Among the last ones to leave?

Understanding the Journeys of Muslim Children in the Care System in England

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Executive Summary

Children of Muslim heritage are likely to experience significant delay in finding a fostering or adoptive placement and where a child has complex needs due to health, disability, age, mixed or multiple heritage background or being part of a sibling group, finding permanent placement takes even longer. In some cases, they may never find a permanent home at all. Such delays cause lasting harm for children and according to Selwyn *et al*, 'delay in decision making and action has an unacceptable price in terms of the reduction in children's life chances and the financial costs to local authorities, the emotional and financial burden later placed on adoptive families and future costs to society' (2006). Policy makers' response has been to emphasise transracial placements so that the process of finding a permanent home is expedited for these children.

Through interviews with social workers, foster carers, adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents, this research presents a research-informed narrative of the complexities in Muslim children's circumstances and identities, which influence how decisions are made about their lives. By better understanding the journeys of these children through the care system, this research will provide an evidence base for practitioners, policy makers and communities to draw upon, and in doing so will improve outcomes for these children, their families and for society as a whole.

This research provides strong evidence of the salience of Islam to Muslim children's identities. When children come into care they experience upheaval, displacement and trauma – in such contexts faith is familiar and enables children to be resilient. If in their new home, children's faith and ethnic needs are provided, they are happier, are more settled and attach better and sooner to their carers. Foster carers and adopters agree that faith is central to their identities too, that faith motivates them to care for the children they look after and that they may be best placed to meet the needs of children who come from ethnic and religious backgrounds similar to their own. For adopters there was an additional emphasis on the child they adopted 'looking like them'.

Based on this key finding of the salience of religion to the formation, evolution and preservation of the identities of children in public care, we suggest 7 inter-related recommendations for policy makers, social workers, carers and for the Muslim community to take forward. We do not assign a particular recommendation to a particular group, instead we call for joined-up thinking and collective action from these stakeholders, aimed at prioritising each child's welfare, security and happiness.

As a final word we emphasise the good practice that we can evidence in how social workers address the faith needs of Muslim children. The story is by no means only about good practice. Indeed, we have found evidence of blind-spots and lacunae. Nevertheless for a profession that faces regular unfair coverage from the media, it is important to emphasise the strengths of the profession and the conscientious care it provides to the most vulnerable children in our societies. Our intention with this report, is to celebrate and share the good practice and where there are blind-spots to engage critically but also collegially to fill the gaps in provision.

The seven recommendations we make on the basis of this project are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Include religion in SSDA903 returns and the national DfE database on looked after children

Recommendation 2: Recognise the salience of faith in children's journeys through the care system and enhance the faith literacy of social work practitioners and policy makers.

Recommendation 3: Develop and disseminate Islamic theological guidance on adoption and fostering that prioritises the children's needs.

Recommendation 4: Where required adoptive parents need be offered theological advice on the issue of establishing *Mahram* relations with their adopted children. If they choose to lactate their children they should be offered medical support

Recommendation 5: The agreements between Islamic modesty guidelines and safeguarding policy need to be shared with Muslim foster carers.

Recommendation 6: In line with the recommendation of the Education Select Committee, more outreach, information and recruitment work needs to be undertaken with diverse British Muslim communities to increase the number of Muslim foster carers and adopters.

Recommendation 7: Need to evaluate the impact of the removal of ethnicity from adoption law and guidance in England on practice.

Section 1: **Introduction and Background**

Children need permanent and secure homes in which they can explore their identities and evolve as human beings, citizens and family members. Homes in which they have a sense of security, continuity, stability and belonging. Recent UK government policy has tried to expedite the process through which permanent homes are found for children who cannot be looked after by their biological parents. There is very little research about the experiences of Muslim children in the Social Care System in Britain. Through interviews with social workers, foster carers, adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents, this research presents a research-informed narrative of the complexities in Muslim children's circumstances and identities, which influence how decisions are made about their lives. By better understanding the journeys of these children through the care system, this research will provide an evidence base for practitioners, policy makers and communities to draw upon, and in doing so will improve outcomes for these children, their families and in the long run, for society as a whole.

1.1   Introduction

Among the last ones to leave? Understanding the Journeys of Muslim Children in the Care System in England is the first in-depth academic research project to examine Muslim children's experiences through the care system in Britain. This research was undertaken as part of a larger DFE funded project that was led by the charity Penny Appeal which aimed to address the shortage of Muslim adopters and foster carers. There are three inter-related aspects to this large project that are informed and shaped by each other:

i.   The first aspect of this project involved an information and recruitment campaign that ran across the Midlands in the UK, as part of which information sessions on adoption and fostering were organised across the Midlands region of the UK. A total of 41 events were undertaken at Mosques, community centres and at other locations where Muslim communities gathered. Prospective adopters and foster carers were given access to a phone-in service where they could seek independent and impartial advice about becoming a foster carer or adopter. Prospective adopters and foster carers were then matched with local providers who could take the assessment process further. In term of evaluating this service all the callers found this service useful, all but one caller reported that they felt more informed and more confident about their application to adopt or foster.

ii.   The second aspect of this project involved consultations with theologically trained Muslim scholars to develop an Islamic guidance document that is informed by Islamic theology and by sociological considerations in Britain around the needs of Muslim children in Care. The development of the Islamic Guidance documents was led by trained Muslim theological scholars and was informed by the experiences of practitioners and this academic research team. The document aims to dispel misunderstandings around adoption and fostering which stem from misinterpretations of religious texts. It will also benefit practitioners to understand the religious needs of Muslim-heritage children. It is accessible here: https://pennyappeal.org/appeal/adoption-and-fostering/islamic-guidance

iii. The final aspect of this project (and to which this report relates) was the in-depth academic research phase. This research was undertaken by academics at Coventry University and professionals at CoramBAAF. For the first time in England, social workers, foster carers, adopters, prospective adopters and foster carers, care leavers and service providers were consulted to understand the journeys of Muslim heritage children through the British Care system. We have gathered quantitative and qualitative data around Muslim children's journeys through the care system and use this to make seven recommendations that are discussed in this report.

1.2   Multidisciplinary Ethos

This project in its entirety has led to three main outputs:

   i.   the recruitment of foster carers and adopters, and information sharing within the Muslim community which relates to the first phase of the project;
   ii. the theological guidance that is offered to prospective foster carers and adopters and to the professionals working with them; and
   iii. the new understandings of Muslim children's experiences and needs in adoptive and foster care homes as detailed in this report.

A ground breaking achievement of this project is the bridging it has forged between academics, social work practitioners and theologians in addressing the needs of Muslim children who are unable to live with their birth families. This multidisciplinary bridging was made possible by our priority to put children's needs first, by our recognition of significant good practice from social workers to ensure the best outcomes for Muslim and indeed all children in public care, and by our desire to achieve a holistic narrative that is informed by understandings of both theology and everyday lived religion. Whereas 'theology' is rooted in foundational religious texts and scholarly understanding of these texts, 'lived religion' is informed by the everyday negotiations that take place as people live and inform their religious understandings in a way that contextualises where they live, who they interact with and their personal circumstances. Lived religion is also relevant to modern social work practice in Britain which although may have had Christian roots is now usually described as a secular practice (Bowpitt, 1998). Social workers may or may not be religious, but in helping Muslim children in care to improve their lives and achieve a sense of well-being, social workers invariably gain an understanding of the Islamic faith as lived by the children they are working with. To understand and best meet children's care needs we believe that both theology and lived religion need to work together. Our work on Muslim children's care needs is therefore rooted in Islamic religious texts, in how these texts are lived and in how religiously informed lives are understood in a secular care system. In achieving the outcomes of this project, we have demonstrated that such multi-disciplinary bridging is possible and is indeed important as we move forward to forge a new vernacular of British Islam that can work with and inform policy and practice in Britain.

1.3   Context for the Research Project

The overarching principle of child protection policy, procedures, adoption and foster placements in England is for the state to provide 'stable, safe and secure homes which meet the *whole needs* of the child' (Newbigging and Thomas, 2011:376). In taking children into care the state is using one of its most coercive powers to secure the welfare and wellbeing of the child, which includes providing foster carers and adopters that can facilitate the child's diverse religious and ethnic identities (Selwyn and Wijedesa, 2011). But, research suggests a lack of adopters or foster carers with similar religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which limits placement choices for ethnic minority Muslim children (Owen and Statham, 2009, Newbigging and Thomas, 2011, Huggins, 2012).

The options available for child welfare professionals of finding similar ethnic and religious adopters and foster carers for Muslim children in care has seen minority ethnic children as being framed as 'hard to place' in foster care and in permanent placements (Wainwright and Ridley, 2012). [1] The current political solution to the resulting disproportionate number of children of Black and minority ethnic (BME) heritage (including children of mixed parentage or heritage) in care is to speed up the adoption process by removing the need to find 'perfect' ethnic matches for children [2] and to

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[1] Some studies have suggested that it takes on average 200 days longer for a child of black, Asian or mixed parentage to be adopted compared to a white child (Selwyn and Wijedesa, 2011).
[2] Children and Families Act (2014) - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

encounter transracial placements (Wainwright and Ridley, 2012). [3] The removal of 'ethnicity from Adoption Law and Guidance in England suggests that when Muslim children enter local authority care, social workers are no longer required to place them in Muslim homes or indeed in homes that match their ethnicity. The children's religious heritage may become a contested identity.

So for example, in 2014 when Harrow Council tried to place a Somali Muslim girl with White lesbian parents, there were protests from local Somali communities who were joined by local campaign groups and councillors who said that the issue was about "religious identity" rather than the sexual orientation of the prospective adoptive couple.[4] Professionals closely involved with this case, have said that the issues surrounding this case were an outcome of the matching discussion but also more importantly arose out of poor communication between the council and the biological family of the young girl and that this allegation of poor communication did not find its way into media coverage of the case. Whatever the reasons and motivations for the protest, this case illustrates on many levels the specificity of practice that is required when working with ethnic and religious minority communities on issues as sensitive as finding a new home for a vulnerable child. In cases like this, when adult emotions are clearly tense and frayed, it is important to consider the impact of these emotions on the child.

