

Pearn Kandola

Religion at Work: Experiences of Hindu Employees

October 22



Difference inspires business

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Introduction

Background

An increasing number of employers are understanding the value of creating an inclusive work environment, where all employees feel valued, supported, and comfortable in expressing their authentic identities. However, compared to other identity groups such as gender or race, the topic of religious diversity and inclusion at work is often overlooked by researchers, practitioners, and employers (Héliot et al., 2020). Pearn Kandola's 'Religion at Work' research project aims to address this issue by raising awareness around employee experiences of expressing religious identity at work.

Hinduism is considered by many to be the world's oldest and third-largest religion. However, very little research has explored the specific experiences of Hindu employees at work.

The current study

The overall project was designed to highlight the experiences of UK and US employees in relation expressing their religious identity at work and to provide recommendations to assist organisations in creating a workplace culture which welcomes religious diversity and encourages employees to freely express their religious identity. This report focuses solely on the experiences of Hindu employees in the UK and US.

Report structure

The first half of the report presents the findings of the initial quantitative survey, conducted in 2021. Firstly, combined UK and US findings will be reported, before presenting a breakdown of findings by country. The results of statistical analyses are then reported to explore gender differences and variations between UK and US responses. The second half of the report presents the key themes and subthemes that emerged from our qualitative survey data, before concluding with recommendations to help organisations understand how they can support their Hindu employees.

Methodology

Quantitative survey methodology

Participants

In 2021, 1,061 Hindu participants took part in the survey (see Appendix 1a for a breakdown of participant demographics) out of a total of 6,315 participants across six religious groups. Participants were eligible to participate if they worked and lived in the UK or US and were a follower of Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity.

Procedure

Focus groups were conducted with individuals who met the inclusion criteria above to understand the factors that impacted on the expression of religious beliefs at work, which informed the development of survey items. Participants also provided demographic information to enable the investigation of group differences. The survey was created using Survey Monkey and distributed via Prolific and various faith groups in the UK and US.

Qualitative survey methodology

Participants

In 2022, 79 Hindu participants took part in our qualitative survey (see Appendix 1b for a breakdown of participant demographics). Participants were eligible to participate if they worked and lived in the UK or US, were in paid employment and were a follower of Hinduism.

Procedure

A qualitative survey was designed to explore the experiences of Hindu employees across the UK and US in more depth. The survey consisted of four broad, open-ended questions:

- What is your organisation doing well to support the expression of your religious identity at work?
- What barriers are there in your organisation which make the expression of your religious identity at work difficult?
- What has been the impact of expressing your religious identity at work?
- Is there anything that your organisation could do differently to support you in expressing your religious identity at work? If so, what could be done?

The survey was created using Survey Monkey and distributed via Prolific in 2022. Data was then analysed to identify the key themes in relation to Hindu employees' experiences of sharing their religious beliefs.

Combined UK and US Quantitative Survey Findings

This section highlights and summarises the key findings from the quantitative survey, with UK and US findings combined. A full breakdown of findings can be found in Appendix 2.

Celebrating religious festivals



23% of Hindu employees have had a request to take annual leave to celebrate religious holidays or festivals rejected.

77% have never had a request to take annual leave to celebrate religious holidays or festivals rejected.



Only 25% of Hindu employees felt that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

21% felt that their organisation was *not* happy, whilst 54% neither agreed nor disagreed that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.



Just 22% of Hindu employees felt that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

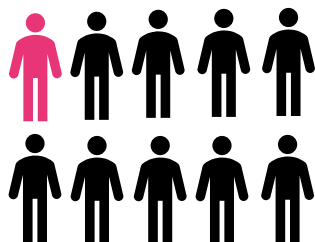
19% felt that their line manager was *not* happy, whilst 59% neither agreed nor disagreed that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.



Only 27% of Hindu employees felt comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work.

32% did *not* feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work, whilst 41% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

Wearing religious dress



Only **10%** of the 430 Hindu employees who wear religious dress chose to do so at work.

90% of the 430 Hindu employees who wear religious dress chose not to do so at work.



21% of Hindu employees felt that their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress.

16% felt that there was nothing more that their organisation could do, whilst 63% neither agreed nor disagreed that their organisation could do more.



Only **20%** of the 41 Hindu employees who wear a religious dress at work felt comfortable doing so.

46% of employees did *not* feel comfortable wearing religious dress at work, whilst 34% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.



Just **34%** of the 41 Hindu employees who wear religious dress at work felt comfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress.

29% felt uncomfortable, whilst 37% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress.



95% of the 316 Hindu employees working for an organisation with a dress code were satisfied that this was proportionate, appropriate, and necessary.

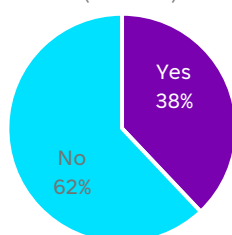
5% were dissatisfied with the reasons behind their organisation's dress code.

UK Quantitative Survey Findings

This section presents UK findings from the quantitative survey. A full breakdown of findings can be found in Appendix 2.

Celebrating religious festivals

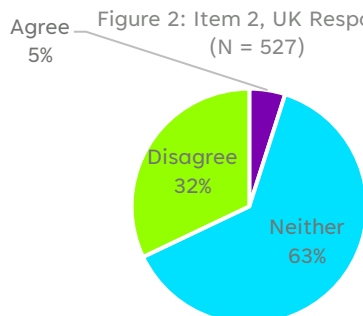
Figure 1: Item 1, UK Responses
(N = 527)



We asked participants ‘Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?’.

38% of UK-based Hindu employees stated that they have had a request to take annual leave to celebrate a religious festival rejected.

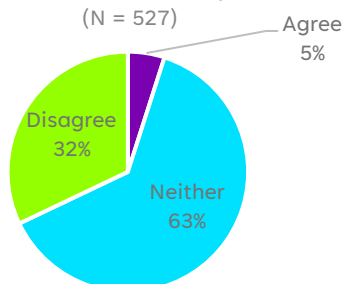
Figure 2: Item 2, UK Responses
(N = 527)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel that my organisation is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate my religious festivals.’

Only 5% of UK-based Hindu employees felt that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

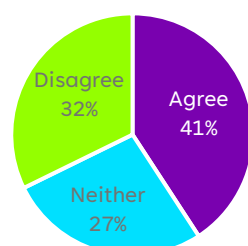
Figure 3: Item 3, UK Responses
(N = 527)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel that my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate my religious festivals.’

Only 5% of UK-based Hindu employees felt that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

Figure 4: Item 4, UK Responses
(N = 527)

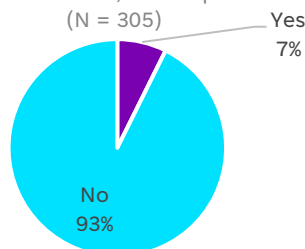


We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace’.

