

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND THE VEILING STATUS OF WOMEN ACADEMICIANS IN THREE UNIVERSITIES OF MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the religious affiliation and the practice of using different veiling articles (e.g. Head scarf, Turban, Telekung, Mini Telekung, Selendung, Coats, Abaya, Niqab, etc.) among women academicians in three universities of Malaysia. The research was designed with a quantitative approach to data and analysis. The method of data collection was survey of online profiles of the women academicians of three universities of Malaysia. The data collected was recorded with the help of a checklist developed by the researchers. The data collected was statistically analysed to test the hypothesis. It is argued that 90% of women academicians in three universities are Muslims as compared to the 10% women academicians as Non-Muslims. It is also observed that 89% women academicians of the universities included in this study are using different articles of veiling as compared to 11% of women academicians not using any veiling article. The chi square test used to explore the association between the religious affiliation and the use of veiling articles by these women academicians. The test results show a statistically significant association between the two variables. Therefore, the study accepted the research hypothesis (H_1) that the religious affiliation of women academicians in three universities of Malaysia is significantly associated with their veiling status (as assessed by their practice of using veiling articles observed in their online profiles). The study recommends for exploration of the similar patterns on a larger sample of population from a large number of universities in Malaysia for more comprehensive and authentic findings.

Keywords: Malaysia, Women Academicians, Universities, Veiling Status, Religion.

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Introduction

According to the dictionary definition of the word, "Veil" is a piece of usually more or less transparent fabric attached to a women's hat etc. especially to conceal the face or protect against the sun, dust, etc. (Thompson, 1997: 1553). It refers to a type of clothing which wraps the body of women from head to ankle. The term veil is mainly concerned to Islamic teachings but it also has special effects on socio-economic features. Veil in itself provides protection and feeling of security to women. It is also considered a symbol of modesty.

The trend of using different articles for veiling among women is increasing day by day in all over the world in general and in Muslim societies in particular. The societies in Muslim countries having a rising pattern of veiling seem to be strongly influenced by the Arab world. All around the globe Muslims' refer to Arab countries as an ideal type of what Islam want us to live like. Therefore, in these societies, women are increasingly returning towards veil and acquiring style and modesty in their lives.

This paper focuses on patterns of veiling among women faculty members of three universities of Malaysia. The paper also test the association or independence of pattern of using different veiling articles with the religious association of these women faculty members.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the research study is to explore the association or independence between religious affiliation and veiling status (as assessed by the use of veiling article observed from online profiles) among women academicians in three universities of Malaysia.

Research Hypothesis

H₁: Religious affiliation of the women academicians in universities of Malaysia is significantly associated with their veiling status (as assessed by their practice of using veiling articles).

Research Methodology

This research study is designed to identify the patterns in terms of religion and veiling status of the female faculty academicians working in three Universities of Malaysia and to explore the association between these two variables. The three universities selected for this research study include Malaysia University of Science and Technology (MUST), University of Technology Malaysia (UTM) and Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia (UTHM). The universe of the study is comprises of all female faculty academicians working in these universities.

The research is designed to be conducted with the quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. The updated profiles of female faculty members on official web pages of Universities of Malaysia are used as primary data. The data was collected from three of Malaysian Universities. The arguments are based on primary data collected through a survey of online profiles of the female faculty academicians available on the official websites of the three universities. A checklist was developed by the researcher for the recording of data on different variables from the online profiles of the faculty members. The collected data through checklist was coded and entered into the computer. Computer software like MS Excel and SPSS are being used for data entry and analysis. The frequencies and percentages were calculated. Chi square test was applied to test the hypotheses.

The data analysis and findings are presented in the form of graphs, tables and textual interpretations for making it easy and understandable for the readers. The data includes analysis shows

the frequencies for the religious status of the female faculty. The frequencies for the veiling status of these academicians are also presented. Then the chi square test was run to explore the independence or association between these two variables.

