

Revealing Religious Discrimination Experience against Indonesian Muslim Women in the United States of America

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Abstract: Muslims in the United States (US) face religious discrimination due to an increasingly hostile environment. Further research is needed to explore the dynamics of gender differences in terms of religious discrimination, as Muslim women are usually more pessimistic about their position in society compared to men. This study explores the experiences of Indonesian Muslim women in the US facing religious discrimination using qualitative methods that focus on socio-religious and psychological perspectives. In-depth interviews were conducted in Bahasa, Indonesia, with purposively selected respondents who are women aged 26 and above. The results demonstrate that respondents are: 1) feeling humiliated by others, 2) feeling intimidated, 3) experiencing hateful speech, and 4) experiencing religious micro-aggressions. This study emphasizes the need to raise awareness and promote education to combat negative stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims, particularly Muslim women, for a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Keywords: America; Indonesia; microaggression; Muslim; religious discrimination

Abstrak: Muslim di Amerika Serikat (AS) menghadapi diskriminasi agama karena lingkungan yang semakin tidak bersahabat. Penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk mengeksplorasi dinamika perbedaan gender dalam hal diskriminasi agama karena perempuan Muslim biasanya lebih pesimis tentang posisi mereka di masyarakat dibandingkan dengan laki-laki. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman perempuan Muslim Indonesia di Amerika Serikat dalam menghadapi diskriminasi agama dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif yang berfokus pada perspektif sosio-religius dan psikologis. Wawancara mendalam dilakukan dalam Bahasa Indonesia dengan responden yang dipilih secara purposif yang merupakan perempuan berusia 26 tahun ke atas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para responden: 1) merasa dipermalukan oleh orang lain; 2) merasa terintimidasi; 3) mengalami ujaran kebencian; dan 4) mengalami penyerangan mikro agama. Penelitian ini menekankan perlunya meningkatkan kesadaran dan mempromosikan pendidikan untuk mengatasi stereotip dan prasangka negatif terhadap kaum Muslim, khususnya perempuan Muslim, demi terciptanya masyarakat yang lebih inklusif dan toleran.

Kata Kunci: Amerika; Indonesia; agresi mikro; Muslim; diskriminasi agama

A. Introduction

Religious discrimination against minority populations was extensively documented. However, this violence has not decreased. Given the circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that Muslim women who have experienced religious discrimination during the pandemic may exhibit symptoms of depression. People belonging to religious minority groups have reported instances of verbal harassment, physical assault, and threats of harm. Furthermore, they have faced discrimination and segregation while attempting to access public services and have been denied necessary healthcare.

Moreover, Muslims are the most likely group to report having experienced any form of religious discrimination, with a percentage of 60%. Mogahed and Ikramullah found that the prevalence of religious discrimination has remained relatively stable over the past five years, with reported rates ranging from 60% to 62%.¹ Additionally, it has been found that Muslims are more prone to religious discrimination in various public institutions, including the airport (44%), job applications (33%), interactions with law enforcement (31%), and when receiving healthcare services (25%).² Furthermore, Muslims are more likely to face interpersonal discrimination, such as in restaurants or other public places (49%), as well as in the workplace or school (42%). Similar to the findings of other surveys, these surveys demonstrate that Muslims, Jews, and the general public are equally likely to have experienced religious discrimination from their family and friends (30%, 27%, and 33%, respectively).³

According to the Pew Research Center's survey of 1,503 adults, the majority of respondents believe that there is still some or a lot of discrimination against Muslims.⁴ Many Muslims report experiencing discrimination more frequently than other groups in society. Approximately 82% of Muslims report facing some form of discrimination, with 56% indicating that they encounter a

¹ Dalia Mogahed and Erum Ikramullah, "American Muslim Poll 2020: Amid Pandemic and Protest," *ispu.org*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.ispu.org/american-muslim-poll-2020-amid-pandemic-and-protest/>.

² Mogahed and Ikramullah.

³ Mogahed and Ikramullah.