32% of UK-based Hindu employees did *not* feel comfortable discussing religious festivals at work.

Wearing religious dress

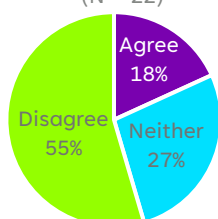
Figure 5: Item 5, UK Responses
(N = 305)



Participants who stated that they wore religious dress affiliated with their religion were asked whether they wore religious dress at work.

93% of UK-based Hindu employees who wear religious dress chose not to do so at work.

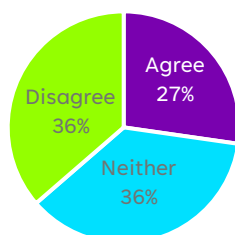
Figure 6: Item 6, UK Responses
(N = 22)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement 'I feel comfortable wearing religious dress at work'.

Of the 22 UK-based Hindu employees who wore religious dress at work, 55% did not feel comfortable doing so.

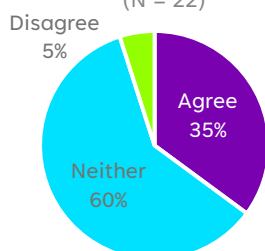
Figure 7: Item 7, UK Responses
(N = 22)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement 'I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress'.

Of the 22 UK-based Hindu employees who wore religious dress at work, only 27% felt comfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress.

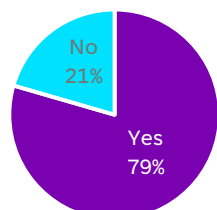
Figure 8: Item 8, UK Responses
(N = 22)



Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement 'I feel my organisation could do more to make employees feel more comfortable wearing religious dress'.

Only 5% of UK-based Hindu employees felt that their organisation was doing enough to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress.

Figure 9: Item 9, UK Responses
(N = 39)



Participants who worked for an organisation with dress restrictions were asked the question 'Do you feel there are good business reasons which are proportionate, appropriate and necessary?'

79% of the 39 UK-based Hindu employees working for an organisation with a dress code felt that restrictions were proportionate, appropriate and necessary.

US Quantitative Survey Findings

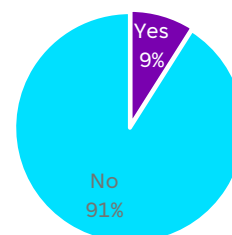
This section presents US findings from the quantitative survey. A full breakdown of findings can be found in Appendix 2.

Celebrating religious festivals

We asked participants ‘Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?’.

9% of US-based Hindu employees stated that they have had a request to take annual leave to celebrate a religious festival rejected.

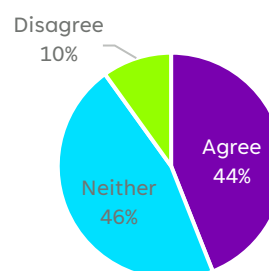
Figure 10: Item 1, US Responses (N = 534)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel my organisation is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate my religious festivals’.

44% of US-based Hindu employees felt that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

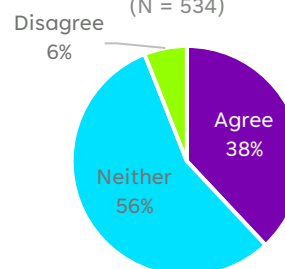
Figure 11: Item 2, US Responses (N = 534)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate my religious festivals’.

38% of US-based Hindu employees felt that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

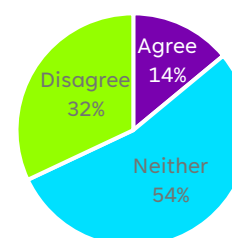
Figure 12: Item 3, US Responses (N = 534)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace’.

Only 14% of US-based Hindu employees felt comfortable discussing religious festivals at work.

Figure 13: Item 4, US Responses (N = 534)

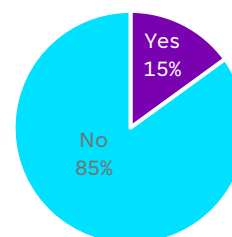


Wearing religious dress

Participants who stated that they wore religious dress affiliated with their religion were asked whether they wore religious dress at work.

Just 15% of the 125 US-based Hindu employees who wear religious dress chose not to do so at work.

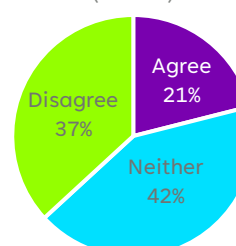
Figure 14: Item 5, US Responses (N = 125)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel comfortable wearing religious dress at work’.

Of the 19 US-based Hindu employees who wore religious dress at work, 37% did not feel comfortable doing so.

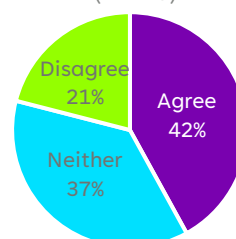
Figure 14: Item 6, US Responses (N = 19)



We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress’.

Of the 19 US-based Hindu employees who wore religious dress at work, only 42% felt comfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress.

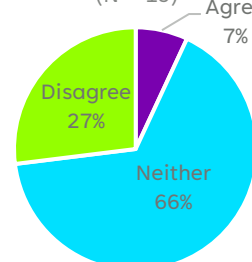
Figure 15: Item 7, US Responses (N = 19)



Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I feel my organisation could do more to make employees feel more comfortable wearing religious dress’.

7% of US-based Hindu employees agreed that their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress.

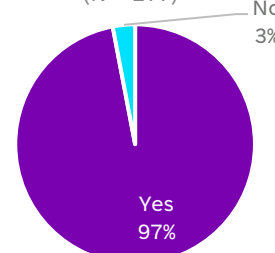
Figure 16: Item 8, US Responses (N = 19)



Participants who had indicated that they worked for an organisation with dress restrictions were asked the question ‘Do you feel there are good business reasons which are proportionate, appropriate and necessary?’.

97% of US-based Hindu employees felt that restrictions were proportionate, appropriate and necessary.

Figure 17: Item 9, US Responses (N = 277)



Comparison of UK and US Survey Findings

Chi-square tests were conducted to determine whether the variation in responses between different groups (male/female and UK/US) were statistically significant. A statistically significant result suggests that the differences between groups are unlikely to be due to chance. Due to the small number of employees who wear religious dress, chi-square tests could not be conducted for the items ‘I feel comfortable wearing religious dress at work’ and ‘I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress’.

