

MODESTY AND STYLE IN MODERN ATTIRE: EXPLORING THE IMPLICIT MEANINGS FOR MUSLIM WORKING WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implicit values and motivations behind the decision of Muslim working women to wear headscarves in workplace settings. Primarily, the basic purpose of this research is to examine whether women wear headscarves to observe the core principles of Islamic modesty or modify and infuse new styles and fashion trends in their headscarf-wearing approach coherent with core principles of modesty. To achieve this, we utilized a qualitative research approach to gain insights into women's attitudes and decisions regarding wearing a headscarf. Using an open-ended questionnaire, data was collected from 20 participants, from two organizations in Mirpur Azad Kashmir, Pakistan through purposive sampling. The subjective insights reflect that women perceive the headscarf as a dynamic and evolving element of their work lives that enables them to navigate the workplace's complexities often inconsistent with cultural/religious and professional norms. Therefore, they adjust and renovate the headscarf style, consistent with the demands of the contemporary, urban, and global environment without undermining the religious principles of modesty. The study's findings can inform organizations to develop more inclusive policies considering employers' implicit adherence to dress code and its effect on their workforce participation. Besides, it can be used as a resource for incorporating equally gender-sensitive work opportunities and fostering respect for cultural expression in the organizations.

Keywords: Headscarf, Modesty, Dress Code, Modern Attire, Fashion and Style

INTRODUCTION

Muslim working women adopt various dress styles in their indigenous cultures that adhere to religious modesty. Typically, Muslim working women prefer to wear the Hijab (headscarf) as a modest dress code at their workplaces. This practice (wearing a Headscarf) serves various purposes, including behavioral check or control, resistance to sexual objectification, modesty, protection, and adornment (Droogsma, 2007; Kopp, 2005). Thus, dressing/clothing is often viewed as a way for Muslim women to navigate the public world and workplaces.

Women's involvement in the workforce is increasing in Pakistan as they are joining diverse

professions and workplace settings. To adapt to these environments, they wear decent and modest dress codes with headscarves in these settings. This trend is increasing among educated, urban working women in Pakistan (Anwar, 2015). The same headscarf is also observed by Muslim women in the West. Scholarship highlights diverse functions and purposes of dress/clothing for working women including, modesty, protection, and adornment, among others (Ahmed, 2014; Carvalho, 2013, Hoodfar, 1990). Taking this perspective into account, there is one area of research specifically related to the hijab/scarf that examines the underlying

significance of the hijab/headscarf among Muslim working women in professional settings. These researchers highlight the implicit connotations associated with headscarves and their implications for Muslim women in the workplace (Vashi, 2007; Omair, 2009; Terrie, Reeves, Arlise, and Azam, 2012). Generally, research in this area has focused on the role Hijab for religious obligations and to follow the prescriptions Islamic Shariah regarding the concept of modest dress for women.

However, a distinct area of research considers the hijab as a social and cultural identity, apart from its religious significance (Mossieri, 2011). Researchers related to this aspect view the Hijab as a means of integration into various environments (such as family, workplace, etc) which demonstrate how fashion, religion, and politics intersect and interact in diverse and creative ways. This perspective highlights the positive impact of fashion on traditional and religious values of modesty as many women maintain a fashionable as well as modest dress style in their work organizations (Abdulai, Appiah, Abraham, 2024; Aris, Ibrahim, Ahmad, 2018).

These two areas related to Hijab practices provide us with an understanding of women's choices to use Hijab in their workplaces. Considering these two perspectives on Hijab/headscarf, this study will look at how Muslim women wearing headscarves perceive it and relate it to their modest representation at their workplaces in Pakistan. The main aim of the study is to explore the underlying values behind their decision to wear headscarves in their workplaces. The study will try to measure the two questions. Is this dress attire primarily linked to a subjective adherence to the female concept of modesty (traditional dress) or do they adopt and modify it according to local trends in dress and style while maintaining the core intents of modesty?

