

## Female attitudes towards women in hijabs in South Russia

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**Background.** This article sets forth the problem of attitudes towards women in connection with the ethno-religious characteristics of their appearance (for example, the hijab [Islamic headscarf]).

**Design.** There were 200 subjects: at the first stage 50 women and 50 men aged 22 to 30 (mean age 25); at the second stage 100 females, residents of Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

**Method.** The study used the Cook-Medley Hostility Scale (translated and adapted by Yu.A. Mendzheritskaya), as well as the author's questionnaire, which consisted of stimulus material (two sets of photos of five girls; in the first set, a portrait shot from the front with natural make-up, in the second set, the same girls, but wearing a black hijab). Respondents were asked to rank the girls in the photographs on a scale from friendly to hostile. At the second stage, we added questions about the respondents' religious beliefs and their assumptions about the religious beliefs of the girls with and without the hijab.

**Results.** The results show that the respondent's level of aggression can lead to a negative, hostile attitude towards a Muslim girl (based only on her external appearance), and more men evaluate the girls wearing the hijab as hostile. We also noted that the color of eyes and hair (even if only the eyelashes and eyebrows could be seen) can form an idea about religious beliefs.

**Conclusion.** Based on the received data, we can talk about the role of appearance. In the future, we plan to study specific features of the perception of appearance and discrimination against girls with a different appearance, in particular ethno-cultural clothing, because appearance is one of the most important triggers of discriminatory behavior.

**Keywords:** hijab, female, attitude, clothing, religious beliefs, Islam, Christianity

## Introduction

Recent events have led to the emergence of the phrase "Islamic factor". Starting with the terrorist attacks in Moscow, in the Stavropol region, in different areas of the North Caucasus, and ending with the conflict with Islamic State and the terrorist attack in France at the editorial office of *Charlie Hebdo*, the relationship with the Islamic world has been discussed in works on political science, conflict studies, sociology, philosophy, and psychology. F.B. Elashi et al. (2010) reported that nega-

tive stereotypes towards Muslims escalated after the events of September 11, 2001. The 9/11 event was a turning point in attitudes towards Islam all over the world. R. Eid and H. El-Gohary (2015) noted that Muslims make up one of the largest tourist markets in the world, but they still encounter problems with the effect of Islamic religiosity on the relationship between Muslim tourist perceived value and Muslim customers' satisfaction. P. Akhtar (2014) identifies another problem, that some Muslims in Europe (who were born in Europe) are no longer consider themselves representatives of their culture, but are subject to discrimination.

Looking at the history of the South of Russia, it is important to note that proximity to the republics of the North Caucasus, as well as trade and economic and political ties, have provided interaction among people of different nationalities and religions and have formed a relatively positive attitude towards representatives of different religions and cultures. Nevertheless, appearance is becoming the most important component that affects perception of others. V.A. Labunskaya (2013) reported that appearance is becoming one of the most important means of building typologies, allocation and recognition of certain social groups, and describing life-styles. Appearance becomes a means of visual communication and stratification. The issue of the hijab in Russia began to become more of a problem after the conflict in the Stavropol region (2012), when Muslim girls started wearing a scarf to school, and the more recent conflict on the border involving a Russian girl who intended to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (June 2015–January 2016). Also, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of students from other regions and countries, including Muslim ones, and of women who wear the hijab.

The purpose of our work was to explore attitudes towards women with the hijab and without, on the part of young people with different levels of aggressiveness, and also to consider attributions of religious belief according to external appearance (head covering).

Discrimination based on physical appearance is a pervasive social problem all over the world. Discussing the essence of the hijab, O.V. Tarasenko (2010) emphasized that under the hijab most mean exclusively a women's attribute, but this concept is broader and includes "external hijab" (clothing covering the entire body except the face and hands) and "internal hijab" (beliefs, behaviors). Internal hijab, the author states, is "*haya* — modesty, shyness." M.G. Dosanova (2010), studying the attitude of modern girls who wear the hijab, found that one of the main reasons that women in Kazakhstan to do so is to claim a certain status. For many girls, the hijab gives them a chance to get married faster, to be accepted in certain social groups, to use religion as a specific resource, and to represent themselves as "having the knowledge of what a real woman should be". Thus, the author emphasized that for the majority of respondents (women aged 17 to 35), the hijab serves not only religious purposes, but also secular ones. N. Hassim (2014) noted that the worldwide spread of Islam inadvertently changed the representation of Muslim women and the hijab and diminish oppressive stereotypes. Y. Mahmud and V. Swami (2010) examined the effects of wearing the hijab on Muslim and non-Muslim men's perceptions of women's attractiveness and intelligence, reporting that there is a significant effect of hijab status, with women wearing the hijab being rated more negatively than women without hijab. Interest in the phenomenon of the hijab today can be

noted at <http://worldhijabday.com>; the basic position presented there is, “Before you judge, cover up for a day”. This resource includes stories of more than 19,000 women from different parts of the world about their feelings and experiences related to wearing of the hijab.