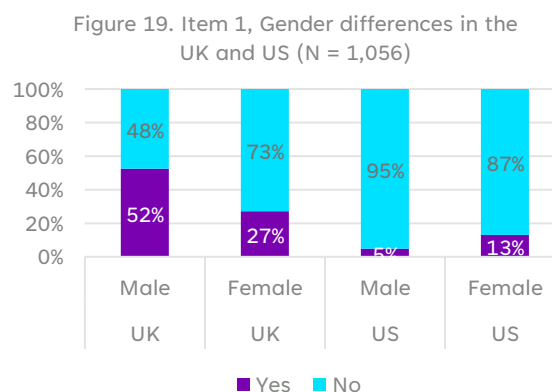
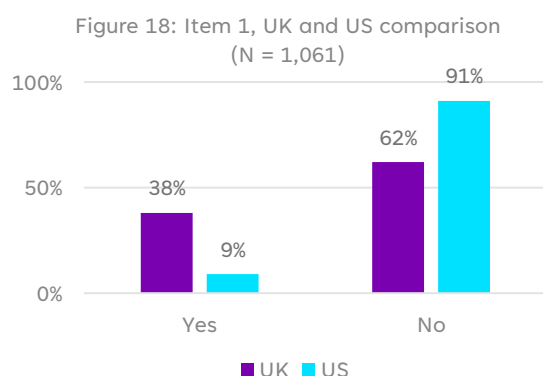
As only a small proportion (< 1%) of participants identified as a gender other than male or female, only male and female responses were analysed when exploring gender differences to enable us to make meaningful comparisons between gender groups.

Celebrating religious festivals

‘Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?’

UK participants were more likely to have had a request to take annual leave for religious festivals rejected without good business reason than US participants. The difference between UK and US responses was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 124.216, p < .001$).

There were also statistically significant differences in how males and females responded to this item in the UK ($\chi^2(1) = 34.499, p < .001$) and US ($\chi^2(1) = 10.899, p < .001$). **In the UK, men were more likely to have had a request to take time off for religious festivals rejected. However, in the US, women were more likely to have had an annual leave request rejected than men.**



‘I feel that my employer is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals’

There was a statistically significant difference between UK and US responses in terms of their perceptions of their organisation’s feelings towards taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals ($\chi^2(2) = 240.733, p < .001$). **US participants were more likely than UK participants to feel that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.**

In the UK, men were more likely than women to feel that their organisation was *not* happy for them to take time off for religious festivals. However, in the US, men were more likely than women to feel their organisation was happy. These gender differences were statistically significant in the UK ($\chi^2(2) = 30.484, p < .001$) and US ($\chi^2(2) = 180.099, p < .001$).

Figure 20: Item 2, UK and US comparison (N = 1,061)

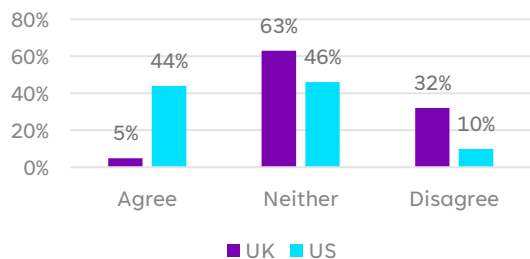
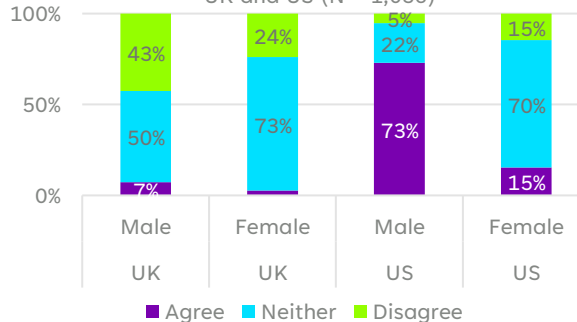


Figure 21: Item 2, Gender differences in the UK and US (N = 1,056)



‘I feel that my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals’

As well as feeling more supported by their organisation, **US participants were more likely to feel supported by their line manager to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals.** The difference between UK and US responses was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 231.876, p < .001$).

In both countries, women were more likely to feel that their line manager was *not* happy for them to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals. These gender differences were significant in both the UK ($\chi^2(2) = 86.398, p < .001$) and US ($\chi^2(2) = 172.165, p < .001$).

Figure 22: Item 3, UK and US comparison (N = 1,061)

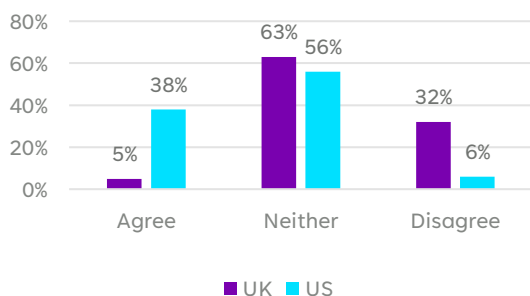
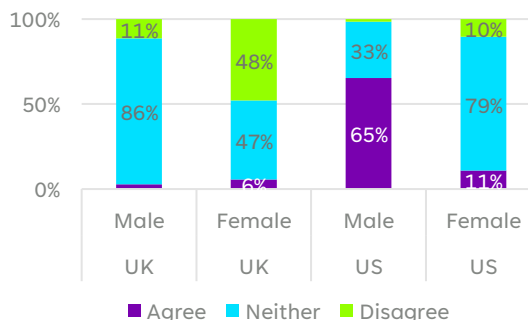


Figure 23: Item 3, Gender differences in the UK and US (N = 1,056)



‘I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace’

Whilst US participants appeared to feel more supported by their organisation and line manager when it comes to taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals, **UK participants were more likely to feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work.** The difference between UK and US responses was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 117.120, p < .001$).

There was a statistically significant difference between male and female responses within the UK ($\chi^2(2) = 236.739, p < .001$) and US ($\chi^2(2) = 232.875, p < .001$). **Men were more likely than women to feel comfortable discussing religious festivals at work in both countries.**

Figure 24: Item 4, UK and US comparison (N = 1,061)

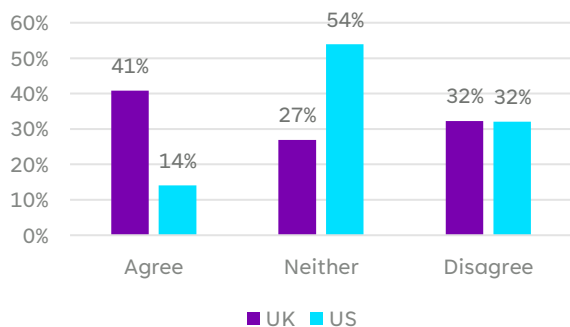
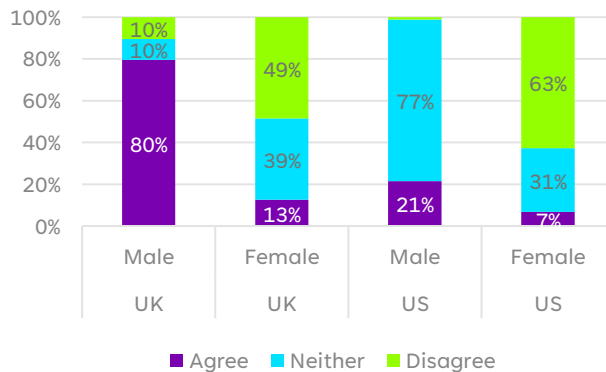


