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AURAH COVERING PARAMETERS: A STUDY ON MUSLIM WOMEN'S LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING

NURJANNAH HASMAD¹
ABDULRAHMAN ALOSMAN^{2*}

¹Kuliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences,
International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Selangor Malaysia.
²Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: nurjannahasmad@gmail.com.my

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Abstract

Islam emphasizes preserving chastity onto its believers, which is derived into several commandments to achieve this goal. Among them is aurah (parts of body that are prohibited to be exposed to the public) covering. In the context the current society, wearing a hijab (veil) among female Muslim is a common sight in public places. However, wearing a hijab is not what all it takes to completely cover the aurah, in fact, one may wear the hijab but with tight-fitting clothes, for example, that does not adhere to the right concept of aurah covering. This article aims to investigate the level of understanding on aurah covering parameters among Muslim women. Quantitative analysis has been conducted for 135 female students from 27 different nationalities in the International Islamic University Malaysia where a questionnaire consisting of questions related to aurah covering parameters are distributed. Datas were analysed using the SPSS version 26. The findings suggest that Muslim women have a high level of understanding on aurah covering parameters. The findings from this study may be helpful in providing insights to further exploration of hijab and aurah covering issue as there have not yet many studies tackling the hijab issue from the perspective of aurah covering guidelines.

Keywords: chastity, aurah, hijab, Muslim women

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INTRODUCTION

Islam made it obligatory for its man and woman believers to cover their aurah. Aurah is the male or female body parts that are obliged by Allah upon the Muslims to be covered (Qal'aji, 1988). The first commandment for Muslim women to cover their aurah was revealed is through Surah Al- Ahzab, verse 59, where Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزُوجُكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ ۚ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ ۗ وَكَانَ
 اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

“O Prophet ! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves (part) of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”

(Al-Ahzab:59)

This verse was revealed when the women believers complained that they are being verbally harassed by the adulterers on the road. Those ill- mannered adulterers offered them money if they agree to have intercourse with them, as they are unable to distinguish between slaves and free women in the night. As a respond to the women believer complaints, this verse was revealed, commanding them to lower their outer garment so that they will be known with chastity (Al-Balkhi, 2002). According to At-Tabari (2000), “bringing down the outer garments” in this verse means tightening it onto their forehead.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to fulfil the aurah covering commandments, Islam set a few guidelines to be followed by Muslim women while covering their aurah. These aurah covering parameters are derived from Quranic verses and ahadith (prophetic traditions) that are related to the matter.

Clothes Must Cover All Aurah Areas

The first important parameter that must be observed by a Muslim woman to correctly cover her aurah is that the cloth that she is wearing must cover all aurah areas (At-Tarifi, 2016; Zaidan, 1994; Al-Albani, 2002). Muslim scholars have divided opinions on the areas of body that are considered aurah for a Muslim woman. There are three opinions regarding the matter.

1. A Muslim woman aurah is her whole body except her face and palm.

Majority Muslim scholars of the madhahib (schools of thought) opine that a woman believer’s aurah is her whole body except her face and palm (Al- Qardhawi, 1998). This includes the madhahib of Hanafi (Al-Jassas, 2010; Al-’Aini, 2000), Maliki (As-Sowi, 1952; Al-Adawi, 1994; As-Soqli, 2013), Shafi’e (Al-’Umrani, 2000; As- Shafi’e, 2000; Ar-Rouyani, 2009; Al-Bughawi, 1997) and Hanbali (Ibn Qudamah, 1998). Among the arguments that they hold on to is the Quranic verse:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۗ

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments, except what normally appear...”

(An-Nur:31)

Ibn ‘Abbas and A’ishah said that “except what normally appear” are her face and palm (Ibn Muflih, 2003; AlAnsari, 1997). Despite the many interpretations of the verse, At-Tabari (2000) views that the one that is most precise is her face and palm, reasoning that if a Muslim woman is permitted to reveal her face and palm even in prayers, where the ijma’ (consensus) is that one has to completely cover his or her aurah and reveal only parts of his or her body that is not considered aurah in the prayer, it is then clear that a woman’s aurah is her whole body except her face and palm. From another point of view, they see that adornments that usually appear from a woman is her eyeliner and her ring, which is also the opinion of Ibn Abbas (Al-Baihaqi, 1988). Hence, her hands, which are the areas where she is wearing a ring, and her face, the area where she applies her eyeliner, are not aurah (Al-Jassas, 2010).

