AL-HIKMAH

The Realisation of Covering 'Aurat among the Successful Women in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Among the conditions prescribed to working women is that they must perfectly cover themselves whenever they are at their working place. However, Muslims today are 'haunted' with a dilemma that influenced the thinking of whether to defend the Islamic laws or make changes to suit modernization. Thus, the involvement of women in the employment field to enhance the economic transformation clearly needs guidance and the right inspiration based on the Islamic law. Data were collected through qualitative design using in-depth interviews and analysis of documents involving past literatures and views of the contemporary scholars. In-depth interviews were conducted with women of higher grade in public sector, specifically grade 54 and JUSA. Supporting data of this study involved interviews with husbands, children, employers and colleagues to create a triangulation data. The findings of the study was analysed thematically using Nvivo 7.0 software.

Keywords: *Model 'Aurat Muslim women; Outstanding Women; Career Women; contemporary; Public Sector*

INTRODUCTION

There are groups like Syed Akbar Ali who reject hadith and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) such as Sisters in Islam (SIS), Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), All Women's Action Society (AWAM), The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) and Zainah, who support the idea of women's emancipation and always raise controversial issues regarding women's rights (Mohd Roslan 2012). Disputes occurred in the aspects of the rights for education, marriage, working outside the home, polygamy, inheritance, domestic leadership, being witness and aurat (Wahidah 2000; Press in February 2013; Zeenath 2002; Muhammad Ariffin 2012; Azlina and Latifah 2012).

The problem occurred because of the ignorance in understanding and carrying out the Islamic laws or Shari 'a. This is also caused by some prejudice towards women. This happens to all

races and religions, not just Islam (Mohd Roslan 2012). There is confusion in the aurat matter which causes some to argue that more than the face and the palm of the hand such as hair, neck and arms are not aurat (Muhd Nur Najib and Mazlan 2010). Even wearing robes or jubbah and covering themselves with veil or hijab is seen as rather suffocating. Women should be given the freedom from doing that (Mohd Roslan 2012). Contestants of Miss World 2013 defended their participation and protested the ban by the National Fatwa Council on the participation of Muslim women because they will only be wearing sport attire, not swimsuit (Syalikha and Mohd Khairie 2013). Negative comments were also given on conspicuous clothing by public servant.

In addition, Muslims were 'haunted' with a dilemma and breakdown in culture, influencing their thinking in the situation to either defend the tradition or make changes to modernization (Mohd Roslan 2012; Rohaiza 2011). Disputes on Islamic law, which is to some extent considered as outdated, has influenced the Islamic society today (Rahimin Affandi et al. 2010). Noor Rahamah (2012) found that the studies only focused on the issue of women's participation in economic activities. Very little attention is given to issues related to the specific problems faced at home and in the workplace and ways to sustain these women workers in the labour market.

Thus, Hasni (2003) through her study found that women's career-related understanding is satisfactory but there is still confusion related to career and household which requires constant efforts from time to time to increase public understanding on it. Lim Hock Eam et al. (2003) suggested that future research should continue to explore the impact of religious and cultural institutions on the probability of married women working from the aspect of religious discrimination in the labour market, the strength of religious faith and society's perception of working married women.

Mohd Najib and Mazlan (2010) stated that many questions were asked on Muslimah clothing in either talks or mass media. Thus, Nooh Gadut (2005) suggested that the authorities provide guidelines for women to dress in accordance with Islamic and eastern cultural appropriateness. Problems that occurred demand more recent studies and explanation to the community that needs to be made from time to time (Hasni 2003; Azlina and Latifah 2012; Rahimin Affandi et al. 2010; Lim Hock Eam et al. 2003). Therefore, this study seeks to contribute in minimizing this shortfall which mainly involves the study of fiqh in home science and when Muslim women go out to work.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to describe (a) the 'aurat according to Islamic perspective which involves Islamic scholars, through turath books and the views of contemporary Islamic scholars (b) the application of perfect care of 'aurat among successful women (grade JUSA and 54) in the public sector. At the end of this study will represent a model of perfect care of 'aurat according to the Islamic Shari'a as a guide to present career women, husbands as leaders, employers and institutions and departments of the government and the private sector will be presented.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In general, this study uses a qualitative research design with in-dept interview method to collect primary data and documentation method involving turath books and also the views of contemporary Islamic scholars and documents belonging to Islamic figure as data support of the study (Gall et al. 2005; Mohd Najib 2003). Researcher uses multiple - case design that involves systematic, clear and profound practices of domestic fiqh and career among the successful women in Public Universities (Gall et al. 2005; Mok Soon Sang 2010). This study is identified as multiple - case design as it involves different successful women but with the same characteristics. In addition, this study is also conducted at different locations and times (Richard et al. 2005). The use of in- depth interviews indicates that the study on the phenomenon is done naturally (Gall et al. 2005). Researcher requires findings from interview sessions to get a more detailed information and new data from selected successful women to produce the model (Maxwell 1996; Salvana et al. 2008). New findings are needed to produce the model of present career women according to Islamic views (Maxwell 1996; Salvana et al. 2008; Richard et al. 2005; Uwe Flick et al. 2004; Locke et al. 2010).