Figure 25: Gender differences in the UK and US (N = 1,056)

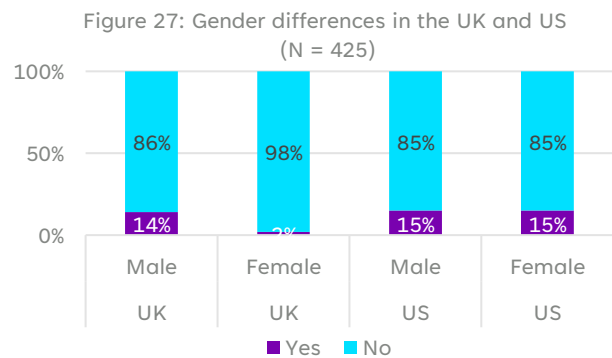
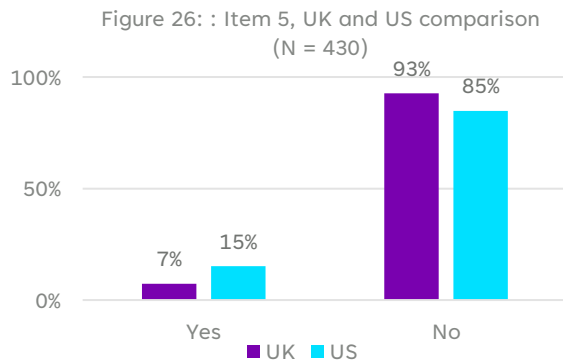


Religious dress

‘Do you wear religious dress in the workplace?’

Of the 430 participants who wear religious dress, just 41 do so at work. **US employees were significantly more likely to wear religious dress at work than UK employees** ($\chi^2(1) = 6.557, p < .05$)

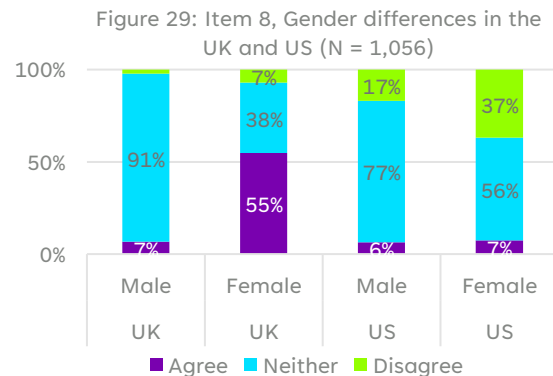
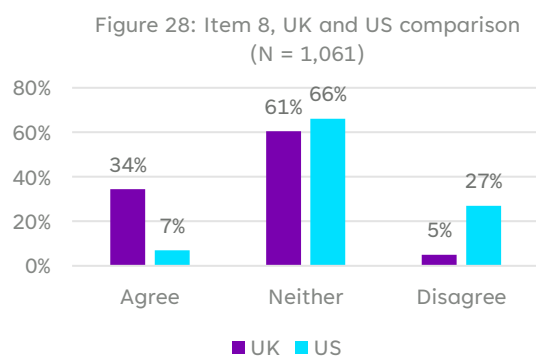
In the UK, men were significantly more likely to wear religious dress ($\chi^2(1) = 14.048, p < .05$). However, in the US, men and women were equally as likely to wear religious dress.



'I feel my employer could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress'

UK participants were more likely to feel their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress. The differences between UK and US responses were statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 182.581, p < .05$).

We found significant differences between male and female responses in the UK ($\chi^2(2) = 149.502, p < .001$) and US ($\chi^2(2) = 29.056, p < .001$). However, whilst **women in the UK were more likely to feel their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress**, in the US women were more likely to feel that their employer could *not* do more.



‘Do you feel there are good business reasons (for your organisation’s dress code) which are proportionate, appropriate, and necessary?’

A total of 316 employees worked for an organisation whose dress code included appearance restrictions or requirements. Whilst we were unable to conduct a chi-square test due to the small number of UK employees who worked for an organisation with a dress code, Fisher’s exact test revealed that **US employees were significantly more likely to feel satisfied with their organisation’s dress code than UK employees ($p < .001$)**. There were no significant differences between male and female responses.

Figure 32: Item 9, UK and US comparison (N = 316)

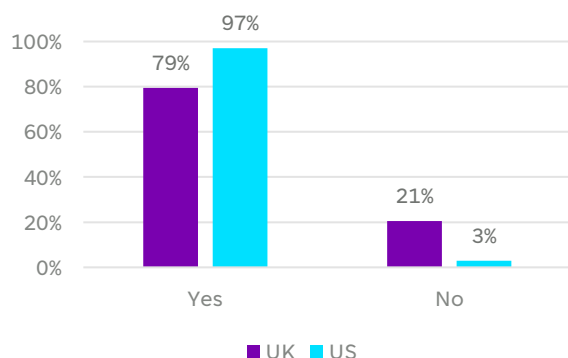
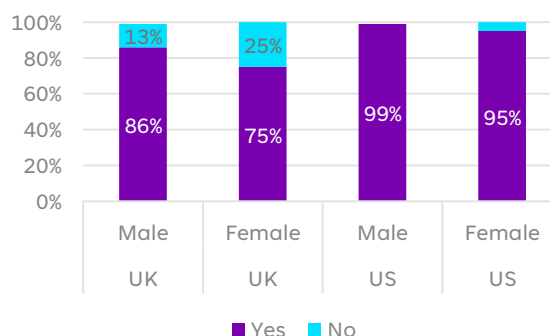


Figure 33: Item 9, Gender differences in the UK and US (N = 316)



Qualitative Survey Findings

This section of the report presents the findings from our qualitative survey, which asked a sample of participants from the UK and US (see Appendix 1b for participant demographics) to explain more about their experiences of expressing their religious beliefs at work. Participants were asked to explain what their organisation was doing well, what was not going well and what could be done differently in relation to religious expression at work.

Experiences of expressing religious beliefs

The key themes and sub-themes which emerged from our qualitative survey data in relation to participants' experiences of sharing their religious beliefs are summarised in Table 1 and reported in further depth below.