In the subsequent section of the paper, we will investigate the concept of Hijab/veiling in Islam, with a specific focus on exploring its significance and how it is presented and perceived for women within the Islamic context. The next section will highlight the various implications of modesty on women's dress and how working women associate implicit meanings with wearing the headscarf, especially in professional environments. In the next part, women's perceptions regarding the use of the Hijab/headscarf as a religious and cultural

practice will be examined. Additionally, the last section of the paper will address the intersectionality between modesty, fashion, and globalization. The primary focus will be to explore how Muslim women navigate the balance between adherence to Islamic modesty and adapting to contemporary fashion trends in the workplace. The study will also highlight the complexities of managing individuality in style while observing religious modesty. It will also highlight how working women reconcile these contrasting elements in their day-to-day lives.

Literature Review

The terms Hijab/abaya/headscarves are utilized differently in various ways across different regions and cultures (Joppke, 2009). For Instance, a Muslim woman in Canada might wear a headscarf, and refer to it as a Hijab, while a woman in Saudi Arabia may choose to wear an abaya or Niqab/face veil. Thus, Hijab/abaya has various connotations and one of the most common is the headscarf in the contemporary world. For this study, we will use the words Hijab and headscarf interchangeably in equal terms due to the diversity in its connotations.

The term veil/Hijab refers to any that conceals, with its primary function being to cover. Generally, it is considered as a cloth/garment used to cover the body particularly that of women (Lazreg, 2009). The concept of veil is mainly discussed under two broad categories when we define Muslim women's modest dress code i) body coverings and ii) head covering. Typically, the term "abaya" a piece of fabric used to cover the entire body from head to toe is associated with body covering (Hoodfar, 1992) while the Hijab or headscarf is associated with head covering of hair, neck and shoulders (Mahfoodh, 2008). Veil/abaya and headscarves (both) are recognized as most popular practices among Muslim women as it symbolizes Muslim women's religious identity (Khosravi (2012). However, the headscarf is considered the most widely recognized practice and also taken as a strong manifestation of Islamic modesty (Syed, 2010).

Hijab/headscarf and Religious Context

The Islamic history regarding women's dressing, modesty, and veiling can be interpreted from various discourses that reflect how it is encoded with different political meanings and references (Mostafa, 2003). Focusing on the Islamic injections from the Quran, the following verse

highlights the significance of Hijab and modesty for Muslim women.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their husbands, or their fathers or their husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical desire, or small children who have no sense of sex; and that they should not stamp their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. . . (Quran 24:31).

Besides the teaching of the Qur'an, the second-hand reports of the Prophet (SAW) known as Hadith, and Islamic clergy (based on Faqihs, Imams, Muftis) are also considered as the strongest interpretative authorities for the Muslims. (Mehmet, 1994; Read & Bartowski, 2000). All these traditions highly emphasize modesty both for women and men. For a believer, modesty is categorized as part of their faith in Islam. Therefore, modesty has deep implications in defining the dress codes, interaction patterns, and social conduct that place several restrictions and segregations on women's mobility and their interaction patterns. (Ali, 2000; Mernissi, 1987; Syed and Ali, 2005; Syed, 2008). These Islamic considerations regarding the discipline of dress code for women to adhere, provide the basic sense and purpose to Muslim women to cover their heads and bodies to maintain modest attire (Brenner 1996). As a result, the Hijab or Abaya, are taken as the great markers of Muslim women's religious identity in many countries. Besides, a head covering (headscarf) is also taken as the most essential characteristic of a Muslim woman's dress which is observed by Muslim women all around the world (Mahmud & Swami, 2010; Abdullah, Matloob, & Malik, 2024).

Headscarf, Practical Implications and Workplace Experiences

Dress code signifies multiple meanings to its wearer and to the people around them (Ahmed, 2014; Carvalho, 2013, Hoodfar, 1990). In Arab Gulf states, the hijab/abaya is taken as a national dress for their citizens and is associated with the nation's cultural and religious heritage (Shimek, 2012). In a more general sense, hijab/headscarf is

perceived as a symbol of Muslim Ummah identity. Thus, hijab/headscarf is practiced by Muslim women for variety of purposes all around the world. In this context, Islamic emphasis on modesty in women's dressing significantly impacts their dress choices to wear a Hijab/headscarf to maintain a religious identity that is also connected with women's sense of self as Muslim women. The studies of Arshad, Basar, Zafar and Ahmad, (2012) and Rumaney and Sriram (2021) highlight observance of modesty in dress code as women's strong persuaders behind their decision to wear a headscarf/hijab at their workplaces. Likewise, Munir's (2014) study shows the observance of the Hijab as a strong signifier of women's adherence to specific values, conduct, and morals. Muslim women consider hijab/headscarves as the expression of their loyalty and devotion to their religious values. Research on hijab/headscarf highlight that wearing hijab/headscarf in the workplaces also serve multiple functions for Muslim working women. Droogsmma (2007) highlight that the hijab exemplifies Muslim identities, define specific boundaries in women's interactions, control/resist sexual objectification, offer more respect and dignity, and strengthens family bonds. Studies also suggest that working women wearing hijab/headscarves feel a sense of security, respect, conform, and dignity in their workplaces (Hoodfar, 1993; Khan, 1995; Tolayamat & Moradi, 2011).

