

## THE DYNAMICS OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MINORITY AREAS: PERCEPTIONS OF HIJAB USAGE

<sup>1</sup>Dhea Nuraisyah, <sup>2</sup>Surawan, <sup>3</sup>Hesty Widiastuty

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya

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### \*Correspondence Address:

Email: <sup>1</sup>[dheanuraisyah0@gmail.com](mailto:dheanuraisyah0@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>[surawan@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id](mailto:surawan@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup>[hesty.widiastuty@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id](mailto:hesty.widiastuty@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id)

**Abstract:** The hijab, as a symbol of identity and modesty in Islam, often becomes a subject of debate involving religion, culture, and individual freedom while facing challenges such as discrimination and stereotypes in predominantly non-Muslim societies. This study aims to explore the perceptions, motivations, and self-views regarding the hijab among Muslim women living in minority regions. Using a qualitative method, the research involved 20 Muslim women who consistently wear the hijab in their daily lives. Data were collected through a survey consisting of three closed-ended questions and analyzed using pie charts to illustrate the distribution of responses. The findings reveal that the majority of participants (55%) view the hijab as a symbol of identity, with personal comfort and individual preference (55%) being the primary reasons for wearing it, followed by social factors and family expectations (30%). Moreover, the hijab is perceived as a tool for reinforcing self-identity and coping with social pressures, despite its association with challenges such as discrimination and prejudice. This study provides insights into the profound meaning of the hijab for Muslim women in minority areas, highlighting its role not only as a religious symbol but also as a crucial element in shaping personal and social identity.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion represents a socio-cultural framework of established practices, behaviors, beliefs, morals, ethics, or organizations that connect humanity to spiritual and supernatural forces beyond the physical realm (Anwar & Surawan, 2024). In Islam, the hijab is regarded as an obligatory attire for Muslim women (Surawan & Pertiwi, 2023). It is a sign of modesty and faith, that has become the focus of debates related to religion, culture, gender, and individual freedom (Abdul Kadir et al., 2024). Surawan et al. (2023) state that one expression of religiosity is when a Muslim woman observes modesty by covering her body with a large hijab or veil. The hijab is often seen as a symbol of religious freedom, Islamic identity, and resistance against anti-Islam sentiments, particularly in Western countries (Rahbari et al., 2021; Sheen et al.,

2023). However, its usage often faces challenges, including discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes that create stigma against Muslims as a homogeneous group opposed to Western values (Karaman & Christian, 2020). Women wear the hijab due to the influence of parental expectations and religious demands (Mohsin Khan et al., 2023). The hijab carries various meanings, including as something that limits or obstructs representation (Kurniati et al., 2020). As a representation of Muslim identity, the hijab frequently faces challenges in minority societies, including discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes, with Muslims often becoming targets of Islamophobia, both in subtle and overt forms (Rehman & Hanley, 2023). In recent decades, the issue of the hijab has given rise to a global phenomenon known as “hijab phobia,” particularly under various European regimes (Sabah et al., 2021). In Western societies, the hijab is often associated with extremism or terrorism threats, reinforcing the view that hijab-wearing women need "liberation" from oppression (Paz & Kook, 2021). This representation is exacerbated by the media, which often portrays the hijab through simplistic or stereotypical frameworks (Tasneem, 2023). Fear of hate crimes and negative representations of Islam in the media further worsens their position as a minority (Rehman & Hanley, 2023).

In recent decades, hijab policies in Western countries have sparked debates on cultural accommodation, assimilation, and racism, affecting minorities, migrants, and marginalized communities within the context of human rights (Syed, 2020). Policies regarding the hijab in countries such as France and the UK are often debated due to being perceived as discriminatory, with hijab bans frequently based on Islamophobic and misogynistic views equating the hijab with Islamic radicalism (Halim et al., 2022; Arab, 2022). Western societies view the hijab as a primary symbol of the oppression of women (Antunes, 2022), as seen in Canada, where Muslim women choose not to wear the hijab at work to avoid discrimination (Hashem et al., 2022). Similarly, in the Philippines, a Muslim woman feels compelled to remove her hijab to blend in with the Catholic majority society (Susilo et al., 2023). In Australia, Muslims are often stigmatized due to tragedies like the 9/11 attacks (Wijayanti, 2023). In India, discrimination against Muslim women wearing the hijab is exacerbated by the caste system and gender bias, creating additional challenges in their lives (Perempuan et al., 2024; Rumaney & Sriram, 2023). Furthermore, in countries like Germany and France, discrimination against Muslims is often stronger when Muslim identity is visibly marked by elements such as the hijab or niqab (Kaskeleviciute et al., 2024; Navarro-Granados & Cobano-Delgado Palma, 2024).

