

## WEARING NIQAB BY MUSLIM WOMEN IS A DIVINE ORDER, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND A SUPERIOR MUSLIM CULTURE

Nasrin Akter Chowdhury<sup>1</sup>, Amani Ali Elmetwally<sup>1</sup>, Hanif Suhairi Abu Bakar<sup>1</sup>,  
A.K.M, Shafiqul Islam<sup>2</sup> and Muhammad Musharraf Hussain<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Human Development and Techno-Communication (iKOM), Malaysia  
(Email: nasrin\_akter@hotmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>School of Human Development and Techno-Communication (iKOM), Malaysia  
(Email: amani.ali@unimap.edu.my)

<sup>1</sup>School of Human Development and Techno-Communication (iKOM), Malaysia  
(Email: hanif.suhairi@unimap.edu.my)

<sup>2</sup>School of Chemical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia  
(Email: shafiqul@usm.my)

<sup>3</sup>Department of Pharmacy, Manarat International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
(Email: dmmhqiabd@gmail.com)

### Article history

**Received date** : 27-10-2019

**Revised date** : 6-2-2020

**Accepted date** : 10-3-2020

**Published date** : 17-3-2020

### To cite this document:

Nasrin, C., Amani, A., Hanif, S., Shafiqul, I., & Musharraf, H. (2020). Wearing Niqab By Muslim Women Is A Divine Order, Religious Freedom and A Superior Muslim Culture. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 5 (28), 74 – 87.

---

**Abstract:** *One of the most significant events in the Muslim world is Islamic communication that intertwined same religious belief and culture. The purpose of the research is to reveal the rights of women in the society, which have significantly changed over the last few decades. It is observed that women possessing feminist sentiments are becoming more aggressive in some religious communities compared to women who accept their prescribed religious values as part of their normal religious freedom. This trend is creating a huge social impact in relation to practicing women's individual's freedom of choice. Recently, the term 'Niqab' has become divisive and it is having controversial interpretations around the globe. Niqab wearing women are also facing serious problems due to some propaganda made by the social media. Many countries imposed limited restriction to this important Islamic culture and think that the Niqab is often imposed to women, which indicates fundamentalism. It is also wrongly seen as an offense to human values and dignity. In view of this development a phenomenological research has been conducted among a total 45 Muslim and non-Muslim female participants who have come from different nations but stayed in Malaysia for a considerable period of time to achieve their individual objectives. The findings revealed that most of the women wear Niqab as their personal choice and religious obligation. Recently the Niqab wearing Muslim women has become a human rights concern in several countries. In this context, the freedom of rights of the Muslim women to choose their dress ups according to their choice and dictates of Islam has been challenged and curtailed to some extent in the light of the rights of others. In this study, wearing Niqab as women's personal choice and religious injunctions in the context of Malaysia has been exclusively discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Artefact Communication, Islamic Culture, Religious freedom, Niqab Wearing Women, Phenomenology Research*

---

## Introduction

Wearing Niqab by Muslim women is a superior Muslim culture as prescribed in the divine book, the Holy *Quran*. It indicates a form of communication as non-verbal behaviour, because women wear it as their personal choice, obedience to divine rule and freedom. Muslim women wear *Niqab*, which is a piece of cloth used to cover some parts of their face, as required by the Muslim culture.

Culture may be defined as the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. It is also referred to the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement. Ideally it originates from people's race, society, gender, religion, and socio-economic position and it holds all the beliefs. Lauren (2016) reveals that most humans follow the practices and rituals according to what they innate from previous generations. In 1871 Sir Edward Burnett Taylor gave a very initial and obvious definition of culture, in his book 'Primitive Culture'. That was the first modern anthropological definition of culture. According to him the culture or civilization in a broad ethnographic sense includes knowledge, belief, morals, art, custom, law, and habits that are normally acquired by members of the society (Long, 2016).

Muslim culture and traditions originated from Arabia. As Islam spread throughout the world, its culture and traditions have greatly influenced by the Persian, Mongol, Berber, Turkic, Indonesian and Indian cultures (Jani, 2011). On the other hand, the present Islamic practices and customs too influenced due to incorporation of various local cultures into the Muslim beliefs.

Global Findex (2017) & Lipka (2016) reports that as of now there are over 1.7 billion Muslims all over the world. Though they speak hundreds of different languages and live in a number of different countries, most of them read the Holly *Quran* as the divine book of guidance and follow the guidance described therein. They also follow the same common Muslim culture (Hassan, 2015). This culture is influenced by the Muslim's common belief that, "There is no god but Allah (S.W.T) and Muhammad (S.A.W) is His messenger". Muslim communities refer to the *Quran* and Prophetic Traditions know as *Hadith* for authorization and validation of their customary cultural practices. These authoritative customary practices include modest dress for all adult Muslims particularly the females (Alalwani, 2012). Besides, the approved Muslim customs and traditions there are also other aspects of Islamic culture that Muslims have adopted in their respective countries which include clothing, food, wedding traditions etc. (Carter, 2014 & Titus Burckhardt, 2009).

