



MUSLIM WOMEN IN SPORT REPORT

We are MSA.

We create safe spaces for ethnically diverse women to engage in sports and physical activity.

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FOREWORD



Yashmin Harun BEM
Chair and Founder MSA

Thank you for reading the MSA's Muslim Women in Sport Report. In the face of the continued challenges presented by COVID-19, I am extremely proud that we have been in a position to commission this research. The impact of the pandemic and successive lock downs was clear. Existing inequalities had widened, and it was evident physical activity levels and the general well-being of women from diverse backgrounds had suffered. Over the course of the year, we adapted to support our participants and community whose access to physical activity and the broader benefits of sport participation was impacted by the pandemic and its lasting effect. Our model has greatly shown robust success even in times such as the pandemic where we were able to adapt and take our existing offering online such as yoga, football, fitness, and fencing fitness to help keep the community engaged, using the network of coaches we have established.

Projects during this time included Laureus Sports for Good, MSA Couch to 5k, and MSA Go Cycle, as well as successful Positive Minds sessions, which provided

much needed support and escapism for the women in our community. We also worked with the Royal Navy to deliver online fitness sessions for young girls to keep fit and active. It was fantastic to see the return of face- to-face sports and along with the further growth of our programmes in rowing and archery, where we were helping to build- back healthier and more confident females in sports. MSA are industry leaders in engaging with diverse females in a variety of sports; a group which has the highest level of inactivity rates as reported in the Sport England Active Lives Survey (May 2021-22).

MSA has not only increased participation levels but supported the increase in a diverse workforce through our partnership with Frenford Clubs. Frenford & MSA Women's FC has seen over 64 qualified football coaches. We have also worked with National Governing Bodies to create over 90 coaches across all sports, all from ethnically diverse backgrounds. We have also up-skilled our participants to become coaches in other sports such as Fencing, and Archery, where we have continued to address

challenges the sector faces by creating tailored courses, working with NGB's and stakeholders. As the immediate impact of the pandemic hopefully recedes, the mission we are on and the work we do is more important than ever.

We hope this report serves to not only update you on some of the motivations and barriers experienced by Muslim females in sport but will also provoke thought, action, and further collaboration in helping ethnically diverse females to go, not only beyond the challenges that face them, but thrive despite of them.

MSA is proud to engage females in sports and to challenge the sector in how they engage with our community. In the following pages we share the insights from this research, case studies of the impact that participation in sport can have on the lives of Muslim females and the potential MSA has to impact even more females from diverse backgrounds in sport - to build more welcoming safe spaces offering ethnically diverse females a place to belong and achieve.

FOREWORD



Ibtisam Belola FRSA
MSA Trustee

The physical and mental health benefits of taking part in sports can not be overstated. Physical activity can improve mood, concentration, reduce stress and depression, help to maintain a healthy weight and boost self-confidence.

We know that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted Asian and Black adults and ‘that women of black and Asian (excluding Chinese) ethnicities remain the least active’¹ and as such inequalities have widened. At MSA we are committed to encouraging greater participation and representation of ethnically diverse women in sport at both grass roots and elite levels.

This summary report shares the findings of a survey with British Muslim women living in England commissioned by MSA and conducted by Muslim Census in March 2022. We highlight the key findings around current sporting interests, activities and barriers to participation

During the process of this research we were successful in engaging with British Muslim women across England and experienced a fairly rapid response to the call outs to participate in the survey. This suggests a high interest in the topic area for Muslim women and that this audience isn’t necessarily ‘hard to reach’.

We acknowledge that some of the barriers to participation in sport for Muslim women outlined in this summary report have been previously raised and discussed within the sector e.g., women only spaces for sporting activities. However our research demonstrates that there is limited awareness of these women only spaces and activities amongst British Muslim women, and that the facilities they are aware of and have access to often don’t accommodate their needs.

Although not explicitly covered within the survey it would be remiss to not comment on the context of this barrier. For many Muslim women modesty

is an act of religious adherence and one of choice. For Muslim women to be able to fully participate in sport we need to create environments in which their ambitions for physical and sporting activities are not in conflict with their religious commitment to modest dress and behaviour.

