



Pearn Kandola Research

Religion at Work (2023)

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Summary

Organisations may believe that they are promoting religious inclusivity but their employees do not necessarily agree. Religion at work is a topic that is largely overlooked by organisations and within organisational research even though for people who have a faith, this is an important part of their lives and identity.

Whilst some initial evidence exists to suggest that religious employees may be experiencing barriers to the expression of religious identity at work, the research around the topic of religion at work is extremely limited. We lack a clear understanding of the barriers that religious employees face at work, particularly within the UK. Pearn Kandola's 'Religion at Work' research project aims to raise awareness around employee experiences of expressing religious identity at work. We set out to understand the experiences of people who have a faith in the workplace; the obstacles they face regarding religious expression; and what organisations can do to create more inclusive environments.

In 2021, using contacts within faith groups and the online research recruitment platform, Prolific, 6,315 participants across six religious groups took part in the survey. Participants were eligible to participate if they lived in the UK or US and were a follower of Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity.

In 2022 a follow-up qualitative survey was carried out to explore some of the issues that had emerged in more depth. 470 people participated in this part of the research.

Some of the key findings were:

- **19% of participants** had requests to take annual leave to celebrate religious holidays or festivals rejected.
- Only **36% of participants** felt that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.
- **47% of people** did not feel comfortable discussing religious festivals they celebrate at work.
- Of those who wore religious dress or symbols in other aspects of their lives, **only 23% of them** were prepared to do this at work.
- Of those who do wear religious dress or symbols at work, **only 16%** felt comfortable doing so.

Overall, it is fair to say that people of all faiths felt as if they were in the minority in the workplace

Overall, it is fair to say that people of all faiths felt as if they were in the minority in the workplace, including Christians. Members of all groups had experienced similar issues with regard to religious expression. Where people had been open about expressing their religious beliefs, there were some positive outcomes, including better awareness and understanding, improved relationships with co-workers and increased well-being at work.

Negative outcomes included stereotyping and discrimination; being mocked and mistreated; being excluded, and having a sense of isolation.

Our research has demonstrated that although there are many positive benefits to expressing religious beliefs at work, there are barriers which prevent people from doing so. Many people are not receiving the support they need to express or practice their religious beliefs at work. Religion is often overlooked within diversity and inclusion strategies, which may lead to managers being unaware of the accommodations that their employees may need to express or observe their beliefs. In an organisation where religious expression is perceived to be discouraged, employees may feel unable to communicate their needs to their employer.

Those who have shared their religious beliefs at work have experienced a variety of outcomes. When working within a diverse organisation with an open and inclusive culture, outcomes are often positive. Within these organisations, relationships between co-workers are improved as people are interested in learning more about religious beliefs and offer support and encouragement to those who would like to observe or express their beliefs at work.

However, our research has highlighted that many people do not feel comfortable expressing their religious beliefs at work. When an organisation lacks this sense of inclusion and openness, employees may fear the consequences of expressing their religious beliefs, or face judgement and exclusion if they decide to disclose their beliefs.

We propose the following recommendations to overcome barriers to religious expression at work and create the conditions for religious expression to result in positive outcomes:

1

> **Review existing policies and procedures.**

To ensure that religion and religious expression are sufficiently addressed in them.

2

> **Take an individualised approach.**

Managers should collaborate with each employee on an individual basis to establish the support and accommodations they may need for religious observance. Employees' needs are likely to vary depending on their level of religiosity and accommodations that are effective for one employee may be insufficient or unnecessary for another employee who is affiliated with the same religion.

3

> **Develop skills and knowledge.**

It is important that organisations assess the current level of knowledge around how to develop religious inclusion, examining this by job level and function. Training and skills development will be required on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour regarding religion; training, for managers on how they can support members of the team; how to challenge inappropriate behaviour effectively; and understanding ways of reducing religious bias in the workplace.

4

> **Develop an inclusive culture.**

Developing an inclusive culture is not a simple process. It requires organisations to listen to their employees views and needs, and make a long-term commitment to action as a result. Inclusion should be at the heart of organisations' values and feed into the interactions and decisions that take place on a daily basis.

Background

A majority of the UK and American populations hold religious beliefs, (Office for National Statistics, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2022) and this is an important part of their lives and identity. Those who participate in religious activities are likely to experience higher levels of mental and physical wellbeing (Spencer et al., 2016). Such individuals may also experience positive outcomes at work, such as increased job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Kutcher et al., 2010). However, religion at work is a topic that is largely overlooked by organisations and within organisational research (Chumman et al., 2013).

Although organisations may believe that they are promoting religious inclusivity, their employees do not necessarily agree. A study conducted by ComRes (2017) found that whilst 91% of HR managers feel that their organisation promotes understanding of diversity and inclusion in relation to religion and belief, 35% of employees feel that their religious beliefs are never discussed at work. Furthermore, research conducted by the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation (2020) found that religion received less attention than other major identities within Fortune 100 companies' diversity and inclusion statements.

Given that many organisations appear to lack religious inclusion, it is perhaps unsurprising that many employees who hold religious beliefs find it difficult to express their religious identity at

work. Whilst some employees prefer to keep their beliefs private, a systematic review of the literature concluded that some may encounter barriers to religious expression in the form of the organisation's culture, policies and practices (Héliot et al., 2020). Recent research has also found that employees with religious beliefs face difficulty taking time off for religious festivals and discomfort around wearing religious dress and symbols, as well as experiencing stereotyping and discrimination (Schneider et al., 2022; Scheitle and Ecklund, 2017). To avoid discrimination, some employees may suppress their religious identity within environments that do not feel psychologically safe. However, at present, there is a lack of research which explores the experiences of expressing religious identity at work, particularly within the UK.

Our research

Whilst some initial evidence exists to suggest that religious employees may be experiencing barriers to expression of religious identity at work, the research around the topic of religion at work is extremely limited. We lack a clear understanding of the barriers that religious employees face at work, particularly within the UK. Pearn Kandola's 'Religion at Work' research project aims to raise awareness around employee experiences of expressing religious identity at work. The aim of the research was to understand the experiences of people who have a faith in the workplace; the obstacles they face regarding religious expression; and what organisations can do to create more inclusive environments.

Report structure

In the next section, we will describe our approach and explain how we collected our data. The subsequent sections present our key findings within the following areas:

- [Key findings from our quantitative survey](#)
- [Key findings from our qualitative survey](#)
- [Comparison across religious groups](#)
- [Comparison between UK and US participants](#)
- [Comparison between male and female responses](#)

The report will conclude with our recommendations on how to develop religious inclusion at work.

Methodology

Quantitative survey methodology

Participants

In 2021, using contacts within faith groups and the online research recruitment platform, Prolific, 6,315 participants across six religious groups took part in the survey. Participants were eligible to participate if they lived in the UK or US and were a follower of Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity.

The survey

The survey asked questions relating to participants' experiences celebrating religious festivals and wearing religious dress at work. Participants also provided demographic information to enable the investigation of group differences.

Analysis

We compared frequency of responses to survey items (represented as percentages) at various levels. Firstly, we analysed the full dataset to understand the overall experiences of those with a religious belief (of the six religions studied). We then explored the differences between all six religious groups, as well as the differences between those living in the UK and US and gender differences. 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.

6,315 participants across six religious groups took part in the survey

Qualitative survey methodology

Participants

In 2022, 470 participants took part in our qualitative survey via the online research recruitment platform, Prolific (see Appendix 2 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, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam or Sikhism.

The survey

A qualitative survey was designed to explore the experiences of 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?

Analysis

Data was initially analysed to identify the key themes for each religious group in relation to employees' experiences of sharing their religious beliefs. We conducted a further content analysis which involved categorising responses, grouping these into recurring themes and forming counts of how many times a theme was mentioned. We were then able to make comparisons between different genders (male and female) and countries of residence (UK and US) using the data from our content analysis.

470 participants took part in our qualitative survey ... Participants were eligible to participate if they ... were a follower of Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam or Sikhism.

Quantitative survey findings

This section summarises the key findings from the quantitative survey from our total sample across all genders and religious groups within the UK and US (N = 6,315).

Celebrating religious festivals



19% of participants have had a request to take annual leave to celebrate religious holidays or festivals rejected.

81% have never had a request to take annual leave to celebrate religious holidays or festivals rejected.



43% of participants felt that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

20% felt that their organisation was not happy, whilst 36% neither agreed nor disagreed that their organisation was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.



Just 36% of participants felt that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.

23% felt that their line manager was not happy, whilst 41% neither agreed nor disagreed that their line manager was happy for them to take time off for religious festivals.



Only 19% of participants felt comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work.

47% did not feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work, whilst 35% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

Wearing religious dress or symbols



Only 23% of the 3,433 participants who wear religious dress or symbols chose to do so at work.

77% of those who wear religious dress or symbols chose not to wear these at work.



38% of participants felt that their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress.

20% felt that there was nothing more that their organisation could do, whilst 43% neither agreed nor disagreed that their organisation could do more.



Only 16% of participants who wear religious dress or symbols at work felt comfortable doing so.

64% of employees did not feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols at work, whilst 20% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.



Just 39% of participants who wear religious dress at work felt comfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress.

30% felt uncomfortable, whilst 31% felt neither comfortable nor uncomfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress or symbols.



89% of the 2,380 participants working for an organisation with a dress code were satisfied that this was proportionate, appropriate, and necessary.

11% were dissatisfied with the reasons behind their organisation's dress code.