⁴ Pew Research Center, "Sharp Rise in the Share of Americans Saying Jews Face Discrimination: Discrimination Seen as Widespread against Muslims, Other Groups," Pew Research Center, April 15, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/04/15/Sharp-Rise-in-the-Share-of-Americans-Saying-Jews-Face-Discrimination/>.

significant amount of discrimination. Previous research has shown that Muslims who have experienced religious discrimination are more likely to develop feelings of suspicion, vigilance, and mistrust.⁵ It could result in physical health and psychological issues.⁶ Thus, it is evident that Muslim American individuals and their communities suffer from religious discrimination. Furthermore, despite the extensive literature on Muslim individuals and the country's history of overt discrimination, only a few studies have been conducted to examine how Muslims in the United States cope with subtle forms of religious discrimination.⁷

Muslim women also express a higher level of concern than men regarding anti-Muslim discrimination. In recent years, a higher percentage of Muslim women (57%) compared to men (43%) believe that being Muslim in the United States has become more challenging. According to a survey, a significant majority of Muslim women (83%) believe that there is a substantial amount of discrimination against Muslims. A smaller proportion of men (68%) share this sentiment. Indeed, approximately 55% of women report having encountered at least one form of anti-Muslim discrimination within the past year. These incidents include being treated with suspicion, being called offensive names, being singled out by airport security or other law enforcement, or being physically threatened or attacked. According to Gecewicz, only 42% of men reported experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination in the past year.⁸

⁵ Alyssa E. Rippey and Elana Newman, "Perceived Religious Discrimination and Its Relationship to Anxiety and Paranoia among Muslim Americans," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 1, no. 1 (2006): 5–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564900600654351>.

⁶ Ibrahim A. Kira et al., "The Effects of Perceived Discrimination and Backlash on Iraqi Refugees' Mental and Physical Health," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 5, no. 1 (2010): 59–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564901003622110>; Lorraine P. Sheridan, "Islamophobia Pre- and Post-September 11th, 2001," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21, no. 3 (2006): 317–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260505282885>.

⁷ Kevin Leo Nadal, "Preventing Racial, Ethnic, Gender, Sexual Minority, Disability, and Religious Microaggressions: Recommendations for Promoting Positive Mental Health," *Prevention in Counseling Psychology: Theory, Research, Practice and Training* 2, no. 1 (2008): 22–27; Kevin Leo Nadal et al., "Religious Microaggressions in The United States: Mental Health Implications for Religious Minority Groups," in *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact*, ed. Derald Wing Sue (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2010), 287–310.

⁸ Claire Gecewicz, "In Many Ways, Muslim Men and Women See Life in America Differently," Pew Research Center, August 7, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/08/07/in-many-ways-muslim-men-and-women-see-life-in-america-differently/>.

As discovered by Peek, in the years following the 9/11 attacks, the Muslim community in the United States continues to face vulnerability and overt bigotry.⁹ A young woman wearing a hijab reported that an American white male was staring at her and began singing the national anthem loudly in a specific incident. Peek concludes from the interview that the respondent “was left feeling as although patriotism was being used as a cover for anti-Muslim bigotry.”¹⁰ Although not explicitly categorized as a microaggression in Peek’s literature,¹¹ this particular incident aligns with the description of a religious microaggression as posited by Nadal and his colleagues.¹² They define it as “subtle behavioral and verbal exchanges (both conscious and unconscious) that send denigrating messages.”¹³ This observation is relevant in the context of Muslim Americans.

Currently, Indonesian Americans, migrants from Indonesia to the United States and their American-born descendants, are the 15th largest group of Asian Americans documented in the United States and one of the fastest-growing.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Indonesians living overseas (individuals born in Indonesia or of Indonesian descent who live outside of Indonesia) also reside in the United States. As of 2015, approximately 8 million Indonesians were living overseas.¹⁵ However, there have been few systematic efforts to define, clarify, and explain the issue of religious discrimination among Indonesian Muslim women living in the United States. Religious discrimination has resulted in the emergence of a burgeoning field encompassing theology, religious studies, interfaith, and interreligious studies. However, there is a lack of attention given to the impact of discrimination on Indonesians residing in the United States.

⁹ Lori Peek, *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans After 9/11* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Peek.

¹¹ Peek.

¹² Nadal et al., “Religious Microaggressions in The United States: Mental Health Implications for Religious Minority Groups.”

¹³ Nadal et al.

¹⁴ Eveline Yang, “Indonesian Americans,” in *The Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, ed. Thomas Riggs (Detroit: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2014); Jessica S. Barnes and Claudette E. Bennett, “Census 2000 Brief: The Asian Population: 2000,” United States Census Bureau, 2002, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2002/dec/c2kbr01-16.html>.

¹⁵ Tempo.co, “Memanfaatkan Diaspora Indonesia,” Tempo.co, August 11, 2015, <https://kolom.tempo.co/read/1002435/memanfaatkan-diaspora-indonesia>.