We would like to thank all the women who participated in this survey for sharing their aspirations and experiences. Your generosity of time and involvement has provided the team at MSA and the sector as a whole with insights on British Muslim women and sport.

We would also like to thank Muslim Census for the teams hard work, dedication and professionalism.

1. Sport England, Active Lives Survey May 2021-2022

ABOUT MSA

MSA aims to offer females a safe and positive environment to participate in sports without compromising their religious or cultural beliefs.

Established in 2014 MSA gained charity status in 2019 and offers over 15 sports weekly including; Badminton, Basketball, Rowing, Karate, Football and Archery.

MSA believes having more positive representation of Muslims and ethnically diverse women will lead to an increase in participation at all levels. MSA has experienced first hand the impact of what sports and physical activity has on its community: making people healthier, happier and encouraging mutual understanding and respect for all.

Winning multiple awards MSA has received recognition throughout the industry, engaging with the House of Lords Sports & Recreation Select Committee to talk about the challenges facing females in ethnically diverse communities.

MSA has supported several Local Authority Sports and Leisure teams and sports clubs to engage with ethnically diverse females in sports, sharing best practices throughout the country.

The charity has also helped local mosques who have historically found it challenging to engage females in sports and leads the way in developing the workforce by offering tailored coaching courses working closely with the Football Association, British Fencing, GB Archery, London Sport, Sport England, Badminton England and Basketball England.

MSA continues to challenge the industry, providing insight and lived experiences, shaping policy and strategy. We have regularly engaged in the placed based approach of connecting to local organisations and entering partnership based working.

This has included working with Vision Redbridge, London FA, Sported, London Sport, Essex FA including an award-winning tailored FA Level one coaching course, award winning rowing project to increase diversity and award-winning archery project with Barking Rugby Club.

MSA are winners of the British Rowing & 'Social Inclusion' Project of the Year 2022, Archery GB Participation Project 2021, Outstanding Volunteer & 'Spirit of Britain' 2020, Faith & Belief Awards, FA Grassroots Football Award, FA 'For All' Award, & She Awards 2019, London Sports Workforce Award 2018 and The Muslim News Award 2017.



RESEARCH AIMS AND APPROACH

As part of Muslimah Sports Associations strategy for growth across London and England we wanted to understand British Muslim women's:

- current sporting activities
- sports they are interested in taking part in
- motivations for taking part in sport
- barriers to participation

This research was carried out to help inform MSA's strategic approach to growth across London and England centered on an understanding of the needs of British Muslim women.

Muslimah Sports Associations commissioned Muslim Census to conduct independent research which involved an online survey of 319 Muslim females aged 18 to 45 years.

Our sample includes:

- A geographic spread with areas that have higher Muslim populations e.g., London and West Midlands
- A mix of ethnicities (South East Asians account for 80% of the sample)

This report provides a summary of the research findings, suggested next steps and some examples of MSA's work with Muslim women.

Limitations of our research:

- The methodological approach of online surveys enabled Muslim Census to engage with Muslim women across England. This method is both time and cost efficient. However, completing an online survey requires a level of digital maturity for respondents to take part and may have excluded those with lower digital skills. The age range of our sample is < 45 years and may not be significantly impacted by this approach but it is a consideration regarding the inclusivity of this method.
- The recruitment methodology involved a social media campaign to participate which indicates that our sample is not entirely random.
- The representativeness of the sample is limited due to the small sample size.