Qualitative survey findings

This section presents the findings of a content analysis of our full qualitative dataset (N = 470). This involved categorising responses, grouping these into recurring themes and forming counts of how many times a theme had been mentioned. We were then able to calculate the percentage that each separate theme's count of mentions represented out of the number of total theme mentions for that item.

“Many people are not receiving the support they need to express or practice their religious beliefs at work. Religion is often overlooked within diversity and inclusion strategies.”

What are organisations doing well to support the expression of religious identity at work?

Chart 1 presents a summary of the key themes identified in relation to what participants feel their organisation is doing well to support the expression of their religious identity. A description of each of the key themes can be found below.

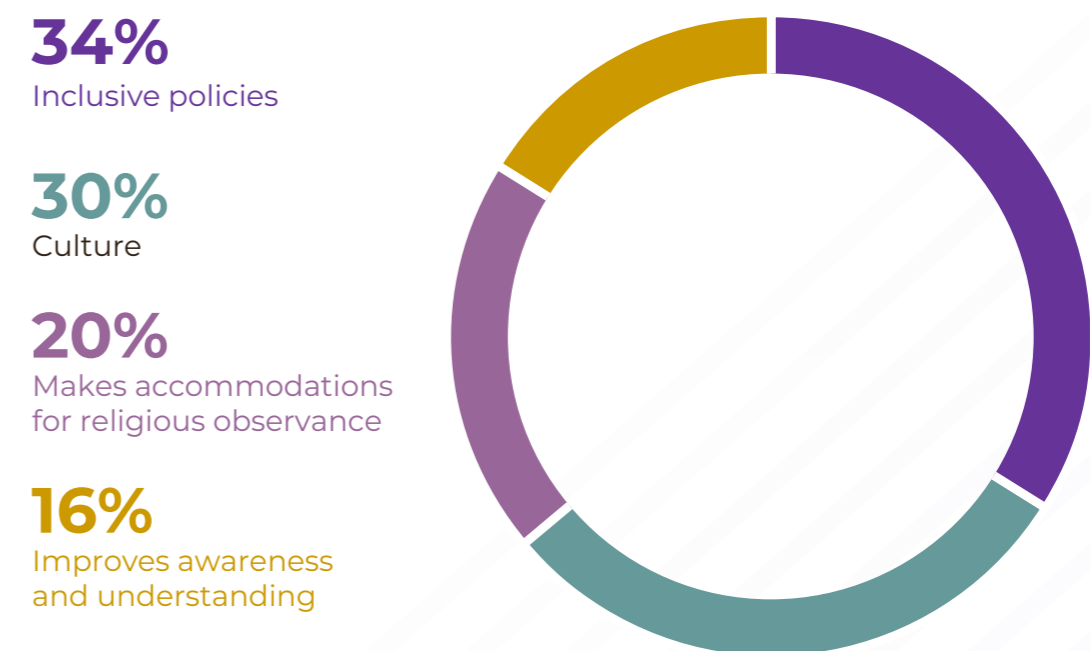


Chart 1: What are organisations doing well to support the expression of religious identity at work? (N = 829*)

* N = total number of coded responses, with responses indicating no support excluded.

Inclusive policies

Participants referred to inclusive policies and practices that support religious expression in three main areas. First, their organisation's dress code policy allowed the wearing of religious dress and symbols. Second, procedures were in place to ensure that requests for time off to celebrate religious festivals were prioritised and accommodated in all but exceptional circumstances. Some organisations also had specific allocations for religious leave. Finally, policies clearly specified sanctions in relation to bullying and harassment on religious grounds. Having policies in place helped provide reassurance and clarity around how the organisation could offer support.

"My organisation is very supportive and relaxed with its attitudes towards religious dress. Our organisational policies have a commitment of tolerance and inclusivity and we have an equality strategy which is there to promote greater involvement of marginalised communities."

Sikh participant

"My organization has some flexible policies in place for religious observance. For example, there are a lot of Jewish holidays I need to take off for, and my supervisor is not allowed to forbid me from taking those days off. I have the option of using a paid personal day or an unpaid religious observance day, but either way I don't need to worry about not being able to take the day."

Jewish participant

Culture

Several organisations had a diverse workforce and had an open and inclusive culture where all employees were treated fairly. People were encouraged to express their beliefs and the organisation often provided opportunities for employees to discuss religion at work and connect with those who shared their beliefs. Employees felt that co-workers and management respected their beliefs and supported religious expression at work. When working within an open and inclusive environment, people felt more comfortable expressing their religious beliefs.

"The culture of our office is very diversified and openly accepting of everyone and their own beliefs. I am glad to be a part of an organization that allows us to feel and think freely and express ourselves as we choose. Because of this open freedom there is often less conflict among workers. Each employee is accepting of everyone's differences. I believe this is what makes us successful as a company and as humans."

Christian participant

"They have established a slogan that states all are welcome just as they are. This is not just a slogan though, we practice this belief on a day to day basis in the work environment. Additionally, my boss has done a really good job of hiring employees that embody this idea before coming in."

Jewish participant

Accommodations for religious observance

Participants appreciated dedicated prayer rooms that are fit for purpose and having flexibility within work schedules to allow time for religious observance. For example, some employees were able to take breaks for prayer throughout the day or adjust their working pattern to accommodate religious observance (such as observing the Sabbath or attending communal prayers). Dietary requirements were also accommodated within staff canteens and during meetings and/or social events.

"When creating our schedules my supervisor even called to ask me if it would work around the Sabbath before she confirmed it."

Jewish participant

"Since I'm Muslim I pray 5 times a day. Even at my work my boss knows when it's my prayer time and they made a special prayer room for me at work so I can pray. On Fridays Muslims are recommended to go to the Mosque and pray there and my manager lets me leave work early on Friday so I can pray."

Muslim participant

Improves awareness and understanding

Some organisations held events to raise awareness around different cultures and beliefs, such as celebrations for a wide range of religious festivals and lunchtime seminars. Some organisations also delivered training on topics such as bullying and harassment, inclusion and unconscious bias. This helped people to feel better understood and supported at work.

"There are regular mandatory training courses for the entire company to complete on subjects such as anti-bullying and diversity and inclusion and these remind people of the cultural and religious differences that exist and how we all interact together."

Jewish participant

"My work supports, understands and encourages everyone's beliefs at my work. They do this by sending out learning emails and holding seminars in which we all read and/or attend so that we are able to support others and their religious beliefs."

Christian participant

What are the barriers to religious expression at work?

Chart 2 presents a summary of the themes identified in relation to the barriers which make religious expression at work difficult. A description of each theme can be found below.

32%
Accommodations for religious observance

23%
Attitudes towards religious discussion

14%
Lack of support

14%
Lack of diversity

9%
Role demands

8%
Lack of awareness and understanding



Chart 2: Content analysis: What are the barriers to religious expression at work? (N = 401*)

* N = total number of coded responses, with responses indicating no barriers excluded.

Accommodations for religious observance

Despite some having inclusive policies in place, many organisations did not make suitable adjustments to enable employees to practice their religion. This was evident in four main areas:

- **Time off for religious holidays and festivals:** Some employees had been unable to obtain time off for religious festivals, despite policies allowing this being in place.
- **Prayer facilities:** Many organisations did not have any prayer facilities, or had facilities that were private, peaceful and clean.
- **Accommodating dietary requirements:** Dietary requirements in line with employees' religious beliefs were not being considered during meetings or social events.
- **Wearing religious dress or symbols:** Some policies prohibited religious dress and symbols at work, or required 'professional' dress, which employees interpreted as meaning they should not wear religious dress or symbols at work (unless policies explicitly stated otherwise).

"Having a uniform policy means that everyone dresses the same. I will never be able to physically demonstrate the clothing my religion brings whilst at work."

Sikh participant

"Although space is given to pray, it tends to be a small storage cupboard instead of a designated clean prayer room."

Muslim participant

Attitudes towards religious discussion

Within some organisations, religion was perceived as a 'taboo' topic and employees felt that they were expected not to talk about their beliefs. Employees would avoid expressing their beliefs due to fear of conflict, fearing that this may offend others or invite opposing views.

"There is always some fear in organisations when trying to allow an open discussion on religion as there is always someone who could take offence, and this could be disruptive to relationships."

Sikh participant

"I was told not to speak about religion to clients, as a lot of them are older and not tolerant of Jewish people for whatever reason. It makes me feel that while I am inside the walls of my place of employment, part of my identity is stripped from me."

Jewish participant

Lack of support

Some participants felt that religion was overlooked within their organisation's approach to diversity and inclusion. When support was provided, it was perceived as insincere if managers were not seen to be challenging mistreatment. Some religious groups were seen to be receiving more support than others (such as when lesser known religious festivals were overlooked).

"Management is both indifferent at best and often hostile to Jewish issues."

Jewish participant

"The main barriers are that because the organisation has already made a commitment to be tolerant and progressive as part of its mission statement that is all they needed to do. There is no practical consideration of how it affects employees."

Sikh participant

Lack of diversity

A general lack of diversity was referenced within many organisations, particularly in relation to race and religious beliefs. Whilst some organisations had a diverse workforce overall, there was a lack of diversity within senior management which left some people with strong religious beliefs feeling that there was little room for progression for them.

"Our employee base is quite uniform - i.e. mostly White and assumed to be Christian...This makes it more difficult I think to talk about experiences of other religions at work."

Buddhist participant

"The lack of anyone of my religion at work can be inhibiting, since no one else can understand my values and what issues I might have."

Muslim participant

Role demands

Work schedules made religious observance difficult for some. For example, some Jewish employees were unable to observe the Sabbath and some Christians to observe Sunday due to being required to work over the weekend. In a similar vein, some Muslims were unable to attend Friday prayers. Some employees also felt that they did not have time for prayer or religious discussion due to a high workload.