Sample

Participants of the study involves seven successful women from management and professional group of the public sector which clearly uses the snow ball sampling. Successful women will provide appropriate recommendations for suitable colleagues for the interview (Pittenger 2003; Mok Soon Sang 2010). Among the participants of this

study were (a) career women from the management and professional group in the public sector (b) successful career women who are married and have children (c) career women who are successful in their career (d) career women who practice Shari 'a of Islam while working such as covering themselves perfectly.

Supporting data involves interview session with seven husband and seven employers using the purposive sampling. Seven colleagues of successful women were selected using snowball sampling based on the characteristics and criteria that are similar to the study participants (Pittenger 2003; Mok Soon Sang 2010).

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data is a systematic process that involves transcribing, coding, detecting and building the main theme and sub theme, analyze the theme and professional assessment to determine the level of Cohen Kappa, a system for designing and presenting the table in report, matrix table and tree diagram. The flow chart of the data analyzing for the interview can be understood better from the diagram below.
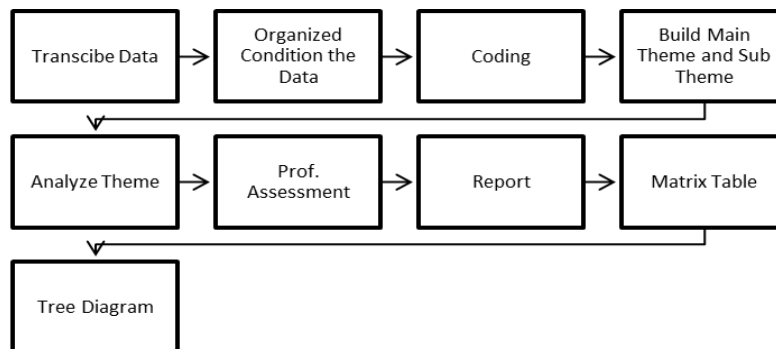
Figure 1.1 Process of Analyzing Interview Data

The last process of analysing this qualitative data is report writing (Maxwell 1996; Salvana et al. 2008; Richard et al. 2005; Uwe Flick et al. 2004; Locke et al. 2010). Report is final stage of completing the research. In this stage, the researcher will interpret, review and disseminate the findings based on the data obtained (Tiaw et al. 2005). The results of the analysis are presented in table and figures matrix in tree diagram through software Nvivo 7.0 (Uwe Flick et al. 2004).

FINDINGS

Proper Applications of 'Aurat for Working Women

Research results showed that the proper application of covering 'aurat perfecly, is a mandatory requirement for women before leaving the house either to work or to carry daily activities outside the home.
Table 1.1 shows the application of fiqh practices at the work place involves perfect care of the 'aurat. This includes practices that should be followed by career women in any field of employment. Perfect covering of the 'aurat not only account for the care to dress and veil that meet Islamic law but also to take into account in the aspects of behavior and movement, no extravagance and wastage in the selection of clothes and scarves and no application of perfume.

Table 1.1 Perfect Applications of Covering 'Aurat for Career Women

No.	Applications of 'Aurat
1.	Features of Apparel
	• Not to show off or gaining compliment
	• Suitable for occupation
	• Lengthy
	• Looseness
	• Does not reveal body shape
	• Cover the entire body except the face and hands
	• Wearing socks
	• Not just wrapping the body
	• Thickness
	• Not revealing
	• Not for attraction and impression
2.	Features of Scarf or Veil
	• Not braided high
	• Not showing neck cleavage
	• Scarf or Veil length must be below the chest
	• Not see through
3.	Not using perfume.
4.	Not lavish or extravagant
5.	Orderly behaviour and gait always
6.	Clothing options
	• Robes, mini tunic
	• Baju kurung
	• Shirts and pants
	• Shirt and shirt muslimah
	• Long sleeve jacket/coat

