

## Fact Sheet

### Examples of Incidences and Issues that Have Impacted Students of or Who are Perceived to Be Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Muslim Background During Times of Crisis

Beginning with the onset of the Gulf War in 1990 when Iraq attacked Kuwait and the U.S. became involved in the conflict, there was a subsequent rise in harassment and incidences of discrimination in public and private schools around the nation. Following 9/11 and continuing through the last decade, with the rise in terrorism and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, students of Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim background have continued to experience similar problems. The following is a list of some of the most prevalent issues:

1. Students of all ages were confused about whom they should hate; some viewed any child of Middle Eastern or Muslim background – or their parents - as “the enemy.”
2. Teachers who encouraged support for American troops exhibited little or no regard or sensitivity to students of Middle Eastern background whose extended families were also affected by the wars.
3. Children who did not bring yellow ribbons or canned goods to school for donation to American troops were ostracized.
4. Many school officials, superintendents, and teachers failed to express sympathy for all families affected by the wars and the value of all human life. The unspoken message was that only American lives were important.
5. In many schools or classrooms, only discussions that voiced full support of U.S. bombing and war objectives were officially allowed.
6. Slurs such as “camel jockey,” “sand nigger,” and others were and continue to be used by fellow students against students of Muslim or Middle Eastern background, particularly after or during a recent conflict or incident.
7. Racially and religiously motivated teasing occurred in many schools, often unaddressed by teachers or school officials.
8. Name calling and teasing resulted in altercations between students on and off campus.
9. Harassment of students occurred on school buses, in hallways, bathrooms, school parking lots, cafeterias, school locker rooms, and school libraries with various slurs and taunts. In many instances, there was no responsible adult to stop the harassment.
10. School secretaries and part-time staff were rarely provided any type of sensitivity training, and often exhibited negative behavior towards children and parents of Middle Eastern and

Muslim background. This included ignoring them when they entered the school office, or taking care of others first although they entered the school office after them. In most cases, even when teaching staff was instructed about respectful behavior towards all students and parents, these instructions were usually not extended to secretaries and part-time staff, who are often the first person a parent or child may see or turn to address a problem or issue.

11. Muslim children fasting during Ramadan during school hours were sometimes seen as “foreigners” assumed to be exhibiting “un-American” social habits. Many Muslim children were forced to remain in the cafeteria watching other children eating while they were fasting, rather than allowed to go to an alternate location such as the library.
12. Muslim schoolgirls who wore a headscarf for religious reasons were and continue to be subject to greater harassment and called names such as “scarf head” or “rag head,” and had their scarves pulled off by classmates.
13. Some teachers encouraged group hatred of all Arabs and all Muslims. For example, at a high school on the East Coast, Virginia, a teacher permanently hung a small poster showing a man in Arab headdress at the end of gun sight in his classroom.
14. The school lunches of some students of Middle Eastern and Muslim background were stolen or insulting notes or bad smelling items were put in their lunch boxes.
15. Some students’ cars were smeared with egg, paint, or thick soap.
16. Teachers sometimes unwittingly ostracized students of Middle Eastern and Muslim background by forcing them to comment, or express their personal opinion in class as if they are experts on anything that involves Muslims or the Middle East. This affirmed the notion that they were “the other,” “foreigners” or spokespeople for all Muslims.
17. Teachers were often afraid to discuss any religious issues in the classroom because they were unaware that the law allows it or out of fear of parents’ responses.
18. Some Muslim teachers experienced other teachers becoming quiet whenever they approached them to join in a conversation.
19. Some schools attended by a substantial number of students of Middle Eastern and Muslim background became the targeted scene of school gangs before and after school.

**While some of these incidences have become less common, many of these issues still persist until the present, making life miserable for the students subjected to this behavior.**

*Adapted with permission from "Protocols for Addressing Issues Concerning Public School Students of Middle Eastern/Arab/Muslim Background When Catastrophe Has Occurred" by Sharifa Alkhateeb, Muslim Education Council.*