"The main barriers are finding the time in a busy day to take time out and reflect. The company allows paid time to pray etc. But finding that time spare is very difficult."

Christian participant

"I'm a Muslim so I need to pray at certain times. This is difficult to achieve due to the nature of the role. Same goes for the Friday prayers - I need to be present on-site always, so I'm not able to achieve that."

Muslim participant

Lack of awareness and understanding

Some employees felt that their co-workers lacked understanding around inappropriate behaviour, leading to offensive jokes which were often excused as 'banter'. There was also a lack of awareness around different religious practices.

A lack of awareness and understanding may feed into other challenges that employees with religious beliefs face at work, such as access to adjustments that enable religious observance.

"I feel that because my organisation hasn't really taken out the time to look into my religion and explore its beliefs or celebrations I feel left out at work."

Sikh participant

"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."

Hindu participant

What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work?

Just over half of respondents (52%) indicated that expressing the religious beliefs had a positive outcome. However, 32% of people felt that expressing their religious beliefs at work led to negative outcomes. A breakdown of the key themes associated with positive and negative outcomes is presented below.

52%
Positive

32%
Negative

16%
Neutral

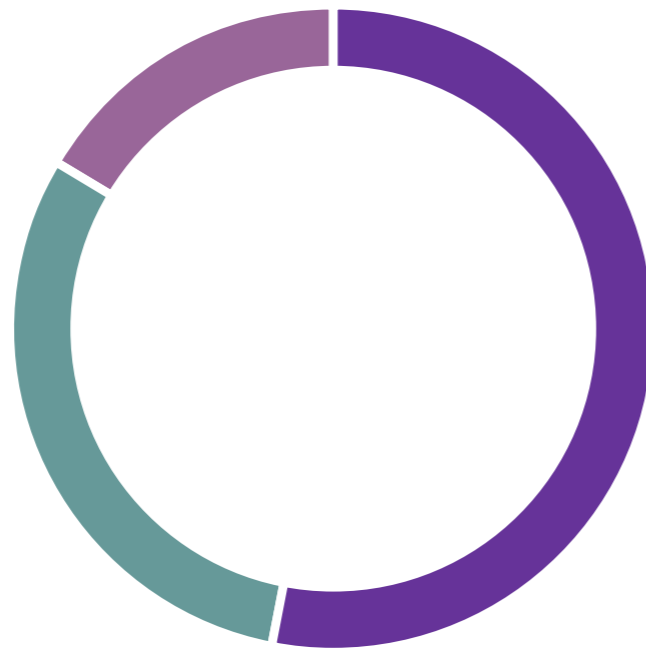


Chart 3: Content analysis: Impact of expressing religious identity at work (N = 518*)

“By expressing one’s religious beliefs, you have the feeling that it may hinder your career progression.”

* N = total number of coded responses, with responses indicating no support excluded.

Positive outcomes

Better awareness and understanding

People were often interested to learn about people's beliefs and asked questions to help improve awareness and understanding of religious practices and traditions. Through learning more, people were able to offer support to help their co-workers engage in religious observance (for example, helping with workload to allow a co-worker time to pray).

“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.”

Hindu participant

“Colleagues have asked questions and been genuinely interested which makes me feel that there is a space in the workplace to talk about religion without it becoming a taboo subject.”

Sikh participant

Improved relationships with co-workers

When participants were able to express their religious beliefs at work, they could bond with those who shared their beliefs and also form closer connections with co-workers who did not. When co-workers expressed interest in learning more about their beliefs, participants often felt this helped to get to know each other on a deeper level and form a closer connection.

“Making people aware of my 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.”

Hindu participant

“Colleagues are very supportive in order to accommodate things such as Friday prayers, Jummah, where they can do things like changing meeting times to accommodate. They are also supportive during Ramadan for example, making sure I take enough breaks and am feeling okay.”

Muslim participant

Improved wellbeing at work

When able to express their religious beliefs at work, participants often felt happier and more confident, with a better sense of belonging. Employees also felt that their beliefs had a positive impact on their team. For example, some Buddhist participants felt that practising meditation helped them maintain a sense of calm, which had a positive impact on their team.

“My religious beliefs are very appreciated by most of the people at work, I think my optimism, positivism, solidarity, and more, make people think that is why I am so happy most of the time. It brings a positive environment at work, as I try to practice more kindness and patience.”

Buddhist participant

“I am much happier and more work gets done because I feel as if I am accepted by my peers.”

Christian participant

Negative outcomes

Stereotyping and discrimination

Participants felt that their co-workers held stereotypes about people who were religious and as a result felt that they were viewed differently when they became aware of their religious beliefs. Although some participants felt that they were assumed to be a kinder person, more often, participants felt that co-workers perceived them as ‘stupid’, ‘weak’, ‘strange’ or ‘old-fashioned’. Participants believed that they were taken less seriously and lost out on opportunities for career progression as a result.

“By expressing one’s religious beliefs, you have the feeling that it may hinder your career progression. Working as a minority in a predominantly white organisation means they have certain stereotypes and displaying religious beliefs will often have a negative impact.”

Muslim participant

“I always feel different, many times misunderstood. A feeling of defiance on one hand, and a feeling of doom on the other.”

Jewish participant

Mistreatment

Some participants witnessed or directly experienced mockery, antagonism and offensive remarks being made about their religious beliefs. On several occasions, participants felt that such comments came from a place of ignorance and perpetrators often described their behaviour as a ‘joke’ which had been misunderstood.

“I have only told my very closest friends the depth of my beliefs because of the way the vast majority of the staff there have ridiculed religion so publicly and so viciously.”

Christian participant

“The only thing is not going well at my place of employment regarding my religion is the age old prejudice many have toward Jewish people. While I do not experience this prejudice a lot, it has surfaced at my current organization. Snide comments, rude remarks, and absolutely horrible religious jokes.”

Jewish participant

Exclusion and isolation

Some participants felt that upon sharing their beliefs, those around them became cold and distant. Whilst they may not overtly display prejudiced attitudes, employees felt that co-workers and clients liked them less after they learned about their religious beliefs or harboured resentment towards them due to their religious practices (such as taking time off for religious celebrations or praying during work hours). Several participants were subjected to exclusion from their co-workers, such as being left out of conversations or social plans, which left them to feel lonely and isolated at work.

“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.”

Hindu participant

“There has been a lot of clashes with other colleagues. They seem to think I’m shirking my duties because of my religious beliefs, this can get very tense and rude. I’ve had a lot of colleagues talk behind my back and segregate me because they see me as different.”

Buddhist participant

Comparison between religious groups

In this section, we present a breakdown of our quantitative and qualitative survey findings by religious group to identify trends and make comparisons between each group's experiences.

Breakdown of quantitative survey data

Celebrating religious festivals

Christian employees were most likely to feel that their employer and line manager were happy for them to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals, whilst Buddhist and Muslim employees were most likely to feel that both their line manager and employer were not happy for them to do so.

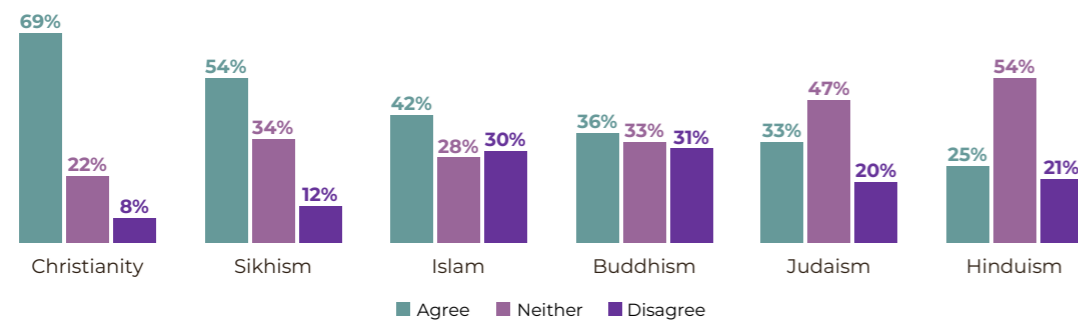


Chart 4: 'I feel my organisation is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals' (N = 6,315)

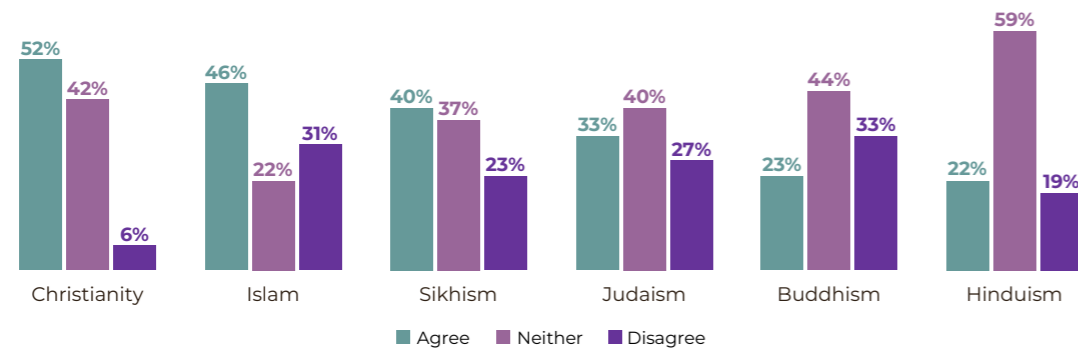


Chart 5: 'I feel my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate my religious festivals' (N = 6,315)

Christian employees were also less likely to have had a request for time off to celebrate religious festivals rejected without good reason. Almost a third of Muslim participants reported having a request to take time off for religious holidays rejected, compared to just 2% of Christian participants.

