

Study finds Muslim women wearing headscarfs face job discrimination

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A Shidler MBA student wears a hajib (headscarf).

In a study, Assistant Professor Sonia Ghumman from the UH Mānoa Shidler College of Business found that Hijabis (Muslim women who wear headscarfs) encountered discrimination when seeking employment.

"We conducted a [field experiment](#) to investigate the extent to which individuals wearing religious attire encounter discrimination during the [hiring process](#)," said Ghumman. "We asked students (ages 19-22) from several [ethnic backgrounds](#) to seek employment with and without the hijab (headscarf) at retail stores and restaurants in two [shopping malls](#). The malls were located primarily in middle-income cities in the Midwest. The [job seekers](#) were paired with an observer and yielded a

total of 112 trials."

The study measured: 1) formal discrimination, marked by explicit [negative behaviors](#) such as outright refusal; 2) interpersonal discrimination, a more subtle expression of discrimination both in nonverbal and verbal behaviors; and 3) expectations to receive job offers.

According to Ghumman, the findings revealed that wearing a hijab had a negative impact in all aspects of the hiring process compared to Muslim women who did not wear a hijab. The field experiment tracked several areas of the hiring process, including the permission to complete job applications, job availability, job call backs, interaction time, and perceived negativity and lack of interest by the employer.

The study also found that Hijabis had lower expectations of receiving job offers than Muslim women who did not wear the hijab, and that Hijabis were more likely to be hired by organizations with high employee diversity.

According to Ghumman, out of all of the [religious symbols](#) and clothes, the hijab is one of the most visual identifiers of Islam, yet Hijabis remain an understudied group in the U.S. when it comes to workplace discrimination. These findings give practical value to recruitment agencies, organizations and Hijabis seeking employment, and helps in the training of individuals who have contact with such job applicants.

A recent publication by Ghumman and co-researcher Ann Marie Ryan of Michigan State University, titled, "Not welcome here: Discrimination towards women who wear Muslim headscarf," outlines their findings and can be found in the May 2013 issue of *Human Relations*.

This is Ghumman's second study related to Hijabis in the workplace. Her

previous research, titled, "The downside of religious attire: The Muslim headscarf and expectations of obtaining employment," looked at several variables that may contribute to the lack of employment opportunities for Hijabis.

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