The face covering (*Niqab*) of Muslim women has become a human rights concern in a number of countries including France, Germany, Holland, Turkey and the United States (BBC News, 2018). In some of these countries the freedom of religion and the freedom of Muslim women's dress up according to their understanding and dictates of Islam, have been challenged in the light of the others (Nanwani, 2018 & Morris, 2005). In some areas the non-Muslims have compelled the Muslims to give up some of their practices. They have also created some controversies about *Niqab* wearing in the society because of media propaganda. Media portray that the face covering does not indicate positive images and it is forcibly imposed among women. The *Niqab* wearing women also interpreted with link to terrorism (Shomaker & Reese, 2014). Muslim women strongly agree with the conviction that women's liberation and freedom are involved in *Niqab* dress code. In this study attempted to analyse and interpret the contradictory live experiences and feeling of *Niqab* wearing women and thinking of media who may not know the hidden wisdom behind such Islamic culture.

## Literature Review

### The Concept of Niqab

There are many different types of veils, depending on customs, interpretation of the literature, ethnicity, geographic location and political affiliation. The *Hijab* is a headscarf that covers head and upper neck but exposes the face. The *Niqab* covers the face and head but exposes the eyes. The *Burqa* (mostly in Afghanistan), is the rarest form, which covers the whole body, with crocheted eye openings.

Two types of veils usually seen in most parts of the Muslim world. *Niqab* is the Arabic term for veils which cover whole of the body including hair, neck, shoulders and face, except eyes and hands. Through *Niqab* some people simply wish to be identified as Muslims. They say that wearing *Niqab* gives them a sense of freedom and liberation for choosing personal attire and clothing. Some choose to do it because their family, friends and community do it, to assert their sense of belonging.

The word *Niqab* is conceptually applies to women to protect their confidentiality and modesty from ill motives of the unknown males having incident and unlawful intention. Wearing *Niqab* protects the women from the harassment of their male counterparts whose ill motives are well known. It signifies humbleness and modesty of the women. According to a British Muslim, "*Niqab* is for liberated women", a placard held by female (Kareem, 2018 & Celizic, 2007). One Iranian women, Ebtaker who conducted a live interview in Tehran, said, "Islamic veil is a kind of social act, I don't think it is big issue for women, because there are a lot of issues for women that are so important, veil is not a big thing (Nakhleh, 2009)."

It has been reported that Muslims believe that *Niqab* was originally prescribed by Allah (S.W.T) to secure privacy and create a different environment for the protection of private and public life of Muhammad (S.A.W) and his family (Derya & Salih, 2015). The Holy *Quran* clearly states: "**And tell the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty**" (*Al Quran* 24:31). This is an injunction and therefore Muslim women should follow this obligation and wear the modest dress. There is no doubt that *Niqab* has an basis of the Islamic culture commonly practised and recognized by Muslims throughout history. Some Islamic scholars say that the *Niqab* is not compulsory for Muslim women. On the other hand some opine that *Niqab* is obligatory. However, Islamic scholars have agreed that *Niqab* is part of Islamic *Shariah*, but have differed as to whether it is also compulsory or optional acts of virtue (Stephen et al., 2019 & Islamic Pamphlet, 2012).

The *Niqab* wearing women are often called '*Niqabiah*' or '*Muntaqabah*'. Bagley (1995) reports that the *Niqab* is worn by the Muslim women in the Arabian Peninsula such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Yemen, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. It is also worn in south Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, some Muslim parts of Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. It is also used as an ideal modest dress in some parts of the Palestinian territories, Syria, Southern Iran and other areas where the populations are predominantly Muslim. There are also African countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Libya, Morocco where wearing *Niqab* as seen as an cultural norms. Because of its worldwide use, it is difficult to differentiate definitively among the different types of *Niqab*. Muslim women think, wearing *Niqab* is a sign of protection of the female sex from the harassment of the males. It is also seen as an important aspect of public safety issues. The expression of wearing *Niqab* is religious faith, a sign of personal freedom, a secured without exemption (Ferrari & Pastorelli, 2013).

Hoodfar (2003) argued multiple meanings of dress codes, such as the *Niqab* which serves significant political, cultural, and social functions, acting as a non-verbal ideological communication medium. According to Clarke (2003), the Islamic dress also has the significant objectives in communicating religious and social values (Basem Attum & Zafar Shamoan, 2019). Jine & Nafey (2012) reports that as a media of social communication and carrier of cultural and gendered norms the *Niqab* is the most provoking and challenging dress, which elicit many conflicting and diverse reactions among many non-Muslims. Therefore, the *Niqab* is adopted as a distinctive dress code for Muslim women (Jasmine, 2006).

### **Dictates of Islam for Muslim Women Regarding Clothing and Attire**

Muslims are concerned about their clothing in two contexts: firstly, clothing for regular in-house and outside wearing; and secondly, clothing required exclusively for religious activities. Allah (S.W.T) says to Prophet (S.A.W), "***O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them. That will be better, so that they may be unrecognized and not harassed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful***" (*Al-Quran, Al Ahzab* 33:59).