Another argument presented by those who hold to this opinion is the hadith narrated by A’ishah:

أَنَّ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتَ أَبِي بَكْرٍ، دَخَلَتْ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَيْهَا ثِيَابٌ رِقَاقٌ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَقَالَ " يَا أَسْمَاءُ إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْمَحِيضَ لَمْ تَصُلْحْ أَنْ يُرَى مِنْهَا إِلَّا هَذَا وَهَذَا " . وَأَشَارَ إِلَى وَجْهِهِ وَكَفَّيْهِ . قَالَ أَبُو دَاوُدَ هَذَا مُرْسَلٌ خَالِدُ بْنُ دُرَيْكٍ لَمْ يُدْرِكْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا .

“Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) turned his attention from her. He said: ‘O Asma’, when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this’, and he pointed to his face and hands.”

(Reported by Abu Daud)

The hadith clearly stated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) specified face and palm as the only body parts that can be displayed by a woman that had experience menstruation indicating that her aurah is her whole body except for those two.

2. A Muslim woman aurah is her whole body except her face, palm and feet.

The other opinion of Hanafi scholars, which is considered as the authorized opinion in the madhhab (Az-Zuhaili,1989), view that other than face and palm, the feet is also not considered aurah for a women believer and thus, not need to be covered (Al- Jassas, 2010). They provide their argument based on the same Quranic verse:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۗ

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments, except what normally appear...”

(An-Nur:31)

The Hanafi scholars view that the meaning of “what normally appear” in this verse is what usually be displayed according to the custom or culture, in which, the feet are among what are usually displayed according to customs and culture and hence, they are not considered aurah (Al-Maula, 1912).

They also use logical reasoning that it is very likely for a woman’s feet to be exposed when she is walking whether while wearing shoes or not, and sometimes, a woman might not find herself shoes or socks (Al- ‘Aini, 2000). Furthermore, in their opinion, one will not be feeling with lust by looking at feet as one might feel by looking at a face, therefore, if even the face is not aurah, then, the feet deserve more not to be considered as aurah (Al’Aini, 2000). A woman also has the need to walk on the street which will expose her feet, especially the poor (Al-Mawla, 1912).

3. A Muslim woman aurah is her whole body.

Some scholars like Ibn Taimiyyah (1985), Ibn Uthaimin (2007) and At-Tuweijri (1980) have the view that on top of that, the face of a woman believer is also considered aurah, which does mean that a Muslim woman’s aurah is her whole body. They base their arguments on the same verse:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۗ

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments except what normally appears. Let them draw their veils over their chests, and not reveal their hidden adornments...”

(An-Nur:31)

Ibn Uthaimin (2008) argued that the verse calls for Muslim woman to guard their chastity. Hence, exposing the face for a Muslim woman opens the door to adore her beauty, which does not lead one to guard her chastity that is called upon by the verse. Covering up the face, on the other way, is one of the ways to guard chastity. Hence, the means share the same

rulings as with the goal. He furthermore holds to the interpretation of Ibn Mas'ud to the verse "except what normally appears..." as outer garments.

Apart from that, they also base their view on the hadith narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " إِذَا خَطَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ الْمَرْأَةَ فَإِنْ اسْتَطَاعَ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَى مَا يَدْعُوهُ إِلَى نِكَاحِهَا فَلْيَفْعَلْ " . قَالَ فَخَطَبْتُ جَارِيَةً فَكُنْتُ أَتَحَبَّبُ لَهَا حَتَّى رَأَيْتُ مِنْهَا مَا دَعَانِي إِلَى نِكَاحِهَا وَتَرَوُجُهَا فَتَرَوُجْتُهَا .

"The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'When one of you asked a woman in marriage, if he is able to look at what will induce him to marry her, he should do so'. Jabir said: 'I asked a girl in marriage, I used to look at her secretly, until I looked at what induced me to marry her. I, therefore, married her.'"

(Reported by Abu Daud)

Based on this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) permits a man to look at a woman with the intention to marry her, hence, if a man does not intend to marry the woman, he is sinning by looking at her, which is a proof that she must not display her face.