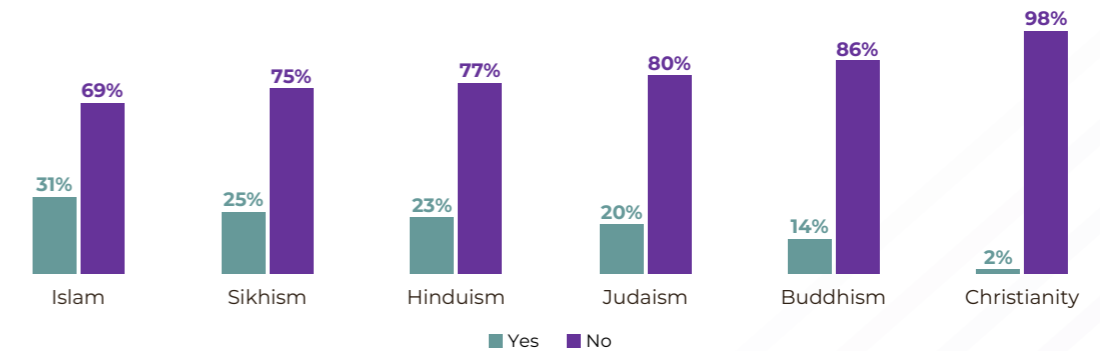


Chart 6: 'Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?' (N = 6,315)

An overwhelming majority of Muslim participants did not feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals that they celebrate at work. Furthermore, just under two-thirds of Sikh participants and half of Jewish participants also did not feel comfortable. Whilst Christian participants are most likely to feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work, only 37% feel comfortable doing so.

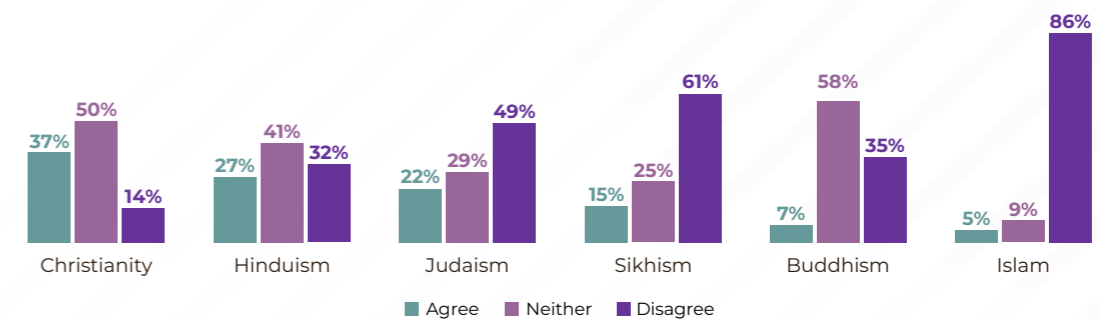


Chart 7: 'I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace' (N = 6,315)

Wearing religious dress and symbols

Of the 3,433 participants who wear religious dress or symbols, the majority do not do so at work. Although Muslim and Sikh participants were most likely to wear religious dress or symbols at work, over two-thirds did not do so.

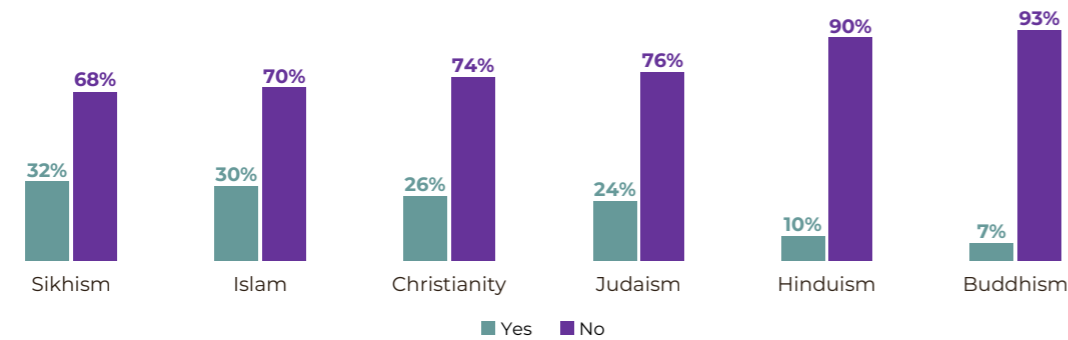


Chart 8: 'Do you wear religious dress at work?' (N = 3,433)

2,380 participants (38% of the total sample) worked for an organisation that imposed dress restrictions. As this is lower than the number that do not wear religious dress and symbols at work, this suggests that some participants choose not to wear religious dress or symbols, despite having the option to do so. Of those who worked for an organisation with a restrictive dress code, Jewish participants were also least likely to feel satisfied that restrictions were appropriate, proportionate and necessary.

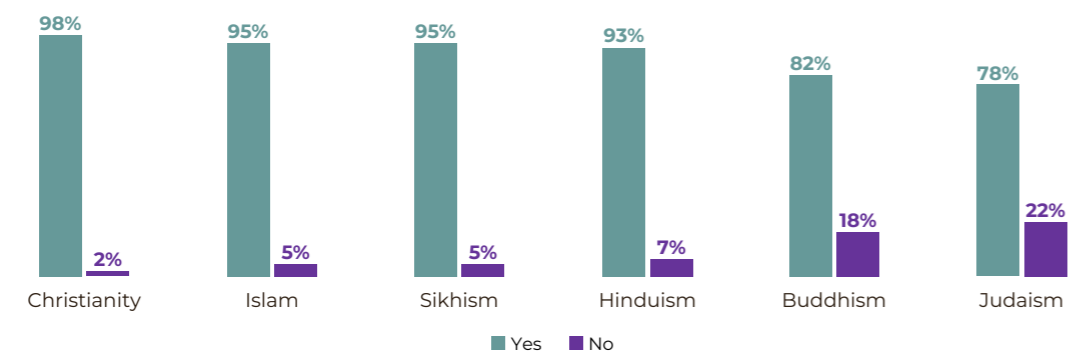


Chart 9: 'Do you feel there are good business reasons (behind your organisation's dress code which are proportionate, appropriate and necessary?)' (N = 2,380)

Across all religious groups, less than a third of participants felt comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols. Although Christian participants were most likely to feel comfortable, only 29% of participants agreed that they felt this way. Only 7% of Jewish participants felt comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols. Although no Buddhist participants felt comfortable, it should be noted that the sample of Buddhist participants who wore religious dress or symbols at work and were therefore eligible to answer this question was particularly low (N = 23).

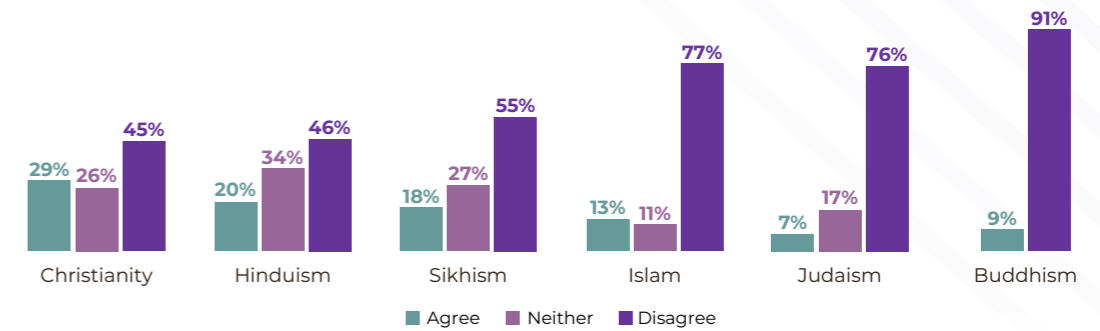


Chart 10: 'I feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols in the workplace' (N = 805)

Although no Buddhist participants felt comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols, the majority felt comfortable reporting an incident that involved their religious dress or symbols. Christian and Muslim participants were least likely to feel comfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress. Although Jewish participants were least likely to feel comfortable reporting this type of incident, almost half responded 'neither' to this statement.

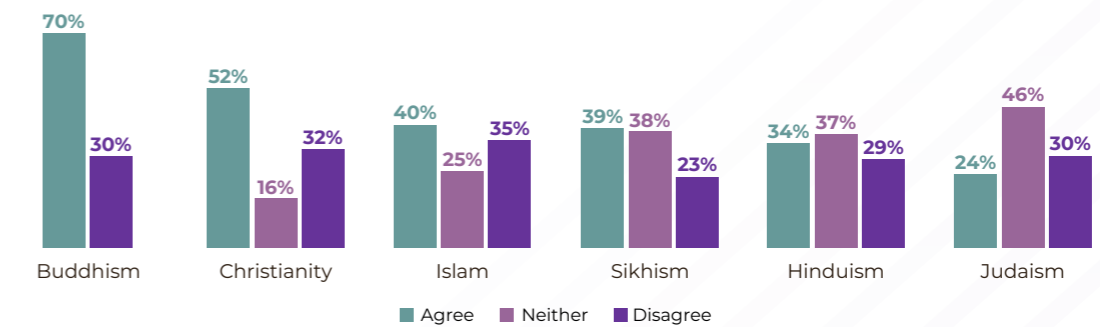


Chart 11: 'I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress or symbols' (N = 805)

Just under half of Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist participants felt that their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols. Conversely, just under half of Christian participants felt that their organisation could not do any more to make employees feel comfortable.

