

VEILS AS AN IDENTITY ACHIEVEMENT: A STUDY OF MINANG MUSLIM WOMEN REFUSING EMPLOYMENT TO MAINTAIN THE HIJAB

Prasetio Rumondor, Trisandi, Roy Bagaskara, and Ahmad Putra

Abstract: When entering the job market, individuals are often expected to adhere to the requirements set by employers. However, there are certain conditions that some Muslim women find unreasonable, such as being compelled to remove their hijab. This requirement can adversely affect their well-being and potentially result in negative societal stigmatization. This research explores why Minang women refuse to accept job offers that entail removing their hijab. The study employs a qualitative descriptive research method with a case study approach. The findings of this research indicate that Minang Muslim women approached by modelling agencies for employment decline offer when they discover that the condition involves removing their hijab. They are cognizant that complying with this requirement contradicts the fundamental principles of the Minang culture, which emphasize self-respect and the avoidance of personal disgrace. Secondly, stereotyping contributes to employment discrimination. Thirdly, the authority of employers in setting job requirements plays a significant role. Fourthly, for Muslim women accustomed to wearing the hijab, not accepting such employment offers is an identity achievement. This decision is driven by their commitment to preserving their sense of self, enabling them to make informed decisions and exercise self-control to resist the allure of certain jobs and salaries.

Keywords: identity achievement; Muslim women; new media

Abstrak: Saat memasuki pasar kerja, individu sering kali diharapkan untuk mematuhi persyaratan yang ditetapkan oleh pemberi kerja. Namun, ada kondisi tertentu yang dianggap tidak masuk akal oleh sebagian muslimah, seperti terpaksa melepas hijab. Persyaratan ini dapat berdampak buruk terhadap kesejahteraan mereka dan berpotensi menimbulkan stigmatisasi negatif di masyarakat. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi alasan perempuan Minang menolak tawaran pekerjaan yang mengharuskan mereka melepas hijab. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perempuan Muslim Minang didekati oleh agen model untuk menerima tawaran penolakan pekerjaan ketika mereka mengetahui bahwa kondisi tersebut melibatkan pelepasan jilbab. Mereka sadar bahwa mematuhi persyaratan ini bertentangan dengan prinsip dasar budaya Minang, yang menekankan harga diri dan menghindari aib pribadi. Kedua, stereotip berkontribusi terhadap diskriminasi pekerjaan. Ketiga, wewenang pemberi kerja dalam menetapkan persyaratan pekerjaan memainkan peran penting. Keempat, bagi perempuan Muslim yang terbiasa berhijab, tidak menerima tawaran pekerjaan tersebut merupakan sebuah pencapaian identitas. Keputusan ini didorong oleh komitmen mereka untuk menjaga harga diri, memungkinkan mereka membuat keputusan yang tepat dan melakukan pengendalian diri untuk menolak godaan pekerjaan dan gaji tertentu.

Kata kunci: pencapaian identitas; wanita muslim; media baru

Introduction

The empowerment of women, which has been an ongoing endeavour, remains a fundamental challenge. Women continue to face issues such as low participation in development, various forms of discrimination, and a lower quality of life across various domains, including social and cultural aspects, the environment, education, health, economics, and politics.

Over the past decade, women's participation in the labour market has seen a noticeable increase, although their representation remains relatively small compared to men. This shift significantly enhances women's roles in Indonesia's economic activities. Indirectly, women strive to assert themselves as equals to men, asserting their rights and desires to enter the workforce for their livelihood needs.

In general, gender discrimination in the workplace is rooted in the existence of misguided gender beliefs within society. Gender roles, as a form of social norms, are often considered inherent, leading to social inequalities. This has a detrimental impact on the position of women in various social communities, affecting areas such as education, socio-cultural aspects, politics, and economics. In the realm of employment, injustice can occur due to the following factors: (1) In the marginalization process, women are excluded from wage labour or certain types of work. (2) The process of pushing women to the periphery of the labour market often involves tendencies to work in jobs with unstable livelihoods, low wages, and jobs that are perceived as unskilled or less skilled. (3) Feminization or segregation processes involve the concentration of women in certain types of work (feminization of work) or separation based solely on gender, either exclusively for women or men. (4) Increasing economic disparity includes differences in wages, among other factors (Khotimah, 2009).