The social work profession that is perceived as being secular is looking after religious Muslim children and meeting their care and faith needs. Additionally, bearing in mind the change in legal guidance, this project aimed to create an evidence base of Muslim children's experiences as they journeyed through the care system in the Midlands, UK. The evidence base can inform policy and practice and in doing so it will reduce delays in Muslim children's journeys and improve their experiences through the care system in Britain. It considered the following interrelated issues and questions:

i. Muslim heritage children currently constitute a small proportion of the children in the care system. Changing population demographics in some, mostly urban, British and Welsh local authority areas mean that these numbers will increase. And the Muslim population in the UK is heterogeneous. Therefore, a question for this project is: What are the numbers of Muslim children in Care?

ii. In British Muslim communities, there is limited recognition of the fact that there are vulnerable children in the community who need permanent homes. Anecdotal evidence suggests a perception within Muslim communities that conditions leading to children being placed in care - such as maltreatment of children or family dysfunction - do not exist in their communities. Adoption and fostering (and the indirectly linked issue of fertility) remain taboo subjects that are not openly discussed. As a result, not enough prospective adoptive parents are coming forward from Muslim communities. This project sought an answer to the question: What are British Muslim attitudes towards adoption and fostering?

iii. As a result of religious misinterpretation, within British Muslim communities there are also cultural and religious barriers to adoption. So a question this research asked was: What is the impact of Islamic theology on British Muslims' decisions to adopt or foster?

iv. While adoption legislation in England no longer requires social workers to find 'perfect matches', discussions with social workers suggest that the realities of practice on the ground generate two sets of issues: (a) a view-point that a good ethnic match between adoptive parents and children, including physical resemblance, can enable adoptive families to more easily settle down into a family unit, reducing issues around attachment and identity formation, and (b) indication that prospective adoptive parents may stipulate that they would only

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[3] Michael Gove, as education minister claimed 'I won't deny that an ethnic match between adopters and child can be a bonus. But it is outrageous to deny a child the chance of adoption because of a misguided belief that race is more important than any other factor. And it is simply disgraceful that a black child is three times less likely to be adopted from care than a white child.' (Gove/Department for Education, 2012)
[4] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-26014756

consider a child whose ethnicity matches with their own. Although there is now no legal emphasis on matching by ethnicity (including religion, culture and language), it is unclear whether this has translated into everyday practice. Indeed despite the new legislation, children still wait. In this light, the project sought an answer to the question: <u>What is the impact of the removal of ethnicity from Adoption Law and Guidance in England on practice pertaining to Muslim children?</u>

1.4 Note on Research Methodology

This project took an ethnographic approach that positioned people – in this case, service providers, social workers, adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, policy makers, legal practitioners, foster carers and families – as the makers of meaning and holders of knowledge. Participatory methodologies are central to this project and throughout its duration, this project drew on the expertise of people already working in this area, to provide a research based evidence-pool to inform policy and practice. A Sociology of Religion research lens underpinned the research. For this project the Sociology of Religion is conceptualised as an interdisciplinary field that 'has as its subject the study of religion in its social context' (Furseth and Repstad 2006: 5). It deals with everyday lived religion as experienced in human interactions, communities and groups.

CoramBAAF's Black and Minority Ethnic Perspectives committee (BMEPAC) and the Faith and Peaceful Relations research group (FPR) at Coventry University acted as critical friends informing the conceptualisation and delivery of the project. We began this research with a systematic analysis of the literature to examine existing and previous research that is relevant to Muslim children's experiences in the care. This review informed the shaping of the research tools that were used in two phases of data collection.

- For phase 1 of the research a freedom of information request was sent to 22 local authorities in the Midlands to gather data about the Muslim children in care. Data was received back from 12 of the LAs.

- For phase 2 of the research we ran focus groups and interviews with social workers, adopters, foster carers and care leavers to understand their perspectives on the experiences of Muslim children. In all we spoke to 41 participants. For this phase of the research, participants were contacted through gatekeepers: Birmingham Local Authority, Leicester Local Authority and Active Care Solutions. Information about the project was publicised through a number of avenues: ADCS, CoramBAAF, CTPSR and Penny Appeal newsletters and mailing lists, an advert in The Muslim News, posts on Mumsnet, AdoptionUK forums and through CoramBAAF's regional practice forums. There was also some snowball sampling when

	Category	Number
1	Adopters	5
2	Foster Carers	10
3	Prospective Adopters	4
4	Social Workers (I)	4
5	Social Workers (LA)	15
6	Care leavers	3
	TOTAL	41

participants introduced the research to friends or colleagues who were adopters or foster carers. Appendix 2 contains a list of questions that were asked of difference participants.

- The research was conducted after securing full ethical approval from the Ethics Committee at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University.

- On 3rd October 2018 we ran a conference entitled 'Faith in the Care System'. This conference brought together academics, practitioners and families from Christian, Muslim and non-religious backgrounds to discuss exciting new research, current best practice and everyday lived experience of faith in the lives of looked-after children. The conference was a valuable opportunity to explore in multi-faith contexts, the experiences of diverse faiths in the care system.

1.5 Reading this Report

Having set up the context for this research project and the methods which were used, the next section will report on and discuss the findings of the research. We discuss our findings using direct quotes and case studies from the field which are contextualised in the literature. The research was conducted with a view to enhancing outcomes for Muslim children, and all children, as they journey through the care system - a phase of their life that is traumatic and challenging on many different levels. We know that the professionals and carers involved in their lives are committed to ensuring that the children are safe, protected and cared for. In this regard, we pre-empt all our findings by stating that this good practice in social work needs to be celebrated and shared across the profession. Unfortunately, media coverage of social work does exactly the opposite. Where we are critical of practice we do so with a perspective that seeks to work with social workers to enhance the experiences of Muslim children. And if one child has a better journey because of this research, then all our work will be worthwhile.

Section 2: **Findings and Discussion**

The research aims to improve outcomes for Muslim children and all children as they journey through the care system. This team acknowledges that the expertise to do this already exists within the care system, in the work of professionals and carers who look after these children. The report will highlight and celebrate good practice with a view of sharing this across the care system. Where we highlight gaps in the practice, we do so as critical friends who seek to work in collaboration with the experts to enhance current provision.

This section of the report discusses the findings from the research process. When we started this project in December 2016 we had a set of clearly defined questions. But soon after we realised that being the first research of its kind, the research was exploratory and its scope was wide. We therefore see this research project and resulting report as a benchmark pioneering piece of work that future research and practice can build upon. This report answers many questions, but many more remain to be answered.

We explored the experiences of Muslim children in the British care system from the perspectives of social workers, adopters, foster carers and a few care leavers. For ethical reasons, this project did not work with children directly, whose voices we have not accessed. This report uncovers findings and recommendations relating to both adoption and fostering as in the case of Muslim children (and indeed children of all backgrounds), there are overlaps in our findings that pertain to both. We bring our discussions to life by using quotations from participants and case studies from the field. All names in this report have been anonymised and in many cases, some of the details provided maybe vague or hazy – this is to protect the identity of our participants. This section is divided into five parts, each of which ends with specific recommendations.

2.1   The Number of Muslim Children in Care

The collection of quantitative data on Muslim children in primary care was requested through the Freedom of Information (FOI) offices in 22 local authorities in the Midlands.[5] Twelve FOI supplied information, six refused and four failed to respond to the request. Data on religion is not required as part of the statutory returns that local authorities make on children in care, therefore FOI refusal to extract information was either due to the information not being recorded or that it would have to be extracted individually from each child's case file. The lack of a systematic recording of the religious affiliation of children entering care is further complicated when the child is of Muslim heritage as previous research has found there is a lack of consistency of information on black and minority ethnicity children entering care of the local authority (Huggins, 2012). In at least two cases, local authorities who previously had refused to provide data in response to our FOI were able to give us the data when we met in person. In the case of these two LAs, they recorded the data on religion locally but were unwilling to share this data with a research team that they did not know. However, when they became aware of the identity and credibility of this team they were willing to share this data.

We provided each LA with a questionnaire. However, the data we were given was in formats that were unique to each LA and was specific to what each LA had recorded. In other cases where LAs had extremely small numbers of Muslim children under their care, exact data was not provided as there was a possibility that these children may be identified if exact data were provided. In these cases, approximations (for example <10 or <5) rather than exact figures were provided. It is

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[5] Appendix 1 contains a list of the Local Authorities in the Midlands

therefore not possible for this team to use the data that we gathered to count the number of Muslim children in care in Britain.

To address the lacuna of data on Muslim children in care, data about ethnicity in the SSDA903 [6] returns was extracted and triangulated with Census 2011 figures for ethnicity and religion. [7] This allowed an approximation of Muslim children in care to be made. There is a precedence of such an approach being used to 'count' the number of Muslims and other ethnic minority religious groups prior to the inclusion of religion as one of the national census questions.[8] However, this approach is problematic as census categories of ethnicity do not always directly correlate to the diversity of Muslims in Britain. Furthermore, the assumptions made in the two datasets are different. For example, the SSDA903 data on looked after children includes the subcategory 'Chinese' under the category 'other ethnic groups' and not under Asian although geographically Chinese would be an Asian category. It is also not clear what is included under the subcategory 'Any other Asian background'. Similarly, the Census 2011 includes a category 'Arab' which is not included in SSDA903 data.

Using our triangulation method, we were able to approximate that there are around 4500 Muslim children in the care system in Britain. Similar approximations for the last five years indicate that the number of Muslim children is increasing at an average by 7.28 per cent over the last five years and at a compound rate of 5.75 per cent. It is important to state again that this figure is an approximation. The number of Muslim children may be higher. An immediate critique of this method of calculation is provided by the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). According to latest DFE figures for the year ending 31st March 2017 there were 4560 UASC in the British Care system. Given the current socio-political situation we can assume that a significant proportion of these children will be of Muslim heritage. For example, data provided to us from a LA indicates that 19 out of 25 UASCs or 76% of UASCs in its care are of Muslim heritage.