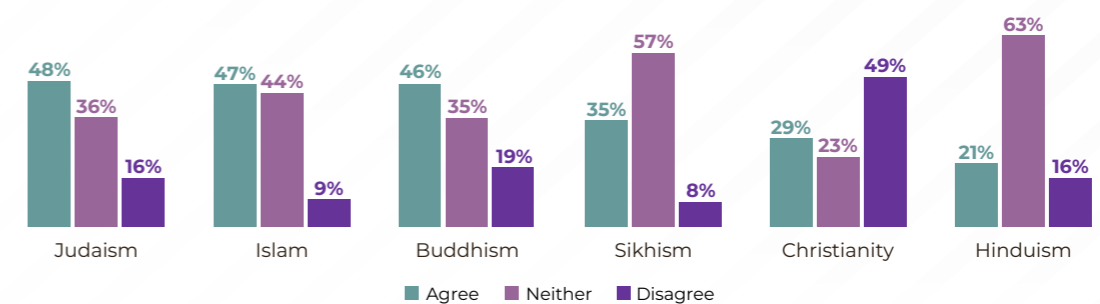


Chart 12: 'I feel my employer could do more to make me and/or others feel more comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols at work' (N = 6,315)

Breakdown of qualitative data

We carried out a content analysis of the focus group and interview data by religious group.

What are organisations doing well to support the expression of religious identity at work?

The below chart summarises the key themes mentioned by each religious group in relation to what their organisation was doing well to support the expression of their religious beliefs.

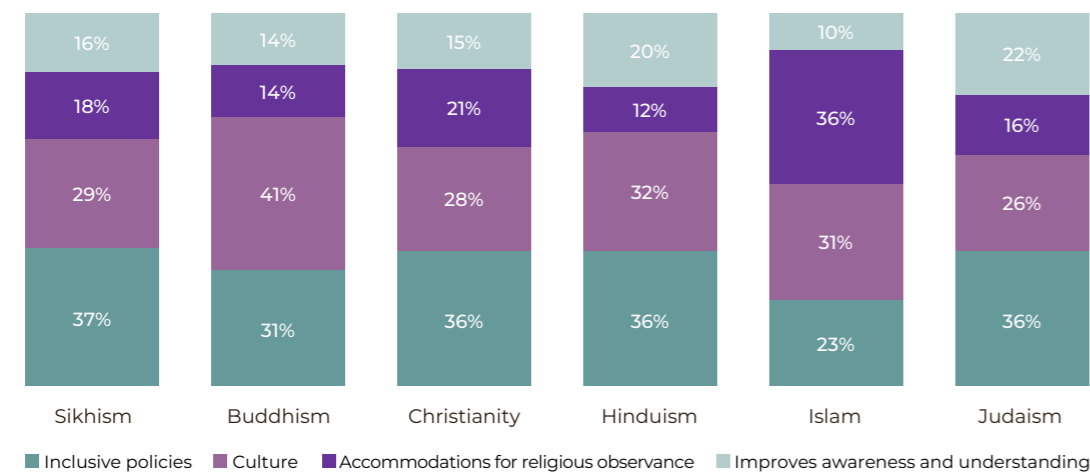


Chart 13: What are organisations doing well to support religious expression at work? (N = 829*)

Key findings >

- Muslim participants were less likely to feel that their organisation had inclusive policies in place (such as policies in relation to time off, dress codes and bullying and harassment). However, they were more likely to mention accommodations that their organisation made to make religious observance easier – such as offering time and facilities for prayer.
- Muslim participants were also least likely to feel that their organisation takes action to improve awareness and understanding around their religious beliefs.
- Buddhist participants were most likely to highlight the culture of their organisation as being diverse, open and inclusive.

* N = total number of coded responses, with responses indicating no support excluded.

What are the barriers to religious expression at work?

The below chart summarises the key themes mentioned by each religious group in relation to what barriers participants face at work that make it difficult to express their beliefs.

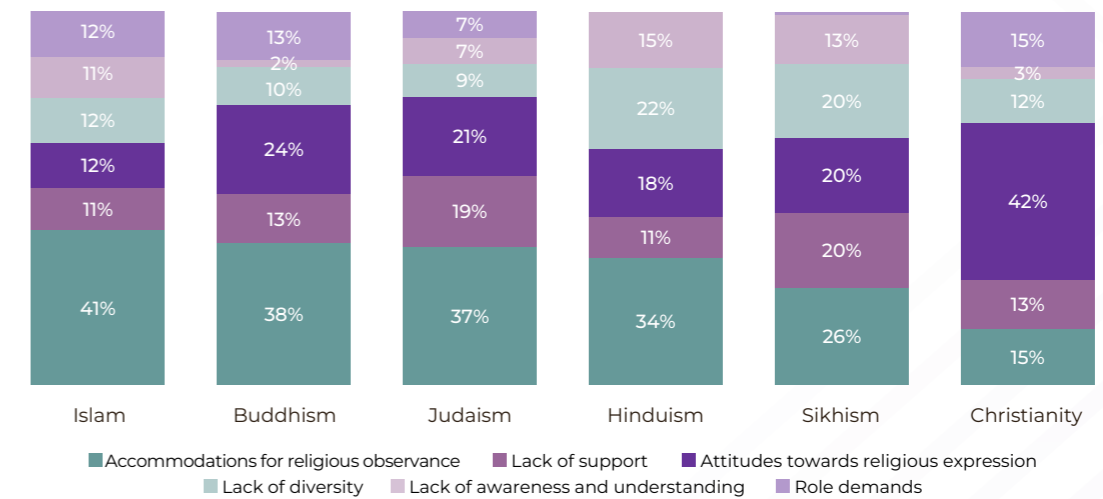


Chart 14: 'What are the barriers to religious expression at work?' (N = 401*)

Key findings >

- Christian participants were least likely to feel that accommodations for religious observance were an obstacle to religious expression. However, they were far more likely than any other group to feel attitudes towards religious expression was the main obstacle.
- Hindu and Sikh participants were most likely to be impacted by a lack of diversity and a lack of awareness and understanding, but unlikely to be negatively affected by role demands.

* N = total number of coded responses, with responses indicating no support excluded.

What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work?

The below chart summarises the impact that expression of religious beliefs at work had on each religious group.

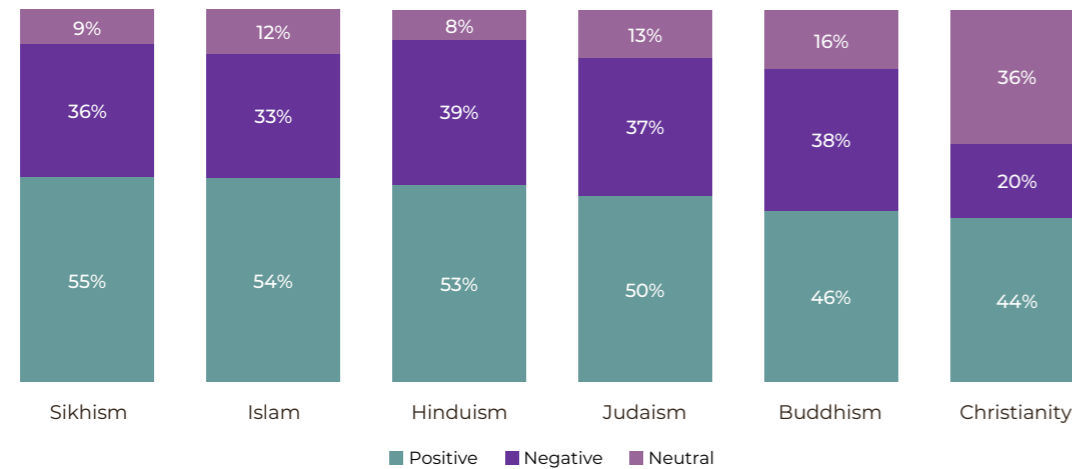


Chart 15: 'What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work?' (N = 518*)

Key findings >

- Whilst Christian participants were least likely to feel that sharing their beliefs had a positive impact, they were also least likely to feel it had led to negative outcomes. Christian participants were more likely than any other group to feel that sharing their beliefs had no impact on their experiences at work.

* N = total number of coded responses, with responses indicating no support excluded.

“Overall, Muslim participants seemed less comfortable expressing their religious identity at work”

Summary of findings

Overall, Christian employees seemed to feel better supported by their organisation in relation to taking time off for religious festivals and wearing religious dress or symbols at work compared to all other religious groups. Christian employees were also more likely to feel comfortable expressing these aspects of their religious identity at work. All other groups generally reported lower levels of support and felt less comfortable expressing their religious identity at work. However, overall, Muslim participants seemed less comfortable expressing their religious identity at work.

Although Christian participants were least likely to experience negative outcomes to the same extent as those with different religious beliefs, that is not to say their experiences are positive and the proportion of Christian participants who feel comfortable expressing their religious identity is still low. Furthermore, our qualitative findings suggest that Christians are more likely than other religious groups to feel that religion is a ‘taboo’ subject at work, that may cause conflict if discussed. Therefore, when trying to build religious inclusion at work, it is important that Christianity is not overlooked on account of having a large following within the UK and US.

Comparison between UK and US responses

Within this section, we draw on the findings of our quantitative and qualitative research to make gender comparisons.

“As US employees were more likely to feel that their organisation and line manager are happy for them to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals”

Breakdown of quantitative survey findings

Celebrating religious festivals

US employees were more likely to feel that both their organisation and line manager were happy for them to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals. This trend was consistent across all religious groups.

