

# Religious Commitment and Sexual Behavior in Dating Among Young Adult Muslim Women in Indonesia Who Are Veiled and Not Veiled

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## ABSTRACT

Religious commitment can be a predictor of sexual behavior, and wearing a veil may be a characteristic of religious commitment. This study investigated the relationship of religious commitment and sexual behavior in dating among 265 young adult (20–38 years) Muslim women in Indonesia who are veiled and not veiled (200 vs. 65 women, respectively). In addition, the study sought to determine if religious commitment and sexual behavior among the veiled women were associated with their reasons for veiling. Data were collected using the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (Indonesian version) and Sexual Behavior Inventory. Overall, results showed a moderate level of religious commitment among study participants, with significantly higher religious commitment for veiled versus not-veiled women. Both groups were involved in sexual behaviors in dating; however, less involvement was noted for veiled versus not-veiled women. A significant negative relationship was noted between participants' religious commitment and sexual behavior. Among the veiled women, those who were veiled on the grounds of carrying out religious orders and of their own desires had the highest degree of religious commitment, whereas those who were veiled because they obeyed the religious rules had the lowest religious commitment.

**Keywords:** dating, muslim women, religious commitment, sexual behavior, veil, young adult.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Religious commitment* can be defined as the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living (Worthington, 1988), which characterizes the individual's attachment to religion and manifests as acting in accordance with religious guidance (Ghufron & Risnawita, 2011; Fatchuri, 2000). Religious commitment can also be seen in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects. *Intrapersonal religious commitment* focuses on individual religious beliefs or

personal experiences and cognitive aspects of commitment, whereas *interpersonal religious commitment* focuses on the individual's activity level in organized religious activities (Worthington, 2003). Religious attitudes in young adults are difficult to change (Sururin, 2004) because beliefs are more intrinsic in this population. However, these beliefs can be influenced by many factors, such as gender (Milevsky & Leh, 2008), social level and residential area (cities/suburbs/villages) (Harlock, 1981), family background

(Longest, Uecker, 2018; Desmond, Morgan, & Kikuchi, 2010), peer religious interest, and how arduous a challenge may be for the individual (Mappiere, 1983).

Religious commitment has a negative relationship with sexual behavior in dating (Barry et al., 2015; Landor, Simons, Simons, Brody, & Gibbons, 2011; Ahrold, Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2011; Astuti, 2008; Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2008; Andisti, 2007; Woodroof, 1985). An often-cited study by Samuels (1997, in Lefkowitz et al., 2010; Haglund & Fehring, 2010; Longest et al., 2018) found that religious commitment can be a “protector” that reduces the risk of involvement in sexual behavior because most religions do not allow premarital sex. Individuals who have high religious commitment have low sexual behavior activity; therefore, religious commitment can reduce the risk of sexual behavior in dating (Lefkowitz et al., 2010; Woodroof, 1985). Individuals who practice their religiosity in daily life have more conservative views toward sex (Barry et al., 2015; Sumer, 2015; Lefkowitz et al., 2010; Woodroof, 1985), whereas those who have lower religiosity are more likely to participate in sexual behavior in dating (Young, Denny, & Penhollow et al., 2015).

*Sexual behavior* can be described as all behaviors that are driven by sexual desire. The forms of this behavior vary, ranging from feelings of attraction to dating behavior, to “kissing” to sexual intercourse. Sexual activity also includes foreplay, such as kissing, hugging, manual stimulation of the breast and genitals, oral sex, vaginal intercourse, anal sex, and other forms of intercourse (Sarwono, 2001). Sexual behavior is more likely to occur during the process of dating or

romantic relationship than non-romantic relationship. *Dating* is a relationship that tends to be permanent and exclusive between people who mostly love each other since young adults (Wardani, 2001). Among young adults (age 20–40 years) – who are at the social development stage of intimacy versus isolation (Erikson in Papalia & Feldman, 2012) – explorations in love become more physically intimate and serious (Arnett, 2000). Young adults are more likely to be more sexually active than adolescents (Lefkowitz, Gillen, & Shearer, 2010). An individual’s decision to engage in sexual behavior may also be affected by internal factors, such as family background, social contexts, and other demographics (Barry, Willoughy, & Clayton, 2015), as well as religion.

In the Indonesian population, the religious majority is Muslim. In Islamic teaching, there are strict laws to guide sexual behavior; thus, it is likely that Muslim attitudes are more likely to be conservative toward sex than those of some other religions (Finke & Adamczyk, 2008, in Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012). Indonesian researchers have found negative relationship between religious commitment and premarital sex (Rahman, 2016; Maimunah, 2016; Astuti 2008), attitude toward sex in dating (Nuandri & Widayat, 2014), and free sex (Andisti, 2007).

Currently, many Muslim women wear a veil, and *veiling* is one of the obligations of adolescent girls in Islam. The veil may be considered as intrinsic to Islamic religious identity (Winchester, 2008) and a characteristic of religious commitment (Ramadhani, 2006; Swami, Miah, Noorani, & Taylor, 2014). Veiling also has its own positive effects, for example,

avoiding mischievous views and minimizing the possibility of women becoming sexual objects (Doogsmas, 2007, in Swami et al., 2014). This phenomenon of veiling among young women shows an increased awareness of religious commitment in Muslim community, according to Wibowo (2014). Veiled Muslim women are assumed to have higher religious commitment than women who are not veiled, with an understanding that veiled women should not engage in sexual behavior in dating. Actually, Muslim women and men are not even allowed to date (Quran: 17: 32, Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2007; pbs.org, 2019). In contrast, however, many of the veiled women who are dating are in fact not reluctant to embrace, make out, and engage in other sexual behavior in public, which may be seen as a double-standard attitude in the Indonesian Muslim community (personal communication with Sarlito W. Sarwono, a Social Psychology expert, in 2015). Veiled women carry out their obligation to cover their faces as a rule in Islam but may also still do something forbidden in Islam – in this case, engage in sexual behavior before marriage. Therefore, it is interesting to discover the relationship between religious commitment and sexual behavior in dating among young adult Indonesian Muslim women who are veiled and not veiled.

