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Muslims pass on faith to children at higher rates than Christians

Muslims in England and Wales are practising their faith and passing it on to their children at much higher rates than any other religion, including Christianity, a study shows.

Research published today [14 February 2012] in the journal *Sociology* says that the proportion of adult Muslims actively practising the faith they were brought up in as children was 77%, compared with 29% of Christians and 65% of other religions.

The study, by academics from Cardiff University, also found that 98% of Muslim children surveyed said they had the religion their parents were brought up in, compared with 62% of Christians and 89% of other religions.

The team analysed data from the Home Office's 2003 Citizenship Survey data, using 13,988 replies from adults and 1,278 from young people aged 11 to 15.

In the study the researchers, from Cardiff's School of Social Sciences and Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK, suggest reasons for the higher rate of transmission of religion. "There is more involvement of Muslim young people in religious organisations," they say. "It is well known that there is considerable supplementary education for Muslim children such as the formal learning of the Qur'an in Arabic.

"The apparently much higher rates of intergenerational transmission in Muslims and members of other non-Christian non-Muslim religions are certainly worthy of further exploration and may in fact pose a challenge to blanket judgements about the decline of British religion.

"These higher rates might suggest support for the theory that for minority ethnic populations, religion can be an important resource in bolstering a sense of cultural distinctiveness."

The research team was Professor Jonathan Scourfield, Dr Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Asma Khan, Dr Sameh Otri, Dr Graham Moore and Dr Chris Taylor. The paper is entitled 'Intergenerational transmission of Islam in England and Wales: evidence from the Citizenship Survey' and *Sociology* is published by the British Sociological Association.

Professor Scourfield later said of the research: "Muslim children tend to lead busy lives, often attending religious education classes outside school three or more times each week on top of any other commitments they have.

"They typically learn to read the Qur'an in Arabic. They also learn a great deal about their faith from parents and other family members. Religion can have an especially

important role for minority communities in keeping together the bonds between families from the same ethnic background.”

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Notes:

The researchers studied the answers of 13,988 to the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS) to the questions:

1. ‘Thinking of your childhood, were you raised according to any particular religion?’
2. ‘Which religion was that?’
3. ‘Do you actively practice any religion now?’
4. ‘Which religion is that?’

These answers allowed the researchers to relate the religious practices of adults (broken down by religion, location, education and social class) to their upbringing in a faith or by atheists. The researchers had responses from people with various religions including Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs. For their study they created four categories: Muslim, Christian, Other, No religion.

The researchers also examined the responses of 1,278 young people to an accompanying 2003 survey, the Young People’s Survey, carried out at the same time as the HOCS, in which they answered the questions:

1. ‘Do you have a religion?’
2. ‘Which religion is that?’

These answers were then linked to the response their parents gave in the HOCS to enable researchers to relate the religion of the young people with the religious upbringing of their parents.

The Cardiff research project is entitled ‘Religious nurture in Muslim families’. It is part of the Religion and Society programme, which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council. The website for the project is:

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchprojects/religiousnurture/> and information about the Religion and Society Programme can be found on-line at <http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/>