Headscarf/Modesty in a Globalized world

The main components of modest dress for women require a head covering, and loose-fitting, and non-transparent clothes covering the whole body. However, how Muslim women incorporate these requirements depends on the specific cultural context in which they live, the dominant views regarding modest attire, and women's likes and dislikes (Boulanouar, 2006). As highlighted by Syed (2010) that the concept of Islamic modesty remains subject to the context, history, and ideology in Muslim societies about how these components of modesty are satisfied. Therefore, practices related to modest dress vary from society to society. From a workplace perspective, Muslim women strive to uphold an adherence to their Islamic modesty with the professional demands of modern attire at their workplaces.

Studies suggest that Muslim women in Europe and America use abaya/headscarves to maintain an elegant look while preserving modesty (Al-

Khalifa, 2017). This issue has been discussed in the literature from the perspectives of Muslim women living in Western societies where they not only adhere to Western values of style and fashion in their dress code but also maintain modesty in their dress attire. For example, Mossieri (2011) identified that Muslim women in the Western context construct distinct Muslim identities based on the roles and status they aim to achieve within the dominant group they are part of and their religious community. The dress codes they adopt reflect the blending of their religious identity as pious and veiled women with their role as modern and Western citizens. She further maintained that Muslim women raised in Western countries view their femininity as a part of the modern paradigm, challenging the dominant secular stereotypes that portray Muslim individuals and communities as traditional and backward. The new fashion trends in their dress reflect a desire to blend Muslim piety and modesty with Western influences, that emphasize individual agency and creativity. These styles also reflect their engagement in urban living, work, study, sports, and a broader pursuit of self-development and transformation.

Research evidence demonstrates a change in women's perceptions regarding religious adherence to the headscarf/abaya with a modern look. It also reflects a global shift in how modesty is perceived and practiced in different contexts. This view is underscored by Olivier Roy when he analyzed the changes Islam has experienced over the past fifty years, as Muslim populations have expanded globally, integrating as minorities in Western countries and responding to the impacts of modernization and capitalism. As a result, women in Europe and America adopted the abaya/scarf and blended the fashion trends in their styles while preserving the modest intent (2004). The results of the Shimek (2012) study indicate that Women in Gulf countries do not take their Hijab (abaya) as a symbol of religious or cultural expression but as an appearance reflecting an expression of individuality and style. The change can be linked with the influences of fashion through globalization processes. We see its influence in the new forms of modern abayas that are popular among women in Gulf countries.

A similar perspective is highlighted by Tarlo (2007) by analyzing the influence of diversity and modernity on dress codes. He asserts that Islamic dress coding cannot be associated only with religious conservatism or political

activism. Islamic dress can also serve as a space for stylistic innovation, often aligning with the cosmopolitan lifestyles and attitudes developed by individuals—particularly younger people exposed to greater religious and ethnic diversity in European and North American societies. Sanno (2022) also highlights this perspective that women now use headscarves in a new way, with unique colors, cuts, and design elements as a response to modernity and globalization processes that have changed women's perceptions regarding traditional dress code by blending it with modern attire (Sanno, 2022; Abdelhadi, 2019; Abdullah & Nisar, 2024).