The gender role referred to here pertains to women's identity in the public sphere, a topic continually discussed by various groups, particularly gender experts. According to Erikson, Marcia (1996) adapted the concept of identity by identifying exploration and commitment as the two fundamental dimensions in determining an individual's identity achievement status. Marcia (1996) focuses on two key elements: (a) crisis or exploration, which is defined as "the search among alternative potential identity elements," and (b)

commitment, defined as "the forming of a potentially durable commitment to some subset of the identity alternatives given consideration." Every status of self-identity development is based on an individual's exploration and commitment level in each identity domain, including gender roles, career choices, religion, and interpersonal relationships (Lambert, 2010).

There are four common identity statuses, and one of them is "Identity Diffusion," which refers to the status of an individual who has not experienced any form of crisis or commitment. They need a deeper understanding of themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, and the initiative to make significant life decisions (Marcia, 1996). There are also three other identity statuses: *Identity Foreclosure*: In this status, individuals have committed without experiencing a crisis or exploring other alternatives. They tend to follow or conform to the expectations of others, especially authoritative figures like parents and religious institutions. *Identity Moratorium*: Individuals in this status have engaged in exploration and faced crises but have yet to form clear commitments. They are still gathering experiences and information to serve as the basis for future commitments. *Identity Achievement*: This status is reached when an individual commits to choices after thoroughly exploring all available options or alternatives. These established commitments enable them to shape their sense of self, which, in turn, assists them in making decisions and assimilating new information or experiences (Lambert, 2010). According to Erikson (1968), identity achievement has significant implications for an individual's self-functioning in life. A strong sense of identity can influence self-confidence and commitment to values that have been previously explored. As a result, individuals with a strong identity are more than merely conforming to societal norms and pressures.

The issue of authority over women is a classic and perennially relevant subject for study. The term "authority" is often used interchangeably with "authoritative" or "having authority." Authority represents a distinct form of power, as it is with authority that power is recognized and legitimized. Authority means making others comply with a command for a specific purpose or intent. Therefore, power becomes meaningless compared to power if it is not accompanied by authority (Marbun, 1996). Authority is a set of rules that has been legalized by the government and granted to various

entities, such as companies, hospitality, modelling agencies, and the like, to regulate their operations.

The presence of authority ensures that employees and talents in the modelling industry, among others, adhere to the leadership and instructions of their employers or agencies, allowing them to use it as needed by society, even if it may sometimes conflict with an individual's moral values, particularly regarding women who wear the hijab. Therefore, authority demands long-lasting and legal obedience.

Authority has the right to demand obedience and issue commands. According to Max Weber, the necessity for authority lies in its legitimacy, which is always linked to the law. Authority is legitimate when its followers accept it as something binding (Marbun, 1996). Indeed, authority is considered legitimate and agreed upon by all parties involved (Syahrin, 2019). For instance, in the context of employment or work ethics, as demonstrated in Wati's research (2016), the authority of leadership can influence work discipline.

As time progresses, employers view media as a means to showcase or advertise their products to the public. Given that people's activities tend to gravitate towards social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and others, one of the strategies to promote their products is to employ a woman. This approach is taken because women have an appeal to consumers. However, on the one hand, it challenges the natural role of women, as they are expected to showcase their beauty and body attractiveness. In some cases, they are even required to remove their hijab when presenting products to consumers. Consequently, the stigma created in society harms Muslim women.

From various studies on the identity of Muslim women, there are two broad opinions regarding the use of the hijab: (1) Aesthetic context, such as fashion and trends. (2) Theological context encompasses commitment and awareness in practising Islam. Research conducted by Maiyusnida (2006), Budiati (2011), Suhendra (2016), and Turmudi (2016) indicates that the hijab serves an aesthetic function in the context of modernization. Understandably, when women wear the hijab, there are typically two underlying motivations: following a prevailing trend and adhering to religious

mandates. Women who wear or remove the hijab have their goals and reasons for doing so.

On the other hand, Awalia (2016) found that the way members of Solo Hijabers communicate the symbols associated with wearing the hijab within the concept of "I" can be seen from the reasons for wearing the hijab before becoming part of Solo Hijabers. These reasons include the hijab's role in fulfilling religious obligations, preserving the honour of Muslim women, serving as a means or mechanism for self-control, and engaging in symbolic resistance against fashion trends. Ramadhini's research (2017) reveals that individuals wear the hijab not only due to theological commitments but also because of their commitment to a group. This commitment is manifested through the hijab's symbolism, which they wear by the constructs defined by socially legitimized religious authorities. Their commitment to the group is demonstrated through the conformity they exhibit to secure a space for more extensive participation within these groups, in this case, the Tarbiyah, HTI, and Salafi groups. This adds to the theoretical findings of Franks (2000), Batkorwski and Read (2003), Dawam (2007), and Hefner (2007), who assert that the hijab is worn due to commitments to religion or theology. For some women, the hijab is viewed as something sacred. In this sense, wearing the hijab is considered a religious obligation to well-being. Wearing the hijab signifies that the woman has tried to preserve her honour and is a form of obedience to religious commands.

