that ensures that all employees have an equitable opportunity to develop their abilities, realize their expectations, and make the best contribution possible.

Equality of access to jobs and services is only one of the many concerns. Most of the other significant issues facing the society such as integration, immigration, race

relations, multiculturalism, and cross cultural understanding also concern, affect or involve visible minorities.

Visible minorities are becoming an increasingly important segment of the society, in numbers if not in influence. In 2001, some 13.5 per cent of all women were identified as members of the visible minority groups. Many belonged to the Roman Catholic Church or did not identify with any institutionalized religion, but one in nine visible minority women were Muslim.

Figure 3: Muslim female population identified as visible minority, major groups (%)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, <http://www.statcan.ca>

All but 14 per cent of Muslim women belong to a visible minority group, ranking fourth in terms of concentration, after the Sikhs, Hindus and the Buddhists. South Asian, Arab and West Asian women make up most of the Muslim visible minorities, but there are also numbers of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Filipinos and other groups among them.

6. The Muslim Family

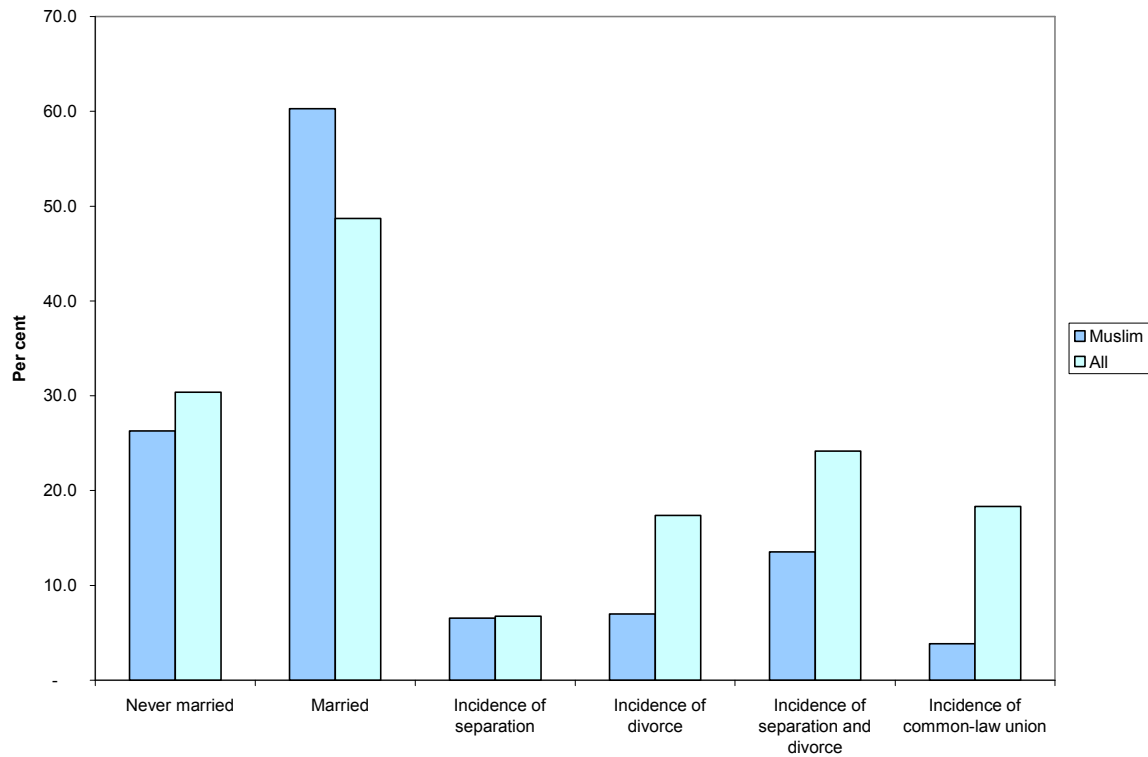
In spite of the enormous change in the institution of marriage, the Muslim community holds on to its traditional form, but the signs of stress are beginning to appear.

In 2001, nearly three-fourths of the Muslim women above the age of 15 years were or had been married. Sixty per cent were still married, to the same spouse or a second or a third one. At the same time, the incidence of divorce was low. For every one

hundred married women, there were seven who were divorced – less than one-half the national average of 17 per cent^{ix} for all women.