Balancing Modesty with Modern Attire at Workplaces

Clothing and styling are crucial factors when analyzing appropriate dress codes for women in the workplace. In the formal sector, organizations establish typical standards for dress codes to help employees choose appropriate attire. (Abdulai, Appiah, Abraham 2024). Research indicates that Muslim women are updating new styles and fashion in modest attire that make it easy for them to practice religious observance and add a personal sense of fashion (Zabeen, Sham, and Sultana 2017). The study of Indrianti and Kurniawan (2021) shows that in official settings, Muslim women living in Jakarta incorporated a more stylish and professional office attire aligned with the Islamic Shari'ah requirements. Abdulai, Appiah, and Abraham's (2024) study, titled *Integrating Faith and Fashion: How Muslim Women in Ghana Are Redefining Workplace Dress Codes*, also highlights significant findings regarding women's successful integration of modern trends/fashion with Islamic values. Findings show that adopting Islamic identity with modern attire produces a synchronized blending that reflects individual identity and religious commitment. Furthermore, embracing Islamic fashion in the workplace is viewed as a means of empowerment, enabling women to engage more actively in the workforce while adhering to religious principles.

The findings of Abdelhadi's (2019) study highlight a relationship between hijab, modest dress code, and workplace surroundings. His findings show that Muslim women can gain benefit from the global processes of modernization and new fashion trends while preserving their integrity, dignity, and adherence to traditional values. Likewise, Genel and Karaosmanolo (2006) work shows that carrying

modern attire while maintaining modesty in their workplaces signifies women's individuality, sense of freedom, self-confidence, and self-pride. Similarly, Sobh, Belk, and Gressell (2010) relate modest dress with modern attire to women's preferences towards religious values and separate social identities. The study of Aris, Ibrahim, and Ahmad (2018) highlighted that modern Islamic fashion has had a positive impact on women's dressing choices, as many Muslim women can dress up fashionably while maintaining modest attire. These studies suggest that women can observe the principles of Islam, irrespective of changing fashion trends, while ensuring a modern look most appropriately. Similarly, Tarlo and Moors highlighted the fact that Muslim women embrace contemporary fashion trends may navigate the balance between global fashion trends and adherence to Islamic laws (2021). Current literature on this issue indicate that Muslim women are engaging themselves in these new trends to manage not only their religious choices but also their aesthetic sense. Muslim women wear new stylish outfits, match headscarves with their dresses, and carry themselves more fashionably, within the limits of modest dress (Hassan and Harun, 2016).

Methodology

Study Design

The main focus of our study was to see women's perceptions regarding wearing headscarf, the primary motive behind wearing headscarf, and its adherence as a religious expression and decent attire at their workplace. For this purpose, we utilized a qualitative research approach. The main aim of the qualitative research approach is to study the subjective experiences, meanings, and understanding of individuals towards a particular social phenomenon in a specific context (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, focusing on the constructivist and interpretive approach, this study permitted us to see careful insights into the issue of wearing a headscarf and its relations with women's subjective interpretations with observance of headscarf at their workplaces.

Locale and Population

This research is conducted in the City of Mirpur Azad Kashmir. We selected two service sectors, i) education and ii) health organizations. From the education sector, we selected Mirpur University of Science and Technology and from the health sector, we selected DHQ Mirpur as our population of the study.

Sample

As not all women wear headscarves at their workplaces, therefore we purposively selected our sample of women who wear headscarves. We gathered data from 20 participants, 10 from the Mirpur University of Science and Technology and 10 from District Headquarters Mirpur. The sample was chosen after the respondents' confirmation of their willingness and availability to participate in the research. The data gathered from twenty respondents however, we have included the descriptions of only thirteen women who shared their subjective experiences regarding the headscarf at the workplace in a cohesive and comprehensive way.

Data Collection

The data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The reason behind using open-ended was the participant's availability and time constrain. In the initial stages of the data collection process, it became apparent that women faced challenges in providing detailed answers due to their official engagements. Therefore, we shared an open-ended questionnaire with them and requested them to provide detailed accounts of the asked questions from their personal experiences. The basic questions consisted of the demographic background of the respondents, their primary intents behind wearing a headscarf and its relation with decent and modern attire.

Data Analysis

Participants provided information in Urdu and English languages. All the responses in Urdu were carefully translated into English. Verification was conducted by a language expert to ensure the accurate translation and meanings of the Urdu words. To analyze to results, we employed qualitative content analysis for our data. The responses were carefully reviewed several times by the researchers. That helped us to categorize the words and their meanings under specific themes. The selection or categorization of suitable statements was developed after a reasonable discussion between the researchers. Eventually, after careful observation and analysis, we selected and quoted the most relevant comments of the respondents in the findings section that were closely related to the central themes of the study (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001).