Simultaneously, there are studies on the use of social media for marketing products through female models. Research such as Roifah's (2018) reveals that women possess an appeal and strength in social media, leading business owners or companies to employ women to reap profits. Astuti's (2016) findings indicate that advertising power, particularly in creating image-driven products, has played a role in reinforcing stereotypes that are deeply ingrained in women. The role of women is highly significant and even more appealing than men when it comes to introducing a product. It is not uncommon that when women become figures in promoting a product to the public, it can lead to unfavourable stereotypes, even if the woman is not wearing the hijab, becoming an issue in the eyes of many. Social media serves as a platform for perpetuating stigma and judgment against a woman who

becomes a spokesperson, or a survivor, compelling them to adhere to values and ideologies that directly conflict with their choices, desires, needs, experiences, and rights.

Method

This research is a qualitative descriptive study with a case study approach focused on understanding why Muslim Minang women refuse job offers. The data used in this study is primary data obtained from three Muslim Minang women, including two hijab-wearing models and one Oppo sales promoter (SPG). This study explores the reasons behind Minang women's rejection of job offers that involve removing their hijabs.

Results and Discussion

Stereotyping as a Factor Causing Discrimination in the Workplace

Stereotypes about women are one of the leading causes of discrimination in the workplace. *Stereotypes* are generally defined as labels or markings imposed on a specific group. In reality, stereotypes are always detrimental and lead to discrimination. One type of stereotype stems from gender perspectives. There is a great deal of injustice toward a specific gender, commonly women, resulting from the labels (stereotypes) attached to them. For example, labels that begin with the assumption that women who wear makeup are doing so to attract the attention of the opposite sex. Suppose we try to relate this to job offers requiring female employees to remove their hijabs. In that case, it indirectly suggests that women in the workforce can attract the attention of many people to pique their interest in the products being sold. Therefore, on the one hand, the explanation related to stereotypes about women touches on the purpose of employers offering job opportunities to women if they remove their hijabs.

Several reasons contribute to the low participation of women in the workforce. First, it relates to the perception of women's work being associated with domestic roles. Second, related to this perception is the measurement, determination, or definition of women's work. The third reason is most women's employment's seasonal, part-time, and informal nature. Stereotyping women with all their femininity and prioritising feelings

over logic has been one of the key factors in dampening women's enthusiasm for science. Exact sciences emphasising rationality have been distanced from women, pushing them to focus more on social sciences and domestic affairs. This is closely related to work construction based on gender (a sex-based division of labour) (Saguni, 2018).

The dual roles that women often assume in both the public and domestic spheres contribute to the perception that women's work is undervalued and that they do not receive fair material compensation for the workload. This reality reinforces gender inequality deeply embedded in societal culture. Furthermore, when women have to engage in public roles to improve their family's economic income, the burden on women becomes even heavier.

The Policies Established by Employers in Defining Job Requirements

In a job, specific rules and requirements are usually in place to make programs more effective and efficient. However, these programs are often more in line with what the employer perceives as the needs of the market or consumers rather than considering the needs of the employees who drive the business. For example, the requirement to remove the hijab because it does not align with societal demands. This means that employers desire something that catches the public's attention.

As a result, many employees start to doubt their choices and even prospective employees think twice about accepting a job. This is the experience of individuals like SWH, IK, and Y, who have found themselves feeling constrained by the requirements set by their employers. SWH expressed her perspective: "I find it illogical if there is pressure to remove the hijab." In essence, wearing the hijab is an obligation for all women because it is a religious command and a necessity to protect oneself from potential harm. Thus, it is reasonable to assert that it is highly illogical and unreasonable to remove the hijab solely for a job.

Likewise, IK said, "I think the request made by those offering the job is too harsh and binding." Prospective employees generally want to avoid being subjected to strict and constraining job requirements, which can raise questions. A mutual understanding between employers and potential employees is desired, which avoids selfishness in attracting workers. This

sentiment is echoed by Y, who mentioned, "Actually, it is the right of the person offering the job, but if it is forced, it is not good." Employers indeed have full authority to set job requirements, as seen when a job mandates certain rules to be followed, which might involve an element of coercion. This is done to prevent unfavourable situations. However, it ultimately depends on how the potential employees evaluate and respond to the offers made by the employers.