However, low incidence of divorce does not imply eternal bliss for the rest of the married couples. Separations were just as common as divorces. Compared to all females, Muslim women’s divorce incidence was less than one-half the national average, but the incidence of separation was almost the same at close to 7 per one hundred married females.

Figure 4: Incidence of marriage, common-law unions and marriage breakdown



Source: Calculated by the author from data from Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, <http://www.statcan.ca>

Comparisons of marriage breakdowns between Muslim and the total population reveal significant differences in attitudes towards the institution of marriage. Muslims have just as high incidence of separation as all Canadians but they are reluctant to divorce. This paradox can be interpreted in two ways. They want to give reconciliation all the chance before dissolving the marriage, or it may be an indication of the deeply-rooted cultural tradition that stigmatizes divorce and forces couples to endure an unhappy union for the rest of their lives.

While common-law unions are increasingly common among Canadians, this family form has not caught up with Muslims. Nevertheless, such unions in which a Muslim is a partner are not absent. Close to 4 per cent of the divorced, separated, widowed and single (never married) Muslim women live in a common-law relationship with a Muslim or non-Muslim partner. Such unions are found in all age groups but are more common

among 25 to 44 years old women. This is the age at which women and men become less susceptible to the family pressure and, if they are economically independent, are freer to make their own choices. As this age group increases in size and the law continues to extend the terms and conditions of traditional marriage to this family form, common-law relationships between Muslims or between Muslims and non-Muslims are likely to increase.

A number of other points emerge from the data. First, Muslim women marry at a younger age. Relative to their populations, nearly four times as many Muslim women were married before reaching the age of 24 years, as their Canadian peers. Marriage at a young age, often arranged by parents and in some cases with an imported husband, also results in higher marriage breakdown rates among the Muslim youth. Proportionately twice as many Muslim as all females in Canada were divorced or separated by the age of 24 years.

Second, although Muslim females tend to marry at a young age, 13 per cent of those in the age cohort, 25-44 years, had never been married, for various reasons, such as pursuit of higher studies or a career, lack of social opportunities to meet eligible men within the faith, being in a common-law relationship, etc. Women in this age group as compared with other age groups are the most likely to form common law unions. Such unions were twice as common among them as the average for Muslim females.

7. Life cycle and strategic planning

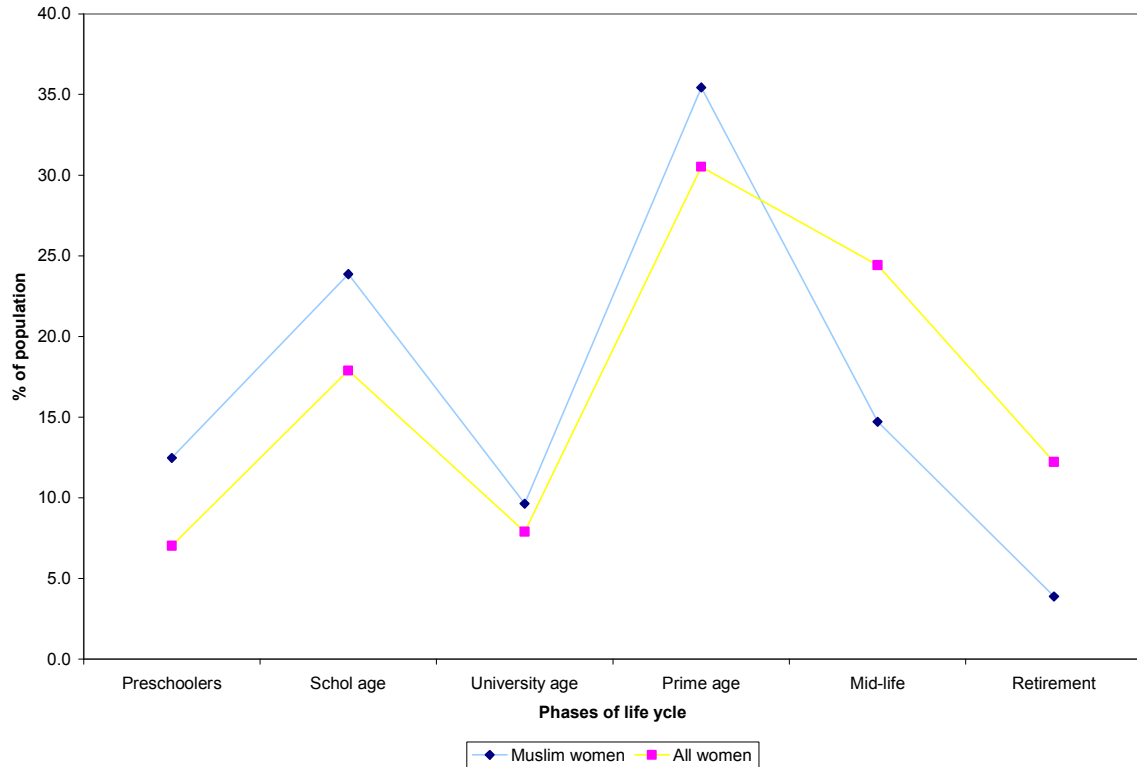
Just as an individual's needs change over the various phases of life, so too do a community's requirements. Age distribution of a community according to the life cycle is a useful tool for strategic planners in order to be able to leverage limited resources to maximize the benefit. Broadly, the community can be segmented into six groups according to the major needs. Life cycle begins with the pre-school age when children are nurtured at home or, if both parents work outside the home, cared for in daycare centres. Then begins the school age when children reach 6 years of age, followed by post-secondary education, beginning at 18 years of age or over. Prime age begins at about 25 years when postsecondary education is, by and large, completed and the people enter the labour force or start raising families. Mature years follow and the final phase begins with retirement at 65 years of age, although the actual average age of retirement is lower than that.