Clothes Must Not Be Tight- Fitting or Transparent

A Muslim woman must observe that her clothes are not tight-fitting that show her figure, or transparent revealing her body parts (At-Tarifi, 2016; Zaidan, 1994; Al-Albani, 2002). Several hadith are reported that bore this prohibition. One of them is the hadith from Dihyah Al-Kalbi who said:

أَبِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِقَبَائِي فَأَعْطَانِي مِنْهَا قُبْطِيَّةً فَقَالَ " اصْدَعْهَا صَدْعَيْنِ فَأَفْطَعِ أَحَدَهُمَا فَمِيصًّا وَأَعْطِ الْآخَرَ امْرَأَتَكَ تَحْتَمِرُ بِهِ " . فَلَمَّا أَدْبَرَ قَالَ " وَأْمُرِ امْرَأَتَكَ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ تَحْتَهُ ثَوْبًا لَا يَصِفُهَا. "

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was brought some pieces of fine Egyptian linen and he gave me one and said, "Divide it into two; cut one of the pieces into a shirt and give the other to your wife for veil." Then when he turned away, he said, "And order your wife to wear a garment below it and not show her figure."

(Reported by Abu Daud)

This hadith tells that the Prophet p.b.u.h was conscious about the cloth will show the wife of Usamah's figure, hence immediately told him to tell his wife to wear a garment under it. It implies that a Muslim woman should not wear clothes that show her figure.

Another hadith is narrated by Abdullah ibn Abi Salamah:

“Umar Al-Khattab gave the people some Egyptian linen, and said to them, ‘Do not give it to your women to wear it’. A man asked, ‘Oh the Leader of the Believers, I gave it to my wife, and she went back home and wore it, and I don’t see it reveal what is underneath’. Umar said: ‘Even if it does not reveal what underneath, it shows her figure’.

(Reported by Al-Baihaqi)

In this hadith, the man reassured Umar Al-Khattab that the cloth did not reveal her body parts. However, Umar is concern about the cloth showing her figure. This adds another point other than the one in the previous hadith, which is a woman should observe that other than not revealing her body parts, a Muslim woman should observe that her clothing does not show her figure.

Apart from that, Alqama ibn Abi Alqama narrated his mother said,

دَخَلَتْ حَفْصَةُ بِنْتُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عَلَى عَائِشَةَ زَوْجِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَعَلَى حَفْصَةَ خِمَارٌ رَقِيقٌ فَشَقَّتْهُ عَائِشَةُ وَكَسَتْهَا خِمَارًا كَثِيفًا .

"Hafsah bint Abd ar-Rahman visited A'ishah, the wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him) while wearing a long thin headscarf. A'ishah tore it in two and made a thick one for her."

(Reported by Imam Malik)

The actions of Sayyidatina A'ishah can be explained because the scarf was thin, it may reveal what's underneath, hence, she made a thicker one out of it.

Clothes Must Not Resemble Men or Non-Muslims

A Muslim woman should not dress resembling the opposite gender or the non- Muslims (At-Tarifi, 2016; Zaidan, 1994; Al-Albani, 2002). There are a handful of ahadith that express this prohibition, as physical imitations of the non-believers may invoke internal approval of what is imitated (Ibn Qayyim, 2011). Among the hadith that contains this prohibition are the hadith that was narrated by Ibn ‘Abbas:

لَعَنَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْمُحْتَنِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ، وَالْمُتَرَجِّلَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَقَالَ " أَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ ". قَالَ فَأَخْرَجَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فُلَانًا، وَأَخْرَجَ عُمَرُ فُلَانًا.

“Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) cursed those men who are in the similitude (assume the manners) of women and those women who are in the similitude (assume the manners) of men, and he said, "Turn them out of your

houses." The Prophet (ﷺ) turned out such-and-such man, and `Umar turned out such-and-such woman."

(Reported by Al-Bukhari)

Commenting on this hadith, Al- 'Athqalani (1959) emphasized that it is not permissible for men to imitate women in clothing and adornments that are specific to women, nor the other way around. Adding to the point, he further commented that considering different dressing norms that existed within different cultures, perhaps in some society, women's clothing is not different from men, instead, women are distinguished by wearing veil and the covering up manner.

On the other hand, among the hadith that contains the prohibition to dress resembling non-Muslims is the one narrated by 'Abdullah b. 'Amr b. al-As who said:

رَأَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَيَّ ثَوْبَيْنِ مُعَصْفَرَيْنِ فَقَالَ " إِنَّ هَذِهِ مِنْ ثِيَابِ الْكُفَّارِ فَلَا تَلْبَسْهَا."

"Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) saw me wearing two clothes dyed in saffron. whereupon he said: These are the clothes (usually worn by) the non-believers, so do not wear them."