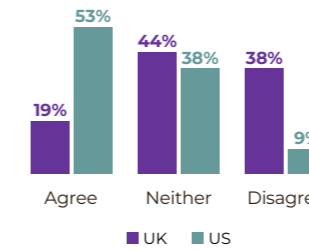


Chart 16: 'I feel my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals' (N = 6,315)

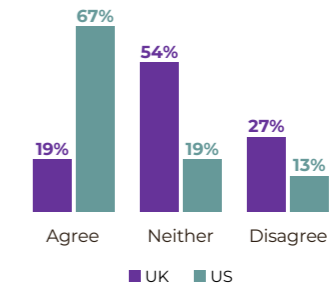


Chart 17: 'I feel my employer is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals'

As US employees were more likely to feel that their organisation and line manager were happy for them to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals, it is perhaps unsurprising that they are less likely to have such a request rejected. UK employees were more likely to have had a request to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals rejected across all religious groups apart from Christianity.

Whilst US participants appeared to feel better supported by their organisation in relation to taking time off for religious festivals, our findings suggest that they feel less comfortable expressing this aspect of their religious identity at work. UK participants were more likely to feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work and this finding was consistent across all religious groups.

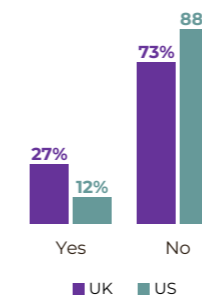


Chart 18: 'Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?' (N = 6,315)

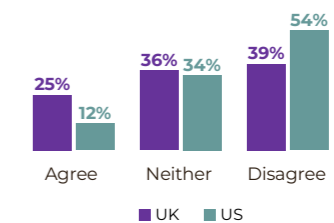


Chart 19: 'I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace' (N = 6,315)

Wearing religious dress and symbols

Most participants did not wear religious dress or symbols at work. However, US employees were more likely to do so, despite also being more likely to work for an organisation with a dress code involving appearance restrictions. Of the employees who worked for an organisation with a dress code that included appearance restrictions or requirements, US employees were more likely than UK employees to feel that restrictions were proportionate, appropriate and necessary.

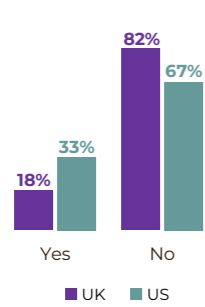


Chart 20: 'Do you wear religious dress at work?' (N = 3,433)

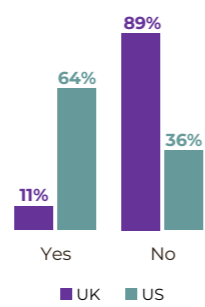


Chart 21: 'Does the dress code in your workplace/organisation include appearance restrictions or requirements?' (N = 6,315)

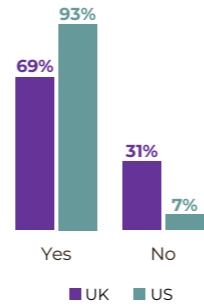


Chart 22: 'Do you feel there are good business reasons that are proportionate, (N = 2,380)

In line with our findings in relation to celebrating religious festivals, results indicated that US employees may feel better supported by their organisation in relation to wearing religious dress or symbols at work. US employees felt more comfortable to report an incident involving their religious dress or symbols and were far less likely to feel that their organisation could do more to make them feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols at work.

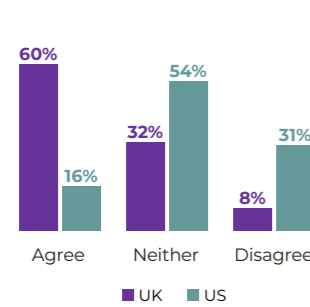


Chart 23: 'I feel my employer could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols' (N = 6,315)

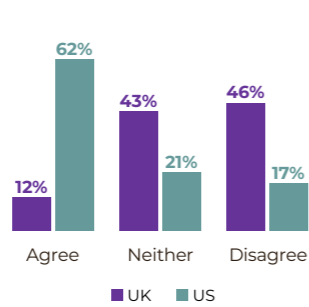


Chart 24: 'I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress or symbols' (N = 805)

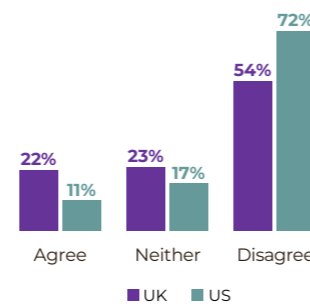


Chart 25: 'I feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols in the workplace' (N = 805)

Interestingly, although US employees were more likely to wear religious dress, they were less likely to feel comfortable doing so; despite being less likely to feel that their organisation could do any more to make them feel comfortable. This suggests that whilst US employees may be more satisfied with their organisation's support in this area, other factors may lead them to feel uncomfortable expressing this aspect of their identity at work.

Breakdown of qualitative survey findings

To use our qualitative survey data to make comparisons across religious groups, we conducted a content analysis and recorded a count of the number of times themes were mentioned by each country. We then calculated the proportion each theme mention represented out of the total number of all theme mentions for each country.

What are organisations doing well to support religious expression at work?

US participants were more likely to refer to inclusive policies within their organisation, such as: policies and procedures to make it easier to take time off for religious festivals; dress code policies which allowed religious dress; and protective policies in relation to bullying and harassment. However, UK participants were more likely to report that their organisation makes accommodations for religious observance, such as providing prayer facilities and allowing flexibility within schedules for religious observance.

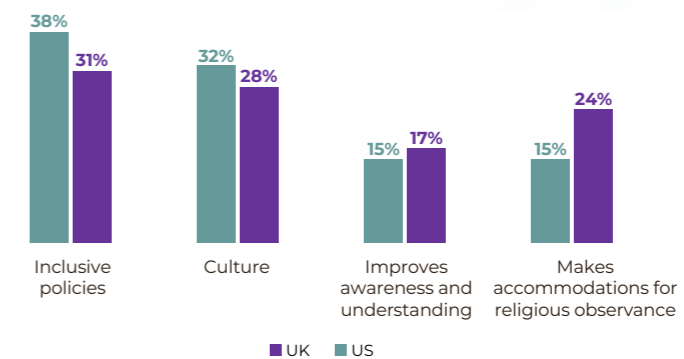


Chart 26: What are organisations doing well to support religious expression at work? (N = 829*)

What are the barriers to religious expression at work?

Our qualitative survey results found that UK employees are more likely to encounter a lack of awareness and understanding and do not always receive the adjustments they need for religious observance. However, the proportion of US participants who reported challenges in relation to discussing their beliefs at work was double that of those in the UK.

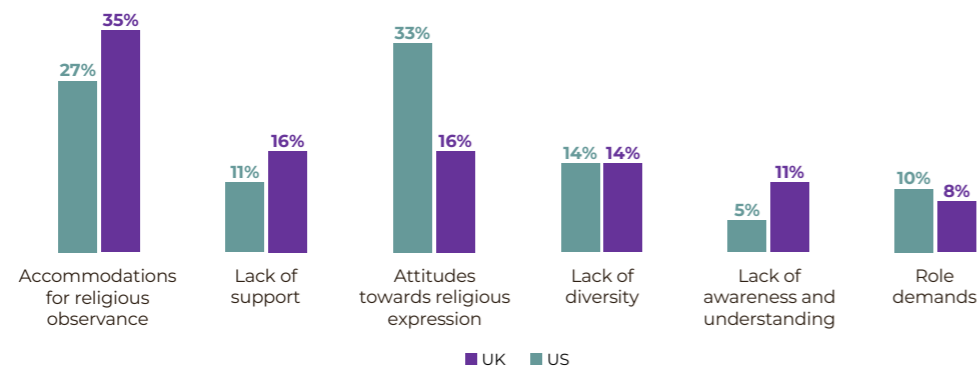


Chart 27: What are the barriers to religious expression at work? (N = 401*)

What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work?

A similar number of participants in the UK and US had positive experiences when they expressed their religious beliefs at work. However, UK employees were slightly more likely to have a negative experience, whilst US employees were slightly more likely to feel that expressing their beliefs had no impact on their experiences at work.

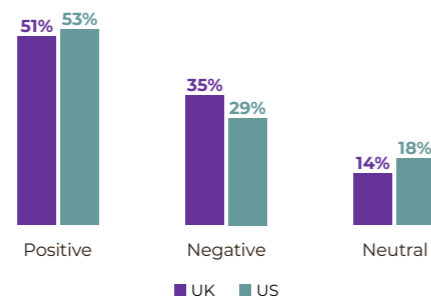


Chart 28: What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work? (N = 518*)

Summary

Overall, US employees are more likely to feel supported by their organisation to express aspects of their religious identity through wearing religious dress and symbols and celebrating religious festivals. However, interestingly, US employees are less likely to feel comfortable overtly expressing these aspects of identity at work, such as by discussing religious festivals or wearing religious dress.

Findings from our qualitative data suggest this may be because US employees are more likely to feel that they should avoid the topic of religion at work. US employees may feel less comfortable overtly expressing their religious identity if they feel at risk of causing offence or instigating conflict between themselves and those with opposing views. On the other hand, UK employees are more likely to encounter a lack of awareness and understanding and may struggle to get the adjustments they need to enable religious observance.

Therefore, whilst US employees may be more likely to receive the support they need to practice their religious beliefs, they may feel less comfortable when it comes to openly expressing their beliefs.