The Holy *Quran* advises Muslim women to wear modest dress to cover their bosoms and genitals (Martin 2003). The *Quran* clearly declares, "***O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women***" (*Al-Quran, Al-Ahzab* 33:32). This is the ruling from Allah (S.W.T) for all Muslim women, but some Islamic scholars say that, this requirement is applicable to Prophet's wives and his family. If other women decide to follow this *Quranic* guidance, it's fine, which indicates their loyalty and submission to the teaching of Islam. According to *Al-Quran* wearing *Hijab* or *al-Khimar* is obligatory, which is found mentioned in the following verse of the *Quran*. It says, "***Tell the believing women to put their Khimar over their bosoms***" (*Al-Quran, An-Nur* 24:31). Many prominent Arab scholar's accepted the meaning of *al-Khimar* as a veil or scarf that is worn by the women to cover their shoulder, head, chest, neck and keep their face open.

According to Safiya bint Shaiba (R.A), Aisha (R.A) used to say that, "*They should cover their necks and bosoms with veils*" and was revealed "*(the ladies) cut their waist sheets at the edges and covered their faces with the cut pieces*". (*Hadith Al-Bukhari* 6: 282).

Another *Hadith* from Aisha (R.A), "*Prophet (S.A.W) used to offer the Fajr prayer and some believing women covered with their veiling sheets used to attend the Fajr prayer with him and then they would return to their homes unrecognized*" (*Hadith Al-Bukhari* 1: 368).

Majority of the Muslim scholars state that the face is not a part of *aurah*. Therefore, for Muslim women, it is not considered as compulsory. *Tabi'een* Hassan Al Basri (Rahimahullah) quoted in the book "Purdah" (Pg# 194) which states in his *tafseer* of the *Surah An-Nur*, "*What a woman is allowed to show in this ayah implies to those outer garments which the woman puts on to cover her internal decoration (her beauty)*".

The prominent *Tabi'ee*, Qatadah (Rahimahullah) stated, the *Jilbab* should be wrapped and fixed from above the forehead and made to cover the nose, and the chest and most of the face are to be covered. Al-Imam Al-Nawawi mentioned in his book *al-Majmu*; "*The aurah of Muslim women is the whole of her body except face and the palms*". Many Muslim scholars e.g., Imam Malik, Imam al-Syafi'i, Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Thaur, Imam al-'Auza'i, and Imam Ahmad all agreed with the opinion and have endorsed it (Ahmad, 2014 & Abidin, 2011).

From the *Hadith Abu Dawood* Saidatina Aisyah (R.A) reported that, Asma' binti Abu Bakar entered the house of the Prophet (S.A.W), wearing attire made of transparent material that showed her skin. The Prophet S.A.W turned away from her and said: “O Asma! **Verily when a woman has achieved puberty, she should not reveal her body except for this and this - showing the face and the palms** (hands)” (Hadith Abu Dawood, 33: 4092). According to this Hadith, women’s head and hair are *awrah* and must be covered in accordance with Islamic principles, except the face and palm or hand. Furthermore, all Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history agree on the obligation of *Hijab* and say that it is not a religious symbol to differentiate between Muslim and non-Muslim women, rather it is a dress code destined by Islam on Muslim women (Ahmad, 2014). This group of learned scholars agree that wearing *Niqab* is a highly recommended act to cover the face. The scholars also agreed that this does not demonstrate her beauty outside her home. However, some scholars argue that this does not include the face.

### **Misconception about Niqab wearing**

For long decades wearing *Niqab* is considered Islamic tradition and many Muslim women associated themselves with this culture. In recent years significant attention has been focused on the *Niqab* wearing. Abdel-Mageed (2008) reports that some people argue that the term *Niqab* has derived from a symbol of religiosity, piety and purity into a cultural and political perspective. When a Muslim women wear *Niqab*, many non-Muslim and some secular Muslims seem to assume that someone is singling out this women differently (Amer, 2014) Modern societies have established a norm and general rule that everybody should have freedom and liberty while practising one's own duty (Jacobs, 2017). Many countries have already ban the *Niqab* and a few other countries are also going to ban it. This action prevents Muslim women to freely practise their own religious duties concerning dresses. Actually banning *Niqab* goes against the basic principles of Islam. It is also considered as a form of discrimination against Muslim. This action signifies that non-Muslims are using double standards to harm the Muslims. In fact, there are international laws which clearly ensure people’s right to expression and right to perform their religious commandments (ICCPR, 2016).

It has been reported that when Islamic resurgence movement started around the Middle East in the 1970s, this Islamic culture of wearing *Niqab* was disappearing (Bullock, 2010). According to many analysts, the unveiling movement came from Western colonialists who controlled most of the Middle East. Schick (1990) reports that, since World War 2 colonial power viewed the face covering of women as a sign of backwardness and oppression, and they encouraged Muslim women not to wear Islamic veil. In the early twentieth century Arab champions for the liberation of women, such as Quasim Amin in Egypt and Kamal Ataturk in Turkey, said that the *Niqab* is a symbol of Muslim backwardness and they encouraged women to unveil and catch up with modernism. Martin (2010) reports that in October 2009, Grand sheikh of Al-Azhar University, Sheikh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, when visited a school in Cairo, saw a *Niqab* wearing teenage girl. He asked the girl to uncover the face veil and told, “*The Niqab is a tradition; it has no connection with religion*”. He advised the girl not to wear *Niqab* again and issued a verdict (religious order) against use of veil in school (The Daily Telegraph, 2009; Chesler, 2010). Sheikh Ahmad al-Qubaisi, an Iraqi religious authority, endorsed the Egyptian decision and issued similar verdict which states, “*People have the right to know the identity of the person they are in front of in order not to feel deceived. The obligation of niqab was only for the Prophet’s wives as they were the mothers of all believers*” (Chesler, 2010).