(Reported by Muslim)

In this hadith, the Prophet provides the cause of his prohibition to his companion not to wear the saffron dyed clothes, which is because it is what normally worn by the non-believers at that time. It can thus be derived from the hadith that the prophet would not want his companions to resemble the non-believers, and in this hadith specifically, in terms of clothing.

Clothes Must Not be Fame Clothes

Islam also sets a guideline to its Muslim believer not to wear fame clothes (Zaidan, 1994; Al-Albani, 2002). Abdullah ibn Umar narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

مَنْ لَبَسَ ثَوْبَ شُهْرَةٍ أَلْبَسَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ثَوْبًا مِثْلَهُ ثُمَّ تُلْهَبُ فِيهِ النَّارُ

"Whoever wears clothes of fame, Allah will wear them in Judgement Day; the similar of the cloth and set it in fire."

(Reported by Abu Daud)

The word ثَوْب (thaub) carries the meaning of clothes that visible to others covering the outward appearance of the body as what is mentioned in the Quranic verse:

عَلَيْهِمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٍ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَحُلُّوْا أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَمُوهُمْ رُهْمًا شَرَابًا طَهُورًا

“Upon them will be garments of fine green silk with heavy brocade...”

(Al-Insan: 21)

On the other hand, the word لِبَاس (libaas) carries a more specific meaning. The word ‘libaas’ shows the meaning of the one that comes in contact with the body. This can be inferred from the Quranic verses:

يَبْنِيْٓءَآدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤْوِي سَوْءَٔتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ ءَايَاتِ
 ٱللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَكَّرُونَ

“O Children of Adam! Indeed, We have sent down to you a garment which covers your shame and provides protection and adornment...”

(Al-A’raf: 26)

It can be related -from the jurisprudence view- that in the hadith: “Whoever wears clothes of fame, Allah will wear them in Judgement Day; the similar of the cloth and set it in fire”, that Allah uses the verb ‘libaas’ - the one that comes in contact with the body- due to the severity of the torment, that those clothes are like an oven around it, as the emptiness is set on fire in it.

On understanding the meaning of the hadith, some scholars explained the meaning of cloth of fame (thaub as-syuhrah). Basically, cloth of fame is a cloth of arrogance and vanity worn to seek and gain fame, thus making its wearer famous among people (Al-Manawi, 1937; Ibn Athir, 1972; Kusaj, 2002). Factors contributing to a cloth’s such nature can be due it’s distinguished form, whether in terms of colour, shape, or design that draws people’s attention and subsequently, the owner strut with wonder and arrogance (Zaidan, 1994). These distinguished features are not merely distinct; in fact, its difference reach the level of unusualness. Ibn Taimiyyah (2004) when defining the high-end characteristic of cloth of fame, characterize its superiority as ‘beyond the norm’.

A certain cloth is labelled as clothes of fame either being way higher or way lower than what the society generally wears (Abu Zaid, 1995). Al- Sarkhasi (1993) stressed that a cloth can be categorized as cloth of fame by being the high-end among clothes or low-end among clothes, both that made it pointed to by the fingers, the former is due to its extravagance while the latter is due to its frugality. This is aligned with what is argued by As-Syaukani (1993), that gaining fame is not only limited to luxurious clothes, in fact, wearing clothes that differ from people’s clothes among the poor can also be accounted as wearing clothes of fame. This may be why Al- Bahouti (1983), when discussing about cloth of fame, stated that it is a finger-

pointer cloth. The prohibition from wearing such clothes is to prevent it from being a cause of back talking about the wearer, in which the wearer itself is sharing part of the back talking sin, as he is the one who wear such clothes that trigger back talking.

Ibn Taimiyyah (in Zaid, 2005) pointed out an important aspect in the discussion of cloth of fame. Defining cloth of fame as ‘what is worn that is intended to be magnified with, or showing off superiority or asceticism’, the aspect of intention to be magnified with is an important element in cloth of fame. One might simply be different from others by his clothes, however, when being different, and at the same time the difference made him feel with greatness, vanity and pride, it is what led to its prohibition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive analytical method designed to elicit quantitative responses from the participants. According to Loeb et. Al (2017), quantitative descriptive analysis characterizes the world or a phenomenon by identifying patterns in data to answer questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent. Therefore, the quantitative descriptive analysis method employed in this study intend to gather responses from females in the Muslim society to assess their level of understanding in aurah covering parameters.