Prime age group, i.e. 25 to 44 years old women are the largest component. They are participating in the labour market or raising families or doing both. For them, job opportunities, skill upgrading facilities, and childcare facilities are important. They face many challenges and therefore need social and community support systems. Studies have shown that the pressure to balance family with career forces women to drop out of the labour market or curtail that activity. If they are working mothers, new arrangements need to be worked out with the spouse to share the housework and childcare. They are also the most likely to interact with the broader society and therefore exposed to discrimination. As mothers, they interact with other mothers in the neighbourhoods and on children playgrounds, and as workers they deal with colleagues and clients in the workplace.

Schoolgirls are the next largest component. Access to and quality of education is their priority. Senior citizens are a small group but growing. They live -- and probably prefer to live -- with their families and relatives, as nursing homes have not yet caught up with the Muslim lifestyle. But if the trend towards the nuclear family gains footing

some Muslim seniors might like, or find themselves looking for, separate living arrangements.

Figure 5: Female population according to life cycle



Source: Calculated by the author from data from Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, <http://www.statcan.ca>

8. Building the base of knowledge economy

Canada enters the 21st century as one of the most endowed countries for education. In an international comparison of the professional and skilled labour force covering 30 advanced countries, the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development placed it fourth, after the United States, Norway and the Netherlands. These ranks are variable depending upon the criteria used because national education systems are not uniform. When professional and skilled workers were defined to include college graduates, Canada topped the list, with the United States, Ireland and Japan following in that order. In either case, Canada ranks very high.

Large investments made in education after the Second World War are paying off. Simultaneously, the shift in economy from an industrial to the knowledge base is inducing students to go to university in spite of the higher cost and rising student debt loads.

Women are at the forefront of this change, contributing more than one-half of the rise in the number of university graduates in the 1990s and, contrary to the perception, Muslim women are an integral part of the progress. One-half of the adult Muslim

females (aged 25 years and over) have post-secondary education. Nearly one in three have university education, as compared with a figure of one in five all Canadian females.^x

On the other end of the scale, Muslim women not completing high school graduation comprise a low proportion. One-quarter had not completed high school certificate by the age of 25 years; our estimate suggests that about one-fifth of these Muslim females who had not completed their high school requirements by the age of 25 years have probably dropped out of school altogether, while the remainder could be pursuing a high school diploma on a part-time or full-time basis.

Competitive edge in the knowledge economy depends on excellence in all types of skills, but conceptual skills – usually associated with university education – which enable people to challenge the assumptions of the existing knowledge and develop new mental models, are crucial in determining the global economic and scientific leadership of a country.

Muslim women play an important part in building the base of Canada's competitive advantage. Human capital that the Muslim and all immigrant women bring cannot be easily replaced or reproduced in Canada because financial capital can be raised in a relatively short period of time as long the country's credit rating is good, but it takes two decades to produce a university graduate.

Muslim women follow the same pattern as all Canadian women as they move through university education: the number of graduates declines as they move up the scale, not counting those obtaining a graduate specialization certificate but not proceeding to the master's degree. However, there are important differences. Relatively more Muslim females continue studies past the bachelor's degree; there are proportionately twice as many master's and doctorate degree holders among them as all females. In order to avoid double counting in these figures, an individual was assigned only to one group, regardless of how many degrees she had. For example, a Ph.D. holder appeared only once and that was in the earned doctorate group.