Many critics of the Muslims comment against the face covering tradition, which implies that women do not wear the *Niqab* by choice, and they are often forced to do so. On the other hand, many Muslim women and Muslim immigrants in the West argue that the veil is a symbol of devotion and faithfulness to the religious doctrines and based on one's own choice. The critics condemn this, saying that it is a matter of religious backwardness, but according to majority of the Muslim women it is a self-expression of Islamic identity (Harris & Nawaz, 2015).

The *Niqab* controversy has been frequently viewed in the Western news and print media in a negative way. It is evident that at times media seems to control peoples mind and they instigate that wearing *Niqab* is ambiguous to one's identity. They have made it become an issue in many schools. The argument on veiling has become a major legal battlefield in courtrooms around the world (Elver, 2012). The very first court case relating to the *Niqab* in the USA began in 2002, when a Muslim woman sued at the state of Florida for the authority to refuse renewing her driving license photo while wearing the *Niqab* (Britton, 2016).

According to Hopkins (2008) & Göle (1996), Islamic face covering (*Niqab*) is the individual Islamic dressing that identifies one as liberal Muslim woman. It is an irony of fate that media intentionally introduce this individual choosing of dress of women as "racist incivilities and attacks". The scope of this analysis is therefore to judge all the dimensions of this debate and to understand some of the issues related to female identity, dignity and freedom as wearing *Niqab* within public space is crucial to this study. As these topics are extraordinarily important and complicated, even especially within the Muslim community, it is necessary to provide some context concerning the value, purpose, meaning and interpretation of the Islamic face covering culture, which has a rich and age-long history.

### **Methodology of The Research Study**

In this study data were collected by using qualitative research design. It has been reported that the Qualitative research framework used the selected approach for this study and able to entirely describe a phenomenon because of in-depth information and situation (Trevino, 2015; Hoepfl, 1997). According to Schmidt & Brown (2015), "Phenomenology is a qualitative method that examines and describes the live experience from the individual's perspective". This phenomenological research was carried out using two approaches: hermeneutic and transcendental.

A phenomenological approach takes all participant's shared common experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This phenomenological research was conducted on the basis of observations, individual and grouped audio-tape interviews, semi-structured and transcribed interviews.

### **Participants and Procedures**

The researcher chose purposive sampling, which is considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling. In this phenomenology research snowball sampling approach and convenience sampling was chosen to identify and recruit additional hidden participants. Data analysis was based on Tesch (1990) and Creswell's (2014) systematic process of analysing textual data. All the participants came from different countries, but stayed in Malaysia for a considerable period of time to achieve individual objectives. For this study 33 *Niqab* wearing women and 4 focus groups (12) were selected, who have practical and live experience about *Niqab* phenomenon. This phenomenological study contains five

open-ended research questions, which were prepared to obtain the live experience of many *Niqab* wearing women. The questions are:

- What is the meaning and essence of *Niqab*, which is regarded as a symbol of cultural piety and Islamic identity?
- What is the Islamic viewpoint of maintaining *Niqab* and how it is considered as an important aspect for Muslim women?
- Why *niqab* wearing women feel discriminated as *Niqab* being religious issue and political problem?
- How the Muslim women wearing *Niqab* avoid a conflict or remove confusion between a Muslim and a non-Muslim living together in a particular society?
- What is the role of foreign media on *Niqab* controversy?

## Results and Discussions

### Family Perception Towards *Niqab* Wearing

In this section the result shows that most of the participants wear *Niqab* due to cultural identity and religious obligation. Wearing *Niqab* is their family tradition and religious belief. So, they should follow and respect this family tradition. Most of the women of Arabian countries wear *Niqab* as part of their Islamic culture, and following this culture it becomes very easy for them to maintain *Niqab* because they were raised within this environment. When they are grown up, they just follow the family tradition. A total of eight responses reveal that as Muslim women they should follow the traditions of their families because Islam instructs them to respect the decision of the elders. Six responses give details of the family's instruction for wearing *Niqab*. So, they can comfortably follow their families instruction in order to follow the *Niqab* requirements. According to the report of the participants, although they sometimes don't like to wear *Niqab*, but due to family or societies requirement they have to follow it. Family rule is very important for them because they give protection and support to women to wear appropriate dress. A participant who was under 20-25, explains that she started to wearing *Niqab* at the very young age to obey the instructions of her mother and other family members. She continues saying that sometimes family head also gives us instruction to wear *Niqab* because of public safety. Most of the participants points of view are that wearing *Niqab* is their personal choice or freedom and for better understanding of the tenets of Islam. Participant No. 9 is a university student, whose comments are as follows:

"I wear *Niqab*, because by doing so I feel safe from our male friends and I can comfortably maintain a distance from them. My father does not force me to wear *Niqab* but my mother does, so, I just follow my mother". (Participant, 9)

