

| Myths & Facts |

**Myth:**

All Muslims are Arabs and all Arabs are Muslim

Find the fact...

Fact:

Muhammad lived in Mecca (in present day Saudi Arabia); thus the first Muslims were Arab. Since Islam began to spread with Muhammad's revelation in 610, Muslims have spread throughout the world. There are currently 1.3 billion Muslims in the world and 300 million Arabs. Most but not all Arabs are Muslim: in some Arab countries (for example, Lebanon) the percentage of Muslims is as low as 60%, but in countries such as Jordan, Egypt or Saudi Arabia the figure is as high as 90% - 99%. The Arabs who are not Muslim are Christian, Druze, etc. Only twenty percent of all Muslims live in Arabic countries. The vast majority of Muslims live in places as diverse as Indonesia, China, Europe and United States. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world with about 200 million Muslims¹¹. Being Muslim is a religious affiliation, while being Arab is an ethnic background.

Find the myth...

Myth:

According to the *Qur'an*, men are superior to women.

Find the fact...

Fact:

The *Qur'an* does not state that men are superior to women but it does say that men and women are different, and as a group have certain traits in common. This is in part physiological and part cultural. However, the *Qur'an* and the Prophetic Traditions (sunna/hadith) have throughout history been interpreted by men living in patriarchal societies and some misconceptions have emerged. Only 5-6 verses of the whole *Qur'an* form the basis for the misconception of men's general superiority to women - either because the verses have been taken out of context or because they simply have been interpreted in the most negative manner. Today women in many Muslim countries use a more positive interpretation of these verses in their battle against discriminatory laws and customs.

Find the myth...

HANDOUT

| Myths & Facts |



Myth:

Men with beards and women with scarves are the most devout Muslims.

Find the fact...

Fact:

Traditionally the amount of clothing that a woman wraps herself up in has been regarded as a barometer for her devoutness and modesty. Even today, many Muslims – men, women and children – find it hard to believe and accept that women without headscarves who wear modest European clothing instead of typical Arabic, African or Asian clothing do indeed read the *Qur'an* and pray every day, fast during the Ramadan and undertake their pilgrimage to Mecca.

In recent times, some Muslim women have taken to wearing the headscarf as a political statement, claiming their right to dress as they choose and to affirm their identity in the face of prejudice.

While the beard is a tradition from the Prophet, it is neither compulsory nor part of a Muslim man's dress code. Sometimes Muslim men wear a beard as a way to identify themselves as a Muslim, or as a means to command respect, as they grow older.

In many ways, the myth is upheld within the Muslim community, perhaps more than outside it. It should be emphasised, however, that a person's devoutness is measured by one's actions and sincere devotion towards God. It is about what is inside rather than what is on the outside.

Find the myth...

Myth:

Islam is not compatible with Western values.

Find the fact...

Fact:

The concept of "Western" values is not in any way comparable to any specific set of religious values. As humans in a globalized world, we are all influenced by many different cultures and traditions. The same goes for the societies we have built up over centuries which have been influenced by different religious and cultural traditions. For example, one fundamental "Western" value is the acceptance of diversity and freedom of expression. Respect for diversity is also found within Islam amongst many other common values, demonstrated by the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who are well-integrated and successful in Western societies. More extreme interpretations of any religion could be found to be incompatible with "Western" values, and it is important not to confuse cultural traditions with religious teachings.

Find the myth...

| Myths & Facts |



Myth:

Muslim divorce laws are unfair to women.

Find the fact...

Fact:

In Islam, a woman can seek divorce simply by applying to the relevant authorities; she does not need to establish adultery or abuse. There are sufficient grounds if she no longer wants to be with her husband. As for the custody of children, Islam suggests that it should always be decided by appropriate (Islamic) courts who would take into consideration the welfare of the children first.

In reality, however, it is easier for a man to obtain divorce than for a woman as within many cultures women are in a less powerful position. Patriarchal structures often dominate the public and private domain. This does not reflect the rights determined by Islam, however the two often become synonymous and inadvertently dictate how a woman who seeks divorce is perceived.

Find the myth...

Myth:

In Islam, women are not allowed to work.

Find the fact...

Fact:

Islam neither prohibits nor forces a woman to work and earn money. A woman is allowed to work, run her own business and keep her own money and belongings. Culturally many women have tended to stay at home and bring up their families, and at the same time, there are numerous examples of successful Muslim women in a diverse range of professional fields. Numerous networks of Muslim professional women exist as proof that in Islam women are indeed working.

Find the myth...

HANDOUT

| Myths & Facts |



Myth:

Islam was spread by the Sword

Find the fact...

Fact:

At various points in history, for political and socio economic reasons, war and violence has been used to convert people from one faith to another. In the Middle Ages, for example, a major purpose of the Crusades was to 'convert the infidel' to Christianity. Examples can be found throughout history from all the major faiths, including Judaism which is not a proselytising faith. Islam is no exception and at certain points in history, Islam has spread during war – even at the time of the Prophet and later with the Muslim invasion of India, for example. However, Islam is not a religion of violence any more than any other religion is a religion of violence and in many parts of the world, over the centuries, Islam has been spread by peaceful means such as in Indonesia which has the largest Muslim population today. There, Islam was spread by merchants.

Find the myth...

Myth:

All Muslims across the world support terrorism.

Find the fact...

Fact:

Since the events of 9/11, much has been made about Islam and terrorism not least because a number of terrorist atrocities have been perpetrated by a handful of Muslims claiming to act in the name of their religion.

However, as with the earlier myth about the *Qur'an* teaching violence, Muslims are no more likely to be engaged in terrorism than those from other religions. Because of the scale of events such as 9/11 and the global impact they have, it is easy for myths to be perpetuated and accepted as being the norm.

However as the *Qur'an* teaches, to kill a person is to kill the whole world, a teaching that has been reiterated by many, many different Islamic scholars across the world to condemn any act of terrorism perpetrated by Islam and to condemn those engaged in such activities.