Considering that the United States is a culturally and racially diverse country, this is relevant to the purpose of this study. The empirical findings will focus on major urban areas with a high percentage of immigrants and visible minorities. Because this study focused on a few states with relatively large cities, expanding it to include the entire country seems overly ambitious. The inquiry for this study was conducted only in eight states across the United States. These states were chosen based on their accessibility.

This research aims to investigate the experiences of Muslim Indonesian women regarding religious discrimination. The main question being explored is what and how these women encounter discrimination. There has been a lot of discussion about the importance of recurring incidents of religious discrimination. Still, not much has been written about the wider significance of the experiences of Indonesian Muslim women living in the United States.

Religious discrimination against Muslims is a widespread global phenomenon, and its detrimental impact on mental health and overall well-being is widely acknowledged. In addition, there is a lack of research on the experiences of Muslim Indonesian women, especially within the context of the United States. Understanding individuals' experiences with religious discrimination can provide insight into the nuances and complexities of their lived experiences, offering perspectives on the larger issue of religious discrimination within a diverse American society.

Understanding the experiences of religious discrimination faced by Indonesian Muslim women is crucial for several reasons. First, this study can enhance the existing literature on religious discrimination and its impact on marginalized communities by emphasizing the firsthand experiences of these women. This study contributes to the literature on religious discrimination by examining the experiences of Muslim Indonesian women in the United States. By examining the various forms of discrimination they encounter, this research provides a deeper understanding of the challenges experienced by individuals. Second, this information can be a valuable resource for Indonesian Muslim women. Furthermore, this finding can assist policymakers and advocacy groups in understanding the specific challenges faced by this population, thereby enabling them to create focused interventions and support systems. Also, this study aims to contribute to the broader dialogue on religious discrimination and promote a more inclusive and tolerant society by understanding the

specific challenges faced by individuals and the impact of discrimination on their well-being. This research aims to empower marginalized communities and promote a society that values diversity and religious freedom by amplifying the voices of Muslim Indonesian women. In addition, this research offers recommendations regarding the study and promotion of understanding and discussion on religious discrimination. Specifically, the author believes these recommendations will serve as a valuable resource for Indonesian Muslim women in the United States.

Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the experiences of Muslim Indonesian women residing in the United States, considering the unique intersection of their religious and cultural identities. Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, has a diverse population that includes various ethnicities, languages, and religious traditions. The migration of Indonesian Muslims to the United States presents unique challenges and opportunities as they adapt to a new cultural environment while upholding their religious beliefs and practices.

This study uses intersectional theory that recognizes various factors that contribute to an individual's identity and experiences. These factors encompass gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, physical appearance, and other aspects of a person's identity that significantly influence their life and how others perceive and treat them. This research uses this concept to explain the oppression experienced by Muslim women that have been widely used across various domains, including politics,¹⁶ education,¹⁷ healthcare¹⁸, and employment, to economics.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ange-Marie Hancock, "Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm," *Politics & Gender* 3, no. 2 (2007): 248–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X07000062>; Evangelina Holvino, "Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender and Class in Organization Studies," *Gender, Work & Organization* 17, no. 3 (2010): 248–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2008.00400.x>.

¹⁷ Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771–1800, <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>; Anna Julia Cooper, "The Colored Woman's Office," in *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*, ed. Charles Lemert (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2016); Sandra J. Jones, "Complex Subjectivities: Class, Ethnicity, and Race in Women's Narratives of Upward Mobility," *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 4 (2003): 803–20, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0022-4537.2003.00091.x>.

¹⁸ Ursula A Kelly, "Integrating Intersectionality and Biomedicine in Health Disparities Research," *Advances in Nursing Science* 32, no. 2 (2009): 42–56, <https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0b013e3181a3b3fc>; Edna A Viruell-Fuentes, Patricia Y Miranda, and Sawsan Abdulrahim, "More than Culture: Structural Racism, Intersectionality Theory, and Immigrant

B. Method

Research Design

This study investigates an area that has not been explored before in the context of religious discrimination. This study aims to investigate the qualitative framework of religious discrimination experiences among Indonesian people living in the United States. The study investigates the descriptive experiences of Indonesian Muslim women using a qualitative approach. This approach is chosen because it closely adheres to the original data, allowing for unexpected insights and exploring sensitive topics such as treatment, circum-stances and behavior perceived as religious discrimination.

In order to enhance our comprehension of religious discrimination, this study aims to document various experiences of discrimination as perceived by victims who live in the United States.