They can make a significant contribution to the knowledge economy if their potential is fully realized. Among the Muslim females aged 25 years and over in 2001, there were sufficient number of doctoral and equivalent graduates to supply the entire faculty of a medium-size university, such as the University of Western Ontario which has 29,000 undergraduate and graduate students and 12 faculties and schools.^{xi}

All education is rewarding. However, as the frontiers of knowledge expand and new technologies replace the old ones, certain fields of study acquire more immediate relevance in order to fulfill the economic needs of the society, as the current economic growth, fuelled by the Internet and biotechnologies, has generated enormous demand for graduates in sciences and applied technologies related to communication, health and agriculture. Fields of studies pursued by Muslim women are in accord with these trends in demand. Nearly two-fifths specialize in a science and engineering discipline. Health occupations top the list in this group, followed by professions in mathematics, computer and physical sciences. Agricultural and biological sciences come next and then applied science technologies and engineering. The corresponding figure for all women in the country specializing in a scientific field is less.

It is noteworthy that culture is not a constraint on Muslim females' entry into science and engineering disciplines which are seen as the male domain, although it is

beginning to change. However, culture does come into play in a number of other fields of study. Health professions and the fine and applied arts studies are good examples. Although more Muslim women pursue health professions than any other discipline in sciences, this is the only scientific field in which they lag behind other Canadian women. The difference, in large measure, is due to cultural and social norms. Nursing is traditionally a female occupation in Canada, but Muslim societies in South Asian and the Middle Eastern countries discourage women from entering it because it is a profession in which members of the opposite sexes come in close contact with each other. Similarly, low representation of Muslim women in the fine and applied arts reflects social attitudes and mores which developed as a result of the intermingling of cultures and societies.

9. Learning is a life long pursuit

Learning and education continues well beyond the age of formal education. Rapid advances in knowledge and a growing realization that the competitive advantage of firms and nations crucially depends on human capital is forcing individuals to continually upgrade their skills. In 2001, about 8 per cent of all Canadian adult women (25 years old and over) were attending school, part-time or full-time to improve their skills in order to advance in their careers or to upgrade their qualifications in anticipation of returning to the labour market after having been away for some time.

In comparison, proportionally twice as many Muslim women were enrolled in educational institutions. Some were in school for the same reasons as other women but a number of unique factors propelled their numbers high. Relatively more Muslim women enroll in educational programs that go past the age of 25 years. Doctoral and certain professional degree programs or programs requiring work experience as a condition of admission such as MBA are in this category. A typical Ph.D. graduand is over 30 years old, for example. Many go back to school to upgrade their qualifications because their international credentials and degrees are not recognized at par or properly evaluated. Some communities traditionally lay greater emphasis on education because they realize that it is their key to success and that sometimes they have to have higher qualifications than others to compete for the same job.

10. A labour force for the knowledge economy and globalizing marketplace

10.1. Participation in the labour market

In spite of the knowledge and skills that they have to offer the new emerging economy and the globalizing marketplace, considerably fewer Muslim women enter the labour market. Cultural constraints, labour market conditions and rules and regulations play a part in their decision as they weigh the option of joining the labour force against staying at home to spend more time with family or help in the family business as an unpaid worker, but cultural factors bear heavily on such decisions. Social norms of the patriarchal societies of their countries of origin look down upon women working outside the home or at least in certain professions. In addition, a lack of satisfactory arrangements with the spouse to share the housework would discourage many women from seeking employment. The need to care for the elderly living with the family may keep others away from the labour market.

Labour market conditions are also important. Sustained periods of unemployment or underemployment create the 'discouraged workers' effect', forcing people to withdraw from the labour market and go back to school. The relatively large number of adult

Muslim women attending school is consistent with this phenomenon. Lack of suitable childcare facilities especially centres where Islamic dietary practices are observed also acts as a deterrent.

Administrative factors are also responsible to some extent. Refugee status claimants are not allowed to work pending final decision on their application. While Muslims countries have more than their share of disruptions and uprooted lives, and there are probably more Muslim refugees, their number in Canada is not so large as to have a perceptible effect on Muslim women' overall labour market participation rate. It is, however, very significant for certain communities among Muslims and certain parts of the country.