The stigma surrounding the hijab also impacts various aspects of the lives of Muslim women, including education, employment, and social integration where in previous research has shown that some Muslim women chose to drop out of school or give up work to avoid discrimination due to wearing the hijab (Hashem et al., 2023; Jain, 2023; Rizcha et al., 2024), while others are able to negotiate the wearing of the hijab in the workplace (Krotofil et al., 2022). In educational settings, there have been cases where hijab-wearing women are treated differently by their peers and teachers after deciding to wear the hijab (Wee et al., 2023; Babacan, 2023). Another study conducted at Mount Top High (Molokotos-Liederman, 2021) revealed that some young women experienced negative interactions with classmates, such as being called terrorists, insulted on the street, told to leave the United States, and asked if they intended to kill their classmates. This underscores how the hijab is often politicized by dominant cultures, obscuring the fundamental reasons why women choose to wear or not wear it (Karaman & Christian, 2022). A teenager who wore the hijab in accordance with her religious beliefs was not allowed to take her school exam because she refused to remove it (Thijssen et al., 2022). A Muslim woman in a study by Carmichael et al. (2021) expressed difficulty in choosing to wear the hijab due to the political climate and felt disappointed with the change in treatment from her friends and professors after she decided not to wear it. Previous research by Murrar et al. (2024) indicated that even in the healthcare sector, several Muslim women frequently face negative treatment and feel they are treated worse than non-Muslim patients.

In the legal context in Switzerland, media discussions about the ban on hijabs for schoolgirls often arise, although they have never been successful legally (Salahshour & Boamah, 2020). The hijab ban is seen as a clear form of discrimination against human rights (Dell'isola, 2022). On the other hand, in Indonesia, the hijab is often viewed as a Muslim woman's identity, influenced by family and social circles (Zain et al., 2023). However, despite Indonesia being a Muslim-majority country, issues of discrimination against Muslims also arise, such as in the relationship between Bugis Muslims and Hindus in Bali, which worsened after the Bali bombing incident (Tohari & Raya, 2021). For many in Western Europe, Muslim women who wear the hijab, particularly the niqab (face veil), are still considered unusual and may provoke fear or rejection in certain circles (Korb et al., 2022). This phenomenon shows that hijab-wearing women are often targets of discrimination because they are the most visible symbol of Muslims (Maghfirah, 2020). Previous research also highlights that Muslim women with strong English skills are more likely to face religious discrimination, suggesting that they

are more sensitive to verbal and nonverbal messages directed at them (Hodge et al., 2023). However, there is still limited research on the perceptions of Muslim women in minority areas regarding the use of the hijab. Therefore, this study aims to explore the perceptions of Muslims living in minority regions, particularly regarding their views on the hijab and how it affects their perspectives amidst social pressure.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perceptions, challenges, and identity issues experienced by Muslim women who wore the hijab in minority regions. The research subjects consisted of 20 Muslim women who had long and consistently worn the hijab in their daily lives. Data collection was carried out through a survey consisting of three questions aimed at understanding their experiences and perspectives. The collected data were analyzed using pie charts to represent the distribution of responses, with percentages calculated based on the choices provided by the subjects.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Perception of the Hijab

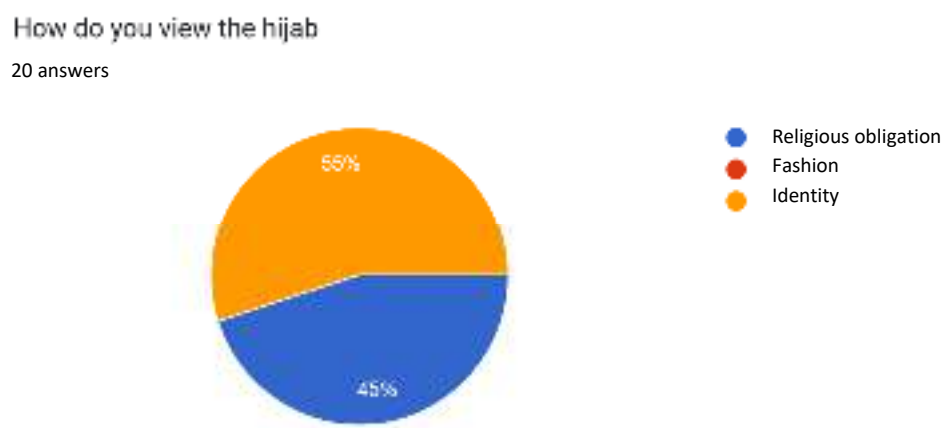


Figure 1. The Survey Result of the Perception of the Hijab

The survey results showed that the majority of participants (55%) viewed the hijab as a symbol of identity, while 45% considered it a religious obligation, with no participants selecting the hijab as a fashion statement. These findings emphasize that the hijab is not merely a fashion element for Muslim women but rather a profound symbol of identity. As an identity marker,