Table 1: Experiences of expressing religious beliefs

Theme	Subtheme
Positive relationships with co-workers	Interest from co-workers
	Support from co-workers
	Deeper connections with co-workers
	Able to be authentic
Negative interactions	Ridicule
	Hostility
	Intersectionality with race
	Stereotyping
Choosing not to share religious beliefs at work	Preference
	Fear

Positive relationships with co-workers

Interest from co-workers

One of the most common reactions received from co-workers was a genuine interest in learning about Hinduism. Participants generally appreciated their co-workers showing interest and asking questions about their beliefs, providing this was done so in a respectful way, as it enabled them to share their knowledge around Hinduism. As a result, participants felt that they had made a meaningful difference in improving co-workers' awareness and understanding.

'They were all open and understanding. As expected, they had questions as well to understand and were curious to learn. I believe they now know more about it than they ever had known'

'It is extremely rewarding spreading awareness of my religious beliefs as my teammates are interested in learning more about my religion'

Support from co-workers

Many co-workers expressed support and understanding towards participants when they were made aware of their beliefs. This was particularly evident when participants had in-depth discussions about their religious practices, as co-workers were able offer support and encouragement which was perhaps not offered before due to a lack of awareness.

'My experiences in making people aware of my religious beliefs have mostly been positive and beneficial. Colleagues are now much more aware of them and respect the process that I have to go through. Most people are understanding of the religious restrictions if they are made aware of them'

'My co-workers are supportive of the religious requirements (like fasting) and have been aware of these restrictions that are beyond my control. The attitudes of my co-workers are sympathetic'

Deeper connections with co-workers

For many participants, sharing their religious beliefs has brought them closer to their co-workers; revealing an important part of their identity enabled them to establish deeper and more meaningful relationships. Several participants discussed how sharing their religious beliefs had created opportunities to meet with co-workers, who do not necessarily share their beliefs, outside of work and form a more personal relationship. Participants discussed how co-workers, sometimes with their families, would come together outside of work to celebrate Hindu festivals.

'Lots of my colleagues join in during different religious festivals now, as we do celebrate in the workplace with decorations or consuming special foods that are eaten during the festivals. Additionally, some of my colleagues have come round to my house for meals during these times'

'Making people aware of your religious beliefs has actually improved my relationship with most co-workers. They've gotten to know me on a more personal level, which has deepened the relationship'

Able to be authentic

Participants appreciated how sharing their religious beliefs had enabled them to be truly authentic at work. Comments indicated that being able to be authentic in relation to their religious beliefs was a relief for many participants and helped them to enjoy their working life.

'I do not have to change myself to being something what I was never before... this helps me to focus comfortably to do my work as I am not judged or looked upon'

'Making people aware of my religious beliefs has made work more enjoyable, as I feel like I no longer need to hide part of my identity'

Negative interactions

Ridicule

Some participants reported being the subject of ridicule by their co-workers. In some instances, these negative comments appear to be regarded as a 'friendly joke' by the perpetrator and the offense that such comments cause is not understood, which suggests a lack of awareness around what is appropriate. Such comments often cause offense and discomfort, however, participants may feel less likely to report these incidents for fear that they may be seen as over-reacting. Furthermore, when participants raised such incidents, negative treatment from clients or customers was not addressed by management in some cases.

'I have at times put a red dot on my forehead which is what married Hindu women do as a sign of being married. This did invite some curious comments as well as some sniggering'

'Sometimes colleagues can be offensive...they perceive it as a joke whereas the staff members find it quite offensive but do not have the heart to speak out'

Hostility

Although some participants report being the subject of overt ridicule, participants were more likely to experience less overt forms of hostility. This may take the form of being avoided or looked down on by co-workers, which can lead to a feeling of isolation through being a member of the 'out-group'.

'It felt like my religion—which, to many Christians it seems, is silly and heathenish—made them say, "not one of us."'

'Expressing my religious identity has had a negative impact on me. I feel more distanced from my co-workers and many of my clients dislike me even though they liked me before they found out my religious identity'

Some participants also described an 'awkwardness' which occurred when they tried to discuss their religious beliefs, with several participants remarking that they felt co-workers regarded Hindu beliefs or practices as 'strange'. Co-workers are unlikely to openly express this opinion, but may give this impression in more subtle ways, such as through body language.

'I sometimes got weird looks, and eye-rolls when I tried to talk about religion at work'

'I sometimes get the impression that people find some of the religious activities I may talk about a little strange and unusual'

Stereotyping

Some participants felt that co-workers had made assumptions and judgements about them based on their religious beliefs. A small number of participants also expressed concerns around religious identity being a barrier to progression, which suggests that in some instances, stereotypes based on religious identity may be leading to direct discrimination.

'Showing my religion seems to have painted me in a different light to certain people. It seems to give people premeditated thoughts about me'

'I've seen that the people with very strict views of religion and want to practice/follow them at workplace are not preferred for top positions'

Intersectionality

Some participants highlighted the interaction between race and religion when it comes to receiving negative treatment and discrimination at work. Several participants recalled having assumptions made about their religious beliefs based on racial stereotypes. This suggests that

when it comes to understanding the experiences of Hindu employees at work, it may not always be possible to disentangle racial and religious prejudice.

'One co-worker asked me if I was a Muslim and I told him that I was Hindu... I felt uncomfortable with the question though, as this co-worker had a track record of Islamophobia and racism'

'Hostile discomfort becomes more prominent the more "brown" your religion is'...non-Abrahamic religions, but especially Asian religions, are treated like mythology by many people here'

'In your religion, do you eat a lot of curry?'

Choosing not to share religious beliefs

Preference

Several participants had chosen not to share their religious beliefs with colleagues. In such cases, participants explained that they simply preferred to keep their religious beliefs separate from work and showed no desire to share their beliefs with their colleagues. However, they tended to support their organisation in encouraging people to discuss religion at work if they wished to do so.

'I like to keep work and religion separate. I would say this is the attitude of all employees at my organisation'

'While I do have religious beliefs, I prefer to keep them to myself'

Fear

Some participants have been deterred from expressing their religious beliefs due to witnessing the negative experiences of co-workers who have previously chosen to do so. Participants also shared how their position as a religious minority led them, and others, to fear negative reactions from their co-workers.

'I feel that I am a religious minority at my workplace. There is not enough representation of people from my religion and I can't express everything freely...My co-workers are not happy with expressing religious beliefs as they fear being shamed and ridiculed'

'In the past I have seen others make a fuss about their religious beliefs and in general they were viewed by many of causing trouble or wanting to draw attention to themselves. As a result, their workplace relations/reputation suffered'

Barriers to religious expression

The key themes and sub-themes which emerged from our qualitative survey data in relation to barriers to religious expression are summarised in Table 2 and reported in further depth below.