DISCUSSION

'Aurat According to Islam

The meaning of 'aurat according to Islamic law is, all that must be covered and which is forbidden to be seen (al-Khin dan al-Bugha 1998; 2008; al-Ghazza t.th). The obligation to cover women's 'aurat does not only apply during payer but outside of prayer times as well (Muhammad Arsyad t.th; al-Syafi'ie 1995; al-Hashimi 2005). Women physical 'aurat should be covering the entire body except the face and hands up to the wrist (al-Ghazza t.th). The women's 'aurat in prayer encompasses outwardly and inwardly covering the entire body except the face and the the hands till her wrist (al-Ghazza t.th). In addition, it is mandatory that women who leave the house to run any matters pertaining to life must also cover themselves properly as determined by the Islamic law (al-Zuhaili 2008; al-Hashimi 2005). Thus, the obligation of covering 'aurat is the same as the command of performing the worship of prayer and fasting (Basri 2009). Allah says, which means:

> And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers that you might succeed. (al-Nur 24:31)

According to al-Tabari, the prohibition of showing a women's self-embellishment is specifically imposed when dealing with non-mahram men. Those who can see the female body are just those who are mahram to her and children who do not know about women's 'aurat (Ibnu Kathir t.th). Islam forbids women to do anything that may attract people's interest, particularly the non-mahram (Ahmad Shalaby 2001). Therefore, women should not wear perfume, makeup and accessories except those of which are a common looking among Muslim women (al-Hashimi 2005). The verse إلا ما ظهر منها can mean the accessories that

can be shown which include eyeliner, rings, bangles, henna, clothes and the face (Abu Syuqqah 2002, 2009; al-Albani 1992, 1994).

According to al-Zamakhsyari, the hidden adornments like anklets and necklaces cannot be shown, including parts of the body such as the neck, legs, head, chest and ear other than to the husband or a mahram with her (al-Qasasi 1997). Whereas, the popular opinion through Ibn Abbas is a ring, the face and the hands (Ibnu Kathir t.th; al-Barazi 1995; Abdul Qadir t.th). Furthermore according to the opinion of the majority of scholars, the verse also means the face and hands (al-Qasasi 1997).

Thus, Al-Ghazza (t.th) among the early scholars has set that the woman's aurat outside of prayer is her whole body when dealing with a non-mahram man. Meanwhile, al-Hanafiah, al-Malikiah and a part of the al-Syafi'eyyah scholars through a firm opinion and al-Auza'i contended that the part of the body that must be covered are the whole body except the face and the hands up to the wrists (al-Zuhaili 2008; Ahmad Shalaby 2001; al-Khin dan al-Bugha 1998; 2008; Muhammad Bakar 2008; Sayyid Sabiq 1995; Muhammad Arsyad t.th; al-Syafi'ie 1995; al-Albani 1992,1994; al-Barazi 1995). This view necessitate opening the face and the hands (al-Barazi 1995). That defines the face border shall begin from where the hair grows until the bottom of the chin and from the right earlobe to the left earlobe (al-Khin dan al-Bugha 1998; 2008; al-Albani 1992; 1994; al-Barazi 1995). Meanwhile, the limitations of the hand, is up to the wrist (al-Khin dan al-Bugha 1998, 2008; al-Albani 1992, 1994). Exposing the hands is a must, if there is no concern that temptation might arise (Ahmad Shalaby 2001). If it invites temptation, then it is haram (forbidden) (al-Khin dan al-Bugha 1998; 2008; Ahmad Shalaby 2001). Similarly, if the face arouse desire and lust then the face is forbidden to be seen (al-Khin dan al-Bugha 1998, 2008). Covering both cheeks and face except for both eyes or one eye is the most perfect form of veil (Muhammad Bakar 2008). Al-Azhar Fatwa states that:

> Covering the face and both hands from the wrist is the practice of choice, subject to the customary conditions and practices of which is not enjoined fully nor completely. So whoever leave it and whoever does it is doing good. But if leaving it will cause temptation then it is better to be done. It is demanded to dismiss the possibilities of evil that might arise (Zainab 2004: 27).