A student Participant says that she likes to wear fashionable dress. She said, "I am using *Niqab* as a culture, because since my childhood I saw my family wearing *Niqab*. So, I follow my families tradition". One Participant, who is a teacher, has negative answer. She said, wearing *Niqab* one may be humiliated or ridiculed even by her own family members, and sometimes by other Muslim family's who don't support wearing *Niqab* for their children. Two participants said, their family are conservative, and they encourage and give priority women's choice but, some families are very conservative. Participant No. 30 said:

"I personally don't like to wear *Niqab* because I have some problems. One of my friends got asthma and breathing problem. So we don't feel comfortable with *Niqab*. Even though we have some other problem but

still we are wearing *Niqab* because we have to obey our family's tradition and their priorities". (Participant 30)

Based on the comments of interviewed participants, wearing *Niqab* is mainly due to the family tradition. Some of them obey their religious teaching and family tradition properly. Wearing *Niqab* express Islamic identity but a few families instructed the family members to wear *Niqab* because for them religion is more important than culture. A few Participants said some families don't like to force their children because it is women's personal choice. According to Dunkel, Trisha, Davidson, & Qurashi, (2010), women are not forced to wear *Niqab* by their male dominated family. They believe their religion considers it mandatory for women to wear *Niqab* and they help them maintain this identity and respect as *Niqab* wearing Muslims (Dunkel et al., 2010). Many people impose negative stereotypes on the women who wear *Niqab* as a visible sign of Islam, harmful for the society. This view is not true. According to Cole and Ahmadi (2003), *Niqab* is embedded in national heritage and place of residence.

### Society's perception Towards Wearing *Niqab*

The results show that every society has their traditional dress. Most of the Participants think wearing *Niqab* is their social tradition and habits. They state that everybody should follow their religious teaching and culture. According to some Participant, Muslim women who wear *Niqab* do that due to Islamic beliefs even though it is not their culture in a particular land or community. The western media condemn *Niqab* wearing women as conservative, offensive, and backward in the society. Table 1 shows the society's view on *Niqab* wearing and this result came out from the interview of 33 participants.

**Table1: Society's View on *Niqab* Wearing**

Code about Society	Response
Follow our religion and culture	12
Media must respect the Muslim customs and tradition	11
Cultural piety	5
Social habit and communities requirement	7
Islamic fashion	4
Location or spot in a restaurant	4
Wearing <i>Niqab</i> is a challenge for me	2
	45

The results obtained from qualitative analysis using NVivo 10 software shows that twelve responses with 33 interview participants reveal, everybody should follow their religion and culture. This is the most coded theme about societies understanding among *Niqab* wearing. According to eleven responses the media must respect Muslim customs and tradition. The common misconception about Islam came from majority of non-Muslim people because of their lack of understanding about Islam. Seven respondent express that wearing *Niqab* based on some countries social norms and community requirement. Some of Arabian women wear *Niqab* as a social requirement and they just follow this requirement is a social norms. Participants also reveal the face covering culture of the Muslim women is based on their practices, beliefs, culture, and some of society's requirement. Five respondents express that wearing *Niqab* is women's cultural piety and they are very happy to wear *Niqab*. Muslim religious people prefer that the liberty of choice and practice is based on Islamic faith and traditions. The young participants mostly like to wear fashionable dresses, but general participants view *Niqab* as modest dress. Therefore, Muslim women's dress up should not be



very attractive. Four respondent reveal that they like to go outside for lunch or dinner but sometimes as they feel uneasy to open their face cover, they suggest for special isolated location where they can sit comfortably. Two respondents said that wearing *Niqab* faced a kind of challenge because their family don't like to wear *Niqab*. Participant No. 14 was a house wife. She said:

"In my country most of the women wear *Niqab*. So, adopting this culture is very easy for us. But in some other countries it is difficult for Muslim women to wear *Niqab*" (Participant, 14).

Participant No. 20 was a foreign student and said during her interview about society. She says, "In my society some people who has Islamic knowledge respect us but some of criticize our dress up because they think, women with full face covering only two eyes open while wearing black dress around their bodies are conservative and oppressive, but it is not true. Actually *Niqab* is women's own choice and her inherent fundamental human right. Nobody can force her to wear or remove the *Niqab*. Participant No. 8 said, "Malaysian society and Western society are totally different. Some non-Muslim wants to destroy the image of Islam and they hate the Muslims. On the other hand, the Malaysian non-Muslim people are very humble, gentle and they do not oppose wearing *Niqab*". Participant No. 11, was a married student, said on her opinion:

"There are different opinions for the use of *Niqab*, some scholars say it is not compulsory while some say the opposite, but there is general consensus of it that it is the best attire and dress for Muslim women who intend to be loyal to their religion and it is my cultural piety" (Participant, 11)

Stephanie, (2014) on his research stated that in Muslim society *Niqab* is modest dress and it's form varied from country to country, class to class, context to context. They prefer to wear *Niqab* as a family tradition and community requirement. Hossain (2015) in his research has shown that the practices of wearing *Niqab* is like their social habit and tradition. They cannot simply come out without that. Muslim *Niqab* wearing women cannot defy their community requirement and *Niqab* is not limiting to free movement and interacting with other members in the society or participating in the communities social work. Every woman who wear a *Niqab*, is a unique individual, and it is unfair and inappropriate to make a general statement about all *Niqab* wearing women that they are extremist due to their Islamic attire and a piece of cloth that make as their face covering (Hossain, 2015). Franceschelli (2016) states that not only most Islamic countries but all religious families are part of strong social unit, and it is considered the basis of a healthy and balanced society.