Key Findings

Headscarf as an adherence of Islamic concept of modesty

The responses of the working women highlight multifaceted explanations for wearing the headscarf at their workplace. Working women perceive it as a strong religious expression and signifier of their religious adherence. The responses emphasize that the headscarf enables them to express their religiosity and individuality. It also works as a tool to resist societal pressures while working in the professional sphere. It is also considered a means to navigate social expectations and workplace requirements.

Women's perceptions reflect that the headscarf is not considered just a practical necessity of meeting cultural expectations, but it has a deeper meaning for them. Most participants perceive it as a religious obligation and consider it a conscious choice to follow the fundamental principles of modesty in their dress code. The common strand of the responses reflects that the headscarf carries a central religious and cultural weight as a signifier of religious values in women's lives. As highlighted by our respondents in the following excerpts.

"I wear a headscarf to obey my religious obligations, it is a way for me to represent my religious affiliation and modesty in dress".

"In Islam, it is not allowed to expose our hair or appear in public without a big shawl. I use a headscarf at my workplace to avoid presenting myself in an immodest way in front of others" For me, the hijab/headscarf has its significance for women working in offices from an Islamic prospect as it provides them protection in many ways.

Responses indicate that working women observe headscarves as their strong devotion to their faith and consider it as a visible marker of their religiosity. Responses also underscore the key value of religious guidelines in women's decision to wear headscarves. The word *big shawl* in the above quotation reflects that women do not use it as simply a cultural practice but consider it as a religious obligation. It can be interpreted from the responses that women's implicit intent to wear a headscarf is religious observance. Working women wear headscarf primarily for their adherence to cultural and religious standards of modesty. Responses also reveal that that women use headscarves for a variety of purposes through which they understand and express their religious identity at the workplace. Most of them take it as a symbol of modesty,

personnel commitment to Islamic principles, respect and dignity, protection, self-discipline, and satisfaction. The following responses highlight the overall situation.

I am a Muslim woman that's why I wear a headscarf at my workplace. I feel proud of my headscarf. It's my strength and gives me a sense of security.

The hijab provides us protection in so many ways. We feel comfortable, safe, and protected. I feel relaxed and comfortable as I do not adjust my attire repeatedly.

It is also observed from the responses that women's modest attire or headscarf enables them to represent a more professional and academic individuality. The headscarf is a symbol that publicly signifies working women's commitment to modesty and is helpful for them to maintain their integrity and dignity in the workplace. It also helps them to resist judgements, or evaluations based on their looks. The responses also indicate that women use headscarf a signal to others regarding their adherence to a set of ethical and religious standards in their values, conduct and morals, respect, and piety. The following statements magnify the significance of the hijab.

The hijab provides me a sense of security, particularly during interactions with men. It shifts the focus of the conversation solely to the content of the words, rather than on my appearance, body, or physical appearance.

The hijab is important for women as it offers protection from inappropriate attention, particularly in environments like workplaces. It works like a shield for women to save them from the gaze of those with ill intentions, concealing their physical appearance and beauty".

These responses illustrate that women wear headscarf in work environments that works as a strong mechanism to protect themselves against unwanted attention. The responses also reveal that women recognize how their appearances are objectified in different social and cultural settings; therefore, they prefer to wear headscarf as a protective barrier against their evaluation based on physical appearance. This practice makes them more concerned about professional commitment at workplaces without any fear or anxiety about their looks. Furthermore, responses also highlight working women perceive it as a protective shield that help them to define their boundaries and personal dignity. It also promotes a sense of security and comfort among them.

Hijab/headscarf and Style in Attire

Our second part of the questionnaire was related to women's attitudes towards integration of headscarf with new trends of fashion and modernization. The responses revealed valuable insights showing a positive link between the headscarf and fusion of new styles in their attire within the work environment. Responses indicate that women are conscious of meeting the demands of official attire in a contemporary, dynamic manner. They renovate and integrate new styles, colors, and fashion into the Islamic tradition of headscarf. The responses highlighted women's propensity towards adherence to modesty using headscarf, however, they are also conscious about adding new styles of wearing a headscarf that suits their personality and official attire. Most of the responses reflect that women wear headscarf and feel a sense of pride, yet simultaneously, they are also concerned about the local and global fashion trends regarding new styles and forms of headscarf. A common excerpt shows the trend.