In some works (Brown & Brown, 2015; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Ho, 2007), examined categorization of the “other” and the role of appearance as ethnic discrimination. However, according to some studies, in countries where the number of immigrants is not high, discrimination at the level of “alien” starts from kindergarten (Wagner, 2008). Jelen, B. (2011) showed that in Turkey today, young university-educated *hijabi* are aspiring to higher education, professional careers, as well as more equal gender relations at work and at home. She notes that these women are a pioneer generation.

The problem of immigration and categorizing immigrants by appearance is a key issue for almost all European countries, Canada, and Australia. It is also applicable to Russia and well reflected in the labeling of all immigrants from Central Asia as “tadjik”, as well as the categorization of all the peoples of the Caucasus as “persons of Caucasian nationality”. Islam is perceived as the main religion there, and although a large part of the population in the Caucasus is Muslim, some regions are traditionally Christian (e.g., Abkhazia, Georgia, Armenia). The 19th Article of the Russian Constitution stipulates that the state guarantees equal rights and freedoms to all, regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, attitude to religion, convictions, membership of public associations, as well as other factors. Thus, the law prohibits any restriction of the rights of citizens based on social, racial, national, linguistic, or religious identity; yet we use a variety of stereotypical judgments to divide people into groups according to appearance. Such stereotypes may be either false or conveying some actual peculiarities of these groups.

In modern psychology there are a lot of works about the role of the hijab in non-Muslim countries (e.g., Webster, 1984; Ruby, 2006; Chaker et al., 2015; Brown, 2006, El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012; Mirza, 2013), but few works about Russian attitudes toward the hijab as a symbol of Islam.

## Method

*Participants.* There were 200 respondents; at the first stage, 50 women and 50 men aged 22 to 30 years (mean age 25 years); at the second stage, 100 women (the same age), residents of Rostov-on-Don, Russia. Youth is a socio-demographic group based on the aggregate of age characteristics, social situation, and specific social and psychological qualities, different authors identify the age limits of “youth” in different ways; but we can say that in general, it is the period between childhood and adulthood. In our study we took a broad range, from 18 to 30 years of age. All respondents were university students and professional staff. This choice was made because these groups interact with representatives of various religious confessions every day.

*Instrument.* In the first stage, to study the perception of women in connection with perception of their ethnic appearance, we prepared two sets of photos of five girls; in the first set was a portrait shot from the front with natural-style make-up;

the second set showed the same girl, but with a black hijab. Photographs of girls without headscarves were coded 1–5, girls in in hijabs were coded 6–10; pairs 1 and 6 (2–7; 3–8; 4–9; 5–10) pictured the same girls. The pictures were in black and white, in order to neutralize hair and eye color. The participants had to rate what they thought were the attitudes of the person in the photo, on a scale from friendly to hostile, with friendliness coded as 1 point and hostility as 6 points, so the lower the average score, the more friendly the attitude of the girl. Each picture was displayed on a separate sheet of A5 paper; pictures were presented in a random order, but ensuring that pictures of the same girl (with and without the hijab) are not demonstrated in a row. At the second stage, we added a question about the “religious beliefs” of the girl in the picture to every photo. We also used the author’s questionnaire, where we asked respondents’ attitudes to the representatives of these confessions, using the same rating scale from friendly to hostile, with friendly coded as 1 and hostility as 6.