AGE GROUP
45% 18-24 yrs old
33% 25-35 yrs old
22% 36-45 yrs old

ETHNICITY
80% Asian*
6% Black-African
3.4% Asian other
1% White Other

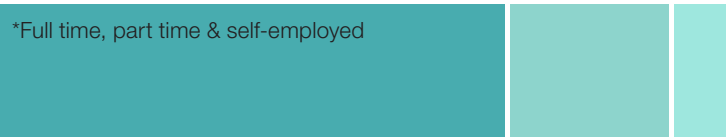
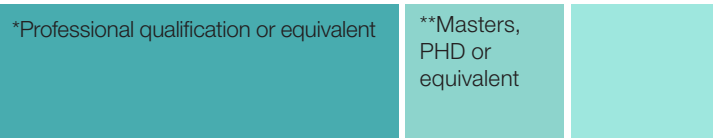
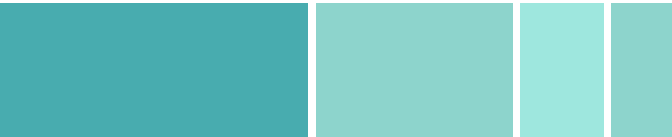
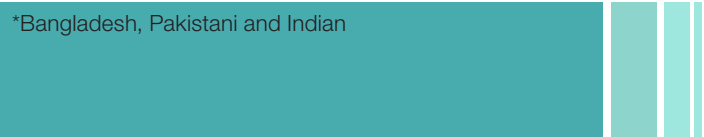
REGION
41% London
26% West Midlands
11% North West
8% South East

EDUCATION
53% Under Grad Degree*
21% Higher Education**
19% A-Levels or equivalent

CHILDREN
73% Do not have Children
27% have Children

RELATIONSHIP
64% Single
30% Married or in Civil Partnership
2% Divorced

EMPLOYMENT
67% Working*
21% Full time student
7% Unemployed





RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The research highlights that of the British Muslim women that responded:

97% said they want to increase their current participation in sports

82% want to increase their sports participation for health and fitness reasons

80% said they would be likely to attend women's only sports sessions if they were available

43% said that current sports facilities are not appropriate for them

33% describe their current fitness activity level as "Inactive"

33% said that past experiences have negatively impacted their participation in sports

CURRENT SPORTING ACTIVITIES

Within this survey British Muslim women, aged between 18-45 years were asked how they would describe their current fitness activity level on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-2 Inactive, 3 Neutral and 4-5 Active).

We found that there were similar proportions of respondents that stated they were inactive (1/3) and those that were active (1/3). And that amongst those that are 'active', 36 to 45 year old British Muslim women represented the lowest figures of 23% across the age brackets.


- Almost a third (**31%**) of respondents reported that they were "inactive" with **25%** of the sample indicating they participate in sports as (in)frequently as "once a month or less".
- Similarly, almost a third of respondents **32%** described themselves as "Active" with 40% of the overall sample participating in sports as frequently as 'a few days a week' and 24% participating 'once every week'.
- Of those that reported they were active there almost half (**47%**) are aged 18-24; 30% are aged 25-35 and 23% are aged 36-45 years old.

We also found that over a third of our respondents do not participate in any sports. When asked what sport(s) do you participate in, **37%** reported "None".

For those are active and taking part in sports the highest played sports reported were Badminton (18%), followed by Running (17%) and Swimming (14%).

Most respondents (**80%**) participate in sport(s) activities 'casually', whilst only 10% participate at 'local team' level and 9% at 'competitive' level.

We found that **42%** of surveyed British Muslim women reported they currently play their chosen sport(s) at their local Leisure Centre; **30%** participate in the Park. **29%** at Home, **28%** at a Sports Centre, **17%** at an Educational Institute e.g. school or university, **11%** at a local playing field and **2%** at a Religious building e.g. Mosque.



THOSE THAT ARE ACTIVE, PARTICIPATE IN BADMINTON, RUNNING AND SWIMMING.

Almost 1/3 of British Muslim women describe their current fitness activity as inactive.

MOST PLAY SPORTS AT THEIR LOCAL LEISURE CENTRE

HIGH LEVEL INTEREST IN PARTICIPATION

97% of British Muslim women said they want to increase their participation in sports.

Interestingly although 37% of the respondents reported they do not participate in sports, 97% of British Muslim women in the survey stated they want to increase their participation in sports.

This is an area we would like to explore further to understand what is inhibiting British Muslim women taking part in sport given the high level of interest and low levels of activity reported in this survey. We will share some of the barriers raised in the following pages.

Of those that said they want to increase their participation in sports,:

- 44% were aged 18-24, 34% were aged 25-35 and 22% were aged 36-45 years of age.

- In terms of ethnicity, the largest percentage of respondents that said they want to increase their participation in sports are women of South Asian descent (Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian), totalling 80%, followed by Black-African or Caribbean (6.1%) and Arab (6%). This distribution of ethnicity may be due to the (potentially due to the sample size.