the hijab reflects personal beliefs and a commitment to the religious values they follow, especially in a minority setting. This suggests that the hijab serves a complex function as both a religious symbol and a personal identity. In line with the findings of Rahbari et al. (2021), the hijab is often seen as a statement of religious freedom and resistance to negative stereotypes. However, this study provides a new perspective, suggesting that the hijab can also serve as a tool for coping with social pressures in minority environments. This supports the argument made by Karaman & Christian (2020) that the hijab helps Muslim individuals negotiate their position in a predominantly homogeneous society. On the other hand, the finding that no participants viewed the hijab as fashion highlights the perceptual difference between minority and majority Muslim communities. In majority-Muslim societies, the hijab is often promoted as part of fashion to attract younger generations (Kurniati et al., 2020). However, in minority contexts, the hijab is more closely associated with identity and beliefs than with aesthetics. Furthermore, these findings provide insight that, in minority settings, Muslim women view the hijab as an important part of their identity, fostering self-pride. This supports the research of Rehman & Hanley (2023), which suggests that the hijab helps individuals confront discrimination by strengthening their identity. On a global scale, the representation of the hijab as an identity is often influenced by policies and media narratives. In some Western countries, the hijab is seen as a symbol of threat, contrasting with the views of participants in this study, who see it as something that reinforces their identity. This suggests a cultural and social difference in how the hijab is perceived, both by its wearers and the surrounding society.

### Main Reasons for Choosing to Wear the Hijab

The main reason for choosing to wear the hijab  
20 answers

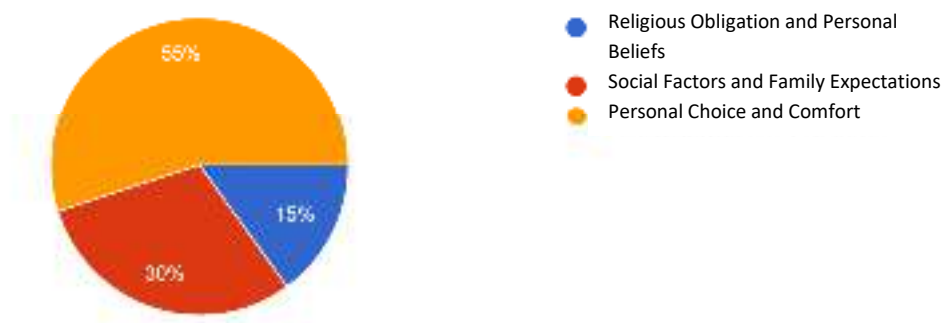


Figure 2. The Survey Result of the Main Reasons for Choosing to Wear the Hijab

The survey results showed that the primary reasons participants wear the hijab are personal choice and comfort (55%), followed by social factors and family expectations (30%), and religious obligation and personal belief (15%). This suggests that although religious values remain an important factor, the main motivation is often rooted in individual preferences and personal comfort. It indicates that social and cultural factors significantly influence Muslim women's decision to wear the hijab. For example, Mohsin Khan et al. (2023) found that family and community expectations are often the primary reasons Muslim women wear the hijab. No participants selected the hijab as fashion, which underscores the finding that the hijab is not merely a fashion element for Muslim women, but rather a profound symbol of identity. As an identity marker, the hijab reflects personal beliefs and a commitment to the religious values they follow, particularly in a minority environment. This discussion reveals that the hijab serves a complex function as both a religious symbol and a personal identity. In line with the findings of Rahbari et al. (2021), the hijab is often seen as a statement of religious freedom and resistance to negative stereotypes. However, this study offers a new perspective, suggesting that the hijab can also serve as a tool to cope with social pressures in minority settings. This supports the argument by Karaman & Christian (2020) that the hijab helps Muslim individuals negotiate their position in a predominantly homogeneous society. On the other hand, the finding that no participants viewed the hijab as fashion highlights the perceptual difference between minority and majority Muslim communities. In majority-Muslim societies, the hijab is often promoted as part of fashion to attract younger generations (Kurniati et al., 2020). However, in minority contexts, the hijab is more associated with identity and beliefs than with aesthetics. Furthermore, these findings provide insight that, in minority environments, Muslim women view the hijab as an essential part of their identity, helping them build a sense of self-pride. This supports the research by Rehman & Hanley (2023), which suggests that the hijab helps individuals confront discrimination by strengthening their identity. On a global scale, the representation of the hijab as an identity is often influenced by policies and media narratives. In some Western countries, the hijab is viewed as a symbol of threat, contrasting with the participants' perspective in this study, who see it as something that reinforces their identity. This highlights cultural and social differences in how the hijab is perceived, both by its wearers and by the surrounding society.