Literature Review

The literal meaning of veil is curtain or screen. The veil refers to the clothing which covers and conceals the body from head to ankles, with the exception of the face, hands and feet (Hoodfar, 1991: 7). Veil concerned to the protection of women from being westernized and as well as it is also considered as the symbol of true modesty. Its main purposes, as enjoined in the Qoran, are to cover the woman from the glance of strange men and to ensure modesty and chastity (Beck, 1977: 195). The veil provides freedom to women from being thought of sexual object. Therefore, women wearing hijab have expressed that dressing modestly and covering their hair, minimize sexual harassment in the workplace (Arshad et al., 2012: 62).

It (veil) is a religious statement supporting Islam as a way of living (Hochel, 2013: 40). The practice of veiling in Islam is rooted in deep devotion to being obedient to God (Doblado, 2012: 7). It is an act of obedience that has been clearly defined in the Qur'an and Sunnah (Latiff & Alam, 2013: 50). In the Qur'an God has revealed the verses for the unveiled women, "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close around them (when they go abroad). That will be better, that so they may be recognized and not annoyed" (Mernissi, 1991: 186-187).

Islamization has gained visibility through the veiling of women (Gole, 1953: 83). As when one sees Muslim woman wearing the hijab or burqa and believes that every woman in Islam has to wear the veil (Doblado, 2012: 5). Some Islamic group have mobilized the Hijab to represent a traditional sense of Islamic identity (Latiff & Alam, 2013: 51). Farhatullah, and Colleagues (2014: 109) recalls Fedrock (2014, cited in Farhatullah et al. 2014) that wearing hijab or covering the head identifies a woman as a socially active Muslim, reflects her solidarity with other Muslims and publicly proclaims her identity as a Muslim. The Hijab is to cover your private part and adornments to maintain modesty in life (Latiff & Alam, 2013: 53). The practice of veiling is as a form of religious piety for (Muslim) women (Doblado, 2012: 6).

The veil has become a totalizing symbol of Muslim gendered practices (Doblado, 2012: 5). The veil protects them against modernism and symbolizes their loyalty to Islam. The veil conceals the departure of Muslim women to the outside world, for, although the veiled women are in the outside world, they still remain in the “inside,” and the veil constantly reminds them that they belong to the *mahrem* sphere (Gole, 1953: 130). The wearing of distinctive clothing or head coverings is also a way in which people observe their religious beliefs (Human Rights Commission, 2005: 2). The veil primarily as a sign of their devotion (Hochel, 2013: 48). Taheri (2013) highlights an example that we often consider an appropriate covering based on the existential value of an object and never provide an expensive wrapping for a non-valuable object, and, vice versa, never wrap an expensive commodity in a cheap covering (like paper) (Taheri, 2013: 441).

Malay women cover because of fashion and convention and not because of religious beliefs (Hochel, 2013: 52). Western inspired clothing with immodest fabrics, colors and cuts being passed off as Hijab fashion today (Latiff, & Alam, 2013: 50). Fashion is only a side benefit and not the motivation for veiling (Hochel, 2013: 52). Tudung

(veil) is a symbol of devotion (Hochel, 2013: 48). The Shari'ah Criminal Offences Act which strongly controls women's proper dress and behaviour is said to be in conflict with basic demonstrates principles and fundamental liberties guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (Martela, 2006: 16).

The power of clothing, particularly religious clothing, to influence self-image and behaviour (Hochel, 2013: 54). The young women's standpoint, traditional people who cover their heads, but who, at the same time, leave their hair and necks uncovered, do not practice true veiling because they are ignorant about Islam (Gole, 1953: 91). Signs of ostentation could appear in any dress or shape; that is, even a person with a proper outer veil (complete covering) could be more noticed than a person with an apparently inappropriate veil (Taheri, 2013: 441).

In South East Asian region there are several countries with large Muslim population living there. It is observed that Muslim women in some of these societies are influenced by the culture of using veiling articles. Use of veiling articles like head scarf and coats to cover different parts of the body is appearing as a cultural expectation and customary practice for women in many Muslim countries in East Asia. Malaysia is one such country in the region, where women customarily use different articles for covering their head, hair and other body part.