Research Instrument

The study uses a questionnaire as its instrument. The demographic part of the questionnaire consists of questions such as questions on nationality, study field, education level, residential area, madhab, and age group. The part that assesses respondent’s level of understanding on aurah covering parameters consists of 12 questions with 6 of them offer answer choices in the form of Likert scale and another 6 offer multiple choices of answer for respondents to choose from.

Participants and Data Collection

Participants in this study were selected through the non-probability convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study (Dornyei 2007). According to Etikan, Musa and AlKassim (2016), non-probability sampling is useful when randomization is impossible given that the population is exceptionally large or when the researcher has limited resources, time and workforce.

The questionnaire was distributed via researcher’s WhatsApp application and Facebook account in the form of Google Form to researcher’s various contacts of Muslims from different backgrounds and nationality. After one month of distributing the questionnaire, 136 answers are collected and analysed accordingly.

RESULTS

Demographic Backgrounds

The demographic part of the questionnaire consists of questions on nationality, study field, education level, residential area, madhab, and age group.

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on their nationality. The respondents come from 27 different nationalities, with over half of them are Malaysian (n= 71, 52.6%). The rest of the respondents come from various Asian countries (n=41, 30.1%) such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Brunei, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Philippine, Maldives and China, African countries (n=11, 8.1%) such as Algeria, Guinea, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Somalia, Mauritania and Tanzania, and Middle East countries (n=11, 8.1%) such as Oman, Syria, Turkey, Yemen and Jordan. One respondent is from America.

Table 1: Nationality

No	Nationality	n	%
1	Malaysia	71	52.6
2	Indonesia	8	5.9
3	Singapore	6	4.4
4	Thailand	3	2.2
5	Cambodia	1	0.7
6	Afghanistan	1	0.7
7	Algeria	2	1.5
8	Bangladesh	1	0.7
9	Brunei	3	2.2
10	China	5	3.7
11	Guinea	1	0.7
12	India	6	4.4
13	Jordan	1	0.7
14	Kenya	1	0.7
15	Maldives	2	1.5
16	Mauritania	1	0.7
17	Morocco	1	0.7
18	Oman	1	0.7
19	Pakistan	3	2.2
20	Philippine	2	1.5
21	Somalia	3	2.2
22	Syria	4	3.0
23	Tanzania	1	0.7
24	Turkey	1	0.7
25	America	1	0.7
26	Yemen	4	3.0
27	Zimbabwe	1	0.7
Total		136	100.00

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents according to field of study. Nearly half of the respondents are in the religious studies and human sciences field (n=61, 45.2%), while the least field that respondents are from are law and engineering, both having 3 respondents (2.2%).

Table 2: Field of Study

Field of Study	n	%
Law	3	2.2
Architecture and Environmental Design	7	5.2
Economics and Management	25	18.5
Information and Communication Technology	9	6.7
Religious Studies and Human Sciences	61	45.2
Engineering	3	2.2
Education	16	11.9
Others	11	8.1
Total	135	100.00

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents based on their education level. Most of respondents are undergraduate students (n=77, 57.0%), while the least are PhD students (n=20, 14.8%).

Table 3: Education Level

Education Level	n	%
Bachelor's degree	77	57.0
Master's Degree	38	28.1
PhD	20	14.8
Total	135	100.00

In terms of residential area, Table 4 shows that over half of respondents stay in the urban area (n= 70, 51.9%), while the rest are divided into those who live in sub-urban area (n=28, 20.7%) and rural area (n=28, 20.7%).

Table 4: Residential Area

Residential Area	n	%
Rural	28	20.7
Sub-Urban	37	27.4
Urban	70	51.9
Total	135	100.00

A large percentage of the respondents practice Shafie madhhab (n=105, 77.8%), while none practice the Hanbali madhhab (n=0, 0.0%). The others are practicing Hanafi madhhab (n=15, 11.0%), Maliki madhhab (n=6, 4.4%) and other madhhabs (n=9, 6.6%).