Requirement of Women's Dress

The appropriate characteristics of a Muslim women clothing according to the Islamic law is to cover the whole body except the face and the hands up to the wrists (Abu Syuqqah 2002, 2009; Sayyid Sabiq 1995; al-Barazi 1995; Muhammad Tariq 2009; al-Qardawi 1998); moderately accessorised, clothing and ornaments worn should be the type that is common practices in the Muslim community the women live with (Abu Syuqqah 2002; 2009); different or does not resemble the clothing of the men and women of non-believers (Abu Syuqqah 2002, 2009; al-Albani 1992,1994; al-Barazi 1995; Muhammad Tariq 2009; Abdul Qadir 2011); not wearing design specifically for men (al-Qardawi 1998; al-Manasiyah 1995); not transparent until it can reveal the white or reddish color of the skin, and the bodily figure of the wearer of the clothes (al-Albani 1992,1994; Sayyid Sabiq 1995; al-Syafi'ie 1995; al-Barazi 1995; Muhammad Tariq 2009; al-Qardawi 1998); loose i.e. not tight until it can show the woman's physique (Sayyid Sabiq 1995; al-Albani 1992,1994; al-Barazi 1995; Muhammad Tariq A 2009; al-Qardawi 1998).

The clothes worn are not made into decoration, not perfumed and not too prominent and conspicuous to the eyes of a stranger man (al-Albani 1992,1994; al-Barazi 1995); not brightly colored (Muhammad Tariq 2009); the cross and any picture must not be on the clothing of the wearer (al-Barazi 1995; Abu Malik 2012); wearing the clothes not with the intention to glorify oneself or exhibit to another person (Muhammad Tariq 2009; al-Manasiyah 1995); and does not cause any prodigality (al-Manasiyah 1995). The other condition of hijab is that the garment should not be perfumed (while going out). There are many traditions forbidding women to wear perfume while going out. After quoting four traditions, he writes: "Ibn Daqiq al-'Id writes that in this hadith a woman is forbidden to go to the mosque wearing perfume, because it stimulates carnal desires in men. So when it is forbidden for women wearing perfume to go to the mosque, their use of perfume when they go out shopping, or for any other purpose, is all the more sinful. Al-Haythami writes that going out wearing adornments and perfume is a major sin, even if it is done with the husband's permission (al-Albani 1992, 1994; Wahiduddin Khan t.th).

Type of Clothing for Working Women Today

Muslim career women choose to maintain the characteristics of clothing as outlined by Islam in any field of work and situations (WC5 2013; WC3 2013; WC4 2013). Choosing clothes that cover their 'aurat is not an optional practice and has become a major agenda (WC6

2013). Clothing selected also depends on the type of work performed. Statement of the research participants:

> This dress is not very strict or not very straight. But what is important is that it must be in accordance to the syariah meaning I do not put any specification in the clothing that the Muslim woman want to wear. For example, not that she must put on only circular veil and that she must be confined to wear only robes. But for me it is better to follow our work environment and the situation we are in, as I was educated to conform to condition (WC4 2013).

> If wearing a long skirt is not appropriate in certain circumstances, it is best not to event through you have covered your 'aurat. For example if I were to attend a hotel banquet, I would not just want to wear the Muslimah T-shirt such it is not appropriate in the circumstances. It must suit with the situation sometimes, it's a concept that is not understood by the students. Because Islam like beauty and as long as the dressing code is not violating the Islamic syariah then we have to follow the rules that has been set (RSWC4 2013).

Professional woman should at least wears colorful clothing but does not over do in their accessorizing especially in official program (RSWC4 2013). Clothes chosen should be appropriate to the event attended. Care must be given to her appearance as it serves as a model to others who sees her (RSWC3 2013). Statement by research participants:

> I'm actually more flexible... the woman can wear baju kurung… can wear the robe… or the robe with pants... there is no problem even if she wants to wear colourful clothing and I like it even better if the apparel is a little colorful... after all my wife always has to go overseas to present paper there... so, we do not want to project that a Muslim is too jumud (antiquated), so meaning such a clothing is acceptable (SWC5 2013).

Thus, according to Ahmad Shalaby (2001), the clothing worn by most women in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sudan that are just showing the face and the hands are appropriate with the Islamic law.

Characteristics of the Muslimah's Veil or Scarf

Furthermore, Scholars also explain the features of the veil or scarf that conforms with the requirements of Islamic law. Scarf or khimar is a cloth used to cover the head of a woman (Abdul Qadir t.th). The features of the veil worn by women must also cover the head to below the chest to cover the aurat underneath which does not include the face according to the famous opinion (al-Barazi 1995). Scarves worn must cover the entire hair, neck, cleavage (clothing), both earlobes and not revealing the accessories such as earrings and necklaces as well as not tying hair in a bun up high, resembling the camel's humps of which will attract the attention of the strangers men (Muhammad Tariq 2009; Abdul Qadir t.th). Statement of research participants:

> Our concern nowadays is that how women have a good intention of putting on veil but there is ulterior intention to dress up or to highlight their accessories to be viewed as beautiful hence receiving compliment from the people around them (RSWC1 2013).