**Figure 1.** Example of a photo of a girl with a hijab and without

The same respondents were asked to fill out the Cook-Medley Hostility Scale (translated and adapted to Russian by Yu.A. Mendzheritskaya, 2001), designed to measure the intensity of the respondents’ hostility, aggression, and suspicion. The instrument contains 27 statements; participants are asked to express their attitude to these statements, using a 6-point scale (“always”, “often”, “sometimes”, “occasionally (by chance)”, “rarely”, “never”). The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 16.0 for Windows) and Statistica 7.0. The reliability of the data was ascertained using the following methods of mathematical statistics: Z-Wilcoxon test to determine a statistically significant shift; Spearman correlation coefficient to identify relationships between variables; U-Mann-Whitney test to detect differences between samples.

## Findings and Discussion

We described the first stage in our recent work (2015), where we noted that the average score suggests that the attitude to girls without a hijab was friendly (MF1 = 3.1; MF2 = 2.2; MF3 = 2.3, MF4 = 2.5; MF5 = 3.7, where M is average and

F1, F2 shows the number of photo); the attitude of the girls in hijab rather negative attitude (MF6 = 5.8; MF7 = 5.15; MF8 = 5.32; MF10 = 5.8), in addition to portrait 9 (MF9 = 3.9), which is often judged as more friendly. When rating the portrait of a girl with a typical Slavic appearance (round face, blond hair, big blue eyes) in a hijab, several respondents asked, "Why is there a portrait of a nun among the Muslim girls?"; those respondents described the black headscarf as "not a hijab", due to the appearance of the girl. The girl in picture 5 (without a hijab) was described by most respondents as "artful, stressed and unpleasant", which can be attributed to her stressed look (narrowed eyes, tightly shut lips, etc.); so her score indicated the most hostility on her part. Analysis of these data shows that at the stage of visual diagnostics of a stranger we estimate the score from his/her appearance (clothing, headgear), and this information can play a key role in shaping a positive or negative attitude. In this case, the hijab is such a factor, which, taking into account the information in the media, leads to interpretation of the girl as aggressive, unfriendly, dangerous.

At the second stage, we added the questions about religion. Our respondents were Christian or "not religious", but those who said that they were not religious grew in Christian families and had symbols of religion at home. So we also used a U-Mann-Whitney test and there was no difference, so we analyzed all the results as one group, "females". The lack of significant difference indicates that the data we obtained are homogeneous and can be considered reliable.

We also used the Z-Wilcoxon test to identify whether there are significant differences in the evaluation of the same girls in headscarves and without them, finding significant differences in all five cases (Table 1). Our findings indicate that appearance affects attitudes. Although there is a range of attitudes toward the girls with the hijab and without it, the attitude to the girl in a hijab is worse than to the same girl with an uncovered head.

In the first stage, we checked the stereotypes/representations of the religious beliefs of the girl in the photo. Five possible answers were offered: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Atheism, Other (the participants could give their own variant). The results (Table 2) show that girls without hijabs were thought to be Christian, the girls in pictures 6, 7, 8, and 10 with hijabs were described as Muslim, except the girl in picture 9. In our first stage, some of respondents noted that she looked like

**Table 1.** Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test between the same girls with hijab and without (tests in boldface are significant at  $p < 0.05$ )

Pair of Pictures	Z
Picture1 & Picture6	5.78
Picture2 & Picture7	4.95
Picture3 & Picture8	5.07
Picture4 & Picture9	4.28
Picture5 & Picture10	4.08

a nun; at the second stage, 77 % said she was Christian, and only 23 % said she was Muslim. Actually the only difference between this picture (9) and the others is the color of eyes (blue, but at in a black-and-white photo, they look gray); her blond hair was covered with the hijab, but the eyelashes and eyebrows were blond. Another girl with blond hair had brown eyes and dark eyelashes and eyebrows, so in a black-white photo with a hijab, she didn't look blond. So we can assume that it was hair color, eyes, eyebrows, and eyelashes which were the main parameters used to judge religious beliefs.

**Table 2.** Attribution of religious beliefs to girls with out and without hijab without (tests in boldface are significant at  $p < 0.05$ )

Picture	Christianity	Islam	Judaism	Atheism
Picture1	94	0	1	5
Picture2	96	0	0	4
Picture3	96	0	0	4
Picture4	95	0	0	5
Picture5	<b>87</b>	0	0	13
Picture6	2	<b>98</b>	0	0
Picture7	3	<b>97</b>	0	0
Picture8	2	<b>98</b>	0	0
Picture9	<b>77</b>	23	0	0
Picture10	0	<b>99</b>	0	1

Then we used a Z-Wilcoxon test to determine statistically significant indicators — differences in attitudes towards women with and without the hijab and attitudes towards people professing Islam and Christianity (Table 3). We can see that the attitude towards girls wearing the hijab (except the girl in picture 9) showed no difference, and we can conclude that the assessment of women in the hijab is the same as the attitude towards all Muslims.