Table 5: Madhhab

No	Madhhab	n	%
1	Hanafi	15	11.0
2	Maliki	6	4.4
3	Others	9	6.6
4	Shafi'e	105	77.8
5	Hanbali	0	0.0
Total		135	100.00

Level of Understanding on Aurah Covering Parameters

Table 7: Aurah Covering Parameters' Understanding

No	Item	Answer Choices	Right answers (%)	Wrong answer (%)	Neutral answer (%)
1	It is permissible for a Muslim woman to dress resembling a man or the non-muslims as long as the clothes cover body parts that are considered aurah for her.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Disagree • Disagree • Neutral • Agree • Strongly Agree 	68.1 (92)	13.3 (18)	18.5 (25)
2	When a Muslim woman wants to make sure she wears clothes that fulfill the parameters of aurah covering, she must make sure that her clothes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are not resembling the non-muslims or the male. • are up to date so people won't intimidate her. • are bright colored enough to catch people's attention. 	97.0 (131)	3.0 (4)	0.0
3	As the fashion industry is evolving today, a Muslim woman is permissible to wear stunning clothes to gain her popularity, as long as the clothes cover all parts of her body that is considered aurah.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Disagree • Disagree • Neutral • Agree • Strongly Agree 	42.9 (58)	27.4 (37)	29.6 (40)
4	A Muslim woman should fulfill the aurah covering parameters so that she will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be in accordance with the Shari'ah. • look beautiful and be popular with her fashion. • not be estranged by people around her. 	99.3 (134)	0.7 (1)	0.0
5	A transparent sock worn by a Muslim woman that expose her feet is fulfilling aurah covering parameters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Disagree • Disagree • Neutral • Agree • Strongly agree 	72.59 (98)	12.59 (17)	16.30 (22)
6	A Muslim woman must cover her aurah with clothes that are:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent • Non-transparent • Semi-transparent 	94.8 (128)	5.2 (7)	0.0

7	Hijab wearing style that shows part of a Muslim woman's hair from front or back is fulfilling the aurah covering parameter because she is still wearing the hijab.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Disagree • Disagree • Neutral • Agree • Strongly agree 	91.8 (124)	2.2 (3)	5.9 (8)
8	A Muslim woman aurah is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her whole body except her face and palm. • Her whole body except her face, palm and foot. • Her whole body from head to toe. 	85.19 (115)	14.07 (19)	0.7 (1)
9	Covering aurah for a Muslim woman is fulfilled when she:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers her aurah completely with loose clothes that do not reveal her shapes and curves. • Covers her aurah completely with clothes, even though the clothes are tight fitting revealing her curves and shape. • Covers her aurah completely with clothes that reveal part of her shapes and curves. 	97.0 (131)	3.0 (4)	00.00
10	Wearing pants or skirts that reveal the shape of a Muslim woman's thighs and hips are permissible as long as it covers that area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Disagree • Disagree • Neutral • Agree • Strongly agree 	86.0 (116)	3.0 (4)	11.1 (15)
11	The right way of hijab wearing for a Muslim woman is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hijab that is long enough to cover the chest area, worn with loose clothes. • Hijab that covers only the head and neck area, worn over loose clothes that do not reveal the shape of the chest. • Hijab that covers only the head and 	99.3 (134)	0.7 (1)	0.0

		neck area worn over clothes that may or may not reveal the shape of the chest.			
Mean			84.90	7.74	7.76

Item 1 and 2 assesses Muslim women’s level of understanding on the prohibition of dressing up resembling males or non-Muslims. Item 1 that emphasizes on permissibility for a Muslim woman to dress resembling a man or the non-Muslims as long as the clothes cover body parts that are considered aurah for her, offers answer choices in the form of Likert scale i.e strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. Answers ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ are considered wrong answers, while answers ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ are considered right answers. Respondents that answered this question correctly (68.1%, n= 92) outnumbered those who answered incorrectly (13.3%, n= 18). The same trend is seen in item 2 ‘When a Muslim woman wants to make sure she wears clothes that fulfill the parameters of aurah covering, she must make sure that her clothes:’. The answer ‘are not resembling the non-Muslims or the male’ is considered the right answer, while the rest; ‘are up to date so people won’t intimidate her’ and ‘are bright coloured enough to catch people’s attention’ are considered wrong. Almost all of the respondents (97.0%, n=131) answered the answer correctly, while only 3% of the respondents (n=4) chose the wrong answer. This concludes a high level of understanding among Muslim women on the prohibition of dressing up resembling males or non-Muslims.