Gender comparisons

Within this section, we draw on the findings of our quantitative research to make gender comparisons. As less than 1% of the total sample identified as a gender other than male or female, we compared only male and female responses to make meaningful comparisons.

Breakdown of quantitative survey findings

Celebrating religious festivals

Women were less likely to agree that their organisation or line manager were happy for them to take time off to celebrate religious festivals. However, men and women were equally as likely to have had a request to take time off for religious festivals rejected without good reason. As well as feeling less supported to take time off to celebrate religious festivals, women were also less likely to feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals they celebrate at work.

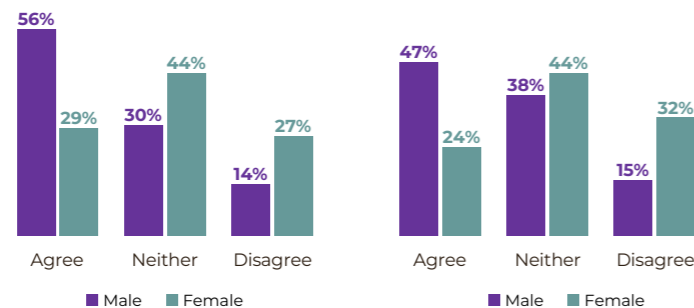


Chart 29: 'I feel my employer is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals' (N = 6,278)

Chart 30: 'I feel my line manager is happy with me taking annual leave to celebrate religious festivals' (N = 6,278)

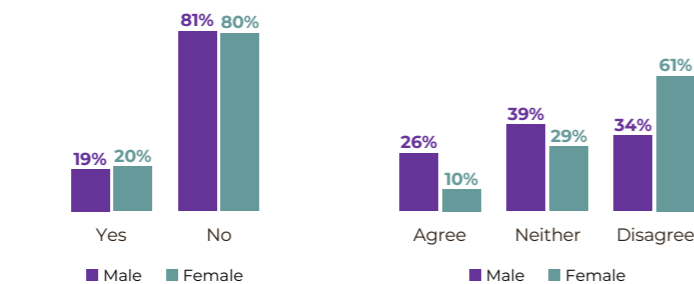


Chart 31: 'Have you ever felt that time off for religious holidays and/or festivals was rejected without good business reason?' (N = 6,278)

Chart 32: 'I feel comfortable discussing the religious festivals I celebrate in the workplace' (N = 6,278)

Wearing religious dress and symbols

We observed differences between male and female responses in relation to wearing religious dress and symbols at work. However, these differences were less pronounced than those relating to celebrating religious festivals at work.

Men were slightly more likely to wear religious dress and symbols at work than women. Although there were no observable differences between how comfortable men and women felt doing so, women were more likely to feel comfortable reporting an incident involving their religious dress than men.

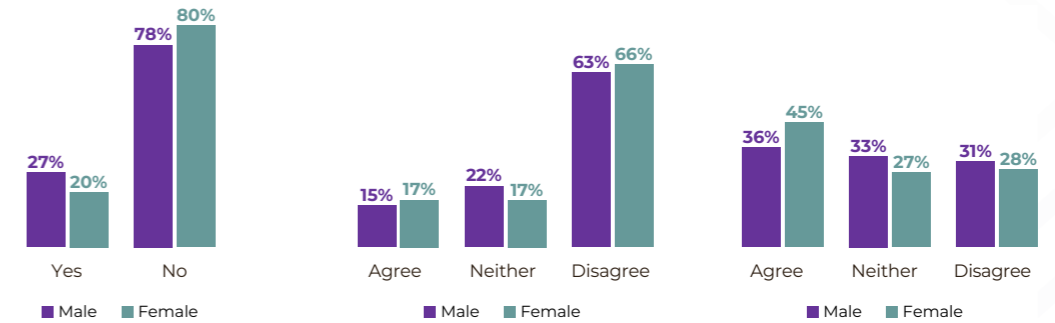


Chart 32: 'Do you wear religious dress or symbols in the workplace?' (N = 3,412)

Chart 33: 'I feel comfortable wearing religious dress in the workplace' (N = 805)

Chart 34: 'I feel comfortable reporting an incident that involves my religious dress or symbols' (N = 805)

Although men were more likely to wear religious dress and symbols at work, they were also more likely to feel that their organisation should be doing more to make them feel comfortable doing so. However, women were slightly more likely to work for an organisation with a restrictive dress code. Women were also more likely to feel dissatisfied with this dress code.

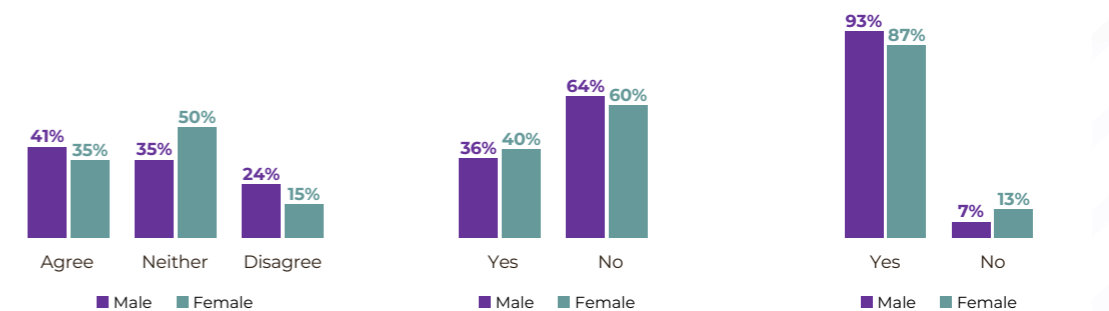


Chart 35: 'I feel my employer could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols' (N = 6,278)

Chart 36: 'Does the dress code in your workplace/organisation include appearance restrictions or requirements?' (N = 6,278)

Chart 37: 'Do you feel there are good business reasons that are proportionate, appropriate and necessary?' (N = 2,370)

Breakdown of qualitative survey findings

What are organisations doing well to support the expression of religious identity at work?

Men were slightly more likely to mention that their organisation had a diverse and inclusive culture which made accommodations for religious observance. Women were slightly more likely to feel that their organisation took steps to raise awareness and had inclusive policies in place.



Chart 38: 'What are organisations doing well to support the expression of religious identity at work?' (N = 826*)

What are the barriers to religious expression at work?

There were no noticeable differences between male and female responses.

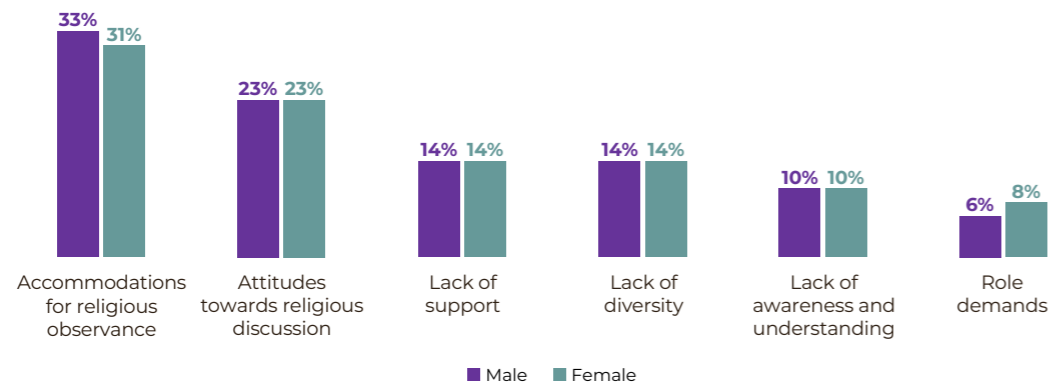


Chart 39: 'What are the barriers to religious expression at work?' (N= 391*)

What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work?

Men were more likely than women to feel that expressing their religious beliefs has had no impact on their experiences at work, whereas women were more likely to feel that expressing their beliefs had some impact – although this may be positive or negative.

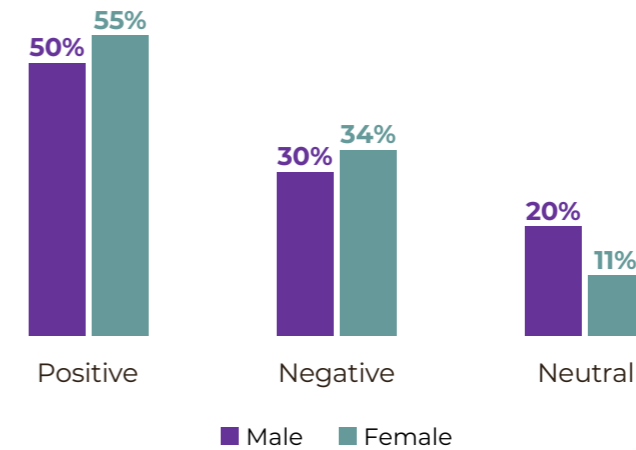


Chart 40: 'What is the impact of expressing religious beliefs at work?' (N = 518*)

Summary

Overall, women experienced poorer outcomes in relation to celebrating religious festivals. Women tended to feel far less supported in relation to taking time off for religious festivals and were less comfortable discussing the festivals they celebrate at work. However, when it comes to wearing religious dress and symbols, men and women experience challenges in different areas and these differences were much smaller.

Within our qualitative data, we generally did not observe any large differences between men and women's experiences of expressing their religious identity at work. However, women were more likely to feel that expressing their religious identity had some form of impact on their experiences at work, although this impact may be positive or negative.

Therefore, overall, gender differences were less consistent and less pronounced in comparison to the difference between UK and US responses. Both men and women may experience challenges within different areas of religious expression.

