Islamophobia and social cohesion in Melbourne and Sydney

A mixed-method, longitudinal analysis of the impact of ethnic diversity, socio-economic disadvantage and sense of belonging

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This report summarises the findings of the project titled 'The impact of ethnic diversity, socioeconomic disadvantage and sense of belonging on Islamophobia and social cohesion locally and nationally: a mixed-method, longitudinal analysis' (July 2018 - Dec 2020).

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Table of Contents

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Executive summary

The aim of this report is to briefly present on the levels of social cohesion and Islamophobia in Australia. The report includes information on concentration, disadvantage, suburb and neighbourhood satisfaction and education of Australian Muslims, a review of programs targeting social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage in select areas, and measurements and explanations for Islamophobia in Sydney and Melbourne. It ends with a summary of implications for practice.

Key findings

The overall project provides the following key findings:

1. A socially cohesive community is a community which enables a feeling of belonging of its members. Professionals and community members consider social cohesion as something to be desired yet challenged by unemployment and other socio-economic problems.

2. Islamophobia is lower in suburbs with high shares of Muslims than elsewhere in Sydney and Melbourne, especially for residents with positive neighbourhood experience. This suggests that real-life encounters between Muslims and non-Muslims reduce Islamophobia.

3. The number of suburbs with a significant percentage of Muslim Australians has increased over the last ten years. In Greater Sydney, 27 suburbs (compared to 12 suburbs in 2006), and in Greater Melbourne 12 suburbs (compared to 6 suburbs in 2006) now have more than 15% Muslim Australians.

4. Most suburbs with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians are also areas of concentrated socio-economic disadvantage. In contrast, an *increasing* number of Australian Muslims lives in socio-economically advantaged areas of Greater Sydney.

5. Residents of disadvantaged suburbs consistently evaluate their suburbs more negatively in terms of feeling of community, preference to stay in the suburb, liveability, satisfaction with the suburb and the house (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, 2016). Interestingly, (changes in) the percentage of Muslim Australians both negatively and positively affect these suburb quality indicators. Our survey showed no difference in neighbourhood satisfaction between areas with lower and higher socio-economic profiles.

6. Who is more Islamophobic? Those with low satisfaction with their income are more Islamophobic, and so are older people with low education. Christians are also more Islamophobic than respondents without religion or those with other religions.

7. Discrimination of Muslims in the labour market seems to prevent them from finding appropriate jobs. Australian Muslims are often overqualified for their jobs, especially those born overseas. Australian Muslim are the most socio-economically disadvantaged religious group in Australia (Hassan 2018, ABS 2016).

Why this work is important

Australia is a multicultural country that supports the presence of different cultural and ethnic groups in society (Koleth 2010). Sadly, increasing numbers of Muslims are reporting that they are harassed in public spaces (Iner 2016), even leading to (self-imposed) limited mobility out of fear (Itaoui 2016). About 10 percent of the general Australian population openly admits to having Islamophobic sentiments (Hassan 2018). Some politicians claim that Australia is 'swamped with Muslims' which was widely reported in the media, although this has been proven to be false information (Forrest et al. 2017). This has nevertheless lead to mediated fear of Muslims in Australia (Itaoui and Dunn 2017).

Up until now it has remained unclear if there is a local component to Islamophobia; if Islamophobia is better or worse in suburbs with concentrations of Muslims. Only when we know the causes of Islamophobia can governments and NGOs effectively work to create more inclusive communities. The Department of Social Services (DSS)[1] "Strong and Resilient Communities Activities" objective is designed to create more resilient communities. DSS funded this research in order to understand how more cohesive communities can be created in Australian suburbs, especially those with high shares of Muslims.

Broad overview

The study took place in three stages: (1) an analysis of the degrees of spatial concentration of Muslims in Australian suburbs, and how concentration affects suburb satisfaction and feelings of community; (2) an investigation of the effectiveness of social cohesion policies in creating more inclusive communities in Muslim concentration suburbs (3) a measurement of, and explanations for, neighbourhood satisfaction and the degree of Islamophobia in Sydney and Melbourne, with an emphasis on Muslim concentration areas.