The total number of children in care in the year ending 31st March 2017 was 72,760. So, our figure of 4500 Muslim children in care indicates that 6.2% of children in care are of Muslim heritage. This percentage figure will be much higher for local authorities with higher proportions of Muslim. According to data provided by Birmingham local authority, 431 of its 1840 looked after children are of Muslim heritage which means that 23% of its looked after children are Muslim. For other local authorities this figure will be different, for example according to data provided by Nottinghamshire LA, 34 out of 839 children or 4% are Muslim. For others such as Herefordshire, the number of Muslim children in care is extremely low – they reported that less than 10 of their looked-after children were of Muslim heritage.

It is important to note that despite its weakness the figure of 4500 Muslim children in care provides a valuable initial figure that can be used to predict and plan for the care needs of these children. The manager of an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) that primarily works with Muslim and Christian heritage children, spoke to us about the need to have a clearer sense of the number of children involved. This IFA has been successful in recruiting Muslim and Christian carers and have placed hard-to-place children in long term foster homes. This team is clear about the importance of faith in helping children settle into a foster placement. Yet they are concerned about the lack of clear numbers that hampers their ability to plan for the future:

> We work within an ethos that bears in mind children's faith needs and we find that our approach helps children settle down sooner. Our work has been commended and encouraged by a number of local authorities even those outside of the Midlands. But without a sense of the numbers of children we do not know where and how we should expand our work.
> Manager at an Independent Fostering Agency

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[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664995/SFR50_2017-Children_looked_after_in_England.pdf
[7] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/submit.asp?menuOpt=201&fmt=xls&lr=Ethnic%20Group&lc=Religion&fn=
[8] See for example Peach 1990

This research was provided with evidence of the social capital of religious groups. Repeatedly we were told about how religious communities could form a support network around looked after children and their adoptive or foster families. Research conducted by the Christian IFA Home For Good, similarly suggests the efficacy of local churches in wrapping around families that adopt or foster.[9] A clearer sense of the numbers of Muslim children in care would allow for robust planning around harnessing the social capital within Muslim or indeed any other religious group in Britain, to improve support networks and outcomes for looked after children. This informs the first recommendation of this research for religion to be included in data collected about 'looked after' children and who cares for them.[10]

Minimum standards for fostering state that, 'The local authority fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service'.[11] Having a clearer sense of the numbers of Muslim children in care will have an immediate impact in better achievement of this standard. Furthermore, the status quo we find ourselves in with regards to available data is that children are classified on the basis of their ethnicity alone and there is no indication of their religiosity. In the case of some children this may be problematic. According to Tamsin Yawar, when Muslim children in care were classed as black or Asian, "this had the potential to undermine their identity and to hinder reunion. Matching religion is especially important for Muslims" (1992 as quoted in Selwyn *et al* 2010)

This is not a new recommendation but rather is a reiteration of similar insights from previous researchers. Selwyn *et al* (2010) note that local authorities are still not required to collect data on religion and language. According to Selwyn, data on ethnicity has not been collected nationally at the point of referral. So, estimates of over or under representation of minority ethnic children are difficult to gauge. Similarly Barn *et al* 1997, Dutt and Phillips 2000 and Lowe *et al* 2002 all highlight gaps in social workers recordings of basic details such as ethnicity, religion, culture and the impact these have on planning.

> **Recommendation 1: Include religion in SSDA903 returns and the national DFE database on looked after children**

This is not a particularly difficult recommendation to be put into practice. We know that a number of Local Authorities (LAs) record children's religion locally. Other LAs record religion on individual children's files. Our recommendation suggests that as with ethnicity, data on children's and carer's religion needs to be recorded on the national database so that this can be used to plan for children's needs and for the recruitment of foster carers and adopters.

2.2 The Salience of Islam to Muslim Children's Experiences of Care

The children of Muslim heritage in care system come in for a variety of reasons. According to social workers interviewed for this research, the reasons children of Muslim heritage come into care are not different from any children who come into care. So, they come into public care due to abuse, neglect, family breakdown, a parent or child's illness or disability and lack of family support, substance misuse and / or extreme poverty. Owen and Statham (2009) found that black and minority ethnic children were over-represented in the care system but there were fewer south Asian children (who are often but not always of Muslim heritage). Owen and Statham also noted that age at entry to care differed by ethnic

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[9] https://www.homeforgood.org.uk/articles/what-church-needs-know-about-real-impact-support
[10] All local authorities in England are required to ensure that they have sufficient accommodation for looked after children under 'the sufficiency duty'. This means that all local authorities must demonstrate how they commission services for looked after children (and care leavers) via a number of providers including 'a range of provision to meet the needs of care leavers including arrangements for young people to remain with their foster carers and other supported accommodation'. A sense of numbers could assist with planning for sufficient accommodation
[11] Fostering Standards 13 - Recruiting and assessing foster carers, www.minimumstandards.org/fost_thirteen.html

group, where mixed ethnicity were the youngest and black children the oldest; there were also differences in the length of time they remained in care and their likelihood of being adopted or returned home. Pakistani and Bangladeshi children were the least likely to be adopted whereas rates for Indian children are below average (Barn and Kirton 2012). One of the reasons why some minority ethnic children enter care later may be related to differential social work practice but there is consistent evidential base for that position (Williams & Soydan 2005, Bernard and Gupta 2006, Masson et al 2008). Barn *et al* 1997 and Hunt *et al* 1999 found evidence that minority ethnic children are more likely to come to the attention of child protection services in times of crisis and not to have been supported beforehand. Furthermore, as noted in the previous subsection a significant proportion of UASC children are of Muslim heritage.

2.2.1 Salience of faith to Muslim Children's identity and needs

Research indicates that for Muslim children in Britain, their religion remains an important aspect of their identity (Becher and Hussain 2003). According to Scourfield *et al* this may be because 'religion is central to children's routines and they spend their time in Islamic places (including their home). This causes their faith to become central to their identity and 'religion becomes part of their lives without them needing to make a conscious choice to embrace it' (2010:3). These British Muslim children have a range of intersectional identity positions based on ethnicity, class, denominational affiliation, national context (English, Welsh, British, Northern Irish), yet according to Scourfield *et al* when presented with multiple identity choices, 'Muslim' was the most popular choice for the children he interviewed .

In Britain, some of these Muslim children, who have diverse ethnic backgrounds come into care for a variety of reasons. The most significant commonality across all these children's lives is their Muslim identity and in this section we consider how their Muslim identity shapes their journeys through the care system. This is illustrated through Fatima's[12] story:

> *Fatima and her two younger brothers were taken into care suddenly. She was 17 and her brothers were much younger and they came from a family that practised its faith. Fatima remembers the day she was taken into care, "we were put into a taxi. I had no idea where we were going. I was anxious yet at the same time things were happening so fast I had no time to be anxious. I knew I had to look after my brothers". Fatima and her brothers were placed in respite care in an African-Caribbean Christian home. Fatima describes this carer as "very kind". Yet Fatima was disturbed. The food in the fridge included ham which she knew she was not allowed to eat. Her foster carer took her to the green grocers to buy vegetables which she and her brothers could eat. But while she ensured her brothers ate halal food, she says she "did not eat for three days".*

> *Fatima and her brothers were moved to a South Asian Sikh home. This was a difficult placement. There was no sense of family or normality in this home. There were rules they abided by and they had access to food and had rooms of their own but there was no engagement beyond what was necessary with their foster carers. Indeed, a month after they stayed here they discovered that unknown to them another foster child has been living in that home. Then Fatima was moved on – she now was placed in a South Asian Muslim home. She liked it here as her foster carers understood her religious and cultural needs. But she was separated from her brothers, one of whom continued to live in the Sikh home and another was moved to a South Asian Hindu home. The children hated being separated from each other. Fatima worried about her brothers, particularly in Ramadan when she could fast with her foster family but her brothers had to fast alone. She talks sadly about her brothers having to get up on their own at 2 am in the morning to get food out of the fridge for their Suhr or breakfast. At contact meetings the siblings discussed the possibility of living together in Fatima's foster home. But when they bought this up with Social workers they were told, "All South Asians have similar cultures".*

> *Fatima says that a change in social workers meant that they later had a social worker who understood a bit more about Islam. This social worker considered the possibility of the children living together but nothing seemed to be happening.*

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[12] Named and other details changed to ensure anonymity

The children threatened to run away which seemed to work. It took six months and 12 months respectively but in the end the siblings were together in a Muslim home. Fatima is now 18 but was attached to her carer and continues to live with her under staying-put arrangements. She says she is happier now that her brothers are with her but she still feels uncertain about their future. Nevertheless, she concludes that she trusts in Allah or God Almighty who will lead her out of her uncertainty to happiness and success. [13]

Fatima's narrative indicates the importance she places on her faith identity and faith practices. She is happiest in her current home where she shares her beliefs and her culture with her foster family. The ability to pray with her foster family, to perform religious observances with them and to celebrate festivals together was important to her perceptions of her well-being. She came from a 'practising' background and regularly prayed and fasted. She felt she had lost her parents and could not afford to lose her faith. Indeed, her faith gave her hope and made her resilient in these uncertain times.

Sabiha[14] was another young woman who had come into care. She has gotten into bad company – she was part of a gang, drinking alcohol and had a boyfriend. She lived with an elderly grandparent who was no longer able to manage her needs or look after her. After she ran away a few times she was taken into care. She was placed in a Muslim family of a similar ethnic heritage to herself. The family practised their faith which initially made Sabiha uncomfortable. However, she soon formed a bond with her foster carers with whom she shared a similar cultural and religious language. In their discussions of faith, she says she gradually found something familiar and comfortable. Over the last year she has stopped drinking excessively, left the gang and is going to college and doing well. She says she feels more settled than ever before. In Sabiha's case, her faith was not particularly important yet sharing language, culture and beliefs helped her trust her fosters carers, which in turn helped her to in her own words 'get a hold on her life'.