What can organisations do to support religious expression?

As part of our qualitative survey, we asked participants to share their ideas for what their organisation could do differently to support them in expressing their religious beliefs at work. This section summarises the feedback that participants gave us, which will form the basis of our recommendations within the concluding section of this report.

Improving awareness and understanding

Learning and development

Several participants expressed a desire for more training within their organisation. First, participants felt that their managers should have a better awareness around the traditions and practices related to different beliefs. Second, participants felt that the wider workforce should attend sessions that help people better understand their own biases and how these may lead them to behave in an exclusionary way at work. Participants felt that some people within the workforce need a better understanding of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, to avoid comments or jokes being made that are unintentionally offensive.

Awareness-raising initiatives

Many participants also felt that their organisation should be doing more on a regular basis to raise awareness around different religious beliefs, traditions and practices. Participants made suggestions such as diversity days and inviting people to deliver informal seminars about their religious beliefs. However, the most commonly suggested way to improve awareness was by celebrating religious holidays. Participants felt that religious holidays presented a valuable opportunity to raise awareness around different beliefs in ways such as sharing well-wishes, providing employees with more information around how and why the holiday is observed and invite them to share their celebrations at work.

Challenging inappropriate behaviour

Protective policies

Participants felt that, as a minimum, their organisation should have clear policies in place which state that the organisation will not tolerate discrimination, bullying or harassment of individuals on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

Take action against mistreatment

Whilst many organisations had policies in place to address bullying and harassment on religious grounds, such policies were not always enforced. Several participants had witnessed inappropriate comments about religious beliefs go unchallenged and felt that managers within their organisation should be doing more to publicly challenge and discipline such behaviour.

Accommodations for religious observance

Prayer facilities

Several employees reported that their organisation had no prayer facilities. However, some organisations had provided facilities that employees did not feel were fit for purpose. Therefore, employees felt that organisations could do more to make sure that the facilities are clean, quiet and private spaces where employees are confident that they will not be disturbed.

Flexibility for religious observance

Many participants expressed a desire for greater flexibility within their work schedules for religious observance. Several participants would like protected time to pray within their working day. Participants would also appreciate flexibility around their work pattern to accommodate religious observance. For example, some Muslim employees would appreciate flexibility with working hours (such as working from home or taking an extended lunch break) during Ramadan and accommodations being made on a Friday to enable them to attend congregational worship services. Jewish and Christian participants would also appreciate changes to their scheduled days off each week to enable them to observe their days of rest.

Time off for religious festivals

Several employees would like their organisation to offer more flexibility in relation to taking time off to celebrate religious festivals. At present, bank or public holidays fall in line with key Christian festivals meaning that many Christian employees receive guaranteed time off on these dates outside of their annual leave balance. Those who do not celebrate Christian festivals would appreciate the flexibility to work on these dates and take this time off to celebrate their religious festivals or would appreciate a religious leave allocation. Some employees, however, simply wish to have more confidence that a request to take time off to celebrate or observe their religious festivals will be accepted. This includes some Christian employees who do not receive guaranteed time off for bank holidays and are likely to have such a request rejected due to the high volume of other employees who have requested the same dates as annual leave.

Religious dress and symbols

A relatively small number of people specified that they would like their organisation to allow people to wear religious dress or symbols. This may be because only a minority of participants feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols at work in any case. Many people also feel that religion is a 'taboo' subject and so may feel apprehensive about expressing their faith overtly in this way. However, a larger number of people cited ambiguous or restrictive policies relating to the wearing of religious dress and symbols to be a barrier to religious expression within their organisation. Even when wearing religious dress or symbols was not explicitly prohibited, employees felt that doing so may be deemed as unprofessional.

Recognising dietary requirements

Some participants would also like to see organisations considering religious restrictions around food and drink when providing staff lunches or arranging meetings and social events. Several participants found that their organisation sometimes overlooked their religious dietary requirements when arranging catering for meetings or events, which sometimes led to there being no suitable food options for staff with certain religious beliefs. Some participants who abstain from drinking alcohol in line felt uncomfortable attending social events that are centred around alcohol (such as a team social event at a pub) and would appreciate the opportunity to attend more inclusive events that do not involve alcohol.

Embracing diversity and inclusion

Increase diversity

Several participants felt that their organisation should do more to increase diversity. Some participants felt that there was a lack of general diversity within their organisation, particularly in terms of race and religion, whereas some noticed that there was a lack of representation for people who shared their specific beliefs. Some employees felt that their senior management team lacked diversity and felt that increasing religious diversity at this level would help people feel more confident to express their religious beliefs at work. Employees would like to see their managers recognise the lack of diversity within parts of their organisation and would like their organisation to develop a plan for improvement.

Develop an open and inclusive culture

Whilst some participants would like to see a more diverse workforce, it was also recognised that organisations should build a more open and inclusive culture to help different groups thrive at work. Whilst some participants suggested that initiatives such as religious network groups would provide opportunities for discussion with like-minded people, many people would like to see these types of discussions extend more widely across the organisation. Many participants would like their organisation to have a more open culture whereby they can celebrate, rather than suppress, their religious identity and express their beliefs without fear of retribution.

Recommendations

Our research has demonstrated that although there are many positive benefits to expressing religious beliefs at work, there are barriers which prevent people from doing so. Many people are not receiving the support they need to express or practice their religious beliefs at work. Religion is often overlooked within diversity and inclusion strategies, which may lead to managers being unaware of the accommodations that their employees may need to express or observe their beliefs. In an organisation where religious expression is perceived to be discouraged, employees may feel unable to communicate their needs to their employer.

Those who have shared their religious beliefs at work have experienced a variety of outcomes. When working within a diverse organisation with an open and inclusive culture, outcomes are often positive. Within these organisations, relationships between co-workers are improved as people are interested in learning more about religious beliefs and offer support and encouragement to those who would like to observe or express their beliefs at work. However, our research has highlighted that a large number of people do not feel comfortable expressing their religious beliefs at work. When an organisation lacks this sense of inclusion and openness, employees may fear the consequences of expressing their religious beliefs, or face judgement and exclusion if they decide to disclose their beliefs.

We propose the following recommendations to overcome barriers to religious expression at work and create the conditions for religious expression to result in positive outcomes:

1

> Review existing policies and procedures.

As a minimum, organisations should have policies in place which make it clear that harassment on the grounds of any protected characteristic, including religious beliefs, will not be tolerated. A clear procedure for reporting harassment should also be available to all. However, organisations should also review their wider policies and procedures through the lens of religious inclusion to understand where changes could be made. Reviews should be carried out by an individual who has the necessary expertise and knowledge about the beliefs and practices of those from different religious groups.

Organisations should clearly state the level of religious expression that is permitted, in relation to dress codes, displaying religious symbols and artefacts and engaging in religious discussion. Any restrictions should be clearly justified and openly communicated with employees.

2

> Take an individualised approach.

Managers should collaborate with each employee on an individual basis to establish the support and accommodations they may need for religious observance. Trust and psychological safety should be developed within the manager-employee relationship to ensure that employees feel comfortable approaching their manager with any requests and concerns.

Each individual will bring their own personal experiences and preferences in relation to how they choose to express their identity at work. Whilst some people would like the opportunity to express their religious beliefs at work and engage in discussion, others prefer to keep their religious identity private and it is important that this choice is respected. An employee's needs are also likely to vary depending on their level of religiosity and accommodations that are effective for one employee may be insufficient or unnecessary for another employee who is affiliated with the same religion.

3

> Develop skills and knowledge.

It is important that organisations assess the current level of knowledge around how to develop religious inclusion, examining this by job level and function.

There should be a clear, shared understanding within the organisation of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour regarding religion. This would help to reduce the number of occasions where people who have a faith feel offended by comments, judgements and behaviours of others.

Training is needed for managers so that they can understand how they can support members of their team in relation to religious observance and expression at work (for example, being aware of the adjustments that can be made to an individual's role or working pattern).

All staff should be equipped with the skills to enable them to identify and effectively challenge inappropriate or exclusive behaviour (this skill is vital at a management level).

One-off religious awareness initiatives that are perceived to be part of a 'tick-box' exercise are likely to disengage employees. Making efforts to raise awareness on a regular basis (for example, through celebrating religious festivals or sharing well wishes) can create opportunities for discussion, which in turn can increase knowledge and understanding of different religious beliefs. However, it is important not to overlook certain religious groups when planning and delivering these types of awareness-raising initiatives.

Understanding and reducing bias regarding religion will also be necessary. Stereotyping and judgements being made about people who have a faith was one of the key obstacles identified to religious expression in the workplace. It is important, therefore, that when organisations are conducting programmes on diversity, inclusion and fairness, they need to ensure that bias against people who have a faith is covered also. Employees should be aware of their own potential for bias and should understand how they can foster religious inclusion.

4

> Develop an inclusive culture.

For learning and development initiatives to be successful, an organisation needs to create the right conditions for employees to apply what they have learned. It is therefore vital that the organisations commit to developing an inclusive culture, where people are encouraged to be their authentic selves and support others to do so, through remaining open-minded, empathetic and non-judgemental. To encourage more openness around the topic of religion, organisations need to build a psychologically safe environment where people do not feel at risk of exclusion if they are to share their beliefs, and instead experience a sense of belonging.

Developing an inclusive culture is not a simple process. It requires organisations to listen to their employees views and needs, and make a long-term commitment to action as a result. Inclusion should be at the heart of organisations' values and feed into the interactions and decisions that take place on a daily basis.

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