Of this 97% most are in either employment or full time study.

- 45% were working full time, 21% reported to be full time students and 17% indicated that they were working part time.
- With respect to marital status, 64% of respondents reported that they are single, 30% described themselves as married or in a civil partnership and 2% as divorced.

We found that the key motivations for British Muslim women wanting to take up sport centred around improved health, enjoyment of the sport and wellbeing.

82% participate or want to increase their level of participation for Health and Fitness reasons, this was closely followed by enjoyment (80%) and general wellbeing (63%).

We asked questions around which sports British Muslim women would be most interested to learn or participate in and found that 44% are interested in swimming. This was the highest reported sport of interest, it was also one of the sports that featured in the open text responses to barriers to participation which are raised in the next section of this report.

Swimming was followed by martial arts (31%) Archery, (30%) Badminton(29%) and Netball (17%) with regards to sports British Muslim women would like to learn and participate in.

We also found that over half of our respondents would be likely to take up their sport[s] of interest given the opportunity to do so:

- 56% of respondents reported that they will likely or very likely learn and participate in the sport(s) they chose, were they given the facilities and chance to do so. Whilst only 13% said they were unlikely/very unlikely to do so.

CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION

There are a number of barriers to participation in sport that British Muslim women experienced in our research. A lack of women only and appropriate facilities, 'comfortable environments', family commitments, cultural norms and discrimination.

We found that 43% of British Muslim Women do not think that current sports facilities are appropriate to them.

When asked "Do you have sports facilities available to you"? 49% indicated they do and 26% reported they do not however further follow up questions indicated that despite having sports facilities available, 43% of British Muslim women do not think that current sports facilities are appropriate to them.

This could partially explain why previously in the survey we saw that 97% of respondents wanted to increase their participation but simultaneously 37% indicated that they will not take part in sports.

Having access to adequate sports facilities is integral to being able to increase and improve levels of participation.

'Coming to a womens only swimming session and being told there were male lifeguards. That defeats the whole purpose.' 18-24yrs, London

'There are no women only sessions in my area.' 35-44

We also found that 65% of respondents agree that there are religious/cultural barriers that limit/stop their participation in sports.

Other barriers to participation in sports include lack of modest sports attire (52%) the potential of encountering discrimination (28%) and parental or domestic and social responsibilities (19%)

A predominant barrier that appears throughout our study is the lack of women only spaces/facilities that prevent participation in sports. When asked whether respondents are aware of any women's only events or sports associations who run appropriate activities, 65% of surveyed British Muslim women said "No"

However, 80% of British Muslim women said they would be likely to attend women's only sports sessions if they were available to them.

Of those that picked Unlikely or Very Unlikely to participate in their chosen sport(s), 64% mentioned "Lack of women only facilities" (especially for sports such as swimming) and that they cannot find "comfortable environments" to participate.

Further, 22% mentioned lack of time and other family commitments as a barrier to participation in sports, whilst 17% highlighted the issue of lack of hijab friendly facilities and spaces as a key barrier to participation.

"Racism in high level football from coaches and players. I had my hijab ripped off. Not suitable football clothes for women as everything is tight. Taken out because of my ethnicity." 25-34yrs, London

"I used to play netball for a semi pro club in east of England when I was 18 and I was wearing hijab and I got discriminated by my coach and other players as everyone else was white. No one stuck up for me. So I left and my opportunity to go pro." 25-34 yrs, London

'The expectations from culture/family to give up childhood sports, as I matured and became older.' 25 - 34 yrs, Manchester

SUMMARY

This research demonstrates that there are high levels of interest amongst British Muslim women in England to participate in sport but that over a third (37%) are not involved in any sports or activities. Their interests in sports are varied and the highest motivator for participation is for health and wellbeing reasons.

We have learnt that for many (57%) they would be keen to take part in their sports of interest given the opportunity. We have also learnt that there are a number of barriers to participation to sport - finding appropriate facilities that allow them to participate in sports while adhering to their religious belief, cultural barriers and discrimination based on their religion.