Methodology

The data used for this project come from three resources:

1. The analyses of the degree of spatial concentration, suburb satisfaction and feelings of community are based on data from the Australian Census (2006, 2011 and 2016), combined with data from the Housing, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) panel survey, waves 2014 and 2016 (Watson and Wooden 2020). The data was used to perform both bivariate statistical procedures, as well as multiple regression analysis. The census data and the HILDA data provide information that can be generalised to the Australian population, although there is an underrepresentation of certain hard to reach groups such as homeless and indigenous populations.

2. The investigation of the effectiveness of social cohesion policies is based on 25 interviews in Western Sydney, in which 60 participants took part, and 27 interviews in Melbourne, in which 28 participants took part. The interviewees held positions as local council officers, schoolteachers, migrant settlement services providers, diversity program coordinators, community and youth workers, interpreters, filmmakers, businesspeople and a religious leader. The semi structured interviews were conducted by two chief investigators, a partner investigator and two research assistants. The interview data were transcribed by a professional transcription service (Outscribe) and thematically analysed by the authors. The information from the qualitative case studies cannot be generalised to the wider population.

3. The measurement of neighbourhood experience and Islamophobia and its explanations is based on a survey of 1020 respondents of metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne. The survey data were collected through a combination of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and an online survey. The online respondents (n=520) were residents of two metropolitan cities, while those reached by phone (n=500) lived in ten suburbs with the highest concentration of Muslim Australians (e.g. from 59% in Lakemba, NSW to 30% in Dandenong, Vic), our target areas. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The survey findings cannot be generalised to the wider population.

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[1] Australian Federal Government

Recommendations/next steps

1. Islamophobia is best prevented by fostering bridging social networks in the community. Create ongoing, positive local relationships focused on bridging social networks among diverse local groups and migrant communities.

2. Social cohesion is best created through school-based programs, those targeting women, children and youth as well as local entrepreneurship and support for migrant-run businesses.

3. The effectiveness of local programs depends on continuous funding. Governments need to take a long-term approach to funding community organisations and programs.

4. Social cohesion must be addressed by programs that at the same time address socio-economic disadvantage at the local and societal level.

5. Co-designed social cohesion programs are more effective than top-down policies.

6. Position white residents as equally invited to and responsible for contributing to socially cohesive local communities and a broader society.

1. Introduction

Occurrence of Islamophobia in Australia

Islamophobia is occurring frequently in Australia. Previous studies indicate that 10% of the Australian population has Islamophobic sentiments (Hassan 2018), and many Muslims report being the victim of Islamophobic behaviours (Iner 2016). Despite this reality, governments are keen to create a more multicultural society in which every resident of Australia feels safe and valued (Koleth 2010), an ideal which is clearly not achieved as yet. Moreover, studies in Sydney and the US show that Muslims have a mental map of 'no-go' areas, which prohibits them from freely moving around the city (Itaoui 2016, 2020). This research provides insight into the occurrence of Islamophobia in the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne and evaluates the effectiveness and processes of projects and programs that aims to create a more cohesive, and less Islamophobic, community at the suburb level.

Muslim Australians: A special case?

Muslim Australians are among the most deprived and disadvantaged religious groups of Australia with the lowest income levels and highest unemployment figures of any religious group, despite average education levels. Muslim Australians may share their religion, but they come from all over the world, with very diverse cultural backgrounds. Muslim Australians of Australia are concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Australia, mostly in Sydney and Melbourne (ABS 2017a, 2017b).

What is Islamophobia?

We use Bleich's definition of Islamophobia: 'indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims' which can result in 'version, jealousy, suspicion, disdain, anxiety, rejection, contempt, fear, disgust, anger and hostility' against Muslims or Islam (Bleich 2012). Some Australian research uses the same definition (Iner 2016, Hassan 2018) while others are following the definition from the Runnymede Trust in the UK, or the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (2019) which is a broader definition: 'Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness' (p.11).