Table 2: Barriers to religious expression

Theme	Subtheme
Isolation	Lack of diversity
	Lack of Hindu representation
Lack of awareness	Dietary requirements
	Social events
	Religious festivals
Restrictive policies	Dress codes and perceptions of professionalism
	Taking time off for religious festivals

Isolation

Lack of diversity

Many participants referenced the lack of racial and religious diversity in their organisation. Many outlined how most of their workforce held Christian beliefs, and several stated that the majority of the workforce was White. This lack of diversity often left participants feeling that they could not freely express their religious identity. Participants remarked that many co-workers were friendly, welcoming and inclusive. However, this was not enough to outweigh the feelings of isolation that some participants experienced as a religious minority.

‘The workforce is not diversified to give comfort to a non-white, non-Christian worker to freely express his religious identity. The thought that the majority of workers may find it strange if I wear something traditional on a special religious occasion stops me doing that’

‘The majority of the staff are Christians and even though they try their best to make me feel included, sometimes I do feel lonely’

Lack of Hindu representation

Some participants specifically referred to the lack of Hindu representation in their organisation and the impact that this had on expressing their religious identity at work. A lack of Hindu representation was likely to make people feel more isolated and less likely to feel comfortable expressing their religious beliefs, whereas working with someone who shared Hindu beliefs sparked a sense of relief.

‘I personally find it relieving to find someone who is following the same faith as me’

‘There is not enough representation of people from my religion, and I can’t express everything freely’

Lack of awareness

Dietary requirements

Many Hindus follow a diet that has some restrictions on what they can eat. For example, many followers of Hinduism are vegetarian; those who do eat meat are unlikely to eat beef, as the cow is viewed as a sacred animal. Specific dietary requirements vary between individuals and best practice is to proactively ask employees about their dietary requirements, rather than make assumptions based on their beliefs. However, some participants' dietary requirements were not considered within staff restaurants and during meetings or events, with some having to skip meals at work functions due to a lack of suitable food options.

'The only time I feel that my religious preferences are not being taken into account is at the time of food options during meetings'

'During gatherings, I may not be able to find items without meat in and may have to skip eating'

Social events

Many Hindus also abstain from drinking alcohol in line with their beliefs. However, some participants referred to a culture in UK and US workplaces whereby social experiences are centred around alcohol, such as having a 'post-work drink' or the expectation that all employees will drink alcohol at company parties. This could lead to some employees to avoid socialising with co-workers in such environments, which may lead to further feelings of isolation.

'The work culture of having alcoholic drinks after work has been a barrier for some people as they feel that social events are not catered towards them'

'Most social events include alcohol...there are some Muslim and Hindus who do not drink for religious reasons and so they could feel left out or isolated at these socials'

Religious festivals

A recurring theme emerging from the data was how organisations focused on the celebration of Christian festivals. Many participants felt that their organisation was either unaware of religious festivals celebrated by other religious groups or did not make effort to celebrate and raise awareness of such festivals. This lack of awareness may mean that some employees do not share their celebrations with co-workers, even though they may like to.

'All of the holidays we decorate for are Christian holidays; all the holidays we close for are Christian holidays. You're assumed Christian by default in the same way people are often assumed heterosexual or cisgendered by default. To deviate from that is to stick out like a sore thumb...'

'I feel certain festivals are still not recognised enough like Diwali and Nepali festivals such as Dashain or Tihar. This lack of awareness means my colleagues are not aware of my celebrations and why I may go abroad to visit family at certain times, every couple of years'

Restrictive policies

Dress codes and perceptions of professionalism

Several people referred to the reasons behind their decision not to wear religious dress at work. For some participants, this was not through choice and was due to restrictions in dress code. Restrictions considered reasonable, such as those clearly explained to be based on health and safety requirements, were generally accepted by participants. However, several participants

stated that they were required to dress in a ‘professional’ or ‘non-offensive’ manner at work. This is interpreted by many employees to mean that they should avoid wearing religious dress.

‘I cannot wear a Bindi at work although I am Hindu, and it is part of my religious practices to apply Bhasma/Vibhuti [holy ash] on the forehead and Kumkum [processed turmeric] between the eyebrows. I can't do that at work’

‘As we are encouraged to wear more professional and non-offensive clothing, wearing very religious clothing day to day isn't very common as a result’

Taking time off for religious festivals

Many participants reported difficulties in taking annual leave for religious festivals. Most participants are required to take time off for religious festivals as annual leave, which means time off is not guaranteed. However, participants pointed out that Christian co-workers often receive guaranteed time off for religious festivals through public holidays or workplace shutdowns. The observed inequality in relation to taking time off for religious festivals may cause anger, disappointment, or exasperation for some employees when annual leave requests are rejected.

‘I have never taken time off at Christmas but as they rejected my Diwali holiday request I made sure I took time off at Christmas because I was very annoyed’

‘They often are not interested in letting me take off days for my own religious holidays, However, when it comes to their religion, they expect me to bend over backwards for them’

How can organisations support Hindu employees?

The key themes and sub-themes which emerged from the data in relation to supporting Hindu employees at work are summarised in Table 3 and reported in further depth below.

Table 3: Recommendations to support Hindu employees

Theme	Subtheme
Educate others	Implement awareness-raising initiatives
	Deliver training
Develop effective policies and procedures	Implement a clear approach to bullying and harassment
	Create and communicate clear dress code policies
	Accommodate time off requests for religious holidays
Promote diversity and inclusion	Champion diversity
	Build employee networks
	Develop an inclusive culture

Educate others

Implement awareness-raising initiatives

Many participants felt that their organisation could be better at raising awareness and sharing well-wishes for a wider variety of religious festivals, instead of focusing solely on Christian celebrations. This may help more people feel comfortable discussing religious festivals at work. Several participants also suggested that organisations should consider holding more events that aim to improve general awareness and understanding of different religious beliefs and practices. As well as making employees feel included and appreciated, this may also help when arranging work events, to avoid unintentional conflicts with religious festivals.

‘My organisation could support my religious identity by celebrating some of the religious festivals like Diwali and making it more of an occasion. Maybe they could organise a lunchtime event with food and music and raise money for charity’

‘There can also be some type of bring and share in the office where people can prepare and share food related to their religions. In that way, everybody will get to talk about their religions so that to decrease the awkwardness between co-workers, if any’

Deliver training

Several participants expressed a desire for training within their organisation, to provide co-workers with insight into potential biases and to provide guidance on how to interact appropriately in a respectful and inclusive way. Participants also felt that training around different religious beliefs would be beneficial. Specific training for senior management and human resources staff would improve awareness of adjustments employees may require in relation to their religious beliefs, such as alternative food options at meetings.