We have to interact with diverse individuals. It is essential to maintain an active and elegant appearance in our workplaces that helps us to engage in the work environment more effectively. We must uphold our religious dress expressions while ensuring a decent, fresh, and modern look. The headscarf is related to religious adherence at my workplace; however, I also use the headscarf to represent a decent, fresh, and active appearance in a more professional manner.

The responses highlight the positive dimension of women's perceptions regarding wearing a headscarf in conjunction modern attire. Responses suggest that these women actively participate in work life and integrate modern aspects of lifestyle without sacrificing their values. These responses also reflect that working women strive to maintain their integrity and dignity with professional work requirements. They maintain both religious and modern facets of attire in their dress codes that help them to endure a sense of self-worth at their workplaces. These women consider modest clothing and style important and appropriate as a dress code for women at their workplaces. Analysis of the responses also indicate that these women wear headscarves stylishly and decently to have a positive conception of their attire at their workplaces and to maintain professional decorum.

Muslim women, specifically in diverse cultural settings, wear headscarf with modest and modern

attire. The results show that women working incorporate modern trends of fashion and style in their headscarf maintaining modesty, and piety and with changing new trends They incorporate new style and fashionable elements in their traditional headscarf to develop a stylish look. This alignment gives them space to assert their individuality, identity, cultural and religious association as well as modern, fashionable attire to participate in the cosmopolitan lifestyle of workplaces. the responses also reveal that women are free to change the traditional styles of headscarf with creativity and blend new trends of fashion within the boundaries of modest attire. It is pointed out by the respondents

"I wear the headscarf as a symbol of both cultural and religious commitment, But I always focus on the selecting the matching colors or that select the scarf that comply with my attire".

Similarly, another respondent highlighted that The hijab/scarf is a crucial part of my attire. However, I always prioritize selecting good quality fabrics that make it easy to wear and maintain. I adapt the scarf according to social settings. My style of wearing a headscarf varies according to the social setting. I modify the look in official/organizational settings and wear it differently at social gatherings with my family, friends, and other social circles

The above responses indicate how working women shaping new definitions of headscarf within their workplace contexts. These responses show that working women do not directly relate headscarf to Islamic concept of modesty. They do not wear headscarf to signify a religious adherence to Islamic values. They wear headscarves to express their freedom, style, and individuality that is blended or modified with styles to add personal choices/tastes and contemporary fashion trends. They take it as a form of self-expression and a way to beautify themselves. Similarly, few responses highlight that women use headscarf with different colors, fabrics, and shapes to reflect an attractive image. As highlighted by our respondents

Wearing a headscarf with a stylish touch enhances my outfit and attire. However, it is also an essential requirement that makes me comfortable".

"I believe I can adhere to our cultural values of modesty by wearing the headscarf in a more adaptable and versatile way".

Women's responses provide insight regarding their preferences to wear headscarf and their successful blending with modern attire. These

responses also illustrate that women wear headscarves to follow cultural expectations and to consider it a fashion accessory that increases their personal, individual, and unique attire. It also reflects that working women choose innovative headscarf styles to embrace religious and professional appearances. These women do not perceive headscarves as creating limitations on one's personal choices. They confidently blend headscarves with the requirements of the work environment.

Discussions

This study was conducted to explore the perceptions of working women regarding the use of headscarf in the workplace. The basic purpose was to know the implicit meanings behind their observance of the headscarf. The responses can be categorized into two major themes i) women who consider the headscarf as a religious obligation and regards it advantages from personal, social and psychological perspectives, ii) women who integrate new fashions styles into their headscarf practice while maintain modesty. Analysis of the respondents' responses, within first theme, indicate that working women actively and consciously maintain modest and decent attire at workplaces with the prime intent to religious adherence. Our findings are consistent with the previous research around the world regarding the use of headscarves and its implicit implications for Muslim working women (Munir, 2014; Tolayamat & Moradi, 2011; Rumaney & Sriram, 2021; Abdullah & Ullah, 2022). These nuanced findings suggest that headscarf use is increasing among working women at workplaces in Pakistan. The insights shared by the show that women observe the headscarf as a spiritual commitment, and they associate it with a deep sense of religious faithfulness and piety. They do not take it as a cultural or fashion choice but as an adherence to the Islamic values of modesty. They wear headscarves in a manner consistent with Islamic values. it helps them to present themselves in work settings where norms regarding women's appearance and interaction are different. Furthermore, findings show that the hijab/headscarf serves various personal, social, and psychological benefits to women in a broader cultural context. This can be deduced from the words like *protection*, *safety*, *comfort*, *security*, *strength*, and *relaxation* that women perceive headscarves as a mean of protection and use them as a strategy to create/develop

