

Veil exercise

Aim:

To explore discrimination, exclusion and inclusion.

Resources:

Seven large scarfs that can be draped over a volunteer's head, obscuring their vision.

Description:

This experiential exercise enables participants to see and feel what it is like to be a young person when exposed to extremist ideologies –and to explore what may help to counteract emotions and ideas associated with extremism.

Method

The facilitator reads out a series of seven statements and participants are asked to place a veil over a volunteer participant after each statement. Once all seven veils have been placed over the volunteer, the second set of statements is read out, and after each statement, a veil is removed. At the end, the volunteer is asked to share her/his experience and others are asked to reflect upon this.

Scenario 1.

Yasmin is a 22-year old working woman who is single and lives with her parents.

First set of statements:

- Today I come home from work and my mother tells me someone pulled her headscarf off and told her she didn't belong in this country. I feel hurt and angry.
- I go to work after the terrorist bombing incident and my colleagues are talking about this. When I enter the room, they all become silent. I feel confused.
- When I hear the news on television, I understand that they blame my parents' country for this bombing incident and are now going to bomb the city my parents come from. I feel very angry and feel there is no justice.
- I have been thinking about wearing a hijab and choose to wear it because it is the right time for me. I notice the looks of hatred I get when I walk down the street. I feel isolated and that I don't belong.
- I go online and start chatting with other people who are like me and feel they, as well as Muslims across the world, are being victimised. I feel anger at the oppression Muslims are facing.
- My parents tell me that they don't want me to wear a hijab as it is not safe. They also tell me that I spend too much time in my own room and don't talk to them. I feel they don't accept me and don't know me any longer.
- I talk to a girl who is in Syria and is married to one of the 'freedom fighters'. I begin to think that I want to do the same. I feel frightened and feel I'm losing control over my life.

Second set of statements

- **My mother comes home and tells me her hijab was pulled off, but a few people who were there at the time helped her and called the police. I feel proud of the community.**
- **After the terrorist bombing incident in my country, I go to work and my colleagues who were talking about it become silent. Later on, I talk about the issue at lunch and explain how the people who carried out the bombings are not accepted as Muslims and they are criminals. I feel listened to and accepted.**
- **I hear the news and find out they are planning to bomb my parents' country for the bombing incident. I organize a petition and get thousands of people to sign it, including people at work. I feel I am helping to make a difference.**
- **I decide to wear the headscarf and before I do this I start discussing this with my family, friends and colleagues. I also start a small campaign called 'see me, not my headscarf'. I feel empowered and in control of my life.**
- **I go online and start chatting and hear that Muslims across the world are being victimised. I speak to my family and friends and get a more balanced view and understand that all communities have oppressors and victims. It is a human rights issue. I feel more informed about the complexity of situations.**
- **Local NGO has decided to tackle the problem of increasing segregation between Muslims and non-Muslims. They organize an environmental project to bring all communities together. I feel part of my community and involved.**
- **I hear how ISIS is recruiting young women and I find out real stories about how these women are mistreated and oppressed and let other young women know. I create a safe environment for young women to discuss these issues. I feel I am making a difference to the lives of others.**

Scenario 2:

Pascal is 19 years old and studying at college. He lives in a suburb, which has many diverse communities including refugees.

- **I am studying at college and recently I found out from my friends that these foreign students have been given a special prayer room. I feel excluded and left out.**
- **When I walk in my neighbourhood, I notice these foreign students standing in street corners speaking in their own language. I feel unsafe.**
- **I hear on the news that thousands of refugees are on their way to my country. Our country will have to spend all this extra money on them. What about our people? I feel angry.**
- **My brother applied for a job and didn't get it because they gave the job to one of them.**
- **These foreign boys are after our girls and keep their own women covered up and indoors. It makes me feel sick and angry.**
- **I meet a group of people at college who think like me and are really annoyed at these immigrants. It makes me feel stronger.**

- We have decided to start approaching their women and harass them. They will know what we feel like when they talk to our women. I feel in control of my country.

Second set of statements:

- The college publicise the opening of an inclusive 'open to all' contemplation room and I find out that I can use this space too. I tell my friends. It makes me feel that my college has thought about me as well.
- Local youth workers in my neighbourhood are forming football teams and I notice that some of these people who are hanging about in street corners are great players. They really want to win the football tournaments just like I do and make our neighbourhood feel proud of us. I feel that we are more similar than I thought.
- One of the immigrant boys in our football team invites me to his home; I don't want to go because I heard their houses are smelly and unclean. I like him and decide to go and I can't believe how hospitable and kind the whole family is. I taste food that I have never tasted before and get to know the rest of the family, including his sisters. I feel I am trusted and respected.
- My brother confronts the immigrant that got the job and finds out he has been living in this country for three generations. My brother also finds out that he had applied for ten other jobs in the last six months, which he didn't get and has a university degree which my brother doesn't have. I feel this is fair.
- I go to the house of my football friend and I find out that one of his sisters is very good at maths. She is at the same college as me and is a few years older. She offers to help me with maths once a week. I feel valued and didn't expect to learn from someone from a different culture.
- I hear about a group of students at college who don't like immigrants and they want to take action. They invite me to join. I choose not to. I feel my mind is open to new experiences and people.
- I talk with a few people from the football group about how we need to do more things together so that we get to know about each other. We decide to speak to the local