Australian Geographers have shown that Muslims feel safer and more connected in suburbs with a higher share of other Muslims (Itaoui 2016, 2020, Itaoui and Dunn 2017), yet what this means for non-Muslims is yet to be explored. Itaoui and Dunn's findings would presume that there is an effect of contact between Muslims and non-Muslims: perhaps people are less hostile towards the 'other' once they are more acquainted with them (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi 2002, Paluck, Green, and Green 2018).

Three project stages

This project explores the impact of socio-economic disadvantage and ethnic diversity on community cohesion. The project's main empirical focus is on ten localities in Melbourne and Sydney where residents who identified as adhering to Islam in the recent Australian censuses are residentially concentrated. Using primary and secondary data and a mixed-method approach, the project aims to achieve two key outcomes:

First, provide evidence for policy based on 1) the analyses of Census (2006-2016) and the HILDA Survey (Waves 6,11,16) data, separately and in combination (Stage 1) and b) a national online/phone survey of at least 1000 respondents focused on neighbourhood experience in the target localities and the acceptance of Muslims/Islamophobia (Stage 3).

Second, provide insights about the ways in which ethno-religious diversity, disadvantage and Islamophobia may impact on community cohesion in chosen localities, through interviews with key stakeholders (Stage 2).

The project findings focus on providing evidence for local, state and national policy and program development.

To what extent and how do diversity, disadvantage and the sense of belonging in urban neighbourhoods impact on the acceptance of Muslims locally and social cohesion more broadly; and which policies and programs successfully support these outcomes?

This question was operationalised through more specific research questions:

1. Have Australian Muslims (overseas born and Australian-born) become increasingly residentially concentrated between 2006 and 2016?
2. If yes, is this associated with socio-economic disadvantage; that is, do they increasingly concentrate in disadvantaged neighbourhoods?
3. Do people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods[2] with significant Muslim minorities have lower sense of local belonging and satisfaction with the local community than the general population?
4. Can a [potential] relationship between the share of Australian Muslims and lower sense of local belonging be explained by mainstream prejudice, specifically Islamophobia?
5. What are the levels of Islamophobia in general population, compared to areas with significant Muslim minorities?
6. What are the experiences of local stakeholders in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with significant Muslim minorities, with respect to programs fostering community cohesion and cushioning socio-economic disadvantage for vulnerable groups, and what is known about the effectiveness of local programs?
7. Do Muslims with post-school qualifications have jobs corresponding to their skill level and has this key aspect of social inclusion changed between 2006 and 2016?

Methodology

The study used a mixed method research design, combining existing datasets with a large-scale survey and qualitative interviews.

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[2] Based on Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) scores.

Table 1 Overview of data sources, year and geographical area information

Research question	Data	Year	Geographical area
1	Census	2006, 2011, 2016	Australia, Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne
2	Census	2016	Australia, Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne + 10 suburbs with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians, SA2
3	Census + HILDA	2006, 2016 (Census) 2014, 2016 (HILDA)	Australia
4	Survey	2019	Online (n=520) Australia, Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne Phone (n=500) 10 suburbs with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians, SA2
5	Survey	2019	Online (n=520) Australia, Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne Phone (n=500) 10 suburbs with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians, SA2
6	Interviews	2019	25 Interviews in Sydney 6 suburbs[3] with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians, SA2 27 Interviews in Melbourne 5 suburbs[4] with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians, SA2
7	Census	2006, 2011, 2016	Australia

Questions 1-3 and 7 are answered using a combination of Census data and HILDA data. Captured annually, the HILDA sample is representative of the Australian population and can be coupled with Census data. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this report, however, are those of the authors and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute. The findings can be generalised to the Australian population and provide insight into the geographical location of Muslims, the degree of (dis-)advantage of Muslims in Australia, as well as the degree to which residents in suburbs with high shares of Muslims are satisfied with their suburb.