Muslim women’s level of understanding on prohibition of wearing clothes of fame is assessed in item 3 and 4. Item 3; ‘As the fashion industry is evolving today, a Muslim woman is permissible to wear stunning clothes to gain her popularity, as long as the clothes cover all parts of her body that is considered aurah’ offers a 5-point Likert scale answer. Answers ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ are considered wrong answers, while answers ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ are considered right answers. Respondents seemed to be divided in their opinions, with nearly half of them (42.9%, n=58) chose the right answer, while 27.4% (n=37) answered incorrectly and 29.6% (n=40) chose a neutral answer. However, item 4 that assesses the same aspect; ‘A Muslim woman should fulfill the aurah covering parameters so that she will:’ which offers three answer choices, saw 99.3% of respondents (n=134) chose the right answer; ‘to be in accordance with the Shari’ah’, while none of them chose the answer ‘look beautiful and be popular with her fashion’ that reflects a high level on understanding among Muslim women on the prohibition to wear fame clothes.

Items 5 and 6 evaluates Muslim women’s level of understanding on the need for her clothes to be non-transparent to fulfil the aurah covering parameters. Item 5, “A transparent sock worn by a Muslim woman that expose her feet is fulfilling aurah covering parameters” is taking into consideration madhab differences in determining the right or wrong answers. Majority of the scholars are in the opinion that a woman’s feet are aurah, except for Hanafi scholar who sees that they are not. Hence, for other than those who are in madhab Hanafi, answers ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ are considered wrong answers whereas ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ are right answers. For those in madhab Hanafi, the case is vice versa; answers ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ are considered right answers while answers ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ are considered wrong answers. Based on this standard, 72.59% of respondents (n=98) answered correctly, while 12.59% of them (n=17) incorrectly answered the question.

Table 8: Item 5 Answers by Madhhab

Answer/ <i>Madhhab</i>	Strongly Disagree	or	Neutral	Agree or Strongly Agree	Total
Maliki	6		1	1	6
Hanafi	9		1	5	15
Shafi'e	82		16	7	105
Others	5		4	0	8

On the other hand, item 6, 'A Muslim woman must cover her aurah with clothes that are:' which offers answers 'transparent', 'non-transparent' and 'semi-transparent' as answers, recorded a high percentage of respondents choosing 'non-transparent' as their answer (94.8%, n=128) which is the right answer, while only 5.2% (n=7) choose incorrect answer of either 'transparent' or 'semi-transparent.'

Muslim woman's level of understanding on the need for her clothes to cover all the areas that are considered aurah for her is assessed in item 7 and 8. Item 7, 'Hijab wearing style that shows part of a Muslim woman's hair from front or back is fulfilling the aurah covering parameter because she is still wearing the hijab', offers answer choices in the form of 5-point Likert scale. Majority of respondents (91.8%, n=124) chose the right answer of either 'disagree' or strongly disagree', leaving only a small fraction of respondents (2.2% n=3) that chose the incorrect answer. 5.9% (n=8) of respondents chose 'neutral' answer. Meanwhile, item 8, "A Muslim woman aurah is:" takes into consideration madhab's different opinion on a Muslim woman's aurah. Majority of the scholars are in the opinion that a woman's aurah is her whole body except for her face and palm, whereas some of Hanafi scholars opine that woman's aurah is her whole body except for her face, palm and feet. A few scholars from other than Hanafi madhab see that a woman's aurah is her whole body from head to toe. Hence, the right answer for those who are in madhab Hanafi, is "Her whole body except her face, palm and foot" or "Her whole body except her face and palm". For the rest, the right answer is "Her whole body except her face and palm" or "Her whole body from head to toe", while the answer "Her whole body except her face, palm and foot" is considered wrong for them. Based on this standard, 85.19.% of respondents (n=115) answered the question correctly, while only 14.07% (n=19) chose incorrect answer for the question.

Table 9: Item 8 Answers by Madhhab

Answer/ <i>Madhhab</i>	Her whole body except her face and palm.	Her whole body except her face, palm and foot.	Her whole body from head to toe.	Not sure	Total
Maliki	4	2	0	0	6
Hanafi	5	9	1	0	15

Shafi'e	88	14	3	0	105
Others	6	2	0	1	9

Item 9, 10 and 11 evaluate Muslim women’s level of understanding on the need of her clothes not to be tight fitting that reveals her shapes and curves. Item 9, ‘Covering aurah for a Muslim woman is fulfilled when she:’ offers the answer choices in which only one of them is considered right; ‘Covers her aurah completely with loose clothes that do not reveal her shapes and curves.’, while the other two; ‘Covers her aurah completely with clothes, even though the clothes are tight fitting revealing her curves and shape.’ and ‘Covers her aurah completely with clothes that reveal part of her shapes and curves.’ are considered wrong answers. Almost all of the respondents (97%, n=131) answered the question correctly, while only 3% of respondents (n=4) chose the incorrect answers. Item 10 that assesses the same aspect with the statement ‘Wearing pants or skirts that reveal the shape of a Muslim woman's thighs and hips are permissible as long as it covers that area.’ that offers 5-point Likert scale answer choices recorded a high level of understanding among respondents as well with 86.0% (n=116) respondents chose the right answer of either ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, while only 3% of them (n=4) chose the incorrect answer of either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’. 11.1% (n=15) hold a neutral view towards the statement.