As a result, less than one-half of the eligible Muslim women participate in the labour market -- substantially lower than the national average of 60.5 per cent. Only the Hutterites had a lower participation rate. However, signs of change are slowly beginning to appear, partly as a result of changes in attitudes and partly because of changing demographics. The Canadian-born younger women or women who grew up in Canada are less encumbered by the social norms of their immigrant mothers, and tend more to join the labour force than their older counterparts. As the proportion of the native-born Muslim women continues to increase, Muslim female labour market participation rate will rise.

However, those who are in the labour force are an important asset for Canadian business; they are highly educated and specialized in fields that are at the forefront of the technological change. In the domestic market, they offer services in both official languages; Muslim women have the highest percentage of workers speaking English and French at work, along with the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox women. For Canadian firms conducting business in the global markets, they offer knowledge of a wide variety of languages and cultures.

Yet they remain seriously unemployed and underemployed. The 1990s economic prosperity, spread by the information, communication and biological technologies, only slightly relieved the pressure of unemployment. At 16.5 per cent in 2001, the unemployment rate was still very high, more than double the 7.2 per cent national unemployment rate for all women and nearly three times that experienced by their Jewish counterparts. People of Aboriginal spirituality were the only community to have had a worse experience. Given the increase in negative experiences reported by Muslims since 2001, one can only guess that the situation has worsened.

This vast amount of idle and underutilized human capital causes hardship for individuals who invested a lot of their time and resources in equipping and preparing themselves for a job. It is also a national loss. Had there been such a high rate of idle capacity in factories in an industry it would have drawn a lot of attention from industry journals, business press and the policymakers. The lack of appreciation for the value of human capital of immigrants appears at odds with the efforts to enhance the capacity and infrastructure for the knowledge economy.

10.2. Full-time versus part-time work

When Muslim women land a job, more often than not, it is likely to be term, casual or part time. In 2001, most work part-time or only for a portion of the year. Some of them may have had full-time jobs but did not work the whole year because they

started work in the middle or at the end of the year. Compared with all women, it is obvious that Muslim women have more difficulty finding full-time jobs.

10.3. Employees and self-employed

When one talks of employment, one tends to think of employees working for business or government sectors. However, many people run their own businesses or set up consultancies. Ranks of the self-employed have been swelling over the years. Large increases took place in the last decade as many people, who lost their jobs in the high-tech meltdown or restructuring of the industry as a result of the introduction of information and communication technologies, set up consultancies.

As well as being a reflection of a community's entrepreneurial spirit, self-employment is a useful predictor of the degree of its engagement in the political life of the country. Almost all politicians contesting the federal and provincial elections are people in businesses, consultancies or those who have retired from active employment in the public or business sectors.

On the whole, Muslim women follow the same pattern as all Canadian women – close to one-tenth have consultancies or their own businesses. However, striking differences emerge when individual communities are compared. The Jewish community stands out for the business entrepreneurship. They are much more likely to be engaged in consultancies or other businesses.

10.4. Occupations

In addition to high unemployment and low levels of full-time employment, Muslim females also face underemployment. Hard estimates are difficult to make, but occupational distribution, used along with educational qualifications, provides some indications of underemployment. Clerical, sales and cashier jobs rank at the top. None of their seven top occupations has a dominantly professional component although some professional subgroups are included.

Occupations generally associated with high-level university education rank low. A lack of correspondence between occupational classification and the field of study makes it difficult to link the two data sets in a meaningful way and derive an estimate of underemployment. However, healthcare provides some clues because health occupations are closely associated with studies in medical and health sciences and can, therefore, be used to illustrate the problem. Just over one-half of the Muslim females who reported specializing in a health profession were in a health occupation in 2001. Given that few Muslim women are in the nursing profession, a vast majority of the unemployed or underemployed women are physicians and surgeons with international degrees and experience. There are several statistical reasons why the two figures – number of people specializing in health fields and the number reporting a health occupation – are different but such a significant discrepancy cannot be entirely a statistical artifact. There is a large element of underemployment. Such large amount of underutilization of the country's scarce resource in a vital field is at odds with the national concern over long waiting lines for medical services and under-servicing of hundreds of communities.