### **Findings and Discussion of the Study**

The findings of this research study summarize that wearing *Niqab* is an expression of Islamic identity and strong cultural influence. Women believe they have to secure the Muslim identity in order to protect their overall cultural identity and *Niqab* is a way to demonstrate the differences between the values of each place and they feel very liberal and independent. The *Niqab* becomes a religious, gender-based, moral and cultural identity. Most of the participants in this study who are used to wear *Niqab* are confident with respect to their inspirations, even though some acknowledge that they also feel discriminated.

*Niqab* Wearing women's freedom is expressed in terms of their personal choice, liberation and empowerment. It highlights the need for women to have personal freedom regarding all aspects

of life. Ruby (2006) in her research has shown that in traditional Islamic countries the status of a woman is indeed a sign of the moral status of the nation and women can play a pivotal role for the overall uplift of the culture. They are indispensable part of every community.

The result of the study indicate that everybody appreciates beautiful fashion, style and color. Nowadays in Muslim society Islamic fashion is getting popular and women has been the focal point of different colour, behaviour and style. Younger generations don't like to wear traditional loose fitting and black color *Niqab*. Even though they wear *Niqab*, but they prefer to design their dress code according to fashion and style. The findings have generally showed that, *Niqab* is women's personal choice and the type of *Niqab* they want to wear is up to them. The world scenario is to combine ethics with fashion, the shari'i norms and modern trends to show the style (Shirazi, 2016). The Russian Mufti (2013) encouraged the Muslim women to participate at the Islamic fashion show because everything depends on women's personality, behaviour, manners, and etiquette, but they have to think about the term "modesty" should come first.

In every religion family is considered to be a very important and strong social unit. A person's identity and aims come from family entity, unity and structure, and an ideal family gives its members physical, moral and psychological support (Callan, 2014). *Niqab* wearing women respect and follow their elders and most of the women stay within family boundary. But every family should understand women's feelings and sentiment, her likes and dislikes. However, family head should not force a woman to wear *Niqab*, because it's purely women's personal choice.

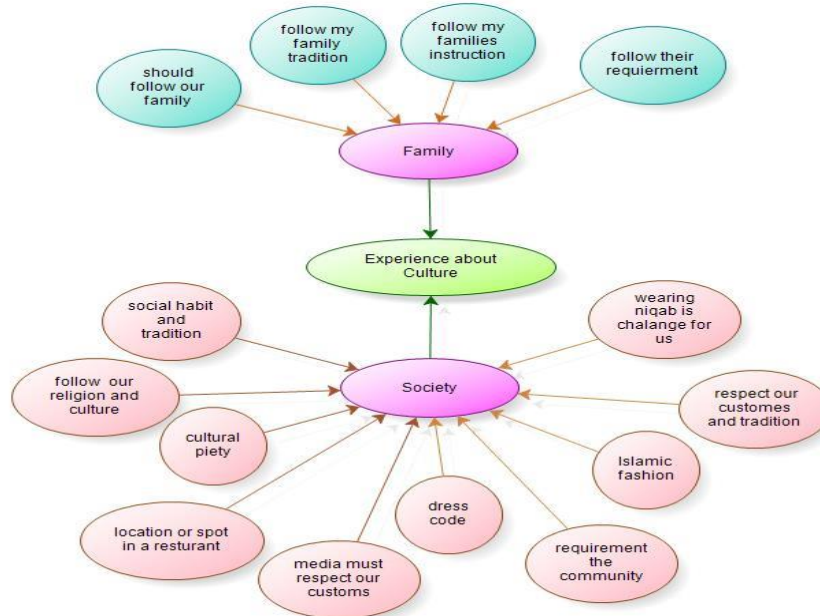
The findings of the study showed that women who decided to wear *Niqab* have taken the decision based on families instruction and peer encouragement. The researcher found out several Participants who are very young (age 20-25), they raised *Niqab* since their childhood. Primarily they had lack of knowledge about Islamic attire and dress, but later on they just followed the footsteps of their mother and other female members of the family. Young women initially thought that probably the family was forcing them to wear *Niqab* but when they are grown up then realized that being a Muslim has a duty to follow religious instructions and family tradition. This is not a kind of force.

Another issue raised by participants is that some families are conservative and very strict about wearing *Niqab* and think, it is obligatory for Muslim, and even when necessary they do not like to open their face cover. In some families they were forced to wear *Niqab*, but that types of family are very few. Wearing *Niqab* is women's personal choice and understanding of Islam. Most of the Participant feel that family culture gives priority to women's choice.

In the context of Malaysian women, some wear *Niqab* as a family tradition and religious belief but some women wear *Niqab* only due to religious faith, even though it is not their culture. However, since Islam is the "Eternal Code of Human life", which the Most Gracious Allah presented to Mankind through Muhammad (SAW), its values and virtues reign everywhere throughout the world. The moral, cultural values and ethical principles of Islam cannot be confined to a particular place or community.