On the other hand, item 11, ‘The right way of hijab wearing for a Muslim woman is:’ offers three answer choices. Respondents answers of either ‘Hijab that is long enough to cover the chest area, worn with loose clothes’ or ‘Hijab that covers only the head and neck area, worn over loose clothes that do not reveal the shape of the chest’ are regarded as right answers, while the answer ‘Hijab that covers only the head and neck area worn over clothes that may or may not reveal the shape of the chest’ is regarded as the wrong answer. Almost all of the respondents (99.3%, n=134) answered the question correctly, leaving only one respondent who does not. Overall, the mean for right answer percentages recorded the highest value (m= 84.90) compared to the mean for wrong answer percentages (m=7.74) and the mean for neutral answer percentages (m=7.76). This result indicates that Muslim women have a high level of understanding on aurah covering parameters.

DISCUSSION

This study examines Muslim women’s understanding on the aurah covering parameters. Data were collected from 135 Muslim women from 27 different nationalities. Findings show that Muslim women have a high level of understanding on aurah covering parameters, with a high mean for right answer percentage (m= 84.90).

The high level of understanding on aurah covering parameter among Muslim women may be explained by Muslim women’s perspective of covering their aurah itself. Even though many themes had arisen in association of wearing Islamic clothes such as culture for the practice of wearing abaya in Saudi Arabia (DeCoursey, 2017), or a fashion statement (Grine and Saeed, 2017; Rahman, Islam & Ferdousi, 2018), a mark of identity (MacKay, 2013), self-protection (Novitasari, 2014; Kamal & Fayyaz, 2016; Maqsood, 2013), and family affiliation (MacKay, 2013) for the practice of hijab, nevertheless, the primary religious purpose of practicing the Muslim women attire have not yet been forgotten. Various studies conducted among Muslims in Malaysia (Grine and Saeed, 2017), Brunei (Haji Mohammad, 2018), Indonesia (Novitasari, 2014), Bangladesh (Rahman, Islam & Ferdousi 2018), Pakistan (Kamal & Fayyaz, 2016), Saudi Arabia (DeCoursey, 2017), Mauritania (Bhowon and Bundoo, 2016), Egypt (Jackson & Monk-Turner, 2015), Yemen (Jackson & Monk-Turner, 2015), Britain (MacKay, 2013), Canada (Litchmore and Safdar, 2016), and America (Koura, 2018; Li Chen et. Al, 2014; Maqsood,

2013) have found that despite the multiple issues associated with the hijab, Muslim women still consider the religious goal to be their main goal of wearing it. It may be implied that when Muslim women still sees wearing Islamic clothes as a religious commandment more than fashion wave, familial affiliation, identity marker or self-protection, they will pay more attention to seek knowledge on the right way to fulfil aurah covering parameters.

However, the demographic background of participants in this study might have affected the outcome of the findings. All the participants received education at least to degree level, and all of them are students at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Furthermore, majority of the respondents (45.2%, n=61) study the field of religious studies and human sciences. Their educational environment of an Islamic university, with nearly half of them studying religious studies and human sciences might be a factor of their high level of understanding in aurah covering parameters.

CONCLUSION

This study ventures Muslim women's understanding on the aurah covering parameters, where data were collected from 135 Muslim women from different nationalities which, after analysed, shows that Muslim women have a high level of understanding on aurah covering parameters. These findings are aligned with previous studies that have shown how Muslim women still perceive wearing Islamic attire as a religious obligation, although also associating it with many themes that arises such as culture, fashion and familial affiliation. Muslim women, when being aware that practicing Islamic attire is a religious commandment, are cautious about how to dress according to Islam, and concern to have the knowledge about parameters of aurah covering so that she is fulfilling the commandment accordingly. Findings in this study can be further explored in terms of hijab, Islamic attire and compliance of Muslim women to the aurah covering parameters.

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