Questions 4 and 5 are answered using survey data, gathered from two sub-samples, the eleven highest Muslim-concentration suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne, and the general population of Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne. The demographic and socio-economic indicators of the two sample groups were similar, apart from the noted difference in trade qualifications and some differences in age distribution, while the religious and ethnic diversity of the two groups varied markedly. This allows us to present a clear picture of the influence of living in a Muslim-concentration suburb on our two main variables of interest, Islamophobia and neighbourhood experience. The findings from the survey in the metropolitan areas are representative for the general population in Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne. The findings provide insight into the amount of Islamophobia in the population and explanations for the phenomenon.

Question 6 is answered using interview data. We conducted 25 interviews in Western Sydney, in which 60 participants took part. Five interviews included two participants and the 25th interview involved a group discussion with 30 female participants in the 'Lakemba Ladies Lounge' (LLL). Among local stakeholder organisation, we interviewed professionals from three schools, three local councils, three community or neighbourhood centres, two settlement services providers, one peak body, one health service provider, 11 community organisations and one community member (apart

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[3] Sydney (Auburn [South and Central], Greenacre-Mount Lewis, Lakemba, Wiley Park)
[4] Melbourne (Broadmeadows, Campbellfield-Coolaroo, Dandenong, Fawkner, Meadow Heights)

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from the 30 women in LLL who were all local community members). We conducted 27 interviews in Melbourne, in which 28 respondents took part. Among local stakeholder organisations, the interviews covered an Islamic college, two mosques, two local councils, two community and neighbourhood houses, two migrant resource centres, an interfaith network, a local support group, one aged care and disability service provider, a local library and several community groups. The findings from these interviews cannot be generalised to the wider population. The interviews provide insight into the experiences of key-persons working in suburbs with concentrations of Muslims with the ways in which local projects and programs affect social cohesion in diverse communities.

The funder and the authors

The project is funded by the Department of Social Services of the Australian Federal Government, under the Resilient and Cohesive Communities Grant scheme. Chief Investigators from RMIT University were Associate Professor Val Colic-Peisker and Associate Professor Karien Dekker. Partner investigators were Prof. Kevin Dunn and Dr Rachel Sharples, Western Sydney University. Research assistants were: Dr Wendy Brouwer, Dr Adrian Flitney, Dr Ashleigh Haw, Dr Derya Dilara, Ms Caitlin Cook, Ms Alexia Derbas.

Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows: Chapter 2 describes the degree of concentration of Muslims in suburbs of disadvantage, and how this affects satisfaction. It also focuses on the levels of underemployment and disadvantage of Muslims in Australia. Chapter 3 reviews the programs targeting social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage. Chapter 4 then focuses on neighbourhood experience and Islamophobia. The concluding chapter outlines the implications for practice.

This report is based on three interim reports that were produced during the project, which are published online by the Social and Global Study Centre, RMIT University:

Dekker, K., W. Brouwer and V. Colic-Peisker (2019) *Suburbs with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians in Sydney and Melbourne: Spatial concentration, community, liveability and satisfaction*. Social and Global Studies Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Colic-Peisker, V. and R. Sharples (2020) *A review of programs targeting social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage in select migrant concentration localities in Sydney and Melbourne.* Social and Global Studies Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Colic-Peisker, V., A. Flitney and K. Dekker (2020) *Neighbourhood experience and Islamophobia in Sydney and Melbourne: survey findings.* Social and Global Studies Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne.

2. Muslim Australians: Concentration, disadvantage, satisfaction and education (first project stage)

This chapter focuses on the geographical concentration of Muslim Australians in Australia. It looks at socioeconomic disadvantage in these suburbs, local community belonging and satisfaction of the residents in these suburbs with higher concentrations of Muslim Australians. The research questions addressed in this chapter are:

1. Have Australian Muslims become increasingly residentially concentrated between 2006 and 2016?
2. If yes, is this associated with socioeconomic disadvantage; that is, do they increasingly concentrate in disadvantaged suburbs?
3. Do people living in disadvantaged suburbs with significant Muslim minorities have lower sense of local belonging and satisfaction with the local community than the general population?
7. Do Muslim Australians with post school qualifications have jobs corresponding to their skill level and has this key aspect of social inclusion changed between 2006 and 2016?

