

# Sacrifices in the face of the pandemic: Fit testing and facial hair for Muslim healthcare professionals

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- ▶ **Background:** During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workers were asked to clean-shave their facial hair in order to comply with PPE regulations. This proposed a challenge for Muslim male healthcare workers: keeping a beard is considered obligatory by all four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (2); and is closely tied with many muslim's identity.
- ▶ **Method:** We surveyed 34 healthcare workers. They varied in level from medical student to consultant and worked across 19 trusts.
- ▶ **Results:** Our results found that 35% of respondents clean shaved in order to pass their fit test. 32% felt forced to shave by their trust. Only 25% of respondees felt that their trust had alternatives such as hoods. 45% of respondees missed out on learning opportunities due to not wishing to clean shave. Below are comments from participants regarding how they felt at the time: 'Felt victimised' and 'No respect for religious beliefs or any support. No intention to help or provide solutions/alternatives. Horrible experience.'
- ▶ **Discussion:** It is commonly accepted under Islamic law that in necessity , exceptions can be made with regards to issues such as keeping a beard (1). However, it seems that many NHS trusts failed to recognise the impact that clean-shaving may have on their muslim staff, nor did they appreciate the sacrifice. Too few trusts offered alternatives such as hoods. We hope that going into Winter, NHS trusts are better prepared with alternatives. Greater awareness is needed of the importance a beard plays for Muslim men, so trusts may better offer support and gratitude.

## References

- ▶ 1. Nadwi A. Two Rulings Related to Prayers & Beards During the Covid -19 Pandemic - Cambridge Islamic College [Internet]. Cambridgeislamiccollege.org. 2020 [cited 2 December 2020]. Available from: <https://www.cambridgeislamiccollege.org/two-rulings-related-to-prayers-beards-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
- ▶ 2. Ibn Adam M. Ruling on Growing a Beard and Moustache [Internet]. Darul Iftaa. 2020 [cited 2 December 2020]. Available from: <https://daruliftaa.com/miscellaneous/ruling-on-growing-a-beard-and-moustache/>