Data on the occupational distribution does not shed light on Muslim women's representation in management. However, other data suggest that they may be under-represented. A report prepared for the Federal Task Force on Visible Minority

participation in the Public Service in 2000 concluded that they were over-represented in the professional and scientific categories but under-represented in executive ranks. It reported that 13.3 per cent of visible minority women in the federal public service were in the scientific and professional category versus 7.8 per cent for all other women, averaged over 1991-99, while only 0.4 per cent were in the executive ranks as compared with 0.9 per cent for women not belonging to visible minorities.^{xii} These figures can be taken to be a fair representation of the situation of Muslim women because 86 per cent of them belong to visible minorities. The study did not contain relevant data for the individual years to get a sense of progress.

In spite of the increase in the numbers of Muslim women joining the labour force, they still face higher unemployment and underemployment. Growth in the female workforce has not been accompanied by jobs suited to their qualifications. The rate of success in crashing through the invisible, symbolic barrier to top management jobs remains low, even discouraging.

11. Income

There are numerous measures of income, each designed for a specific purpose. One common but not necessarily the most appropriate indicator of the standard of living is the average income, covering all sources of income and all types of income earners. On this measure, the average income of a Muslim woman in 2000, at \$16,000, was nearly one-third less than the average for all women in Canada.

Since the average masks the extremes and is not very useful to represent skewed observations, the median which divides the income earners into two equal halves is more meaningful. The median income for Muslim women was \$10,300, i.e. one-half of Muslim female income earners earned more than that and the other half earned less than that.

However, both the average and median are summary measures. Frequency distribution provides a more comprehensive view of how well the community is doing. There are many Muslim women who earned less than \$1,000 in 2000. These could be people who worked only for a short period of time, on very low wages, were refugee status claimants or school children doing odd jobs, to mention just a few possibilities. On the other extreme, about 3 per cent of Muslim women earned more than \$60,000.

Abstracting from these extremes, a vast majority of Muslim female earners falls in low income group. About three-fourths, as compared with just over one-half of all women had income under \$20,000. Men fared better.

This measure is an all-inclusive measure of income and there are far too many reasons for the income disparity between faith communities in a report of this nature. More refined measures are presented below to narrow down the number of factors.

Employment income is the most appropriate in this respect because it deals with only one source of income, i.e. wages, and it is also the source of livelihood for 90 per cent of the Muslim females. Their average income from this source was nearly 20 per cent more than the average income from all sources, but still 21 per cent less than the average wage employment income of all women.

A further refinement is to analyze only those wage earners who worked full-time, full year in 2000 in order to eliminate the variations caused by part time, term and casual

employees who worked for only a portion of the year. As expected, they earn much more. A Muslim woman working full-year, full time in 2000 reported an annual income about 29 per cent more than the average of all wage earners. However, compared to the national average for all women in Canada, a Muslim female made about 10 per cent less.

Returning to the standard of living, \$32,000 seems like a reasonable annual income. But we should note that only an estimated 37 per cent of the Muslim women in the labour force worked full year, full-time.

12. Women, work and family

Change in the role of women has been one of the most profound social phenomena of the post-1960s liberalism. Although men were also involved women have been the focus of attention in studies dealing with changing spousal roles and work-sharing arrangements at home. As a result, women have come to be seen in many different roles such as the working mom, the single mom, the supermom and the soccer mom, without there being any similar modifiers to qualify the word father, suggesting little notable change has occurred in the way they have responded to the new phenomenon.

There is also an underlying current in these studies that the roles have changed so much that full time motherhood and housework have come to be seen as a choice, and no longer a woman's duty as the traditional feminism and cultures saw it. According to these studies or at least assumptions made by them, women bore and continue to bear the brunt of the change. If these adjustments have been difficult for women in general, cultural orientation of Muslim men in immigrant families adds another layer of difficulty for Muslim women. It is, therefore, important to ask: To what extent Muslim mothers participate in the labour market and has there been any change, as a result of that, in men's attitudes towards housework, child care and the care of the elderly.

All but a small number of Muslims live in households which have both parents. Some households are headed by a lone parent, who in four out of five cases is a woman. Most of the households consist of a couple and their children and some include relatives, usually one of the spouse's parents. In a sizeable number of these households, women run the household and work outside the home to supplement the family income as a dual income earner and in some cases as the sole supporter of the family.

Two points are noteworthy. First, contrary to the perception, shared by many Muslim men, the majority of Muslim women in the labour force are not single women or married women without children. They are working mothers who have preschoolers and school-age children at home. According to the census, more than one-half of the Muslim women (57 per cent) who were in the labour force in 2001 were mothers with children. For many women, it is the realization of their full potential as a person. There are, no doubt, others who are compelled by the family's economic circumstances, i.e. the husband is either unemployed, does not earn enough to support the family or is being put through school by the wife to upgrade his education. Husband's dependence on the wife to supplement his income or be the provider of the family shows how much the traditional Muslim family in which the man was supposed to be the provider has changed.