The analyses in this chapter are based on data from the Australian Census (2006, 2011 and 2016), combined with data from the Housing, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) panel survey, waves 2014 and 2016 (Watson and Wooden 2020).

Residential Concentration of Muslims

Research question 1: Have Australian Muslims (overseas born and Australian-born) become increasingly residentially concentrated between 2006 and 2016?

Muslim Australians are a little more concentrated in 2016 than they were in 2006, with both slightly higher concentrations as an increasing number of suburbs with a significant number of Muslims. However, the number of Muslims in Australia remains low, with only 1.7% in 2006 and 2.6% in 2016 of the Australian population identifying as Muslim 2016. New Muslim migrants tend to settle in Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne, leading to an increase in numbers in those two metropolitan areas.

Spatially-defined socio-economic disadvantage

Research question 2: If yes, is this associated with socioeconomic disadvantage; that is, do they increasingly concentrate in disadvantaged suburbs?

Yes, many Muslim Australians live in suburbs with concentrated socioeconomic disadvantage, although increasing numbers are also found in more affluent suburbs in Sydney. Most suburbs with concentrations of Muslim Australians are among the most disadvantaged ones in Australia (SEIFA score 1, 2 and 3). Muslims in the Melbourne metropolitan area are more concentrated in the disadvantaged suburbs than those in the Sydney metropolitan area. Since Muslim incomes are among the lowest in Australia, it is no surprise that Muslims tend to concentrate in areas with more affordable housing. Tables 1 and 2 in the annex provide an overview of the characteristics of the suburbs with concentrations of Muslims.

Sense of belonging, community and satisfaction

Research question 3: Do people living in disadvantaged suburbs (SEIFA score 1 and 2) with significant Muslim minorities have lower sense of local belonging and satisfaction with the local community than the general population?

We have been unable to provide a conclusive answer to this question using the HILDA and Census data (2006-2016). On average, people are less satisfied with their suburb if they live in a suburb with concentrated disadvantage (SEIFA score 1). However, since most Muslims live in suburbs with concentrated disadvantage, we do now know that respondents dislike the presence of Muslims and the presence of problems in disadvantaged suburbs[5]. Feelings of community, evaluation of liveability and satisfaction with the suburb and the house are higher when the shares of Muslim Australians are lower. It is striking, however, that there is no clear effect of an increase in the share of Muslims in the period 2006-2016. On the one hand, more people want to leave the suburb when the share of Muslim residents increases. On the other hand, residents evaluate their suburb more positively in this scenario. All in all, more (qualitative) research would be needed to fully understand these findings.

Muslim Australians: socio-economic disadvantage

Research question 7: Do Muslim Australians with post-school qualifications have jobs corresponding to their skill level and has this key aspect of social inclusion changed between 2006 and 2016?

Muslim Australians are mostly overqualified for the work they are doing: The educational level of most Muslims in Australia exceeds the level needed for the work they are doing. This is even more the case for overseas born Muslim Australians, and to a lesser extent Australian born Muslim Australians. This pattern is not unique, though, as most migrants in Australia have a higher educational level than Australian born employees, for the work they are doing. This potentially points towards structural discrimination of migrants on the labour market, favouring Australian-born over foreign-born respondents.

Conclusion

An increasing but still small number of Australian residents identify as Muslim. Most live in disadvantaged suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne. Lower numbers are found in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, although these small populations are also growing steadily. The growth of the share of Muslims as part of the Australian population is due to natural growth as well as migration from various countries.

On average, Muslim Australians have the lowest incomes in Australia, despite higher than average education levels. Like other migrants, overseas-born Muslims are overqualified for the work they do. Potentially this could point to discrimination in the labour market. Other religious groups such as Hindu and Jewish residents are not facing this issue to the same extent.

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[5] The survey data collected in stage 3 of the study, in contrast, points out that respondents in Muslim concentration areas are less Islamophobic (see below). This would indicate that concentrated disadvantage, rather than the presence of Muslims, negatively affects satisfaction.

