

Muslim identity and right to practice faith: The need for quiet spaces and ablution areas
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November 2023

Introduction and Overview

Muslims pray five times a day and this is the most important aspect of being a Muslim. Supporting this practice allows Muslims to have a positive religious identity. To pray, quiet space is needed. Before Muslims pray they carry out 'Wudu', a purification process, requiring access to water to wash the face, arms and feet. Lina has created a film to raise awareness of 'Wudu' and to call for appropriate spaces to be developed and accessible for ablution and prayer.

Wider Context

- Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 (freedom of thought, belief and religion) protects the right to put your thoughts and beliefs into action, including the right to wear religious clothing and the right to take part in religious worship.
- It is estimated there are 15,000 Muslims in Edinburgh. There are 12 mosques across the city.
- The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to prevent discrimination where possible.
- Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) advocates for multi-faith prayer spaces in school, because prayer is integral to the Islamic faith and supporting this practice allows Muslims to develop their religious identities, but also that these spaces could be used by other religions and even as a quiet space to promote wellbeing. They cite a study carried out by the University of Surrey which found that participants who engaged in mindfulness showed a 58% reduction in anxiety and a 40% reduction in stress.¹
- Quiet areas have been identified to have positive impacts for human health.²
- Where an employer has not made facilities or accommodations they could be accused of indirect discrimination.³

Good Practice

- Lina has identified good practice at the University of Edinburgh. King's Building currently has accessible prayer space and ablution areas that are accessible.
- In London, shopping centres, markets and museums like the Westfield, Borough Market and the V and A have ablution and prayer spaces. This means that Muslims can practice their faith more easily and exercise their Muslim identity.

Next Steps

- The first step is to raise awareness of this issue and it is hoped that this will promote dialogue about how space can be better used within the city, to be more inclusive.

"Finding a place to perform Wudu and to pray is a source of stress. Other than in airports, there is not the space in the city. You have to go instead to the Mosque and they are not always close. There are a few quiet spaces in the city but they are not easy to find."

¹ https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/MEND_Guide_to_Prayerspace_in_Schools-1.pdf

² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/good-practice-guide-on-quiet-areas>

³ <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Muslims-in-the-Workplace.pdf>