Comparisons with all working mothers further reveal the role a Muslim mother plays in the family beyond raising children. The Canadian female labour force is largely (51 per

cent) comprised of women with no children at home, while mothers with children at home dominate the Muslim female labour force (57 per cent)

The actual gap between Muslim and all Canadian women is larger than the above figures suggest. The data only covers paid workers; it does not include unpaid workers who work in the family businesses but are not paid for their services. Muslim women are more involved in this labour activity than are other Canadian women, although the absolute numbers are not very large. About one per cent of the Muslim female labour force is engaged in family businesses and receives no pay for their work. The Canadian average is 0.6 per cent. Faith communities of South Asian origins, also report lower percentages than Muslims. There can be two interpretations. Relatively larger involvement of Muslim women in unpaid work reflects the nature of economic activity in which their families are engaged. For example, small corner store businesses are usually family affairs, requiring long hours of work and involving several family members. It may also be an indication of closer family ties or an attempt to minimize women's dealings with strangers, which working for someone else will necessarily entail. If the latter is the case, the number of women helping in family businesses has probably increased as a result of the backlash against Muslims in recent years.

Second, a significant number of Muslim women who work outside the home are young mothers. Over one-third (36 per cent) had pre-school age children. By comparison, 29 per cent of all working mothers in Canada had pre-school children at home.

12.1. Work-sharing at home

If the Muslim family has changed as an economic unit, the inevitable question then is: Have there been corresponding changes in spousal responsibilities concerning housework and childcare and the care of the elderly, which, by and large, are regarded as the women's duty in patriarchal cultures.

The information gathered in the census is not designed to answer this question. Other sources do address this specific question, but data on the religious affiliation are not readily available. While these data do not tell us how spousal work-sharing arrangements have changed in Muslim households they do provide a good benchmark from which we can draw conclusions about how much time Muslim couples who have full-time jobs spend with their children.

The following discussion covers all Canadian couples who have full-time paid jobs and have children to look after. Statistics Canada's 1998 General Social Survey examined in detail Canadians' time-use patterns and found that in household, where mothers are employed full-time and have a child under 5 years of age, mothers spend 50 per cent more time with the child than the father. Second, for about half the time that the father spends with their kids, the mother is also present. But men were less likely to be with their wives when the wives were with the kids.

It should be noted that the above data do not reflect the actual involvement of the mothers and fathers with the child. They refer to the time spent with the child, which can mean being in the same room with the child but not engaging in any activity with her or being together in the car while driving the child to Sunday school in the mosque, cutting the grass or shoveling the snow.

A more insightful finding was that in dual earner families with children, mothers have less leisure time for activities such as reading, watching television, socializing, hobbies, etc. -- 2.4 hours per day for mothers and 3.6 hours per day for fathers. Fathers spend 29 per cent of their leisure time with their preschoolers, while mothers devote one-half of their time to their children. The same pattern of time use was observed in dual earners families with respect to school-going children in their early grades.^{xiii}

Another study found that women devoted more than twice as many hours providing care to the seniors as did men. Characterizing the people who have full-time jobs outside the home and have to look after their children as well as other family members as the "sandwiched generation", the study noted that they were more likely to feel stressed.^{xiv}

It is not far fetched to conclude that Muslim working mothers in dual earner families probably share a greater burden of the housework, child care and the elderly-care than their non-Muslim counterparts. Most of the Muslim immigrants are from patriarchal cultures which see childcare and housework as women's duties. There are, no doubt, many Muslim men who share housework with their working spouse. For the rest, enculturation is a slow and arduous process. Significant numbers of Muslims community are recent immigrants, and adaptation to the new phenomenon could take time.

13. Conclusion

This study is the first word on the subject. It has illuminated many issues but, like much research, it has raised more questions. For example: why such a qualified labour force specializing in leading-edge technologies does not participate in the labour market? To what extent is it a cultural phenomenon and what role the labour market imperfections play? Will increase in daycare facilities encourage more Muslim women to join the labour force? What accounts for such a high unemployment rate for so highly qualified professionals and skilled labour force in the knowledge economy? Why do so many have only term and casual jobs – are these working mothers who might not want full time jobs or are employers reluctant to offer mothers with children full-time jobs? Are the experiences of Canadian-born Muslim women different from their immigrant counterparts?