Malaysia is a country located in South East Asia. The country is divided into two geographical parts: Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Borneo). Peninsular Malaysia shares a land and maritime border with Thailand and maritime borders with Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. East Malaysia shares land and maritime borders with Brunei and Indonesia and a maritime border with the Philippines. The capital city is Kuala Lumpur (Wikipedia, 2014). The country is multi-ethnic and multi cultural where the Malays who are primarily Muslims, comprises 50.4% of the population. The rest of

the population is Chinese 23.7%, indigenous 11%, Indians 7.1% and other ethnicities 7.8% (CIA World Factbook, 2014). Malaysia is not officially an Islamic state, Islam is the official religion (Yousif, n.d: 31). The majority of the population (i.e. 61.3%) is Muslim and the rest of the religions followed are Buddhist 19.8%, Christian 9.2%, Hindu 6.3%, Confucianism, Taoism, other traditional Chinese religions 1.3%, other 0.4%, none 0.8% and unspecified 1% (CIA World Factbook, 2014).

In Malaysia women used to dress modestly as it is customary in this country. According to local culture women tend to cover themselves from head to feet. In this country particularly women are observed to wear long skirts, shirts with sleeves and headscarf. Women are wearing veil particularly because of social and religious expectations. Mostly veil is observed among females in general and in University going females, in particular.

Accordingly, this article highlights the trend of veiling among female faculty members in Universities of Malaysia. The study focuses on relationship between religion of the respondent and the practice of using veiling articles in Universities of Malaysia. The study is done in terms of increasing trend of veiling among females, in general, and influence of religion on use of veiling articles, in particular.

Data Presentation and Analysis

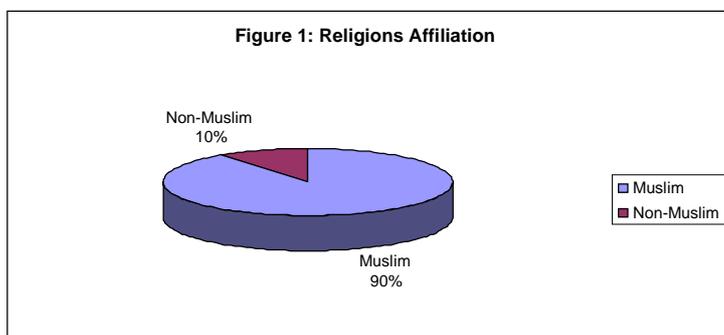
The study was aimed to explore the association of religious affiliation and the practice of using veiling articles among women faculty members of three universities in Malaysia. Therefore, this section of the paper presents data analysis on three aspects dealing in the paper. First sub section deals with the religious affiliation of the women faculty members of three universities of Malaysia as studied here. Second, the paper shows the practice of either using any veiling article by these women female faculty members or not as

their veiling status. Finally, the paper explores the association or independence between these two variables of religious affiliation and veiling status of women faculty members of Malaysian universities.

Religious Status of Malaysian Women Academicians (Muslim/Non-Muslim)

As we have already discussed in the literature review that Malaysia has a multi-ethnic population, similarly, the women faculty members in three universities of Malaysia are also found belonging from different ethnic and religious groups. For the easy understanding of the reader and to best serve the purpose of this paper the data on religious status of women faculty was reduced into two major categories of religious affiliations: 1) Muslims Malaysian women university faculty members, and 2) Non- Muslim Malaysian women university faculty members.

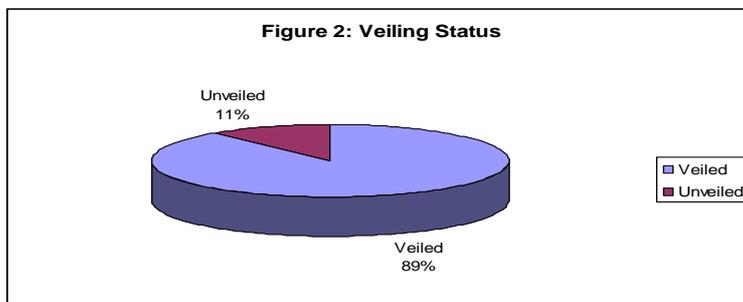
As presented below in the pie chart in Figure 1, it is observed that 90% of the female faculty academicians are Muslim and 10% of female faculty academicians are Non-Muslim among all the faculty members of three Malaysian universities as shown in their profiles randomly selected and visited through internet. This chart shows that majority of female faculty academicians working in the universities included in this study are Muslim.