Participants

This study recruited seven Indonesian people living in various areas of the United States. The ages and length of time living in the United States of the participants are varied. Gaining access to recruit informants can be a challenging process. Some respondents may have hesitated to share their experiences for fear of revealing their identification or undermining their reputation.²⁰

This study used purposeful sampling in selecting participants because participants must be able to provide relevant responses to the interview questions.²¹ Therefore, the author needs to identify and recruit participants

Health,” *Social Science & Medicine* 75, no. 12 (2012): 2099–2106, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.12.037>.

¹⁹ Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F Tate, “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,” *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education* 97, no. 1 (1995): 47–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104>.

²⁰ Nadiatus Salama and Nobuyuki Chikudate, “Unpacking the Lived Experiences of Corporate Bribery: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Common Sense in the Indonesian Business World,” *Social Responsibility Journal* 19, no. 3 (2023): 446–59, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-06-2021-0232>.

²¹ Colin Fischer, *Researching and Writing a Dissertation, a Guidebook for Business Students* (Essex: Prentice Hall, 2007).

who can report specific experiences they want to investigate.²² Furthermore, this study included a semi-structured question regarding participants' personal experiences to elaborate and clarify further how religious discrimination manifested in their lives.²³ This study primarily focuses on collecting religious discrimination's experience accounts to describe one's experiences with racism, with the expectation that responses will reflect the most salient experiences of religious discrimination or those that are most "top of mind" for participants.

Data Collection

The present investigation endeavors to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to people's experiences of discrimination, such as verbal slurs, exclusionary practices, stereotypes, and microaggressions. Respondents were questioned about their personal experiences with discrimination, including religious discrimination. Participants who reported religious discrimination in any of these scenarios were then asked a series of follow-up questions. The interview with respondents about their self-reported experiences of religious discrimination is important data in the toolkit when trying to understand inequality and discrimination in society. This study draws on data from the first nationally representative survey designed to collect information on self-reported religious discrimination in the United States. This research is concerned with the following questions: What are the experiences of those respondents who have suffered from religious discrimination?

Finding and identifying the researchers' biases and assumptions is an important aspect of qualitative inquiry because these might have a negative impact on the data collection and analysis process.²⁴ The researchers became aware that their own social identities could have an impact on data collection and analysis; they investigated how their own personal experiences could have

²² Nadiatus Salama and Nobuyuki Chikudate, "Religious Influences on the Rationalization of Corporate Bribery in Indonesia: A Phenomenological Study," *Asian Journal of Business Ethics* 10, no. 1 (2021): 85–102, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13520-021-00123-0>.

²³ Margarete Sandelowski, "Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis Techniques in Mixed-Method Studies," *Research in Nursing & Health* 23, no. 3 (2000): 246–55, [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X\(200006\)23:3<246::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-H](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200006)23:3<246::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-H).

²⁴ Ruth E Fassinger, "Paradigms, Praxis, Problems, and Promise: Grounded Theory in Counseling Psychology Research," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2005): 156–66, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.156>.

an effect on their interpretations to avoid any biases. All reported differences are meaningfully significant. Any references to religion and gender are based on respondents' self-identification among seven Muslim Indonesian women. Each interview was approximately 40 minutes long, with ages ranging from 24 to 63 years old. The institutional review board approved this study at the university where the author was affiliated with the findings. There was no monetary recompense granted. Participants stated their willingness to be recorded. The interviewer began by providing a brief explanation of the study, then asked open-ended questions about participants' experiences with religious discrimination, allowing them the opportunity to respond when they were ready and probed with follow-up questions as necessary.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data is analyzed thematically to gain a deeper understanding of the process and potentially provide explanations for the findings. Similarly, the primary objective of this descriptive qualitative approach is to identify the specific experience. During the analytical process, the author has considered the assumptions made in this study regarding collecting data that captures the lived experiences of the research participants. Transcripts are meticulously coded, with a constant shift in focus between the informant's perspective and the researcher's interpretation of its significance. The analysis follows an inductive approach, known as "bottom-up," and is not driven by preconceived hypotheses. During and after the interviews, the author analyzed the overarching themes. Next, the author ascertained the core elements of the data gathered during the participants' interviews.

C. Results

In this study, participants were asked if they had ever personally experienced religious discrimination because they were Muslim Indonesian women across a variety of situations related to religious discrimination. The main research question guiding this study is to explore the nature and manifestations of religious discrimination experienced by Muslim Indonesian women. It does so by analyzing the various types of discrimination they suffer, such as verbal harassment, physical assault, and being denied access to public facilities. Through in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, the study intends to capture the voices and experiences of Muslim Indonesian women,

highlighting their narratives and bringing attention to their struggles. The participants were asked how they experienced religious discrimination. Similar questions regarding these experiences were asked, with the only difference being the perceived discrimination. For instance, respondents were asked, “Do you believe you have ever personally experienced discrimination because you are a Muslim?” This phrase represents participants’ perceptions of the motivating religious discrimination that underlies their experiences.