However, there are Muslim women who have overcome these obstacles and have made significant contributions to various sports. It is important to recognize that Muslim women are not a homogeneous group and come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. They have different interpretations of their religious beliefs, and it is up to each individual to determine how they balance their religious and cultural values with their desire to participate in sport.

Having a healthy and active life is a universal ambition for all. Physical activity can provide a sense of empowerment, support self esteem and confidence and promote both mental and physical health impacting on overall wellbeing.

However, for Muslim women there are a number of acute benefits for engaging in sports. Participating in sport can help to break down stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim women, support social inclusion, create a sense of belonging in communities and encourage diversity and a greater understanding of different cultures and communities.

This report has highlighted that there is a huge opportunity to engage with British Muslim further in sport by:

- raising awareness of women only sessions and facilities
- developing a shared understanding of what these 'comfortable' spaces might mean
- considering modest dress codes and hijab within sports
- tackling religious discrimination within sport

80% of British Muslim women said they would be likely to attend women's only sports sessions if they were available to them.



NEXT STEPS & OPPORTUNITIES

Women only sessions is a predominant and recurring theme in our findings but is not a solution in of itself; as highlighted by some of the quotes around male lifeguards at women only swimming sessions. There is much nuance to unpicking what a 'comfortable environment' means to Muslim women and scope to create some principles around this to develop a greater understanding of this for the sector as a whole.

We call upon our partners, sporting bodies and policy makers to engage in discussions with MSA in how we can best address the challenges faced by British Muslim women as outlined in this report.

We would like to have open discussions on the following:

1. The extent of women only facilities and activities to encourage participation
2. Further investigation around 'comfortable environments' and what this involves
3. Initiatives to address unconscious bias against Muslim women participating in sport
4. Engaging further with communities to encourage support of Muslim women in sport and tackle some of the misconceptions and cultural attitudes around this.
5. Modest attire to support Muslim women's access and opportunities to career pathways in sport

We also encourage further research into Muslim women and their participation in sport with a larger and more representative sample and a qualitative piece to explore and understand motivations and barriers in greater depth.





LEADERS OF TOMORROW

A story of intergenerational bonding and success through football

Mother and daughters trio Shmaila, Zoeya and Zaina began their journey with MSA five years ago. They found Friday night football to be their outlet and a time they could spend together to build their relationship as a family.

Their love for football has led them to each pursue their passion to inspire greater representation of women and girls in sport in different ways.

Shmaila is now a level one football coach and featured in the Women's Euros 2022 Exhibition in Newham and at a local gallery exhibition on Muslim women and sport.

Zoeya had the joy and privilege of joining the historic Women's Euro 2022 as a Visa Ball Kid.

Zaina was successful within a competitive selection process to become a #LetGirlsPlay Ambassador.

Zaina joined England defender Lotte Wubben-Moy on ITV news to discuss the importance of girls having the same opportunities as boys to play football as part of her role as a #LetGirlsPlay Ambassador.

As an ambassador Zaina will work to influence decision-makers within communities and schools to encourage and inspire change.

We're proud that Shmaila and her daughters Zoeya and Zaina are each playing a vital role in increasing visibility of Muslim women and girls in football for the community and beyond.





FOSTERING A LOVE FOR SPORT

Encouraging Muslim women and girls to join in as participants and spectators of sport

At MSA we encourage our participants to experiment and try out new sports with taster sessions.

We also organise trips to stadiums to watch matches and meet players. We are grateful to all the teams that have connected with MSA, support our work and champion diversity in women's sport.

Below are some examples of the activities and partnerships we have developed to offer a breadth of sports and opportunities to our participants:

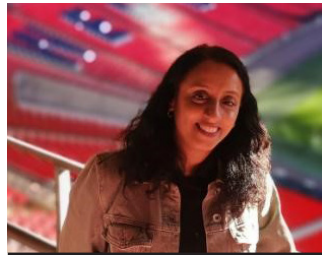
- MSA has partnered with the Golf Association and semi-professional Nicola Bennett to engage with more women from ethnically diverse backgrounds to play golf.