The principle findings of this study are framed by the Muslim women staying and living in Malaysia. The most frequent value raised was freedom and rights, particularly freedom of expression and acceptance of religious views. It supports that wearing *Niqab* is a women's individual right and freedom of choice. Secondly, the findings consist of the opinions of some individuals who are selected by the media to present the covering issue. recently it is observed

that Niqab wearing women are facing significant problems in the society. Many non-Muslim countries recently have imposed some restrictions to this superior Muslim culture and a divine rule. They think that the face-covering, often imposed to women forcibly, which indicates fundamentalism, oppression and an insult of human dignity. Figure 1 exhibits a data framework that explained the participants experience about the culture.



**Figure 1: Framework *Niqab* Wearing Women's Cultural Perspective**

### Conclusion

This study is an humble effort to present the precise information and live experiences of Muslim *Niqab* wearing women who are the subject matter in this phenomenological research. The aim of this study is to discuss wearing *Niqab* as women's religious faith and Islamic culture and personal choice. The results showed that there was a consensus among Muslim *Niqab* wearing women followed by their experience in a mixed society where many are not wearing *Niqab*. *Niqab* is undoubtedly modest dress. It expresses Islamic identity and women's perception about Islamic values and its beauty. Wearing *Niqab* is a women's personal choice and a religious requirement. But very recently there has been a varied debate over the importance, necessity, justification on mere validity of the *Niqab*. This debate should be ended with immediate effect.

Every woman has the right to be treated equally and be given the freedom of choosing the type of dress they want to wear. Although Islam does not force the Muslim women to wear face-covering attire, some contemporary Islamic scholars referring to the *Quran* and tradition of the Prophet (S.A.W) have made it an obligatory practice for the women. This has given rise to some sort of controversy surrounding the traditional Islamic dress. Everybody should have the right to wear what they like and follow the religious duties and obligation.

In many societies *Niqab* wearing women are seen as progressive people. They are neither anti-social elements, nor they are a barrier to women's development and prosperity. So *Niqab* should not be perceived as a security risk. Some non-educated and misguided people while wearing *Niqab* might get involved in some sort of criminal activities, and thus they appear to portray a bad image of Islam. These women's identity remains unknown. Consequently *Niqab* wearing

women are becoming victims of such illegal media propaganda, crimes and unlawful activities. It is often noticed that some biased media reports portrayed bad image of Islam, and as a result *Niqab* wearing women become subjected to humiliation, dishonor, discrimination and victimization in some cases.

## References

- Al- Qu'ran, Al-Ahzab 33: 59  
Al-Qu'ran, An-Nur 24:30-31  
Al Bukhari. Volume 6, Book 60, Hadith no. 282  
Al-Bukhari Volume 1, Book 8, Hadith no. 368  
Abu Dawood, book no. 33, Hadith no. 4092  
Abdel-Mageed, D. (2008, September 18). The multiple shades of the hijab. Retrieved from <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/09/20089812812445443.htm>  
Abidin, Z.M.A. (2011, May 14). Hukum Memakai Purdah, Retrieved from [http://drmaza.com/himpunan\\_fatwa/?p=35](http://drmaza.com/himpunan_fatwa/?p=35)  
Ahmad, N. M. (2014). Understanding the obligation of hijab in Islam. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/understanding-the-obligation-of-hijab-in-islam-nisar-mohammad-ahmad#sthash.TnQe6YgD.dpuf>  
Ahmadi, F. (2006). Islamic feminism in Iran: Feminism in a new Islamic context. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22(2), 33-53. <https://www.popline.org/node/179305>  
Alalwani, T.J. (2012). *Apostasy in Islam: A Historical & Scriptural Analysis*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA.  
Basem, A., & Zarif, S. (2019). *Cultural Competence in the Care of Muslim Patients and their Families*, Treasure Island (FL), Stat Pearls Publishing. Retrieved <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK499933/>  
BBC News. (2014). The Islamic veil across Europe, 1 July 2014 Retrieved from [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-130...](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-130...) British Broadcasting Corporation  
BBC News. (2018). The Islamic Veil across Europe, 31 May 2018 Retrieved <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095>  
Bullock, K. (2010). Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes, *International Institute of Islamic Thought* (111T), USA.  
Britton, B. (2016). Why are the Burqa and Burkini being banned? CNN, Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/19/europe/burqa-burkini-bans/index.html>  
Brown, A.Y. (2013). *Fully veiled women hinder progressive Islam* [WWW Document]. The Independent. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/fully-veiled-womenhinder-progressive-islam-8817963.html> (accessed 3.13.14).  
Clarke, L. (2003). *Hijab according to the hadith: Text and interpretation*. In S. S. Alvi, H. Hoodfar, & S. McDonough, PP. 214-286, Toronto, Women's Press.  
Carter, J. (2014). *9 Thing you should Know About Islam*, *The Gospel Society*, Retrieved <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-islam/>  
Chesler, P. (2010). "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings," *Middle East Quarterly Spring* 2010, Vol. 17 pp. 3-11. Retrieved from: <https://www.meforum.org/articles/2010/worldwide-trends-in-honor-killings>  
Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mix method approaches*, 4th Edition, Thousand Oaks, U.K., Sage Publication.  
Celizic, M. (2007, September 13). Beyond the veil: Lives of women in Iran. *Today News*. Retrieved from <https://www.today.com/news/beyond-veil-lives-women-iran-2D80555320>  
Derya, I., & Salih, Y. (2015). *Muslim Identity Formation in Religiously Diverse Society*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK.