Participants were not asked about their citizenship status during the interview. They were simply asked which city or state in the United States they resided in. Although discrimination comes in many forms, this report distinguishes between racial and religious discrimination. In this study, religious discrimination refers to various types of discrimination based on religion, belief, and the related behavior of worship or wearing clothes, veil, speaking style, and appearance.

The results of this study demonstrate that the analysis revealed the following four essences: 1) Feeling humiliated by others, 2) Feeling intimidated, 3) Experiencing hateful speech, and 4) Experiencing religious microaggressions. This next section will provide a more detailed explanation of these themes and offer supporting examples to describe the types of religious discrimination experienced by Muslim Indonesian women. Pseudonyms such as P1, P2, P3.... and P7 will be used to protect the identities of the respondents. Below is Figure 1, which illustrates the experience of religious discrimination.

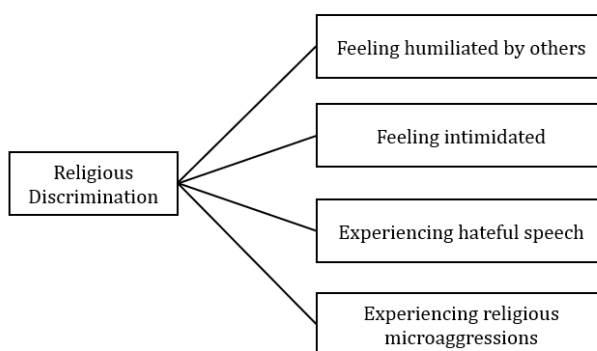


Figure 1
Religious Discrimination

Feeling Humiliated by Others

Because physical appearance is sometimes used to justify discrimination, the author documented the participants who were wearing the traditional Muslim hijab. During the interview, P1, who worked as a nurse, shared her experiences of being treated differently and discussed how she had to adjust aspects of her Muslim identity or physical appearance.

“I’m a Muslim woman from the Minang tribe, but I choose not to wear a hijab. I only used it occasionally, during certain events. Once, when I was wearing the hijab, someone approached me and began grumbling and nagging. It’s just that, because I’m not a regular hijab wearer, I often remove it and confidently state, “I am American and this is only my hijab.” I dare to speak like that and ask them, “What is your problem?” Even so, if necessary, I will show photos of myself on my phone while wearing revealing clothes. I asked them, “Why do you discriminate against people just because of the hijab? Usually, they wonder, “Oh, you don’t always have to wear the hijab?” I answered, “I must.” It is just my faith that has not yet gotten there. These moments happen very often.” (P1)

In this theme, as a result of this (often unconscious) assumption, people who practice a different religion may exhibit behaviors that indicate hostility or even violence towards those who are different from them.

Feeling Intimidated

This theme describes how participants in this study felt intimidated due to their religious adherence. P3, as a lecturer with a doctoral degree, narrated:

“When the incident of Christchurch (New Zealand) mosque shootings occurred, it was very gripping until here. My husband gets worried every time he wants to go for Friday prayer.”

This theme depicts participants becoming victims of those who make fun of their religion, use abusive language, or tease those who adhere to it. White people shouted a hateful statement regarding anti-immigrant rhetoric. Furthermore, another participant also added a similar story:

“Although I and my family enjoy vacationing and exploring the area’s natural beauty, as a Muslim, I am more worried about worship. Thus far, my wife has not worn a hijab yet, but if she does so in the future, of course, I will be even more worried. If we choose to support Trump today, we inadvertently contribute to the promotion of Islamophobia, which is a negative phenomenon.” (P7)

The participants expressed feelings of intimidation. They experienced psychological and emotional harm.

Experiencing Hateful Speech

This theme explores the perception of Islam, which is often portrayed either as a source of fear or as an unacceptable belief system. The participants shared instances where they were subjected to openly negative opinions about Islam. For example, P4 claimed:

“I have been the target of hate speech. The incident happened in 2019, right before the 9/11 memorial. The media kept showing the event over and over again, which might have upset some folks who saw it on the news. So, as I was heading back to the apartment from campus, this group of guys in a truck decided to roll down their windows and start yelling at me, saying something like, “Hey, go back to your neighborhood!” That was the first time someone directed hate speech towards me. Perhaps it happened because they had a negative perception of the hijab I was wearing.”