A case study that provides a different perspective is of a Muslim-heritage sibling group that was taken into care after facing significant ill-treatment at the hands of their biological family. As a result of the ill-treatment the siblings wanted to disaffiliate from Islam and while in care they insisted on being placed in a non-Muslim home. An example of the seriousness of their rejection of their parent's religion was a request to eat ham (as they knew it was not permitted to eat ham in Islam). They made it clear they wanted nothing to do with "the faith of their parents". This is a complicated case, and although in the short term social workers tried to appease the children so that they would settle down, there were also longer term concerns around the identity positions of these children.

For this discussion on the salience of children's faith to their identities and to their needs, firstly, it is important to note that although these children were rejecting their faith, they did it in ways that were informed by the faith they were rejecting, which therefore remains salient to their identity. Having grown up with the Muslim faith and within Muslim culture, their rejection of Islam was informed by what they knew of Islam and how it was practiced in their lives. Secondly, in many ways, it was not that they were rejecting Islam, but that they were rejecting the faith that their parent's practiced. These were parents who had mistreated them to the extent that they were bought into care. In such cases, children's choices need to be discussed with them carefully and empathetically, so that both short term and long term care goals around security and stability are achieved.

In a different case, a young Muslim care leaver stated that when she was younger and lived in foster care, she had rejected her faith. According to her, this was due to a number of reasons, including that she was disillusioned with her faith after what she had experienced in her biological family. She also lived with foster carers who were not Muslim, which meant she was no longer in a cultural context where she could easily practice her faith. She also wanted to fit in within her foster family, friends and peers. So it was easy for her to reject her faith. When she was much older and had left care she found

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[13] This case study is based on interviews with Fatima (named changed) and with her foster carer
[14] Name changed to protect identity

her faith again and states that she now felt her "identity was rooted in her faith". A Christian care leaver presented a very similar narrative at the Faith in the Care System conference.[15] In cases where children who come from faith backgrounds reject faith on the basis of their experiences, it is important for social workers and carers to have an understanding of faith in order to help children navigate their identities, and to explore if rejecting religion is what they really want. Whether it is rejection of faith or a desire to devoutly practice it, faith remains salient to children's identities.

2.2.2 Salience of faith to Foster Carers

When we asked foster carers and adopters about their motivations to adopt and foster they spoke about faith being an important factor in their decision to care for vulnerable children. According to this foster carer:

> Religion has been a factor to my fostering as well. The Prophet that we follow, Prophet Muhammed (peace be to him) was fostered, and he had a very positive approach to fostering and through his teaching he had a very nurturing approach to fostering. His teachings promote fostering and indicate that anyone who loves a child will be highly regarded and will be close to him and to God. And he also fostered as well. In our religion, we follow his ways, and his ways were to foster children.
> *Muslim Foster Carer, British Bangladeshi*

For this foster carer, his identity and his motivation to foster were determined by his faith. This is not dissimilar to the narrative that we heard from many other foster carers who quoted from Islamic foundational texts, the Qur'an and the Hadith, to justify their desire to foster children. They felt that sharing a faith identity with the children they looked after was important and ensured the best outcomes for the children who fitted into the household and wider context of the family:

> Yes, being Muslim and the child being a Muslim girl played a role in the decision to foster her. We believe in God and have a conviction that we should do good to humanity. So yes, religious beliefs played a role especially for a child staying with us for a long time. But we welcome anybody for short breaks, it doesn't matter what religion they are.
> *Muslim Foster Carer, Pakistani-African mixed heritage*

This is not to say that all the Muslim children we encountered lived in Muslim homes or that all the Muslim foster carers we encountered only looked after Muslim children. Indeed we found a number of examples where foster carers who were not Muslim looked after Muslim children and did their best to ensure that the faith needs of the children were met. This is Pat's[16] story:

> *Pat is a single White woman who has been a foster carer for more than a decade. During this time she has fostered a number of Muslim children including a few who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. At the moment she is looking after a teenage Muslim boy.*
>
> *Every time she has cared for a Muslim child she has considered their faith needs carefully, even consulting with the Imam (Muslim faith leader) at the local mosque. She organised for the boys to go to the mosque to learn to read the Holy Qur'an in Arabic. After all these years she says she now has very good contacts with the Imam!*
>
> *She remembers that when she was looking after a particularly devout Muslim boy who prayed five times a day, she ensured that she woke this boy up for his Fajr (or pre-dawn prayer). When she first looked after a Muslim child she did a lot of research on Islam and continues to teach herself about the faith of the children she looks after.*

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[15] 3rd October 2018
[16] Name changed to protect identity

We similarly found an example of Muslim foster carers looking after a little girl from a nominally Christian White background, who recognised her faith traditions by celebrating Christmas and the little girl's birthday, celebrations that they did not normally practice. In the past they had looked after Muslim children and those who were from other faiths or no faith backgrounds. Reflecting on this they stated that while it was wonderful to have been involved in all these children's lives they felt that they had cultural and religious capital that was best utilised when they looked after a Muslim child. So, when they had to foster an infant of Muslim heritage they knew exactly what rites of passage had to be performed and negotiated with social workers to ensure that these were undertaken on time. It is important to note that the fostering journey of some Muslim foster carers was hampered by cultural understandings of their faith particularly as understood by people around them. We will discuss this in some detail in section 2.3.

2.2.3 Salience of faith to Adopters

When we spoke to adopters, almost all the adopters had chosen to adopt after encountering infertility and being unable to conceive a child. Nevertheless, faith was a strong motivator for those adopters who described themselves as being highly committed to their faith. In the words of this participant:

> We wanted a child in our family but we didn't necessarily need a biological child so adoption seemed the right option for us […] we were very lucky to have close [Muslim] friends who adopted themselves and they were very happy so we decided to decline the fertility treatment and go down the adoption route instead.

> We are both intensely aware of our faith, we might not be the most devout towards outward practice so we are not in the top category in that way but in terms of our awareness and understanding our faith, reading and thinking and reflecting, we do that. That reflection helped us understand adoption was a good thing because you're taking a child who is vulnerable, taking them into our home, the Qur'an talks about orphans but we recognise that we were not going to get an orphan but in a similar sense they are orphans because they don't have a home to live in.
> *Muslim Adopters, British Indian*

For this family their faith shaped their identity and their desire to adopt. The fact that their Muslim friends had adopted before them helped consolidate their thinking. Like fostering, adoption can sometimes be misunderstood in Muslim contexts – we discuss this in section 2.3. But for this family, their friends had already negotiated the religious texts which made their decision easier. Another couple presented a similar narrative:

> I knew that I wanted to adopt, we've not been able to conceive we were about to start IVF treatment, we went the initial appointment and something would happen and we would back away and that's when we started thinking about adopting. It is not the religious leaders told us that, it was our decision that we came together on but we spoke to a couple, a Muslim couple who adopted two children and we went and spoke with them. We wouldn't have come to the decision as quickly if we haven't spoken to them.

> I think it's about giving, our intention is to give a child a good upbringing that they may not have had but we are not doing for any ulterior motive, we are trying to do a good thing. To look after a child, an orphan, we consider that a child in care is the same because they don't have someone to look after them is a great Islamic reward, that also helps with the decision. It seems that they (Muslim community) don't understand that, it does romanticize biological parents and they don't understand adoptive parents that they are not different
> *Prospective Muslim Adopters, Muslim heritage*

Again, the salience of faith in the identity of the couple and in their motivation to adopt is clear. It is particularly interesting that the fact that their friends have adopted encouraged this couple to apply to adopt. From both cases, it seems that faith can motivate people to adopt both through religious texts and through the faith networks that are formed around people of similar faith. The second quote also begins to hint at ways in which faith or cultural understanding of faith can hinder adoption – we discuss this in section 2.3. For adopters who were not practising Muslims, faith was not significant in their decision to adopt. Yet they too recognised that culturally they would be best placed to look after a Muslim heritage child as they had an understanding of Muslim normative values and morals that matched with the values that Muslim children had grown up with.

2.2.4 Social Workers and Islam

As noted in Fatima's case above (page 20-21) social worker practice around faith can at best be described as patchy. There is good practise where social workers understand the nuances of Islam and how this is practised in a particular child's life. Fatima's second social worker was able to recognise the importance of the children's faith and was able to work with them and gradually was able to place them together in a Muslim home.

In 2.2.2 we noted how a Muslim foster carer was able to negotiate with social workers the organisation of rites of passage for an infant he and his family were looking after. He had to pick up the infant from the hospital and recited the *azaan* or call to prayer in the child's ear. He later organised the child's *aqeeqah*. This is an important rite that needs to be performed either on the 7th, 14th or 21st day after a baby's birth. It involves the shaving of the baby's hair, the giving of charity (the equivalent amount of the weight of a child's hair in silver) and the sacrifice of sheep and distributing its meat to the poor. This foster carer was able to perform both these rites of passage. However, we also heard from another foster carer who was in identical circumstances – he picked up an infant from the hospital and fostered it. Yet he was not allowed to perform these important rites of passage.

This inconsistent understanding of the religious needs of Muslim children has led to some foster carers to become frustrated with social work practice and sceptical of its fitness for purpose:

> I think overall in UK fostering journey, Muslim children are given a raw deal. The social workers have no knowledge or skill to meet their needs. They don't want to research and know. They are quite ignorant in Muslim faith, and all religion to be fair. And they come here just to apply the law and policies.
> *Muslim Foster Carer, British Pakistani*

Both foster carers and adopters spoke about the impact of this 'patchiness' on the assessment process. A number of foster carers told us about not being approved when they approached local authorities to foster. Yet, when these foster carers had approached an independent fostering agency (IFA) with a faith ethos they were approved and were able to foster:

> Had it been not for the agency, my dream of being a foster carer, would not be realised. If it weren't through them, I wouldn't be a foster carer. Local authority let me down, so many other agencies let me down, sorely because of my name! [his name is common among Muslims]. When I approached local authorities, they had so many excuses that I can't be a foster carer.
> *Muslim Foster Carer, British Bangladeshi*

Despite this criticism, it is important to note that we encountered a number of examples where social workers engaged with applicants' religious beliefs in ways that were faith-sensitive and which demonstrated significant and nuanced knowledge of the Islamic faith. This was particularly true in local contexts that had larger proportions of Muslim communities and where the staff included social workers of BME and of Muslim heritage. Good practice included a

heritage panel at Leicester LA that considered the heritage implications of placements. Two local authorities told this team about approving their first *niqabbed* adopters who wore the face-veil. They spoke about engaging with these women carefully to understand that their face veils would not be worn in front of any children they looked after and realising that the person behind the veil had the empathy and skills to make a good mother.