- Elver, H. (2012). *The headscarf controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion*. Oxford University Press.
- Bagley, F. R. C. (1995). "Introduction", in B. Spuler, *A History of the Muslim World. The Age of the Caliphs*, Markus Wiener Pub (1995, February, X;
- Ferrari, A., & Pastorelli, S. (2013). *The Burqa Affair Across Europe: Between Public and Private Space*, Abingdon Oxford, UK, Raligare.
- Franceschelli, M. (2016). *Identity and upbringing in South Asian Muslim Families: Insights from Young People and their Parents in Britain*, London UK Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gul, M. (2005). Ideology, progress, and dialogue: A comparison of feminist and Islamist women's approaches to issues of head covering in Turkey. *Gender and Society*. 19(1), 104-120. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30044571>
- Hoodfar, H. (2003). More than clothing: Veiling as an adaptive strategy. In S. S. Alvi, H. Hoodfar, & S. McDonough (Eds.), *Muslim veil in North America: Issues and debates* (pp. 3–40). Toronto: Women's Press.
- Hassan, M. (2015). Unity of Muslim Ummah, It's Need Importance and suggestions, *International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp-26-32.
- Harris, S., & Nawaz, M. (2015). *Islam and the Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue*, Harvard University Press.
- Hossain, K. (2015). *Oppressed or in serenity*. Retrieved from <http://www.sociable7.com/blog/2015/03/11/oppressed-or-in-serenity/>
- Islamic Pamphlets (2012). *The Burqa and Niqab-Uncovering the Facts*, Retrieved from <http://islamicpamphlets.com/the-burqa-niqab-uncovering-the-facts/>
- Jasmine, J. (2006). Unveiled Sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and Experiences of Veiling among Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School. *Journal Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39(3), 239-252. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600788503>
- Jani, V. (2011). *Diversity In Design: Perspectives From The Non-Western World*, New York: Fairchild Books.
- Kareem, P.A.McDonald. (2018). Denmark's Recent "Burqa Ban"-Unnecessary, Counterproductive and Hypocritical, *Religious Freedom Institute*, Retrieved <https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/cornerstone/denmarks-recent-burqa-ban-unnecessary-counterproductive-and-hypocritical>
- Lipka, M. (2016). Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world, *Pew Research Centre*. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>
- Lauren, D. D.(2016). The Role of Gender, Class, and Religion in Biracial Americans' Racial Labelling Decisions, *American Sociological Review*,. 81(1) 57–84. <http://asr.sagepub.com>.
- Long, H., & Chakov, K. (2016). *Anthropological Theories, A Guide Prepared by Students For Students: Social Evolutionism*. University of Alabama Department of Anthropology. Retrieved from <http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Social%20Evolutionism>
- Morris, P. (2004). *Covering Islam: Burqa and Hijab: Limits to the Human Right to Regulation*. Retrieved from <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/law/centres/nzcpl/publications/human-rights-research-journal/previous-issues/volume-two,-2004/Morris.pdf>
- Nakhleh, A.E. (2009). *A Necessary Engagement: Reinventing America's Relations With The Muslim World*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Nanwani, S. (2018). The Burqa Ban: An Unreasonable Limitation on Religious Freedom or Justification Restriction? *Emory International Law Review*, Vol. 25 (3), Retrieved

- <http://law.emory.edu/eilr/content/volume-25/issue-3/comments/burqa-ban-limitation-religious-freedom-restriction.html>
- Ruby, T. (2006). Listening to the voices of hijab. *Women's studies International Forum* 29(1), 54-66. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2005.10.006>
- Sahar, A. (2014). *Burka and Niqab cover their face but not mind*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/burqa-and-niqab-they-cover-the-face-not-the-mind-31558>
- Stephanie, C. (2014). *Anti veiling campaigns in the Muslim world: Gender, Modernism, and the politics of dress*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Shoemaker, P.J., & Reese, S.D. (2014). *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective* (3rd ed.), New York: Routledge.
- Stephen, H. Jones, Rebecca Catto, Tom Kaden & Elsdon-Baker. (2019). 'That's How Muslims are Required to View the World: Race, Culture and belief in non-Muslims descriptions of Islam and Science', *The Sociological Review Foundation, SAGE Publication*, Vol. 67, issue 1, Pg 161-177. Retrieved <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0038026118778174>
- Schick, I. (1990). Representing Middle Eastern women: Feminism and colonial discourse. *Feminist Studies*, 16(2), 345-380. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177854>
- Schmidt, N.A., & Brown, J.M. (2015). *Evidence-Based Practice For Nurses: Appraisal And Application of Research* (3rd Ed.), Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Shirazi, F. (2016). *Brand Islam: The Marketing and Comodification of Piety*, 1st edition, Austin, University of Texas Press, USA.
- Sayyid, M. R. (2014). *The Muslim dress Islamic or Cultural: Hijab the Muslim Women's Dress, Islamic or Cultural?* Lulu Press.
- Titus Burckhardt. (2009). *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning Commemorative Edition*, Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom.
- Global Findex. (2017). The World Findex Data Base, The World Bank. Retrieved <https://globalfindex.worldbank.org/>