

Religious affiliation and residence in Muslim-majority nations influence sexual behavior

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Hindus and Muslims are less likely than Christians and Jews to have premarital sex, and Muslims are the least likely among people of these religious groups to have extramarital sex, according to a new study that analyzed data on premarital and extramarital sexual behaviors in over 30 developing countries around the world.

Co-authored by Amy Adamczyk, an Associate Professor of Sociology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Brittany Hayes, a Ph.D. student in John Jay's Criminal Justice program, the study, "Religion and Sexual Behaviors: Understanding the Influence of Islamic Cultures and [Religious Affiliation](#) for Explaining Sex Outside of Marriage," appears in the October issue of the [American Sociological Review](#).

According to the researchers, Muslims' lower likelihood of premarital and extramarital sex is related to their commitment to, and community support for, strict religious tenants that only permit sex within marriage. Adamczyk and Hayes also found that national Islamic cultures influence the sexual behaviors of all residents, even people who do not identify themselves as Muslim. The authors posit that religion tends to have a more powerful effect than restrictions on women's movement in many [Muslim countries](#).

"One of the most surprising findings was that [religious](#) affiliations have a real influence on people's sexual behaviors," said Adamczyk.

"Specifically, Muslim and Hindus are significantly less likely to report having had [premarital sex](#) than Christians and Jews. One of the novelties

of our study is our analysis of behaviors, rather than attitudes. While a lot of research attention has been given to understanding differences between the major world religions in adherents' attitudes, much less attention has been given to understanding differences based on behaviors."

The study was inspired by Adamczyk's earlier work where she observed the differences in HIV/AIDS infection rates between Christian- and Muslim-majority nations in which residents in Muslim-majority nations had lower infection rates than residents of Christian nations. Adamczyk and Hayes speculate that differences in sexual behaviors may help explain why people in Muslim-majority nations tend to have lower prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS than residents of other countries.

Adamczyk received her B.A. from Hunter College, City University of New York, and her Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University. Her interests focus on religion, deviance and crime, and health. Her research has been supported with grants from the Department of Homeland Security and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Hayes is currently working on a project focusing on how contextual factors influence victim–offender relationships in ideologically and non-ideologically motivated homicides.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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