In another example, an adopter said that her social worker did not have nuanced knowledge of Islam. However, her social worker had an open mind-set and was committed to looking beyond cultural differences:

> We had a very good social worker, she was very engaged […] Our social worker was not from the same background as us […] Cultural differences did come up but it didn't come up as offensive but more as how it would be barrier and so we were very careful to explain things and our social worker was very prepared to understand difference. Social workers need to understand Muslim communities and Muslim communities need to understand fostering and adoption law, if we all understand one another the children can have the best outcomes.
> *Muslim Adopters*, British Indian

2.2.5 Concluding thoughts on the salience of faith

In sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 we have begun a discussion around the salience of faith to the identity and wellbeing of children who come from faith backgrounds. Sharing a faith with their carers helps them settle down faster and enhances their well-being - a sentiment that is echoed by their foster carers. When people apply to foster or to adopt, in both cases they spoke about faith as a motivator in their decisions. Through the examples cited above and through this report we note good social work practice in meeting children's faith needs. However, we also note that the evidence suggests that practice is patchy and that in many cases children's needs are only partially met or are not met at all.

Furthermore, there is a lacuna in recent policy-focussed reports including the Fostering Stocktake,[17] the Education Select Committee's report into Fostering[18] and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Enquiry[19] into the role of the social worker in adoption. These reports only barely engage with religion and there is only limited recognition of the salience of faith to the identity of children who come from faith backgrounds. But all three reports make a few valuable contributions. The Fostering stocktake calls for a database of foster carers that in addition to other characteristics includes their religion. The Education select committee includes within its recommendations the establishment of a national recruitment and awareness campaign that will seek to increase the number of carers from ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds which are currently lacking in representation. And finally, the BASW report into adoption includes a quote from a child that asserts the importance of religion to its identity (pp. 26).

In this research young people and their carers spoke about the salience of faith to their lived experience. Recent policy-focussed reports do not engage with religion in a substantial way but nevertheless as discussed above make two recommendations that have the potential to improve outcomes for children who have religious identities. Against this backdrop, this project recommends that social work professionals and policy makers recognise the salience of Islam to Muslim children's journeys and to therefore enhance the faith literacy of social work practitioners and policy makers. Indeed, the salience of any faith to children's journey's needs to be recognised

> Recommendation 2: Recognise the salience of faith in children's journeys through the care system and enhance the faith literacy of social work practitioners and policy makers

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[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foster-care-in-england
[18] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/340/34002.htm
[19] https://www.basw.co.uk/adoption-enquiry/

2.3 Shortage of Muslim Adopters and Foster Carers

There is a shortage of Muslim families coming forward to adopt or foster. Our research indicates that this is due to number of reasons that we discuss below.

2.3.1 Mis-interpretation of Islamic foundational texts

A plethora of Islamic scholars and bloggers convincingly argue that **adoption and fostering is not only permissible in Islam but is also a collective obligation for every Muslim and non-Muslim alike**[20]. Most literature address issues of adoption than fostering, since the latter is viewed as a temporary arrangement. There is a consensus in Islamic literature that the legal relationship between the adopted child and adoptive family must be maintained according to Qur'an. Specifically, the adopted child's identity and biological family name must be preserved (Qur'an 33:4-5). The discussion on adoption legality mainly dwells on child re-naming, conditions when embracing an adoptive family name is permissible in Islam; establishing *mahram* relations (which is discussed later in this report)[21]; and finally that adopted child has no right to inheritance in the adopted family but can be compensated by the adoptive parents. There is however, a diverse interpretation of the Qur'an in Islamic literature on adoption. Others have argued that adoption should be encouraged to take place within the extended family of the child and country of birth or where the religious values of the child will be maintained[22].

On the other hand, it is argued that lack of Islamic knowledge coupled with cultural and traditional values reinforce a negative view and misconception on fostering and adoption in many Muslim families. Consequently, in Muslim majority countries there are many Muslim children on the streets or in orphanages[23]. The misinformation about adoption in Islam,[24] is further exacerbated by a negative stigma attached to adoptive parents in most Muslim communities[25]. Hence, most Muslim communities continue to have differing views on adoption. A number of adopters and foster carers discussed with the team mis-interpretations of foundational Islamic texts, which then become barriers to adoption and fostering. This is best exemplified in this narrative from a social worker:

> *A decade or so ago this social worker was on a team tasked with finding a home for twin baby boys of Muslim heritage. A number of Muslim and non-Muslim families were keen to adopt the twins as they were babies. However, the twins came from a distinct and hard-to-find ethnic group and social workers struggled to find an appropriate cultural match for the children. They ran various campaigns and even went on a Muslim TV show to try to find a family for the twins. After a year or so they placed the children in a Muslim family that was a less than ideal ethnic match and they were not sure whether the children's cultural heritage would be preserved.*

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[20] See Huda, Adopting a Child in Islam: Islamic legal rulings about foster parenting and adoption (2016), available at *https://www.thoughtco.com/adopting-a-child-in-islam-2003804*
Accessed on 20 September 2017. Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, Adoption in Islam, (1990) available at *https://www.al-islam.org/articles/adoption-islam-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi* Accessed on 20 September 2017. Adopt Islam UK: Issues on Adoption in Islam, online resource available at *http://www.adoptislam.co.uk/1-19-issues-on-adoption.aspx* accessed on 22 September, 2017. **Imam Abu Eesa Niamatullah position on Adoption (Imam Abu Eesa Niamatullah is** the Director of the non-profit educational institute Prophetic Guidance) available at *http://www.adoptislam.co.uk/1-19-issues-on-adoption.aspx* accessed on 25 September 2017. The Fatwa Department Research Committee – (chaired by Sheikh `Abd al-Wahhâb al-Turayrî) Who says Islam prohibits adoption? Available at *http://en.islamtoday.net/quesshow-16-786.htm* Accessed on 30 September 2017.

[21] "Mahram" refers to a specific legal relationship that regulates marriage and other aspects of life. A mahram is unmarriageable kin with whom sexual intercourse would be considered incestuous, and a punishable taboo in Islam

[22] See Huda, Adopting a Child in Islam: Islamic legal rulings about foster parenting and adoption (2016), available at *https://www.thoughtco.com/adopting-a-child-in-islam-2003804*

[23] Adopt Islam UK: Issues on Adoption in Islam, online resource available at *http://www.adoptislam.co.uk/1-19-issues-on-adoption.aspx* accessed on 22 September, 2017.

[24] Some of the misinformation include loss of lineage of the adopted child, potential sexual intimacy in the family after puberty and confusion over inheritance amongst rightful children. Therefore, orphans and abandoned children must only be sponsored in orphanages or homes but must be released upon puberty.

[25] Adopt Islam UK.

Recently this social worker was involved in the assessment of a Muslim couple who had applied to foster. At assessment panel when they were asked about their motivations to foster, this couple unexpectedly spoke about a decade ago having seen the television programming about the twins. They had been keen to adopt the boys and according to the social worker they would have been a perfect match. However, when they sought the advice of their Imam, they were told it is not permissible for Muslims to adopt and they had therefore not applied. Now 10 years on, although they were still not ready to adopt they had decided that it was possible for them to foster children. [26]

In relation to these misinterpretations of Islamic texts, it was interesting to note that all the adopters in this research did not discuss having applied to adopt with anybody beyond their immediate families. Despite this reticence, adopters spoke about being challenged about their decision to adopt. One woman told us that when she told her father-in-law about her decision to adopt, "he sat her down" and told her not to bother adopting and that he would instruct one of her husband's siblings to have a child and hand it over to her - a suggestion that left her flabbergasted. Another adopter told us about both her mother and her mother-in-law being told by religiously-informed friends that adoption is *haram* or forbidden in Islam:

> We didn't tell everyone, we just told immediate family and we did have some hiccups…it happened twice, with my mother and mother-in-law. My mother did tell her friend who is a madrasa teacher and he said the adoption was forbidden, my mother-in-law had a similar experience that a friend said they should stop the adoption because adoption is not allowed. Both my mother and my mother-in-law were very perplexed about this and we had to explain to them, they were always supportive but it did come up and they wanted to know more
> *Muslim Adopter, Asian Indian*

Foster carers described similar challenges. A foster carer ascribed these attitudes to cultural traditions within his community, which meant that fostering an unrelated child was considered taboo. Another foster carer described how her family stopped inviting her and her family to social occasions after she started fostering. A third foster carer described "poor reactions" from her brother and from her extended family to her decision to foster. Fosters carers criticised their 'culture', which they described in terms of their ethnicity. Whereas their religion encouraged them to "place their hand of care on the vulnerable child's head" their culture discouraged them from doing so. The quote below relates to the participant's Pakistani culture but we have recorded similar comments about Indian, Bangladeshi and Middle-Eastern cultures:

> The culture does not support fostering, Pakistan culture no. Some people are very narrow minded. The culture wants you to help your own, but the religion says you have to help everybody. Not many Pakistan foster carers are there. Very few. For instance, if it's a training for 30 people, sometimes its only 5 or 4 or 3 and sometimes only myself who is Asian. But there are also cell meetings for Asian foster carers, where we meet and talk about fostering. So, there we meet some of them.
> *Foster Carer, British Pakistani*

This is by no means the only experience - in the research, we also had examples of supportive extended families and families who were inspired by their family and friends to adopt of foster children. As noted previously the presence of somebody within the faith or cultural network encouraged others in that network to adopt or foster. However, it is clear that the theological issues around adoption and fostering need to be addressed. The Islamic theological guidance document[27] produced as result of the larger project of which this research forms a part, is a ground-breaking first step

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[26] Based on an discussion with a social worker at a CoramBAAF practice group
[27] Accessible here: https://pennyappeal.org/appeal/adoption-and-fostering/islamic-guidance

towards achieving *ijma'a* or consensus among scholars and faith leaders from diverse Muslim ethnic and denominational groups and which prioritises children's needs. Indeed, the Islamic guidance places an unequivocal duty on Muslims to care for vulnerable children who need either adoptive or foster homes. However, this work needs to be developed and built upon. It also needs to be disseminated across diverse Muslim communities in Britain and beyond.