The lower income of the average Muslim Australians directs them to areas with affordable housing, which is mostly concentrated in disadvantaged suburbs. The result is that Muslims tend to live in concentrations in lower income suburbs. Suburbs with concentrations of Muslim Australians are mostly found in metropolitan Sydney and metropolitan Melbourne.

The census and HILDA data show that residents of disadvantaged areas tend to be less satisfied with their suburb: community feeling is lower, suburbs are less liveable, residents are less satisfied with house and suburb, and more residents want to move out. In contrast, the impact of high shares of Muslim Australians is both positive and negative, giving inconclusive findings which indicates that further (qualitative) research is needed to fully understand the impact of Muslim concentrations on suburb satisfaction.

For more detailed information on the information provided here:
Dekker, K., W. Brouwer and V. Colic-Peisker (2019) *Suburbs with a higher concentration of Muslim Australians in Sydney and Melbourne: Spatial concentration, community, liveability and satisfaction*. Social and Global Studies Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne.

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3. Review of programs targeting social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage (second project stage)

Introduction

We now turn to an analysis of the effectiveness of programs targeting social cohesion in Broadmeadows, Campbellfield-Coolaroo, Dandenong, Fawkner and Meadow Heights in Greater Melbourne (Victoria) and Lakemba, Wiley Park, Auburn Central, Auburn South, Greenacre-Mount Lewis in Greater Sydney (NSW). All these suburbs are characterised by high shares of Muslims (varying around 1/3 to 2/3 of the population identifying as Muslim).

The analysis is based on 52 interviews with stakeholders in these ten suburbs in the two metropolitan areas. The interviews focused on the activities as well as the perceived effects on social cohesion in these suburbs with high shares of Muslim residents. The respondents were all local professionals or local community members, working for local councils, settlement services, local community organisations, schools, libraries, mosques and so on.

Research Question 4: What are the experiences of local stakeholders in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with significant Muslim minorities, with respect to programs fostering community cohesion and cushioning socio-economic disadvantage for vulnerable groups, and what is known about the effectiveness of the local programs?

Social cohesion

The aim of social cohesion policies in these suburbs is to bring people from different cultural backgrounds together. On the one hand, social cohesion policy is often used to address high crime rates, substance abuse, extremism and the like, which potentially damages the reputation of a community. Social cohesion policy aims to empower the population by increasing social engagement, feelings of belonging, and civic involvement. A problematic aspect of social cohesion policies is the implicit assumption that cultural diversity leads to problems and needs to be 'managed'.

Social cohesion was referred to in three different ways. First, as engaging local communities and building networks in culturally diverse populations. Second, to integrate 'others' (migrants, refugees, Muslim residents) into 'mainstream Australia', which is reference to a white Anglo Saxon English-speaking Christian Australia. Finally, social cohesion is a way to bring people of similar background together ('bonding') as well as bridging differences between groups.

Socio-economic disadvantage

The respondents overwhelmingly stated that socio-economic problems such as high unemployment as well as low incomes were the most pressing issues that needed to be tackled. Social cohesion is seen as a secondary issue to the multitude of economic problems that many residents of these suburbs are dealing with on a day to day basis. Most interviewees saw poverty and low education as the root causes of problems in the suburbs, such as high crime rates, vandalism, littering, as well as domestic violence and abuse.

Program delivery

In line with the above, social cohesion policies focus on (1) addressing disadvantage and (2) doing so using a bottom-up approach by including the diverse communities in the design as well as implementation and evaluation phases.

The most successful programs, as identified by our interviewees, focus on creating pathways to paid work by building skills and improving English-language proficiency. Local entrepreneurships and migrant-run businesses are also seen as excellent ways to empower the local community and reduce disadvantage. Schools were also often identified as places where community cohesion can flourish, reaching families of all backgrounds.

Successful programs are delivered in co-design with the super-diverse community. Effective programs build on ongoing relationships, with respect and understanding for local, linguistic, religious and cultural difference.