- MSA participates in the annual Al-Noor Foundation Dragonboat which led to a partnership with Fairlop Rowing club to encourage Muslim women to take up rowing.
- Partnering with Archery GB and Badminton England to increase diverse workforce
- Partnerships with Essex FA and the FA to increase the workforce thereby increasing role models
- Fostering local partnerships to widen the scope of engagement with clubs such as Frenford Clubs and Barking Rugby club
- Working is several consortiums to encourage partnership and influence project work to engage and increase visibility of young Muslim girls



Yashmin Harun BEM
Founder & Chair

Yashmin has been working in International Banking for over 20 years. Yashmin is a Director at the London FA and the FA Council Representative. She also serves as an Independent Director at British Fencing. Yashmin is part of the Asian Females in Football Working Party Group with the FA and Vice Chair of the British Asians in Sports and Physical Activity with Sporting Equals. She has been key in promoting Muslim women to get active and has seen the number of participants rise increasingly. In 2020, Yashmin was named in the Queen's New Year Honours List and Awarded a British Empire Medal for Increasing BAME Female Representation in Sports.



Hafiza Patel
Trustee

Hafiza help set up MSA together with the Chair. As trustee, she leads the planning and strategic development of MSA. She is an Independent Director at Essex Football Association and leads their Inclusion Advisory Group which was recently awarded intermediate level on the equality standard (the only county to hold the standard at this level). She has worked in Higher Education for 20 years and is the Deputy Director of Finance at City, University of London. She is a Governor for the 'City of London Academy Islington' secondary school and is a Global visiting lecturer in Accounting and Finance teaching in London and Athens.



Ibtisam Belola
Trustee

Ibtisam is a trustee at Muslimah Sports Association and sits on the advisory committee of the Muslim Women's Network UK. Ibtisam is a fellow of The Royal Society of Arts and is an alumni of the Sporting Equals Leaderboard Academy. She has 20 years of experience in consumer research with specialisms in user centred design, international qualitative studies, and digital transformation of public sector services. Ibtisam holds a degree in Economics and a Masters in Applied Social and Market. Research.



Lipa Nessa
Trustee

Lipa's passion for football is constantly growing which led her to coin her catchphrase "I'm going to change the world with a hijab on my head and a ball at my feet." She wants to be the change, by challenging herself and engaging with minority communities; by doing so her catchphrase becomes a reality. Former semi-professional football player, and is now a grassroots coach and sports activist. Lipa sits on various sports boards locally and nationally showcasing her passion for sports education, sports policy, and innovation.



Reha Ullah BEM
Trustee

Reha has a background in Law and is the legal secretary at MSA and leads on safeguarding and welfare. She works as a teacher and is the head of IT. She is also the Community Manager at Street Tag. Since joining MSA Reha has become a coach for football and fencing, an activator for Tennis and Badminton and an instructor for Archery. Reha was integral in setting up the womens football team. She kept MSA moving throughout lockdown by project managing the 'MSA Sport for Good' initiative. Reha was honoured in 2021 and awarded a British Empire Medal for her services to sport and the community.



Salma Islam Qaium
Office Manager

Salma has a background in science, having left university with a degree in Molecular Biology with Forensic Science she went on to become a qualified science teacher. When Salma isn't teaching or looking through a microscope, she loves to keep active by cycling, running, and doing yoga. Through her love of keeping fit, Salma discovered MSA and as a result became an active member of the association. She strongly believes in the objectives of MSA and feels that it is extremely important for Muslim and BAME women to be active and take part in sports and look after their wellbeing.



Shafia Begum
Volunteer

Shafia is a homemaker, who has had a passion for sports from a very young age. In 2019, Shafia came across MSA and has been an active volunteer and participant since. Shafia She has been involved in many activities across MSA including cycling, boxing, and yoga. Shafia has also taken on many other opportunities to appear as a speaker where she has discussed her experience through MSA to inspire other Muslim women just like her to engage in sports.



Sofina Khanom
Volunteer

Sofina joined the MSA with the interest of golf and became enamoured with community spirit that welcomed her with open arms. The passion that MSA sparked within her, for their supportive role for Muslim women in the sports industry, prompted her to volunteer and become part of their journey. Her role within the MSA entails assisting the finance director and trustees with quarterly financial accounts; a transferable skill from her full-time job.