Recommendation 3: Develop and disseminate Islamic theological guidance on adoption and fostering that prioritises the children's needs

2.3.2 Modesty and establishing *mahram* relationships in adoptive families

Related to the issue of theological interpretation are issues around establishing *mahram* relationships within adoptive families. *Mahram* may be understood as close family relations whom one is not permitted to marry and with whom strict modesty is not required. *Mahram* is established through blood relationships or through breastfeeding or feeding a child expressed breast milk.

In relation to establishing *mahram* relations in adoptive families, the more devout Muslim families told us about their concerns. Without establishing *mahram* relations the adoptive mother would need to wear the hijab or headscarf in the presence of her adopted son when he reaches puberty and similarly modesty guidelines would come into place between a father and his adopted daughter. Different families dealt with this in ways that were unique to their contexts and ways of believing. Two adoptive mothers told us about using hormonal medication to stimulate lactation. They expressed breast milk which they fed to their child a minimum of five times to establish *mahram* relations. One mother adopted thrice and each time she lactated her children, this allowed *mahram* relations to be established between each child and the parents and also between the children.

The most commonly-accepted religious guidelines require that the child be under the age of two which is why Muslim couples may stipulate that they will adopt children under the age of two. In this research, social workers at two local authorities stated that they had a number of Muslim families who were approved but who were insisting on adopting children under the age of two. This is problematic as the children who come into care are usually older. Of the two mothers who lactated, one had the support of a medical practitioner; the other self-medicated using medicines bought off the internet (it is important to note here that self-medicating in this way is dangerous and may be detrimental to the mother's heath). If Muslim adoptive mothers are insisting on lactating their adopted children, then it is important that they have appropriate medical support as there are health-risks associated with this process. Families also need to be given options:

- For example, it is possible to establish *mahram* relations by feeding the child the expressed breast milk of a close family relation, for example a sister
- As noted in the theological guidance when young children are adopted, there may be no need to breastfeed as *mahram* relations are automatically established.

For other families, including those who came from a range of Muslim positionalities (both practicing and non-practicing) breastfeeding was a non-issue - it did not even cross their mind. And if it did, it was not an important issue:

> I adopted this child and he is mine. And I leave the rest to Allah
> *Muslim adopter*, British Pakistani

For the couple we quote below it was not important to establish *mahram* relations between the children and parents. However their strategy was to adopt a sibling group so that the children were *mahram* to each other:

We did ask for guidance and also in the aspect of Islam that the child is not a biological, yeah *mahram* you question it, for example if we were to adopt a girl would she have to cover up in front of me and that sort of thing. We did seek guidance on that and we felt that that it would not be necessary.

Our preference is to go for sibling group, so that's our priority……. the interesting thing the *mahram* changes you know if we had one child now and we adopted another child, a son and then went for a daughter we would have the issue of *mahram* so if we had two children from two different families that would be an issue.
Prospective Muslim adopter, British Indian

It is important for practitioners and faith leaders to recognise that establishing Mahram relations is meaningful for some adopters. It is therefore essential that they be given a range of options to do so. And if they decide to go down the lactating route that mothers in particular are provided with appropriate medical support. There is evidence that attitudes to lactating adoptive children are changing. In America there is now a tradition of this taking place. However, in Britain traditionally this has been frowned upon but a social worker in this research reported that she recently worked with a family that was open with social workers about their plans to lactate their adopted child and they were given appropriate support.

Recommendation 4: Where required adoptive parents need be offered theological advice on the issue of establishing Mahram relations with their adopted children. If they choose to lactate their children, they should be offered medical support

2.3.3 Modesty Guidelines and Foster Placements

Issues around Islamic modesty guidelines were similarly bought up in fostering contexts. Social workers told us that a number of Muslim foster families refused to foster teenage boys as they felt it would be inappropriate to have them in their homes, especially if they had biological daughters in the family. This was ratified by a number of foster carers who told us they would only adopt younger children:

Fostering is encouraged in Islam. But then, due to some Islamic theories and traditions, I don't want to foster a boy child who is over 12 years. Being a single woman, I just don't want to be in the same house with an older boy because of *mahram*. For *mahram*, I have decided that I will not foster boys over the age of 12. So, I only foster younger boys and girls.
Female Muslim Foster Carer, British Pakistani

Similarly, where the main carer was male we noticed a preference to adopt teenage boys and a reticence to adopt teenage girls. Again, where families were less practising or where biological children were no longer residing in the family home, this was less of an issue. The case of fostering is different from adoption and here theological scholars and practitioners need to work with foster carers to arrive at a different set of solutions. For example, as the demands and conditions of a foster placement are different, Islamic modesty guidelines including the wearing of the hijab in the presence of foster children or foster parents of opposite gender may be more easily navigated. Indeed, as noted by this foster carer the safeguarding and privacy guidelines in foster placements are as stringent as Islamic modesty guidelines and they often are in agreement with each other, which makes Islamic modesty guidelines easier to manage in fostering placements. He learnt this through experience which he believes needs to be shared more widely:

Mahram and hijab, was an issue with us to be honest. Hence, we only went for the girls at first because my wife could be in the house and do everything. But it was difficult for her because I couldn't do anything… But now things have changed, we now have boys, my mum is here and daughter. But things are just fine because we practise

safeguarding anyway. We have to do things in a particular way and that falls completely in line with safeguarding. So that is not an issue. Our religion demands that we are not dressed half naked anyway, so with our own children or other children, it doesn't make a difference.

Muslim Foster Carer, British Bangladeshi

Recommendation 5: The agreements between Islamic modesty guidelines and safeguarding policy need to be shared with Muslim foster carers

2.3.4 Unawareness within diverse British Muslim communities

Our research indicates that Muslim communities were unaware of the needs of Muslim children in the care system. At a talk presented at a national Muslim body the emphasis seemed to be solely on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) coming to Britain from Syria. There was limited recognition that these UASCs would be teenage boys, instead the assumption was that they would be young children. There was almost no comprehension of the needs of British-born Muslim children who are in care.

I don't think Muslims realise a lot of children need to be adopted in the care system. They think everyone is looked after and cared for, for example we went for a training session they told us what's happening to lots of Muslim children from the Bradford area, they are coming into care, a lot of mixed race children with a Muslim dad or a Muslim mum. I think people try and brush under the carpet, we need to talk about it people need to be aware, I just think it's too covered up.

Muslim Prospective Adopter, Asian Indian

Social workers report their frustrations about this lack of understanding within Muslim communities. Two local authorities and two independent fostering agencies (IFA) described being inundated with phone calls and expressions of interest in fostering UASCs. But when further enquires were undertaken very few of these expressions of interest developed into a serious assessment. An IFA manager stated that out of 50 expressions of interest received, only three were able to complete the assessment process. This he said was because some Muslim applicants came with a specific set of demands which made them ineligible to be assessed as foster carers. These demands included only wanting to foster Muslim children, or babies, or children under the age of two. There was also lack of awareness of what the assessment process entailed. For example many of those who expressed interest did not realise that they needed spare rooms. Furthermore three foster carers who were interviewed for this research reported that they did not know they would receive an allowance to look after foster children.

Similar issues were raised about Muslim couples coming forward to adopt. One local authority told us that they had a long list of approved Muslim adopters who were waiting to adopt a child under the age of two. As most children who come into care are older, these approved adopters are having to wait for much longer and are then frustrated by the wait.

2.3.5 Suspicion of Social Work practitioners

A number of foster carers told us about their suspicions of social workers. A foster carer told us that a family member advised him that inviting social workers into their home was a mistake. That social workers would interrogate him and his wife about their family, faith and culture and that under the guise of assessing them would take away their biological children!

Some of my family thought that fostering was inviting trouble to our house

Muslim Foster Carer, British Indian

Such suspicions of social work practice are not uncommon. Research conducted by the Christian ethos IFA Home For Good notes similar suspicions of social work in Christian communities. For Muslim communities these suspicions may stem from a number of different issues:

- Differences in cultural and religious values:
  When social workers come in they want to force their way of life, and Muslim way of life is disregarded. They would encourage a child to have a sexual partner as soon as they reach a certain age. Explore sex, they say. But in this day and age, we need to teach children about sex and have them exposure to it in a controlled manner. And in a manner when the child is ready. We had a boy who was exposed to sex education and he came back naming women parts and giggling and all that. So, according to the books he is ready, but mentally he is not ready. In our religion and culture, we are not accustomed to having boyfriends and girlfriends. But when the social workers come they ask, does he or she have a girlfriend or boyfriend. And they kind of castigate that ideology of not having boyfriends or girlfriends that is central to our religion and culture. And they say, maybe he or she has a problem if they don't have girlfriends or boyfriends.
  Muslim Foster Carer, British Bangladeshi

- Fear of Islamophobia
  Muslim foster carers are not recognised as much as they should be, and I don't feel their contribution is also recognised as they should be. You know, when Muslims practice their religion the way it should be done, they are interpreted as extreme and it becomes an Islamophobic issue. You know the law or most safeguarding measures are similar to Islam. You know, you can add say 3 hours of extra maths lessons to your children after school and its interpreted as ok, but if you add one and half hours of Islamic religious training to children they will ask why? So, a lot of times you can't be what you are, and you always have to explain yourself. There is lack of cultural and religious awareness that is particular to Islam that is not understood in fostering, and you always have to explain yourself. And with issues of terrorism, you always have to explain yourself.
  Muslim Foster Carer, British Pakistani

The quote below is from a Pakistani Sunni Muslim, who is married to a Pakistani Muslim. She is training to become a social worker and is interested in fostering/adopting once her children are older. She expresses how her partner objects to her becoming either a social worker in fostering and adoption or a foster carer:

I'm doing my masters in social work at the moment and my partner, who is a Pakistani Muslim man, he is very vocal about it. He didn't want me to go into child protection and doesn't want me to go into the field of adoption or fostering. His reasons behind that is child protection is seen as someone who is a child snatcher, someone who breaks up families and in adoption and fostering you are taking someone's child and you are placing them in an environment where it could be a non-Muslim.