### Self-View of the Hijab as a Muslim Woman

Self-View of the Hijab as a Muslim Woman  
20 answers

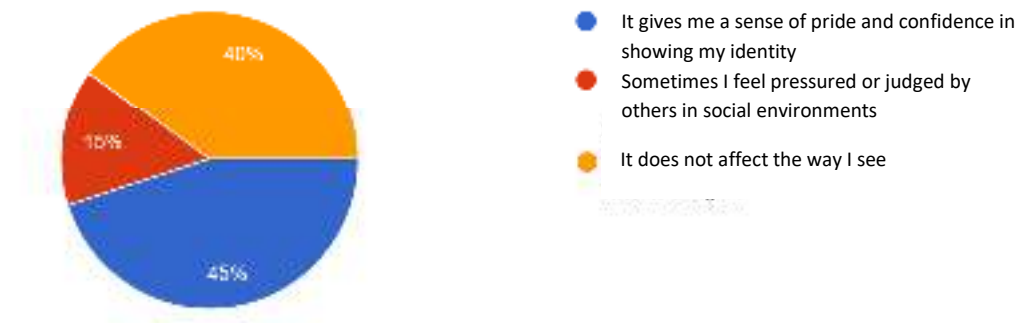


Figure 3. The Survey Result of the Self-View of the Hijab as a Muslim Woman

The survey results showed that 45% of participants feel proud and confident wearing the hijab, 15% feel pressured or judged by their social environment, and 40% stated that the hijab does not affect how they view themselves. These findings reflect the diverse emotional experiences of Muslim women regarding the hijab in minority regions. The discussion suggests that the sense of pride and confidence experienced by the majority of participants highlights the role of the hijab in reinforcing their identity. This finding supports the research by Rehman and Hanley (2023), which indicates that the hijab can serve as a symbol of resistance to discrimination and a tool for enhancing the self-confidence of Muslim individuals. However, the feelings of pressure or being judged by the social environment also reflect the challenges faced by Muslim women in a predominantly non-Muslim society. This aligns with the research by Molokotos-Liederman (2021), which found that Muslim women often face prejudice and negative stereotypes, including verbal harassment and discrimination in public spaces. Furthermore, the result that 40% of participants feel the hijab does not affect their self-view suggests differences in how individuals process their experiences. This is relevant to the study by Krotofil et al. (2022), which shows that some Muslim women are able to adapt to social pressures without allowing it to affect their self-perception. In minority contexts, the hijab often becomes a prominent symbol, making its wearers more vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice. However, this study shows that many Muslim women are able to use the hijab as a tool to navigate their identity and strengthen their position in society. This finding also has practical implications, indicating that greater social support, from both family and community, can help

reduce the pressure experienced by Muslim women who wear the hijab. This study reinforces the importance of community-based approaches in supporting Muslim women living in minority regions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This research showed that the perception of the hijab in minority regions was influenced by various factors, including social pressure, family support, and individual beliefs. The majority of participants (55%) viewed the hijab as a symbol of identity, while the primary reason for wearing the hijab was driven by personal comfort and individual preference (55%), followed by social factors and family expectations (30%). This indicated that the hijab functioned not only as a religious or cultural marker but also as an important form of self-expression for its wearers. The high level of individual preference suggested that the decision to wear the hijab was based on a strong personal choice, reflecting autonomy in determining one's identity. Furthermore, the significant influence of social factors and family expectations underscored that social norms and family support continued to play a crucial role in the decision to wear the hijab. The combination of internal and external factors highlighted the complexity of motivations behind wearing the hijab, which should be taken into account when attempting to understand the social and cultural dynamics related to its use. To enhance the understanding and support of Muslim women wearing the hijab in minority areas, future research should explore interventions that foster greater social inclusion and reduce discrimination. It is recommended that community-based programs and educational campaigns be developed to address the challenges and stereotypes associated with hijab usage.

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