The phrase “go back” mentioned above reflects nativism hostile to immigrants. Anti-immigrant nativists sometimes make derogatory statements like “go home” or “go back to your country of origin” to perpetuate the belief that Asians are perpetual foreigners who do not belong in the United States. This statement exhibits a caustic tone, indicating a negative sentiment towards immigrants.

“When I was waiting for the bus, an old man came up to me and said: “Fuck Islam, fuck you” (P4).

Since September 11, 2001, Muslims in the United States have been subjected to Islamophobia. This unfortunate reality serves as a historical reminder of how Asian Americans have also faced discrimination and scapegoating by other Americans, driven by racism and xenophobia. However, one participant shared an incident where a stranger verbally harassed them. The harassment specifically targeted Asian and Muslim individuals, reflecting a form of scapegoating.

Experiencing Religious Microaggressions

This subtheme describes how some incidents included interactions when American people may or may not have noticed that their comments and actions were offensive. A white person refused to offer a seat because the respondent was a Muslim:

“I’ve been getting this strange feeling that people are staring at me when I’m out in public, like on the bus. It’s like they’re giving me these weird looks and expressions as if they think I’m some kind of weirdo. They did it right in front of me, without

even trying to hide it. I felt like they didn't treat me very well. When I got on the bus, they didn't give me a seat. People seemed quite shocked when they saw me wearing my clothes and hijab during the summer." (P3)

This case illustrates how P3, as a woman wearing Muslim garb, was subjected to civil rights violations in the United States. In this particular instance, she had been prevented from using public transportation. During the discussion, female participants reported the glances they experienced when they donned headscarves. Participants said that these stares could be a sign of hatred but also a sign of curiosity or discomfort.

D. Discussion

Many academics believe that religious discrimination, particularly against Muslims, is widely prevalent and has resulted in the emergence of a new collective identity among Arab Americans, characterized as Muslim first and Arab second.²⁵ The clothing of the Muslims, in this case, revealed their religious affiliation. Indeed, there continue to be prevalent gender biases in society that perpetuate stereotypical views of women. A significant number of individuals hold comparable perspectives. These biased perspectives may simply be subjective opinions that reflect cynicism toward the existence of women.²⁶

The Muslim immigrant population was not only diverse in terms of race and ethnicity but also intentionally chosen to uphold or, at the very least, advance their Islamic identity within the nation. The portrayal of all Arabs as Muslims in the media and entertainment industry has distorted the reality of their arrival, thereby damaging the context of their reception in the United States.

This study discovered that workplace harassment and discrimination when using public transportation, shopping, or worshipping had the most harmful consequences. Because social interaction is crucial to individuals' quality of life and mental well-being, the first outcome is expected to emerge. A social scenario in which there is a continuous set of relationships and

²⁵ Khyati Y Joshi, "The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (2006): 211-26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600790327>.

²⁶ Nadiatus Salama, "Seksisme Dalam Sains," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 8, no. 2 (2013): 311-22, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v8i2.659>.

interactions, although in other areas, relationships and interactions tend to be one-time or intermittent in character, is represented by employment. Another study also strengthens the fact that women workers are still vulnerable to abusive, marginalizing, and subordinating treatment.²⁷ In addition to having significant psychological implications, being excluded from social relationships as a result of prejudice can have serious consequences. Similarly, barring access to public amenities could significantly impact an individual's quality of life and well-being.

When asked about the characteristics associated with a more severe impact, respondents who covered at least their heads and the area between their waist and knees were the most likely to report a serious impact, whereas traditional women's dresses covered the hair and the entire body from the ankles to the neck. It could be because they are more likely to face discrimination across different domains.

However, policies pertaining to physical appearance should not exhibit bias toward individuals based on their religious beliefs. In the case of a young Sikh man, it is imperative to respect their religious beliefs by allowing them to wear a turban, which holds significant religious and cultural value. Likewise, Muslim women should not be denied the right to wear the hijab based on their religious beliefs.

The religion has played in the lives of many people who have broken the law also highlights the fact that religion does more than just make these other conditions worse. As a result of racism—including personal, institutional, and structural racism—and religious discrimination, Muslim Indonesian women in the United States may be subjected to negative experiences that no one else in this society has ever had to deal with.