boundaries around their physical appearance. Women also consider it a solid shield that protect safeguard their appearance from objectification. In this sense, Headscarf becomes a means, not just to observe modesty, but to preserve personal individuality and autonomy. Women' viewpoints suggest that headscarf provides them with psychological peace of mind as it develops a feeling of inner relaxation and comfort that leads to confidence and self-assurance. In this way, the headscarf acts as a barrier against societal expectations about physical appearance and beauty standards. The findings that emerged from women's responses also aligned with research conducted on modesty, attire, and workplace experiences of working women as discussed on the literature review section.

This responses under the second themes illustrate that the besides religious adherence to their practice of headscarf wearing, working women also incorporate new fashion styles into their attire while maintaining both religious and professional requirements. Women's responses demonstrate that working women are attuned to new trends and actively participate in the current fashion trends, revamp the headscarf with modern cuts and styles, select suitable colors and patterns with adherence to the Islamic dress code. It can be inferred from the words "*stylish*" "*versatile way*" "*decent*" and "*elegant*" that women do not perceive the headscarf as a traditional and static compulsion necessary for them to follow. They are tuning and adjusting according to the new fashion trends of contemporary world. This shift reflects their sense of wearing a headscarf and its link with personal and unique style. Our results support the few studies conducted in the West and other parts of the world that highlight how Muslim women situate themselves in the Western context by adopting new balanced and modern attire consistent with Islamic values of hijab/headscarf (Sanno, 2022; Abdelhadi, 2019; Abdulai1, Appiah, Abraham, 2024).

The results also demonstrate that women reshape and redefine the definitions of modesty using headscarf in a more decent and fashionable way while honoring religious principles. In the current age, where a clash exists between religious norms of modesty and modern fashion trends, headscarf serves significant function to maintain a link between tradition and modernity as women add style and fashion to adapt a decent modest dress code. It can be observed in contemporary styles and trends in headscarf

wearing. This blending reflects a flexibility in women's attitudes towards religious dress code and modest fashion where women modify the headscarf in various ways. This is evident from the responses that headscarf serve a space for individuality, freedom, and creativity for working women. Women are now blending fashion into their dress attire with headscarf and form their own interpretations and meanings of modest attire. They do not wear traditional abayas/scarves, but they modify them with new styles and make them modest in look. As it also highlighted in the previous research that the abaya/headscarves with modern attire are becoming more popular among Muslim women throughout the world.

Conclusion

This study explored how working women in Pakistan, particularly in organizational settings, express their adherence to Islamic modesty with headscarf while upholding a modern look in their attire. Women's perceptions regarding modesty with headscarf demonstrate that it is subjective phenomenon, and it is experienced by each woman differently. In the context of our study, women who relate headscarf as a religious expression in their dress code, expressed a strong adherence to Islamic values of modesty. The significance attached with the modest attire reinforces women to embody this concept in their appearances and behaviors in public settings, specifically when they are working in a professional work environment. Submission to religious obligations in dress code, enable women to develop a self-regulation, maintain their integrity and respect not only at workplaces but in all aspects of all.

There is limited scholarly work available on this aspect of the headscarf and its relations with women's modest, decent, and modern attire at workplace settings in Pakistan. So, our study provides significant contributions to academic literature on this topic. The present study offers useful insight regarding Islamic prescriptions of a modest dress code and how it intersects with new trends in fashion that significantly impact women's personal and professional lives. It also offers a deep analysis of how women's modest dressing with new styles develops a sense of self-expression, autonomy, and agency among these women living in a society where various perceptions regarding gender roles exist. It also provides an understanding of how Muslim

women relate aesthetic style with modest dress deeply embedded in their religious adherence.

The study's findings can inform organizations to develop more inclusive policies considering employers' implicit adherence to dress code and its effect on their workforce participation. Besides, it can be used as a resource for incorporating equally gender-sensitive work opportunities and fostering respect for cultural expression in the organizations.

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