The lack of awareness of Muslim communities and their suspicion of social work needs to be addressed. This can be done through greater outreach and engagement with Muslim communities in venues such as mosques and Islamic centres where they are comfortable. Muslim faith leaders need to publicly support adoption and fostering and social workers need to demonstrate religious literacy and a commitment to recruit foster carers and adopters from diverse ethnic backgrounds:

I think what needs to happen is we should talk about adoption in Muslim community, I think it needs more publicity in more Islamic centres. There has to be a message going to the community and there is a lot of Muslim

children in the care system who are not ending up with parents because of the whole issue, we have to change the way people think.

Muslim Prospective Adopter, Asian Indian

Recommendation 6: In line with the recommendation of the Education Select Committee, more outreach, information and recruitment work need to be undertaken with diverse British Muslim communities to increase the number of Muslim foster carers and adopters

2.4 Matching of Muslim Children in Adoptive Placements

Policy and guidance around the matching of children, particularly in adoption (but also in fostering) needs to be reviewed. In 2014 in order to improve outcomes for children from ethnic minority backgrounds and to speed up the adoption process, the government removed ethnicity from Adoption Law and Guidance in England.[28] This research provides compelling evidence that adopters are insisting in adopting children who 'look like them'. Social workers continue to look for 'best' possible matches. In this section we develop this discussion around matching with evidence from the qualitative research and quotes from adopters and prospective adopters in our sample. Firstly, it is important to note that finding a 'best' possible match is not something that social workers alone insist upon. In this research every adopter in our sample wanted a child that looked like them and / or who shared their religious heritage:

We go to India a lot, twice a year and we wanted our child that looked like us, so didn't necessarily need to be the same ethnic match. Our child is not an ethnic match, but they do look like us. […] As long as the child looked like us, this was because here in Britain we are more used to mixed ethnicity but if we had adopted a blonde blue-eyed child every time we went to Tesco's to do a shop we would stand out as a family. I also felt that in the playground, it can be a cruel place and we didn't want other peoples' children to say to everyone that we were a family out of the ordinary, so we said that we would adopt a child of people of Spanish heritage, Latin American, Asian or even those with a dual heritage that can look similar to us.

Muslim Adopter, British Indian

Because we have a birth child already that sort of gave us the requirements because we wanted a child to fit in with our own child in terms of religion and skin colour.

White Christian Adopter with a Muslim Partner

We definitely want a child to be raised as Muslim so preferably from a Muslim background and preferably the same ethnicity as us, just because it makes it easier in the community […] so, hopefully they will have a similar background as us. We think it will help the child to settle and the child won't stick out so it will be much easier to integrate.

Prospective Adopters, British Indian

In the quest for a perfect match this prospective adopter who came from a nominal Muslim background and who wanted to adopt a Muslim child had declined to adopt around 50 children based on their profiles:

I want the child to have similarities, not just in culture and ethnicity. I want the child to look similar to me, so that they feel comfortable………. So, my friend who is Hindu and she's going through the process and she's adopting a child that Sikh, she's quite happy to do that and the child that she's adopting said that he was happy that they

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[28] Children and Families Act (2014) - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

looked the same. [...] My social worker came to visit me recently and said that over the past six years I've seen between 50 and 60 children that I have said no to, that sounds a lot but that's only 10 a year........the children were of mixed heritage, you know Muslim or Muslim and something else that I've looked at but not chosen and they were all between the ages of 0-5.

Prospective Adopter, British Pakistani

This Greek Orthodox adopter was aware of a large number of Muslim children looking for adoptive homes in her local authority. She felt that a Muslim child would look similar to her and she was willing to adopt a Muslim child. She was prepared to work with the child to ensure that religious heritage is maintained. However, her local authority refused to place a Muslim child with her:

We were prepared to take a child of any religious heritage and we preferred a younger child but not necessarily a baby. The only thing we were certain of was we wanted them to fit into our family, so they had to look similar to our other children, so we looked for children of mixed heritage. I think that religion shouldn't matter when matching a child, the most important thing is they have a home where they are cared for. I don't understand why children should be left in care because they can't find foster homes or adopters that have the same religion, it is better that they are bought up in a different religion than stay in the system.

Greek Orthodox Adopter

When questioned about how she would ensure that the children's faith needs would be maintained this adopter suggested that she would take the child to the mosque once a week. Perhaps in this case, social workers recognised that this would be insufficient and superficial exposure of the child to the faith it was born into. In another case, social workers told us about finding a perfect match for a mixed ethnicity and mixed religion child whose mother is White non-religious and the father is an Asian Muslim. While they have found families, who would be able to cater for the Muslim aspect of the child's heritage, they have not been able to find a family that would also accommodate its non-religious heritage and the child continues to wait till a suitable family is found. It appears that practice is not following the new guidance. There is sufficient evidence suggesting the significance of ethnic and religious matching to ensure good attachments between the child and its adoptive family (see Barn and Kirton 2012 for a critical summary of the evidence). And social workers are adhering to the research rather than to government policy. Indeed, within reason and resources permitting, social workers have stated that they would wait to find a perfect match for each child in their care. This Muslim adopter summarises the situation:

I think if it were me, I would prioritise their religion because they would be brought up with the right principles and the foundations because I think that helps a child grow to be strong resilient person. [...] What I would like is the repealing of the clause, the children act, I think it's section 22 as section 22 is regarding due consideration for a child's religion. Since 2014 it has meant a lot of children, not just Muslim children, black ethnic children are putting them at a disadvantage by being placed in transracial families and they grow up forgetting their religion and know less about their identity. I think those children are deprived of their religious beliefs and I think the affect is they will be very confused about their identity.

Prospective Muslim Adopter, British Pakistani

Issues around matching appear in discussions around foster care too. Foster carers state that while as professionals, they would be happy to care for a child from any background, they are often best placed to meet the identity and social needs of children who come from ethnic and religious backgrounds similar to their own:

Religion and culture should be taken into consideration when placing these children. For young children, they should be able to see their foster carers and see themselves. Asian children with Asian families. Again food, familiarity, cultural recognition. It's comforting for the young children. Matching is important.
White, Non-religious Foster Carer

Therefore as its final recommendation this project suggests an evaluation of the impact of the removal of ethnicity from Adoption policy and guidance.

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Recommendation 7: Need to evaluate the impact of the removal of ethnicity from Adoption Law and Guidance in England on practice

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Barn and Kirton critique the policy emphasis on transracial placements as being simplistic and misguided (2012: 11) and that it distracts from finding other solutions to reduce the delays in children's journeys. This research project reinforces Barn and Kirton's critique. The policy guidance is not working, and children continue to wait to find permanent homes. As stated in recommendation 6 of this report, what is needed is greater strategizing around the recruitment of adopters and foster carers from diverse backgrounds. In addition as discussed in recommendation 1, a clearer sense of the numbers of Muslim children in care is needed so that plans can be developed and implemented in order to recruit the kind of adoptive parents and foster carers that children in care need.

Section 3: **Conclusions**

This research project is the first in-depth academic research project to explore the experiences of Muslim Children in public care in England. Over the last year we have found brilliant examples of the diligence with which social workers, foster carers and adopters meet the needs of the most vulnerable children in our communities. We have also found lacunae and blinds spots that we hope this research can help address.

It is also important to emphasise the diversity among Muslims in Britain: denominational affiliation, ethnicities, ways of believing, patterns of migration and classes. These all have bearing on children's constructs and experiences of faith. So, Muslim children are all very different from each other.

Yet they are also similar to each other and indeed to other children. This report has focussed on issues that are unique to Muslim children, however it important to state that many of the issues that Muslim children experience are shared by children of any ethnic or religious background. They come into care for similar reasons (except we know that Muslim children are disproportionately represented in the UASC category); they experience the same formal processes that are integral to being in care; and they face similar vulnerabilities as other children. What makes Muslim children different is their faith identity and this report insists that all stakeholders involved in children's journeys should engage with children's faith, on terms that the children themselves define

There are limitations to this research. And hence we reiterate the statement made on page 14 of this report, that there are many questions that this research addresses but many that yet need to be answered. Being one of the earliest research projects to look at issues around Islam and the care system in Britain, the questions that this project aimed to answer broadened during the course of the project. Therefore this project is exploratory and needs to be followed up with further research that can develop its findings. This is a small project that collected data only in the Midlands and it needs to be followed up with a national study that includes Muslim experiences of care in Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish and wider British contexts, particularly in London and the North West. For ethical reasons and given the exploratory scope of this research, this project did not directly speak to children. An immediate next step of this work would be to gather children's voices around their experiences of faith and the significance or not of faith in their lives.

Having written about its limitations, it is important to state this research project's strengths. It provides unique and unparalleled insights into Muslim children's experiences in the British care system. With appropriate contextualisation in local settings, the findings of this research are relevant to the experiences of Muslim children in other parts of the UK and beyond. In signifying the salience of faith to Muslim children's lives, the findings of this research are also significant for children who come from other faith backgrounds and for the professionals and carers who meet their needs. Through the Faith in the Care System conference, this project began the process of interfaith collaboration and reflection on issues around children in public care. We hope that this work can be carried forward.