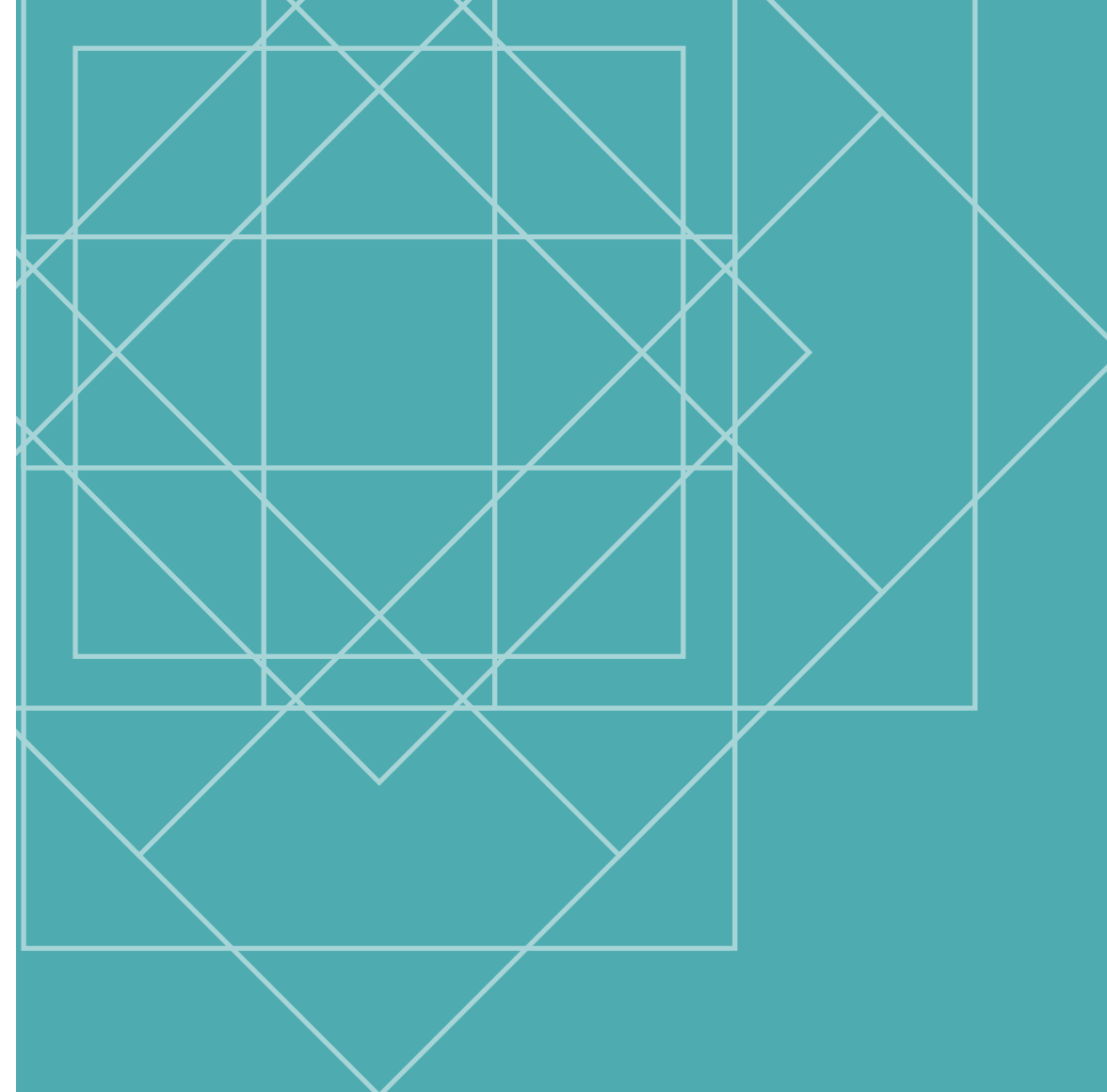
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If you would like to join, please visit:
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Instagram: muslimah_sports_assoc

Registered Charity in England & Wales: 1182763



WE INSPIRE | WE DEVELOP | WE EMPOWER

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