‘I have had people make up assumptions about me without choosing to ask me. If people had cultural awareness or religious awareness training, many individuals like myself would not be put in this type of situation’

‘The upper-level management and human resources is not taking better steps into educating themselves about cultural diversity and religious beliefs’

Develop effective policies and procedures

Clear approach to bullying and harassment

Participants indicated that there should be clear policies in relation to bullying and harassment to address the ridicule and hostility that some employees face when expressing their religious identity. Management should be fully committed to enforcing these policies to ensure that employees have a clear understanding of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and the consequences if this behaviour is exhibited. Organisations should be aware that when such incidents go unaddressed, this may have a lasting impact on the individual and their view of the organisation, leaving them to feel more isolated and unsupported.

‘Any sort of looking down or bullying must be discouraged, and strict action must be taken. There should be a committee to investigate any possible religious attacks’

‘My organization could take discriminatory comments made by my clients more seriously. For example, when I reported a bigoted comment made about my religion by a client to my manager, they brushed it off’.

Create and communicate clear dress code policies

Allowing the flexibility to wear religious dress was received positively by participants. However, several participants referred to restrictive dress codes as a barrier to religious expression. Organisations could benefit from being explicit around restrictions around religious dress in their policies and be mindful that requirements such as ‘professional’ may unintentionally lead employees to feel that religious dress is not accepted. Organisations should ensure that any restrictions are reasonable and communicated openly with employees with a clear explanation.

‘Allowing religious dress code is a positive sign for the company as we are seen more inclusive, diverse and open minded’

Accommodate time off requests for religious holidays

The lack of guaranteed leave for religious festivals can make celebrations difficult for Hindu employees, who may be forced to miss celebrations if a request to take leave is rejected. This often created a sense of injustice when Christian co-workers often received guaranteed leave through public holidays. To address this, organisations should ensure that line managers understand the importance of religious holidays and festivals and make every effort to accept annual leave requests of this nature, to ensure that employees feel that their employer is happy for them to take the time needed for observance and celebration.

‘One thing that I would like to see is to make it easier to get a holiday for some of my religious occasions’

Promote diversity and inclusion

Champion diversity

Our data suggests that Hindu employees are at risk of feeling lonely and isolated in an organisation that lacks diversity. In contrast, those who highlighted that their team was diverse in terms of religious or cultural background tended to associate this with co-workers being respectful and supportive of each other’s backgrounds and beliefs. Organisations can help to improve and promote diversity in their organisation through initiatives such as unconscious bias training and reviews of policies and procedures (e.g., recruitment processes) to ensure that fair opportunities for recruitment and development available for all.

‘My team is made up of people who practice many religions (Hinduism, Christianity, Islam etc.) and we support each other in the workplace when it comes to celebrating different religious festivals’

‘Co-workers have a great mix of many cultures; hence everyone is understanding, accommodating and respectful of each other’s cultures’

Build employee networks

Whilst many people decide not to discuss their religious beliefs through choice, others may want to express their beliefs but feel unable to do so through fear of negative consequences. Working alongside other Hindu employees seemed to help participants feel supported and comfortable in expressing their religious beliefs. Several participants formed close connections with other Hindus in their organisation, through shared attitudes and experiences. Organisations may, therefore, benefit from setting up employee network groups for co-workers with shared beliefs, to allow employees to share experiences with those they may not meet otherwise.

‘My organisation is full of other Hindu people, so I feel very supported. We tend to go to temple events together or if someone goes, they will bring temple food back for the rest of us. It helps that we are all the same ethnicity as well - it’s like a small community of people I have the same experiences with’



Develop an inclusive culture

All the above recommendations will help to develop conditions where Hindu employees can freely express their religious identity in the way they would like. However, the organisation is unlikely to see successful, long-term change unless it commits to building an inclusive culture, where valuing differences and supporting each other is the 'norm'. Participants who worked for an organisation with this type of culture reported overwhelmingly positive experiences. The key to achieving this is by making a long-term commitment to diversity and inclusion, rather than implementing initiatives as one-off events. Whilst organisations should not force people to disclose their religious beliefs at work, leaders and co-workers should make a consistent effort to ensure everybody in the organisation feels safe to express their authentic identity.

'They always do a great job at having something in the office for me whenever I have a specific religious holiday as well as noting it to make sure it is known to me that they care'

'We have a chilled, peaceful, and close-knitted culture where everyone is accepted as long as you make an effort with others'

Summary of Findings

Quantitative survey findings

Celebrating religious festivals

Our findings suggest that UK-based Hindu employees feel less supported by their organisation in relation to celebrating religious festivals. UK participants were more likely to have requests to take time off for religious festivals rejected and were less likely to feel that their organisation or line manager was happy for them to make such requests. However, despite feeling less supported, UK participants felt more comfortable discussing the religious festivals that they celebrate at work than US participants. Women in both countries were less likely to feel that their line manager or organisation was happy for them to take time off to celebrate religious festivals and more likely to feel uncomfortable discussing religious festivals at work. However, in the UK, men were more likely to have had an annual leave request rejected. Therefore, whilst women may experience poorer outcomes in relation to celebrating religious festivals at work overall, there may be exceptions which are influenced by an individual's country of residence.

Wearing religious dress

Our initial findings suggest that US employees feel more supported than UK employees to wear religious dress at work. US employees were more likely to wear religious dress at work and less likely to feel their organisation could do more to support them in doing so. US employees were also more likely to feel satisfied with their organisation's dress code. However, only 10% of Hindu employees that wear religious dress chose to do so at work; therefore, we were unable to make meaningful conclusions or explore statistical differences between groups for some items relating to religious dress. The number of employees who chose not to wear religious dress slightly exceeded the number who work for an organisation with a restrictive dress code, suggesting that the reasons behind not wearing religious dress are not due solely to restrictive policies.

Qualitative survey findings

Many Hindu employees felt relieved to work in an environment where they felt comfortable expressing their religious identity and found that sharing their beliefs improved the quality of their relationships at work. However, some employees experienced ridicule and hostility upon expressing their religious identity, with some experiencing prejudice based around the connection between their racial and religious identity. Some participants would like to share their beliefs but fear the consequences of doing so. A lack of diversity and Hindu representation exacerbated these issues and often left Hindu employees feeling lonely and isolated. Restrictive or ambiguous policies and a lack of awareness around Hindu beliefs and practices also made it more difficult for employees to express their religious identity.

Hindu employees felt that educating others through training and awareness-raising initiatives would help people in the organisation understand more about Hindu festivals and practices, which would help them feel more comfortable in sharing their beliefs. Furthermore, developing and enforcing effective policies and procedures that take religious diversity into account would make religious expression easier. Crucially, championing diversity and inclusion can help to create more positive outcomes for employees who express their religious identity at work. Working within a diverse organisation which adopts an inclusive culture is likely to help Hindu employees feel less isolated and more comfortable expressing their religious identity.