**Table 3.** Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test between girls with and without a hijab and attitudes towards people professing Islam and Christianity (tests in boldface are significant at  $p < 0.05$ ).

No. of picture	Z (Islam)	Z (Christianity)
Picture1	<b>3.284996</b>	1.646862
Picture2	<b>2.780446</b>	1.763205
Picture3	<b>4.010780</b>	0.324788
Picture4	<b>4.757777</b>	1.591521
Picture5	<b>4.791489</b>	0.806257
Picture6	0.277737	<b>3.591042</b>
Picture7	1.707836	<b>3.243044</b>
Picture8	0.842951	<b>5.487974</b>
Picture9	<b>2.847187</b>	1.293616
Picture10	1.033217	<b>3.332688</b>

Thus, we can say that there is prejudice against persons confessing Islam, who were evaluated as dangerous and unfriendly, and the religious beliefs of the respondents were judged on the basis of appearance. This stereotype is a trigger for the formation of attitudes and the attribution of certain characteristics.



## Conclusion

Our findings indicate that appearance affects the formation of attitudes. Although there is a certain range of attitudes towards the girls with a hijab and without it, the attitude towards the girl in a hijab is worse than that to the same girl with an uncovered head. We also found that there is a relationship between the score of representatives of Islam in general and girls in hijabs.

We can conclude from these results that the respondent's level of aggression can lead to a negative, hostile attitude towards a Muslim girl (based solely on her appearance), and that more men say that their attitude to the girls wearing a hijab is more hostile. The attitude can affect both personal stereotypes (as evidenced by evaluation of the women without a hijab, which is closer to the median and with some negative assessment) and difficulties in categorization (e.g., the evaluation of picture 9, when some thought the hijab was a nun's attire).

Our research identified a number of patterns. Respondents were more tense and hostile towards a girl in a hijab than to the same girl without a headscarf. Respondents indicated that most women in a hijab are Muslims, and their attitudes to the abstract representation of Islam and to the girl in the photo have a common modality.

In general, despite the fact that the Southern Federal District is multicultural, and the proximity of Islamic peoples of the Caucasus fosters a certain neutral attitude to various religions, women with a Slavic appearance dressed in traditional Islamic headgear are perceived as significantly more hostile than the same women without a scarf. Considering this issue more broadly, we can note that in this case there was a certain layering of assessments: on the one hand, the assessment of the attractiveness of the girl attributing certain characteristics to her; and on the other hand, the categorization and discrimination against women with a certain appearance. However, considering the problem of Islamophobia in Russia and comparing it to the attitude towards Islam in Europe, North America, and Australia, we can assume that the factor of rapprochement of cultures, discussed in the literature, has a positive effect. Experience with Tatarstan Muslims generates a more positive setting to all representatives of Islam, which could also explain the results.

For our future work, we require an increased sample, and the testing of hypotheses about the relationship of the level of hostility and aggressiveness to attitudes towards girls with "European" and "Muslim" appearance. In the future, in addition to photos without a hijab and with a hijab, we plan to use pictures of girls in colored scarves (the scarf tied under the chin in the "Russian" style) and girls in the typical headgear of Catholic nuns, since these scarves and hats are similar in nature — an open face, the hair and neck covered — but are connected to different stereotypes. And to identify attitudes towards Islam in general and their role in the formation of attitudes towards girls in a hijab, we also believe it is necessary to develop a profile filter to determine the religious beliefs of the respondents, as the present study involved young w who believe (Orthodox), and those who adopt atheistic beliefs, but there were no respondents who practice Islam. A number of works indicate that some differences may be detected. It is also important to note that the assessment can add color and the presence/absence of ornament and pattern on the hijab. We suggest that a hijab with a flower pattern and bright colors can positively influence

the attitude toward the girls. Another important point which we plan to explore is the age of the women wearing the hijab. In our study, the photographs shows girls 20–25 years of age; in the future, we plan to use photos of women aged 45–60, who may be associated with the “mother”, because in Russian Christian tradition it is common for older women to wear headscarves to church, and in everyday life; thus there might be a more positive attitude toward older women with a hijab.

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