Use of Veiling Articles by Malaysian Women Academicians (Veiled/Unveiled)

We have discussed above that it is a customary Malaysia for women to dress modestly. This section present data analysis regarding the use of veiling articles among women faculty members of three Malaysian universities studied here. The use of veiling article include the practice of wearing head scarf, Turban, Telekung, Mini Telekung, Selendung, Coats, Abaya, Niqab, etc. For easy understanding of the readers and to best suite the purpose of this paper all the data collected regarding use of one, more than one, or none of the veiling article listed above by the women faculty members was reduced/recoded into two major categories showing their veiling status as “veiled” and “unveiled”. The women academicians using any one or more than one veiling articles listed above are categorized in the status category of “veiled” while those not using any one of these veiling articles are categorized as “unveiled”.

According to the Pie chart presented below in Figure 2, it is observed that 89% of female faculty academicians were found using one or more than one of the above listed veiling articles, thus categorized as “veiled” as compared to 11% of female faculty academicians who are found not using any of these veiling articles and categorized as “unveiled”. This chart shows that majority of female faculty academicians are veiled due to their practice of using any one or more than one articles of veiling as listed above.



Association Between Religious Status and Veiling Status of Malaysian Women Academicians

The study was aimed to explore the association or independence between the religious affiliation and the practice of using veiling articles among women academicians in three university of Malaysia as presented in their available online profiles. The above presented data analysis in Figure 1 and Figure 2 clearly shows that majority of these women academicians are Muslims (90%) and are using certain veiling articles (89%). According to the main aim of the paper a chi square test of independence or association was used to test the research Hypothesis. Chi-Square test results show a significant association between religious affiliation and the veiling status (as ased by the practice of using veiling articles) of women academicians in Malaysian universities.

Table 1: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig.(2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	153.835 (a)	1	.000	.000	.000

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.87.

Table 2: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.969	.000
	Cramer's V	.969	.000
Total		164	

The results of data analysis done for hypothesis testing, presented in Table 1 showing Chi-square tests results and Table 2 showing the Symmetric Measures of the test, show the significant values. The

data analysis done to test the hypothesis show a chi square value 153.8 with df as 1 and 2 tailed sig as .000. It shows a significant association between religious affiliation and veiling status of women faculty members of Malaysian universities. Therefore, alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion

The main aim of the research study was to explore the association or independence between the religious affiliation and veiling status (as assessed by the use of veiling articles) of women academicians in three universities of Malaysia. The data was collected by visiting online profiles of women Malaysian university academicians available on university websites and recording the observations on a checklist developed by the researchers. Malaysia is a Muslim country and comprising 61.3% Muslims of the total population. There are 90% Muslims and 10% Non-Muslims observed in three universities of Malaysia included in this research. The veiled women are 89% of observed cases.

Further, the chi square test of association and independence was done to test the research hypothesis. The test results done to explore the association between two variable of religious association and the veiling status of the women Malaysian academicians in three universities show a chi square value 153.8 with df as 1 and 2 tailed sig as .000. It shows a significant association between the religious affiliation and the veiling status (as asses by the practice of using veiling articles as recorded from online profiles) of the women academicians. The Phi value as .969 and Cramer's V as .969 with p value of .000 shows a strong and significant association between religious status and veiling status of women academicians of these universities in Malaysia.

The research has certain limitations of collecting data from a small number of profiles, and from three universities due to availability of

limited resources and time to the independent researchers. It is recommended to conduct this research on a larger number of women academicians from a larger number of universities in Malaysia for more authentic and reliable findings.

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