The most common problem in program delivery is the lack of funding – many professionals and community leaders indicated that they were spending a disproportional amount of time writing grant applications, time which could be used in more effective ways. Everyone involved agreed that the networking, relationship building, and design phase of programs should be appreciated more by funding bodies.

Recommendations

1. Program delivery is hindered by precarious and intermittent resourcing. The grants process needs to take a long-term, community-driven and strategic approach to funding community organisations and programs.
2. Organisations delivering social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage programs need to be able to have the surety of multi-year, and sustainable funding in order to be able to build ongoing, positive local relationships focused on bridging social capital through strong networks and trust among diverse local groups and migrant communities.
3. Community organisations should be adequately resourced to be able to apply for funding grants through a streamlined process. For many organisations, this process is currently prohibitively onerous.
4. Government policy on social cohesion building should be community driven, not just through liaising through self-identified community leaders but through seeking broad representation of less publicly prominent sections of community such as women and youth.
5. Social cohesion must be addressed by programs that at the same time address socio-economic disadvantage at the local and societal level.
6. Develop projects that encourage more active civic participation, as active membership in the community and investment in the wellbeing of the community leads to stronger, more vibrant and connected communities. A socially cohesive community is therefore a community which enable a feeling of belonging of its members and where they feel able to contribute to its future prosperity.
7. Encourage a social cohesion mindset that positions Anglo-Australians as equally invited to and responsible for contributing to socially cohesive local communities and a broader society.
8. It is especially valuable to fund programs that build bridging social capital and trust among diverse communities and between governments of all levels and those local communities where there is a high proportion of Muslim Australians among local populations.

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9. Due to widely reported Islamophobic and xenophobic statements from some politicians and sensationalist media reporting, such communities may feel targeted and under suspicion. Ensure Muslim Australian and other migrant communities are supported in their efforts to build a better life in Australia and contribute to the prosperity of the Australian community.

For more detailed information on the information provided here:

Colic-Peisker, V. and R. Sharples (2020) *A review of programs targeting social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage in select migrant concentration localities in Sydney and Melbourne.* Social and Global Studies Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne.

4. Neighbourhood experience and Islamophobia (third project stage)
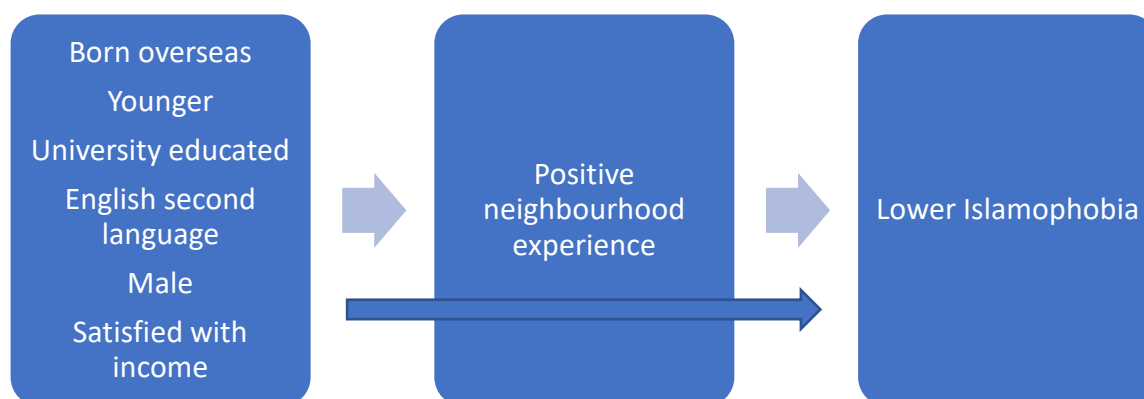
Introduction

Islamophobia is defined here as generalised negative emotions about Muslim people or Islamic religion, potentially resulting in negative behaviour towards either of those (Bleich, 2012). The assumption that is tested in this project is that neighbourhood experience affects the feelings of Islamophobia of the residents in those localities. Neighbourhood experience is a combination of local social networks, participation and satisfaction with the suburb.