The rules and requirements established by employers cannot be intervened with because they have full authority to set them, even if potential employees cannot accept them. Understandably, potential employees feel burdened by requests that require them to remove their hijab in the workplace. While employers have full authority, and their requirements cannot be protested or changed, these regulations create problems for potential employees who find it challenging to accept these requests. Naturally, with such requirements in place, potential employees think twice before accepting the offers.

Identity Achievement as the Reason for Minang Women Refusing to Remove the Hijab in the Workplace

Islam has mandated that women cover their bodies from head to toe, which is an obligation in Islamic teachings. However, in socializing in society, many Muslim women still do not cover their bodies. Many internal and external factors contribute to why someone decides to wear the hijab. Internal factors stem from an individual's awareness of religious principles, while external factors include motivations from close acquaintances, workplace dress codes, and environmental influences (Rahayu and Fathonah, 2016). This aligns with the statements from SWH, IK, and Y, who all rejected job offers requiring them to remove their hijabs. SWH explained in the interview:

“Sabana ndak patuik kalau ado di paso-paso untuk membukak jilbab untuk yang kerajo” "It is not right if there is a demand to remove the hijab for work."

Indeed, it is unethical to force employees to remove their hijabs, especially when someone has been accustomed to wearing them. However, such demands do exist in the job market; for example, when working in a

hotel or pursuing a career in modelling, for Muslim women raised from childhood to cover their bodies, removing the hijab is met with immediate rejection. Moreover, if their peers witness them removing the hijab, it becomes a shame for them. On the other hand, IK stated:

"I am a student at UIN, and as a Muslim, I should cover my body. I am confident and believe I can actively participate in the modelling industry without removing my hijab."

She believes that, with her label as a UIN student and a Muslim, she has to cover her body. She is confident that she can continue to work in the modelling industry without removing her hijab. Similarly, Y expressed:

"Because I have been taught to wear the hijab and guard my modesty since childhood, being asked to remove the hijab would be a serious issue for me."

Someone who has obeyed a command since childhood, such as wearing the hijab, would feel uncomfortable removing their modesty cover. It makes them a devout follower of their faith, and facing a job that demands hijab removal poses a serious challenge to their inner self. For instance, there is a case of a woman who went for an interview at a private bank. She answered every question well, but the company's condition for hiring her was to remove her hijab, as the company strictly prohibited its employees from wearing hijabs. This story illustrates the lack of tolerance for Islamic rules that require women to cover their bodies.

From the explanations above, it can be understood that choosing not to remove the hijab is because these individuals have committed to believing that what they wear has become their identity as Muslim women. This aligns with Lambert's description that identity achievement is the status an individual reaches when committing to choices made after thoroughly exploring all options or alternatives. This established commitment allows them to manage their sense of self, which, in turn, helps them make decisions and assimilate new information or experiences. The same idea is echoed in Erikson's statement that identity achievement significantly influences self-confidence and commitment to values deeply ingrained in their minds for a

long time. Therefore, it is reasonable for them to reject removing the hijab for a job.

Their identity has solidified because of an awareness of the importance of covering their bodies, primarily because Islam obliges Muslim women to wear the hijab, both within the family and in a work environment. It becomes a tool of control for Muslim women to remain consistent with what they have believed in for a long time. Support from their family also influences this. Family teachings are the initial foundation for developing awareness regarding wearing the hijab (Intan et.al., 2014).

As Hurlock, as cited in Khairunnisa (2013), suggests, self-control relates to regulating emotions within an individual. Therefore, it can assist individuals in dealing with problems that may be influenced by external factors, such as their jobs, and potentially harm them as Muslim women. On the other hand, Kazdin, as cited in Khairunisa (2013), adds that self-control is necessary to help individuals manage their limited abilities and deal with various harmful factors that may come from external sources. This notion aligns with Berk's explanation of self-control. Berk, as described in Gunarsa (2004), defines self-control as an individual's ability to resist momentary desires or impulses that conflict with behaviour contrary to social norms.

Conclusion

The authority held by employers allows them to establish rules they deem crucial for the benefit of their businesses. However, the issue is that rules requiring women to remove their hijabs are considered legitimate, causing prospective employees to feel constrained. Observing the principles and commitments of the Minangkabau culture, if a woman removes her hijab and this becomes widely known, it indirectly damages her honour, turning it into a source of shame for herself. Furthermore, considering the existing facts, prospective employees who are asked to remove their hijabs as part of their job requirements are guided by their commitment and identity achievement, leading them to decline such offers made by employers.

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