Also scarves worn must not be made of thin fabric that will reveal their hair, neck and skin color. Women nowadays can still follow the current fashion trend given that the style still follow the characteristics of the veil or scarf provided in the guidelines of the Islamic law.

'Aurat Includes Movement and Walking Manner

Islam allows women to do a job that is suitable with her femininity and laws should be related to hijab and 'aurat implemented (Abdul Gaffar 2009). Work done by women should suit the body structure, physical ability, dignity and feminine nature. Al-Qardawi (1993), describes the responsibilities of women to preserve their dignity and the privilege of their femininity granted by Almighty God. First, Islam requires women to protect their gentleness, politeness and beauty. Due to that fact, Islam has permitted gold and silk for women but banned for men. Islam also forbids women to resemble men in their clothing, movement and behaviour (al-Qardawi 1993). Statement of research participants:

> But there is more in the Quran not only asserting the verse وليضربنا بخمرهن not only that but also ولا يضربنا بأرجلهن. Not only physical. But her swaying movement, her behaviour as well (M1WC1 2013).

So 'aurat can mean her skin, her body shape and her personality, her own character is also considered as 'aurat hence as a woman she needs to take care of her 'aurat is not only a matter of covering her skin (SWC3 2013).

The study conducted by Mi Seon Kim (2012) found that women are more likely to choose a job in the arts, health and natural science than a career such as engineering and business. Therefore, the women should not do heavy work that burden them and of which will scrape a woman's true nature of gentleness such as working as construction workers, blacksmiths, or mine workers, pilot and others. This is because such work is better handled by men in accordance with their body structure (Basri 2009). Islam prohibits women from showcasing their beauty. Among the matters that leads to displaying of beauty is walking in a swaying movement and seducing whoever that sees her and wearing clothes that are transparent revealing the shape of the body that is hidden underneath the clothes (al-Zuhaili 2008). Among the purpose of covering themselves is due to the differences in physical appearance and areas of responsibility between men and women, to distinguish between good and bad female character and to preserve a woman's dignity and save her from temptation (Abu Syuqqah 2002, 2009; al-Hashimi 2005; Ahmad Shalaby 2001).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to cover the 'aurat properly is a mandatory practice for woman with career and it is not a matter of choice. Figure 1.2 below shows the model of 'aurat among professional women in the Malaysian context.
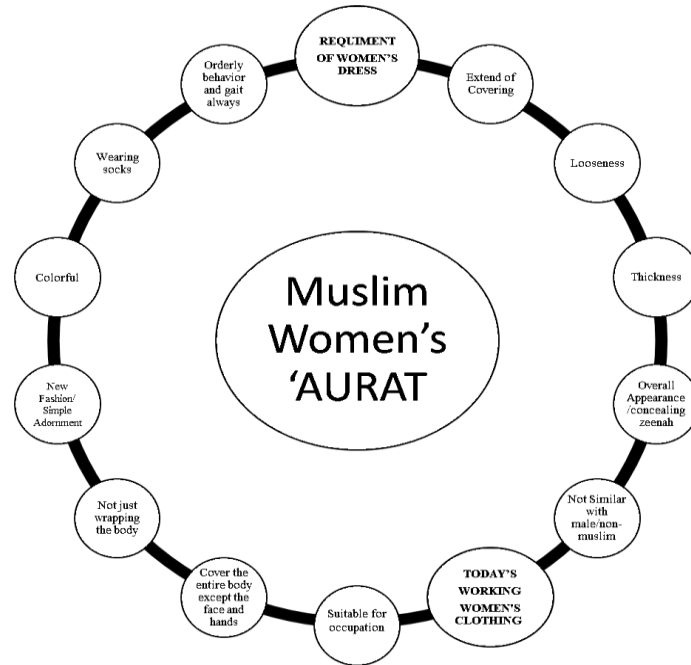
Figure 1.2 Model of Muslim Women's 'Aurat

The practice of covering 'aurat amongst today's successful professional women proves that people practicing Islam can still achieve excellence. Thus, may this paper serve as an inspiration to today's society about the importance of properly covering 'aurat in the life of a Muslim.

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