This report is a summary of our findings, over the next year we plan to develop and launch publications aimed at different audiences. In this way, we hope that the findings may reach different audiences who can collectively work together to enhance outcomes for children. The planned publications include:

i.   Two journal articles on the findings of the project aimed at academic audiences and furthering new knowledge production and theorisation on the subject of faith in care.

ii.   A practice guide that will share the good social work practice we have uncovered during the research. By sharing existing good practice we hope that blind-spots and lacunae can be overcome. This will be aimed at professional and practitioner audiences.

iii. A final publication will be an illustrated children's book that will distil project findings around identity and resilience using language that is accessible to a child. The hope is that the book will help children better understand their journeys.

To conclude this report, as professionals and carers, we cannot impose our understandings of faith on children – indeed given the diversity of faith positionalities this would be near impossible. However, our research makes it clear that as professionals and carers we can ask children about faith and understand their perceptions and experiences of faith – the latter makes for empathetic best practice that puts children and their needs first.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Local Authorities in the Midlands

1	Birmingham
2	Coventry
3	Derby
4	Derbyshire
5	Dudley
6	Herefordshire
7	Leicester
8	Leicestershire
9	Lincolnshire
10	Northamptonshire
11	Nottingham
12	Nottinghamshire
13	Rutland
14	Sandwell
15	Shropshire
16	Solihull
17	Staffordshire
18	Stoke-on-Trent
19	Telford and Wrekin
20	Walsall
21	Warwickshire
22	Wolverhampton

Appendix 2: Questionnaires for Semi-Structured Interviews

Questionnaire 1: Adopters

[Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please note that you will be kept fully anonymous in the project.]

1. Without giving us any sensitive information please can you tell us about your adoption journey so far?

   (Possible follow-up questions, leave out any that have already been covered)

   - How many children did you adopt? What age were they when you adopted them? What age are they now?
   - Did you adopt via a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency and why?
   - Why did you decide to adopt?
   - Do you have biological children? If yes how have they adapted to the change in your family?

2. Have your religious beliefs been a factor in your decision to adopt? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

3. Have your culture been a factor in your decision to adopt? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

4. How has your extended family and community reacted to your decision to adopt and to your children?

5. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to adopt and in looking after your children from within your community? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

6. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to adopt and in looking after your children from social workers and other professionals? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

7. Please can you tell us how you have dealt with or plan to deal with issues around *mahram* and *hijab*

8. Please can you tell us how you have dealt with the issue of your child's name vis-à-vis Islamic guidance on this

9. Please can you tell us how you meet the religious and cultural needs of the child/ren and in making them aware of their cultural-heritage?

10. Will you adopt again in the future?

11. What contribution do you want this project to make? How can we help improve the current situation

12. Is there anything else that we have not asked but which you would like to tell us?

Questionnaire 2: Prospective Adopters

[Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please note that you will be kept fully anonymous in the project.]

1. Without giving us any sensitive information please can you tell us about your adoption journey so far?

   (Possible follow-up questions, leave out any that have already been covered)

   - How many children will you adopt? What age?
   - Will you adopt via a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency and why?
   - Why did you decide to adopt?
   - Do you have biological children? If yes how will you help then adapted to the change in your family?

2. Have your religious beliefs been a factor in your decision to adopt? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

3. Have your culture been a factor in your decision to adopt? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

4. How has your extended family and community reacted to your decision to adopt?

5. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to adopt from within your community? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

6. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to adopt from social workers and other professionals? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

7. Please can you tell us how you plan to deal with issues around *mahram* and *hijab*

8. Please can you tell us how you plan to deal with the issue of your child's name vis-à-vis Islamic guidance on this

9. Please can you tell us how you will meet the religious and cultural needs of the child/ren and in making them aware of their cultural-heritage?

10. What contribution do you want this project to make? How can we help improve the current situation

11. Is there anything else that we have not asked but which you would like to tell us?

Questionnaire 3: Foster Carers

[Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please note that you will be kept fully anonymous in the project.]

1. Without giving us any sensitive information please can you tell us about your fostering journey so far?

   (Possible follow-up questions, leave out any that have already been covered)

   - How many children have you fostered? What age were they when you fostered them? Have you fostered any children long term?
   - Do you foster via a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency and why?
   - Why did you decide to foster?
   - Do you have biological children? How have they adapted?
   - Have your fostered children gone on to be adopted? Have any gone back to their biological parents? What other outcomes have there been for children?
   - Have you fostered any unaccompanied asylum seeking children?

2. How do you deal with your own feelings and that of your family when fostered children move on?

3. Have your religious beliefs been a factor in your decision to foster? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

4. Have your culture been a factor in your decision to foster? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

5. How has your extended family and community reacted to your decision to foster and to the children?

6. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to foster and in looking after the children from within your community? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

7. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to foster and in looking after the children from social workers and other professionals? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

8. Please can you tell us how you have dealt with or plan to deal with issues around *mahram* and *hijab*

9. Please can you tell us how you meet the religious and cultural needs of the child/ren and in making them aware of their cultural-heritage?

10. Will you continue to foster in the future?

11. What contribution do you want this project to make? How can we help improve the current situation?

12. Is there anything else that we have not asked but which you would like to tell us?

Questionnaire 4: Prospective Foster Carers

[Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please note that you will be kept fully anonymous in the project.]

1. Without giving us any sensitive information please can you tell us about your fostering journey so far?

   (Possible follow-up questions, leave out any that have already been covered)

   - Have you applied to foster via a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency and why?
   - Why did you decide to foster?
   - Do you have biological children? If yes how will they adapted to the change in your family?
   - Will you fostered any unaccompanied asylum seeking children?

2. How will you deal with your own feelings and that of your family when fostered children move on?

3. Have your religious beliefs been a factor in your decision to foster? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

4. Have your culture been a factor in your decision to foster? Yes. Please explain / No. Please explain further

5. How has your extended family and community reacted to your decision to foster?

6. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to foster from within your community? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

7. Did you face any barriers / problems in your decision to foster from social workers and other professionals? Alternatively please give us examples of good practice and support that you received

8. Please can you tell us how you plan to deal with issues around *mahram* and *hijab*

9. Please can you tell us how you plan to meet the religious and cultural needs of the child/ren and make them aware of their cultural-heritage?

10. Will you continue to foster in the future?

11. What contribution do you want this project to make? How can we help improve the current situation

12. Is there anything else that we have not asked but which you would like to tell us?

Questionnaire 5: Social Workers

[Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please note that you will be kept fully anonymous in the project. We will bring copies of the attached consent form that you can sign on the day. We hope our discussion will last for around 90 minutes]

Section 1: **Without giving us any sensitive information please can you tell us about your work with children of Muslim heritage?**

- In general what are the backgrounds and ages of the children?

- Why are they coming into care?

- What are the backgrounds of the parents coming forward to adopt / foster? Are they generally aware of what this entails? Are they in general able to meet the needs of the Muslim children in care?

Section 2: **Again, without giving us any sensitive information please can you tell us about the people adopting / fostering children of Muslim heritage?**

- Please tell us about the backgrounds of families that are adopting / fostering children of Muslim heritage?

- What are the motivations of these families to adopt or foster a child of Muslim heritage (both Muslim and non-Muslim)?

- Please share problems and good practice in meeting children's cultural and identity needs?

Section 3: **Who are the Muslims coming forward to adopt / foster?**

Evidence gathered so far suggests that not enough Muslims are coming forward to adopt and foster and when they do come forward they have very specific expectations. Please can you tell us about the experiences and motivations of Muslim individuals who decide to adopt / foster?

- In your experience, what role does culture and religion play in Muslim individuals' decision to adopt foster?

- In your experience, what role does the extended family and community play in Muslim individual's decision to adopt and to your children?

- Do you face any barriers / problems when working with Muslim carers?

- Is there need for awareness raising activities within Muslim communities about adoption and fostering?

Section 4: **Please tell us about the issues you face in meeting the needs of children of Muslim heritage and your good practice in meeting these needs.**

- Do you face any barriers / problems when working with Muslim children and carers?

- Please also give us examples of good practice and support that you received

- Have you experienced any issues relating to Muslim belief or religious practice and how do you address them? For example: issues around *mahram* and *hijab* or changing the child's name vis-à-vis Islamic guidance

- Do you feel you have enough support from your employer and from the Muslim community in understand Muslim culture and in supporting the needs of children, carers and families? Do you need more support, if so what kind of support?

- How does your own background shape / support / inform your social work practice?

Section 5: **Closing Comments**

- What contribution do you want this project to make? How can we help improve the current situation

- Is there anything else that we have not asked but which you would like to tell us?

The Report Partners

About Penny Appeal

Penny Appeal is a multi-award-winning international and domestic humanitarian charity founded and based in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. With over 200 staff across the UK and hundreds more across the world, Penny Appeal works in over 30 crisis-hit countries providing sustainable life-saving relief and development as well as working across the UK offering a range of welfare solutions for those most in need.

Penny Appeal's Adoption and Fostering project

Penny Appeal's Adoption and Fostering service offers a range of interventions to support children who have experienced the care system. In addition to the production of this document, since its inception in early 2016, the service has:

- Recruited adopters and foster carers from across the UK, particularly from British Muslim backgrounds

- Supported and referred applicants to adoption and fostering providers

- Produced the Islamic Guidance Document on the Contemporary Practice of Adoption and Fostering

- Provided anti-discriminatory practice training to children's sector professionals

- Presented at over 100 community based events, promoting fostering and adoption

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About CTPSR

The Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University, works in over 30 countries. It is a multi-disciplinary Research Centre that draws from academic disciplines, knowledge and skills across the social sciences and beyond, to tackle many of the most critical and sensitive contemporary challenges facing society.

Website: http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/trust-peace-social-relations/

About CoramBAAF

About CoramBAAF: CoramBAAF is an independent membership organisation for professionals, foster carers and adopters, and anyone else working with or looking after children in or from care, or adults who have been affected by adoption. It is the largest network of organisations and individuals involved with children in their journey through the care system

Website: https://corambaaf.org.uk/