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Appendix 1: Hinduism Participant Demographics

1a. Quantitative survey demographics

Country	Gender	Count	% of country	% of total
United Kingdom	Male	221	41.93%	20.83%
	Female	301	57.12%	28.37%
	Other	5	0.95%	0.47%
	Total	527		49.67%
United States	Male	266	49.81%	25.07%
	Female	268	50.19%	25.26%
	Other	-	-	-
	Total	534		50.33%
Combined Totals	Male	487	-	45.90%
	Female	569	-	53.63%
	Other	5	-	0.47%
	Total	1061		

1b. Qualitative survey demographics

Country	Gender	Count	% of country	% of total
United Kingdom	Male	27	52.94%	34.18%
	Female	24	47.06%	30.38%
	Total	51		64.56%
United States	Male	13	46.43%	16.46%
	Female	15	53.57%	18.99%
	Total	28		35.44%
Combined Totals	Male	40	50.63%	
	Female	39	49.37%	
	Total	79		

Appendix 2: Full Breakdown of Quantitative Survey Findings

Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?

Country	Gender	Yes (N)	Yes (%)	No (N)	No (%)	Total
UK	Male	116	52.49%	105	47.51%	221
	Female	82	27.24%	219	72.76%	301
	Other	2	40.00%	3	60.00%	5
US	Male	13	4.89%	253	95.11%	266
	Female	35	13.06%	233	86.94%	268
	Other					
Total		248	23.37%	813	76.63%	1061

N = number of participants

I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace

Country	Gender	Agree (N)	Agree (%)	Neither (N)	Neither (%)	Disagree (N)	Disagree (%)	Total
UK	Male	176	79.64%	22	9.95%	23	10.41%	221
	Female	38	12.62%	117	38.87%	146	48.50%	301
	Other	1	20.00%	3	60.00%	1	20.00%	5
US	Male	57	21.43%	206	77.44%	3	1.13%	266
	Female	18	6.72%	82	30.60%	168	62.69%	268
	Other							0
Total		290	27.33%	430	40.53%	341	32.14%	1061

N = number of participants

I feel that my employer is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals

Country	Gender	Agree (N)	Agree (%)	Neither (N)	Neither (%)	Disagree (N)	Disagree (%)	Total
UK	Male	16	7.24%	111	50.23%	94	42.53%	221
	Female	8	2.66%	221	73.42%	72	23.92%	301
	Other	2	40.00%		0.00%	3	60.00%	5
US	Male	194	72.93%	58	21.80%	14	5.26%	266
	Female	41	15.30%	188	70.15%	39	14.55%	268
	Other							0
Total		261	25%	578	54%	222	21%	1061

N = number of participants

I feel my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals

Country	Gender	Agree (N)	Agree (%)	Neither (N)	Neither (%)	Disagree (N)	Disagree (%)	Total
UK	Male	6	2.71%	190	85.97%	25	11.31%	221
	Female	17	5.65%	140	46.51%	144	47.84%	301
	Other	3	60%	2	40%		0%	5
US	Male	174	65.41%	88	33.08%	4	1.50%	266
	Female	29	10.82%	211	78.73%	28	10.45%	268
	Other							0
Total		229	22%	631	59%	201	19%	1061

N = number of participants

Do you wear religious dress that affiliates with your religion?

Country	Gender	Yes (N)	Yes (%)	No (N)	No (%)	Total
UK	Male	131	59.28%	90	40.72%	221
	Female	169	56.15%	132	43.85%	301
	Other	5	100%	0		5
US	Male	66	24.81%	200	75.19%	266
	Female	59	22.01%	209	77.99%	268
	Other					0
Total		430	40.53%	631	59.47%	1,061

N = number of participants

Do you wear religious dress in the workplace?

Country	Gender	Yes (N)	Yes (%)	No (N)	No (%)	Total
UK	Male	18	13.74%	113	86.26%	131
	Female	4	2.37%	165	97.63%	169
	Other			5	100.00%	5
US	Male	10	15.15%	56	84.85%	66
	Female	9	15.25%	50	84.75%	59
	Other					0
Total		41	9.53%	389	90.47%	430

N = number of participants

I feel comfortable wearing religious dress in the workplace

Country	Gender	Agree (N)	Agree (%)	Neither (N)	Neither (%)	Disagree (N)	Disagree (%)	Total
UK	Male	4	22.22%	5	27.78%	9	50.00%	18
	Female	0	0.00%	1	25.00%	3	75.00%	4
	Other							0
US	Male	3	30.00%	6	60.00%	1	10.00%	10
	Female	1	11.11%	2	22.22%	6	66.67%	9
	Other			0		0		0
Total		8	19.51%	14	34.15%	19	46.34%	41

N = number of participants

I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress

Country	Gender	Agree (N)	Agree (%)	Neither (N)	Neither (%)	Disagree (N)	Disagree (%)	Total
UK	Male	4	22.22%	7	38.89%	7	38.89%	18
	Female	2	50.00%	1	25.00%	1	25.00%	4
	Other							0
US	Male	0	0.00%	6	60.00%	4	40.00%	10
	Female	8	88.89%	1	11.11%	0	0.00%	9
	Other		0.00%		0.00%		0.00%	0
Total		14	34.15%	15	36.59%	12	29.27%	41

N = number of participants

I feel my employer could do more to make me and/or others feel more comfortable wearing religious dress

Country	Gender	Agree (N)	Agree (%)	Neither (N)	Neither (%)	Disagree (N)	Disagree (%)	Total
UK	Male	15	6.79%	201	90.95%	5	2.26%	221
	Female	165	54.82%	115	38.21%	21	6.98%	301
	Other	5		0				5
US	Male	17	6.39%	204	76.69%	45	16.92%	266
	Female	20	7.46%	149	55.60%	99	36.94%	268
	Other	0						0
Total		222	20.92%	669	63.05%	170	16.02%	1061

N = number of participants

Does the dress code in your workplace/organisation include appearance restrictions or requirements?

Country	Gender	Yes (N)	Yes (%)	No (N)	No (%)	Total
UK	Male	15	6.78%	206	93.21%	221
	Female	24	7.97%	277	92.03%	301
	Other			5	100%	5
US	Male	157	59.02%	109	40.98%	266
	Female	120	44.78%	148	55.22%	268
	Other					
Total		316	29.78%	745	70.22%	1,061

N = number of participants

Do you feel there are good business reasons which are proportionate, appropriate and necessary?

Country	Gender	Yes (N)	Yes (%)	No (N)	No (%)	Total
UK	Male	13	86.67%	2	13.33%	15
	Female	18	75.00%	6	25.00%	24
	Other					0
US	Male	155	98.73%	2	1.27%	157
	Female	114	95.00%	6	5.00%	120
	Other					
Total		300	94.94%	16	5.06%	316

N = number of participants



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