In this study, these experiences of religious discrimination are relevant with intersectional theory, which provides a framework for understanding how a person's various social and political identities intersect and contribute to different forms of discrimination. This study uses the concept of intersectionality to explain the oppression experienced by Muslim women. Sometimes, within some institutions, intersectional effects often occur. Particularly, in the aftermath of 9/11, researchers observed that Muslim and

²⁷ Nadiatus Salama, "Suara Sunyi Pekerja Pabrik Perempuan," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 7, no. 2 (2012): 37–50, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v7i2.648>.

Arab Americans experienced low birth weights and other negative birth outcomes, which they attributed to increased racial and religious discrimination during that period.²⁸ Some researchers argue that immigration policies can affect health outcomes through factors such as stress, limited healthcare access, and social determinants of health.²⁹

Religious discrimination occurs when individuals are treated unjustly due to their religion, religious beliefs or practices, or their request for religious accommodation. Furthermore, it applies to how others are treated as a result of their lack of religious belief or practice. Not only does the law protect those who are discriminated against based on their religious beliefs or lack thereof, but it also protects the rights of all individuals who adhere to religious, ethical, or moral principles. Suppose someone has been denied employment, fired, harassed, or otherwise treated unfairly on the basis of their religion, beliefs, or practices, and they have requested that their religious beliefs and practices be accommodated. In that case, they may have been the victim of unlawful religious discrimination.

Discrimination on the basis of religion should not be tolerated in various aspects, including but not limited to economic and social opportunities, access to goods, services, and facilities, and education. There is significant concern among individuals regarding the adverse effects of religious discrimination, specifically in relation to the humiliation, insult, and demeaning of Muslims. The challenges Muslims face daily will necessitate greater access to health and human services because of population growth. There has been less attention given to Muslim experiences of various forms of anti-Muslim bigotry, prejudice, discrimination, and microaggressions in the social work literature than other groups, which is an issue that needs to be addressed. However, religious microaggressions have been given considerable attention in social science literature; they have garnered less attention in social work literature in general, particularly in the social work literature on religion.³⁰

²⁸ Diane S Lauderdale, "Birth Outcomes for Arabic-Named Women in California before and after September 11," *Demography* 43, no. 1 (2006): 185–201, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.2006.0008>.

²⁹ Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim, "More than Culture: Structural Racism, Intersectionality Theory, and Immigrant Health."

³⁰ Altaf Husain and Stephenie Howard, "Religious Microaggressions: A Case Study of Muslim Americans," ed. Michael S Spencer, *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 26, no. 1–2 (2017): 139–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2016.1269710>.

An intense psychological toll is placed on targeted communities as a result of systemic religious discrimination. To cope with this scenario, it is vital for Muslim Indonesian women to have access to mental health resources and support systems. Therefore, assuming the role of ally and active bystander by intervening and providing support to individuals who are being victimized is essential. Previous research has indicated that overall perceived support from family can mitigate the negative psychological effects, including distress and depression, that are associated with experiences of unfair treatment.³¹

It is important to acknowledge that discrimination based on religious beliefs can have far-reaching implications on the psychological and emotional state of individuals. Prior research has indicated that individuals who experience religious discrimination may be vulnerable to experiencing psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.³² Zamarripa illustrates how mental health and spirituality are typically viewed as disconnected subjects from Western perspectives.³³ Zamarripa argues that “in our community, spirituality is key for many of United States in our overall well-being and in restoring and giving balance to our lives.”³⁴ For Chicana/os, Zamarripa believes that identity, community, and spirituality are three fundamental characteristics essential to maintaining good mental health. Nevertheless, there is evidence that there has recently been a growing public interest in religious microaggressions in society.³⁵

Research suggests that instances of religious discrimination contribute to a reduction in self-esteem³⁶ and an increased prevalence of stress among

³¹ Krysia N Mossakowski and Wei Zhang, “Does Social Support Buffer the Stress of Discrimination and Reduce Psychological Distress among Asian Americans?,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2014): 273–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272514534271>; Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, Margarita Alegria, and Chih-Nan Chen, “Perceived Discrimination, Acculturative Stress, and Depression among South Asians: Mixed Findings,” *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2012): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024661>.

³² Sawsan Abdulrahim et al, “Discrimination and Psychological Distress: Does Whiteness Matter for Arab Americans?,” *Social Science & Medicine* 75, no. 12 (2012): 2116–23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.07.030>.

³³ Manuel Zamarripa, *Chicana, Chicano Spirituality & Mental Health*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcEMOsFgXyk>.

³⁴ Zamarripa.