Do mothers with small children enter the labour market out of choice or economic necessity? Why are they driven by economic necessity – is it because the husband cannot provide? What about single mothers? How do working mothers cope with housework and work outside the home – are they supermoms who can deliver both? What support do they get from their families and friends and how many?

Endnotes

ⁱ This report is largely based on data from Statistics Canada. For more information, please go to <http://www.statcan.ca>

ⁱⁱ It was not uncommon for the people to think that Islam was a new religion introduced to Canada by immigrants coming in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Abdul Rashid mistakenly stated that there were no official statistics on Muslims prior to 1981. See Abdul Rashid, *1981 Census of Canada: The Muslim Canadians, A Profile*, Ottawa, Supply and Services, Canada, 1985, p. 16, footnote 5. The first National census of population of Canada reported 13 Muslims.

ⁱⁱⁱ Daood Hamdani, "A Century of Islam in Canada: 1871-1976", *Inteshar al Islam* (Spread of Islam), Imam Mohammed Bin Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1979.

^{iv} The first six, in descending order, are: Roman Catholics, Ukrainian Catholics, members of the United and Anglican churches, Baptists and Lutherans. Other communities such as other Christians, other Protestants, or no religious affiliation were not included in the rankings because they do not identify a single group.

^v For details, see Derek Janhevich and Humera Ibrahim, "Muslims in Canada; An Illustrative and Demographic Profile", *Our diverse cities*, Spring 2004, no.1, pp. 49-56.

^{vi} For example Randall Denley, "Let's talk frankly about immigration," *The Ottawa Citizen*, January 24, 2003, p. F4.

^{vii} <http://www.queens.ed.ca/cora>

^{viii} Andrew Parkins, "Introduction: How Canada is Changing", *A Changing People: Being Canadian in a New Century*, Centre for Research and Information on Canada, April 2003, p. 5.

^{ix} Incidence of divorce is different from divorce rate. Divorce rate reported in the press is simply the number of divorces in any one year expressed as a percentage of the number of marriages registered in that same year. Incidence of divorce is the total number of divorced (and not yet remarried) persons in 2001 regardless of when they were divorced as a percentage of all the married people regardless of when they were married. In other words, divorce rate is a flow concept, while the incidence of divorce is a stock concept.

^x The present study departs from the standard practice in statistical publications -- and some other analyses as well -- of relating educational attainments to population 15 years old and over because hardly anyone completes anything by the age of 15 years. We have, instead, opted to relate educational attainments to the adult population, i.e. people aged 25 years and over.

^{xi} The University of Western Ontario, London has 1,164 faculty members and 29,000 undergraduate and graduate students. See <http://www.uwo.ca>

^{xii} Douglas Booker, Natalie Dole, Stan Lee, Kathy Malizia, Daniel O'Connor and Rhonda Nause, *Demographic Study of the Visible Minority Community in the Federal Public Service*, prepared for the Federal Task Force on Visible Minorities in the Public Service, February, 2000, p. 13, Table 3.3. The data reported in this study are taken from the files of the Public Service Commission. They are averages for the period 1991-99. Data for individual years were not reported in the study and may present a somewhat different picture than the 10-year average, because of the implementation of the Employment Equity Act.

^{xiii} Cynthia Silver, "Being there: The time dual-earners couples spend with their children", *Canadian Social Trends*, Summer 2000, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008, pp. 26-29.

^{xiv} Cara Williams, "The Sandwich Generation", *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, September 2004, Vol. 5, no. 9, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-001-XIE.

About the author

Daood Hamdani is a pioneer in the study of Muslim Canadians and one of the most influential writers on the subject. He is the author of numerous articles in professional journals, including the critically acclaimed entry in the encyclopedia of Muslim minorities and Islam. His work has been translated into several languages, including French, Spanish, Arabic and Farsi, and is cited in doctoral dissertations; in legal briefs and submissions to the commissions of inquiry; by policymakers and the media.

An economist by training, his main interest is the study of knowledge and information as the strategic agents of change. Author of numerous articles and recognized as one of the world's foremost experts on innovation measurement, he has served as an advisor to the U.S. National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C. and has given guest seminars at universities and government agencies in Europe and North and South America.

He has received several recognitions for his work, including honorary citizenship from Tennessee, USA, and recipient of several other recognitions