

# New study finds nearly half of American Muslim doctors feel scrutinized on the job

December 11 2015

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While many studies have examined the impact of bias based on race, gender or sexual orientation, religious discrimination in the health care workplace has received little research attention. A new study funded by the John Templeton Foundation and conducted at the University of Chicago finds that for Muslim Americans, even those in one the nation's most highly regarded professions, encounter a less-than-inclusive and welcoming work environment during their career.

In a national survey of 255 Muslim American physicians published online this month by the journal *AJOB Empirical Bioethics*, researchers found that nearly half of respondents felt greater scrutiny at work compared to their peers. Nearly one in four said workplace religious discrimination had taken place sometimes - or more - often during their career. The same percentage of Muslim American physicians believe they have been passed over for career advancement due to their religion. The likelihood of religious discrimination over one's career was greater among the respondents who consider their religion to be a very important part of their lives.

Notably, the study found that neither indications of religious practice (such as a more frequent habit of performing ritual prayer) nor religious appearance (such as wearing a beard or hijab, a headscarf worn by some Muslim women) was associated with perceived [religious discrimination](#) at the [health care](#) workplace.

"This [national survey](#) of American Muslim physicians provides some

encouraging findings regarding the extent to which Muslim religious identity attracts negative workplace experiences, but also some findings that merit concern," said study author Aasim Padela, MD, MSc assistant professor of medicine and director of the Initiative on Islam and Medicine at the University of Chicago. "It's further evidence that the acknowledgement of the religious identity of one's co-workers should be an added focus within workforce diversity efforts that today focus primarily on reducing discrimination directed at racial, ethnic, gender and [sexual orientation](#) identities."

This study is the first to examine the relationships between religiosity of American Muslim physicians and workplace discrimination. American Muslims from diverse backgrounds make up about 5 percent of U.S. physicians. With this survey, researchers aimed to uncover any adverse impacts on career satisfaction or job turnover in the health care context given the current political climate and ongoing accounts of Muslim stereotyping in the general population. Recent reports, including a Pew Research Center survey and a Zogby national poll, found Muslims to be the most negatively viewed religious group in America.

The findings of this study, researchers say, suggest that data-driven programs are needed to eliminate religion-directed discrimination in the health care workplace.

"Achieving an inclusive and diverse workforce requires policies that cultivate respect and accommodation for the religious identity of physicians of minority religions," said Padela. "American Muslim doctors provide a valued service to this country. If they can't feel comfortable being who they are in their workplace, we may marginalize them to practice medicine in some locales and not others, and also may create a ceiling on their upward career trajectory or even limit their openness about their identity."

"When these things happen, these accomplished, respected members of our society lose some of their ability to serve as positive role models in their own religious communities and more broadly within American society; we restrict their ability to ultimately counter negative stereotypes and create a positive narrative of Muslims in America."

Padela is also a faculty member of the MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics at the University of Chicago Medicine. A former Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar and Templeton Faculty Scholar, he is internationally recognized for his work on Islamic bioethics and for his empirical research on how religious beliefs, values and identities impact the health care decisions of American Muslims and practice of Muslim clinicians. In 2012, he received the Ibn Sina Award from the Compassionate Care Network of Chicago for his contributions to the field of Islamic medical ethics.

**More information:** Aasim I. Padela et al. Religious identity and workplace discrimination: A national survey of American Muslim physicians, *AJOB Empirical Bioethics* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/23294515.2015.1111271](https://doi.org/10.1080/23294515.2015.1111271)

Provided by University of Chicago Medical Center

Citation: New study finds nearly half of American Muslim doctors feel scrutinized on the job (2015, December 11) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-american-muslim-doctors-scrutinized-job.html>

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