³⁵ Zamarripa.

³⁶ Bonnie Moradi and Nadia Talal Hasan, “Arab American Persons’ Reported Experiences of Discrimination and Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Personal Control,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 51, no. 4 (2004): 418–28, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.51.4.418>.

Muslim populations.³⁷ Sleep deprivation and headaches have also been linked to religious discrimination in several studies.³⁸ However, there has been few research conducted to investigate the potential mental health implications associated with religious microaggression.³⁹ Consequently, the impact of religious microaggressions should be investigated further to determine whether the pattern and symptomatology of religious microaggressions are similar to those observed in the case of racial microaggressions.

However, this literature on religious microaggressions is still scarce and fragmented. A study conducted by Edwards attempted “the first successful expansion of the microaggressions model to a population targeted for their religion, as opposed to their race.”⁴⁰ Because of this, he demonstrated that Muslim Americans are subjected to microaggressions and emotional upsurges. Similarly, as explained by Nadal et al., “religious microaggressions can be defined as subtle behavioral and verbal exchanges (both conscious and unconscious) that send denigrating messages to individuals of various religious groups.”⁴¹

At the same time, mass media also affect the schemas held by targeted individuals. As a result, when Muslim Indonesian women hear or read negative stories in the media about other Muslim women and conclude that the stories are true, they are more likely to worry that other members of the racial/ethnic community may harbor similar views and treat them unfairly.⁴² Essentially, negative relational schemas about others are formed as a result of media

³⁷ Rippy and Newman, “Perceived Religious Discrimination and Its Relationship to Anxiety and Paranoia among Muslim Americans”; Alyssa E. Rippy and Elana Newman, “Adaptation of a Scale of Race-Related Stress for Use with Muslim Americans,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 3, no. 1 (2008): 53–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564900802035292>.

³⁸ Nadal et al., “Religious Microaggressions in The United States: Mental Health Implications for Religious Minority Groups.”

³⁹ Nadal et al.

⁴⁰ Rayna Gwen Edwards, “Religious Microaggressions Towards Muslims in the United States: Group Identity and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Affective Responses” (Wesleyan University, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.14418/wes01.1.525>.

⁴¹ Nadal et al., “Religious Microaggressions in The United States: Mental Health Implications for Religious Minority Groups.”

⁴² Yuki Fujioka, “Black Media Images as a Perceived Threat to African American Ethnic Identity: Coping Responses, Perceived Public Perception, and Attitudes Towards Affirmative Action,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 49, no. 4 (2005): 450–67, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4904_6.

portrayals, and threat appraisals are raised due to individuals' anticipation of the probability of discriminating treatment in the future. This study emphasizes the need to raise awareness and promote education to combat negative stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims, particularly Muslim women, for a more inclusive and tolerant society.

E. Conclusion

This study explores the lived experiences and meaning of being a victim of religious discrimination among Muslim Indonesian women in the United States. The results of this study have significant implications. The author coded, classified, and categorized interviewees' data into four themes: 1) feeling humiliated by others, 2) feeling intimidated, 3) experiencing hateful speech, and 4) experiencing religious microaggressions. Advocating against discrimination can be stressful and frustrating. Alternatively, one can seek out local organizations hosting anti-racism demonstrations. People who don't want to join a group can sign petitions or donate money to activist organizations. Maintaining connections with family, friends, and communities is crucial for shared wisdom, support, and collective power.

The results of this study have the potential to enhance academic understanding and guide policymakers, community leaders, and organizations promoting interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and fighting religious discrimination. This study focuses on the challenges faced by Muslim Indonesian women, allowing for targeted interventions and support systems to address their specific needs.

The limitation of the sample size in this study may be constrained by the availability of participants and the geographical scope of the research. Furthermore, it is important to note that the experiences of Muslim Indonesian women may vary depending on various factors, including age, socioeconomic status, educational background, duration of residency in the United States, and other demographic parameters. These factors can contribute to discrimination faced by Muslim Indonesian women. Furthermore, although the emphasis on theoretical sensitivity in qualitative data analysis processes is intended to reduce researcher bias, bias can still be present. This is due to the interpretative nature of the methodology and the researcher's close involvement with the empirical data. Future research should expand the investigation on the

meaning of life experience. To achieve this, interviews will be conducted with more participants, different thoughts and concepts related to the meaning of experience in various contexts will be explored, and the findings will be compared with the study's theoretical framework. To have a comprehensive range of experiences, it is important to make extra efforts to include a diverse representation in the study.[s]

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