The findings are based on a survey among more than 1000 respondents living in metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne which was held both online and via the phone. The online respondents lived in all suburbs of the wider metropolitan areas, whereas those contacted by phone were selected because they resided in the ten suburbs with high shares of Muslims (ranging from 29-59% Muslims). The data were analysed with SPSS statistical software.

Neighbourhood experience in suburbs with Muslim concentrations

Research Question 5: Can a [potential] relationship between the share of Australian Muslims and lower sense of local belonging be explained by mainstream prejudice, specifically Islamophobia?

Neighbourhood belonging is similar in all kinds of suburbs, irrespective of the share of Muslims in those suburbs. Islamophobia is slightly lower for those that have a positive neighbourhood experience. The findings are summarised in the graphic below.

| Born overseas
Younger
University educated
English second language
Male
Satisfied with income | → | Positive neighbourhood experience | → | Lower Islamophobia |

Islamophobia

Research Question 6: What are the levels of Islamophobia in the general population, compared to areas with significant Muslim minorities?

Non-Muslim respondents that live in suburbs with high numbers of Muslims are less Islamophobic, providing tentative evidence for the social contact theory. Interestingly, Islamophobia is lower in Sydney concentration suburbs than Melbourne concentration suburbs. Christians have higher Islamophobia scores than non-religious or other religions (non-Muslims).

Conclusions

The analysis of the survey findings (N=1020 respondents) indicate that sharing spaces with Muslim residents decreases feelings of Islamophobia. Non-Muslims that live in suburbs with high shares of Muslims are less Islamophobic than those that live in suburbs with lower shares of Muslims. This potentially means that the 'other', once acquainted, is less feared.

We also found that having positive neighbourhood experiences and higher satisfaction with income positively affects Islamophobia. This may mean that those that are more positive about life in general, are also more positive about other people. Due to the nature of the dataset we cannot test the direction of this relationship: Does a positive outlook on life make people more satisfied with their personal situation and their suburb, thereby reducing fear of Muslims? Or are people that are not afraid of Muslims also more satisfied with their suburb and their personal situation?

For more detailed information on the information provided here:
Colic-Peisker, V., A. Flitney and K. Dekker (2020) *Neighbourhood experience and Islamophobia in Sydney and Melbourne: survey findings.* Social and Global Studies Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne.

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5. Where to from here? Implications for practice

This study has two important findings:

First, the triangulated empirical data show convincingly that living in suburbs with high shares of Muslims increases tolerance towards Muslims: Sharing public space with the 'other' reduces fear and creates more cohesive communities.

Second, the impact of socio-economic deprivation on Islamophobia and social cohesion is not so straight forward, as much depends on the quality of the local community. Education and satisfaction with the suburb as well as the personal financial situation positively affect social cohesion.

What does this mean for civil organisations and public organisations working to create more cohesive and less Islamophobic communities?

1. Islamophobia is best prevented by fostering bridging social networks in the community. Create ongoing, positive local relationships focused on bridging social networks among diverse local groups and migrant communities.
2. Social cohesion is best created through school-based programs, those targeting women, children and youth as well as local entrepreneurship and support for migrant-run businesses.
3. The effectiveness of local programs depends on continuous funding. Governments need to take a long-term approach to funding community organisations and programs.
4. Social cohesion must be addressed by programs that at the same time address socio-economic disadvantage at the local and societal level.
5. Co-designed social cohesion programs are more effective than top-down policies.
6. Position white residents as equally invited to and responsible for contributing to socially cohesive local communities and a broader society.

Future research

Unsurprisingly, residents of more affluent areas are more satisfied with many aspects of their suburb. Conversely, the impact of concentrations of Muslims in the suburb is not so clear. It seems that the specific local suburb configurations are more important in explaining levels of cohesion and Islamophobia, than the share of Muslims. This would point to a need for research that creates a deeper understanding of the ways in which concentrations of Muslims affect feelings of community, satisfaction and liveability (see Itaoui 2016, 2020) for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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6. Literature

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