### **1.1. Aims of the Research**

This study focused on young adult Muslim women in Indonesia to determine the following: (1) the differences in religious commitment and sexual behavior in dating of those who are veiled and not veiled; (2) the relationship between religious commitment and sexual behavior in dating among those who are veiled and

not veiled; and (3) the differences in religious commitment and sexual behavior among veiled women based on the reasons for veiling.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Study Design**

This study used a nonexperimental design. Correlational analysis was conducted to assess the relationship of religious commitment and sexual behavior in dating among young adult Muslim women in Indonesia and to examine the differences in religious commitment and sexual behavior between veiled and not-veiled women.

### **2.2. Participants**

Participants were selected through non-probability sampling (Kumar, 1996) or convenience sampling (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). Data collection was carried out online. Study participants were 265 young adult Muslim women (age 20–38 years; median age, 21.76 years): 200 were veiled and 65 were not veiled. Most participants were educated with an elementary/secondary/highschool/equivalent education (67.8%), and the remainder were undergraduates and postgraduates (32.2%). Most participants were students, either undergraduate and postgraduate (83%), and the rest were unemployed, freelancers, entrepreneurs, civil servants, or privately employed. Most participants lived in Java, Indonesia (90.8%). Almost 50% were Javanese (45.3%), and the remainder were a mixture of other ethnicities, such as Minangese, Sundanese, Aceh, Balinese, Bangka, Betawi, Batakese, Bugis, Palembang, Lampung, and Malay.

**2.3. Measures**

**2.3.1. Religious Commitment Measurement**

The religious measurement tool was the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 by Worthington et al. (2003), which was adapted by Andrea (2014) into the Indonesian language. This questionnaire consists of six items for intrapersonal commitment and four items for interpersonal commitment on a six-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (6).

**2.3.2. Sexual Behavior Measurement**

The behavior measurement tool used was an instrument developed by Mayasari and Hadjam (2000) based on sexual behavior manifestations. This questionnaire consists of 18 items on a 6-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from “never” (1) to “highly frequently” (6).

**2.4. Procedure**

A trial of the online site to administer the questionnaire was performed before

data collection. A total of 358 online responses were received. However, 82 responses were eliminated based on the individual being outside the age range (20–38 years), and 11 were eliminated because of duplicate responses. Therefore, 265 participants were available for data analysis.

**2.5. Data Analysis**

First, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to obtain the demographic data. Second, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted using SPSS to examine the relationship between religious commitment and sexual behavior. Then, an independent sample *t*-test and analysis of variance were conducted to observe differences among both veiled and not-veiled young adult Muslim women in terms of their religious commitment and sexual behavior.

**3. RESULTS**

Study results showed that participants had both moderate religious commitment and moderate sexual behavior (Table 1).

Table 1. Religious Commitment and Sexual Behavior Among 265 Veiled and Not-Veiled Participants

	Mean	SD	Range Score	N	%
<b>Religious Commitment</b>			<33.527	39	14.7
	42.60	9.073	33.527–51.673	187	70.6
			>51.673	39	14.7
<b>Sexual Behavior</b>			<25.438	46	17.4
	47.14	21.702	25.438–68.842	168	63.4
			>68.842	51	19.2

Significant differences were observed in religious commitment between participants who were veiled and not veiled, and a significant relationship was

noted between religious commitment and veiled and not-veiled participants (Table 2).

Table 2. Religious Commitment Differences Between 265 Veiled and Not-Veiled Participants

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Veiled	200	44.90	7.459	8.032	.000**
Not Veiled	65	35.55	9.983		

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Both groups were engaged in sexual behavior in dating. However, a significant difference in sexual behavior was evident between veiled and not-veiled women ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $t -5.166$ ) (Table 3). Not-veiled participants were engaged in more sexual behaviors (mean, 58.68; standard deviation, 22.14). Among both groups,

their sexual behaviors were primarily the following: stealing glances at their partner’s sensual body part, sitting side-by-side with their partners, and touching their partner’s fingers or hand. In addition, 8% of veiled participants and 21.53% of not-veiled participants engaged in intercourse.

Table 3. Sexual Behavior Differences Between 265 Veiled and Not-Veiled Participants

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Veiled	200	43.40	0.239	-5.166	.000**
Not Veiled	65	58.68	22.140		

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Moreover, a significant negative relationship was noted between religious commitment and sexual behavior in dating

among participants ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $r -0.373$ , one-tailed) (Table 4).

Table 4. Relationship of Religious Commitment and Sexual Behavior Among 265 Veiled and Not-Veiled Participants

	<b>Religious Commitment</b>	<b>Sexual Behavior</b>
Veiled and Not Veiled	.444**	-.304**

\*\* $p < 0.01$  level, two-tailed (N = 265).

A significant relationship was also found between sexual behavior and veiled and not-veiled participants. This finding indicated that their sexual behavior was greatly influenced by the level of their religious commitment; however, a high or low level of sexual behavior was not greatly influenced by whether the woman is veiled or not veiled.

Furthermore, there was a significant difference in religious commitment and sexual behavior based on reasons for

veiling. Participants who wore veil because of practicing their religious obligations or because of their own willingness had the highest religious commitment and the lowest sexual behavior. In contrast, participants who wore the veil because of religious regulations had the lowest religious commitment and the highest sexual behavior (Tables 5 and 6). Therefore, those who were veiled because of self-will evidently had more religious commitment than those who were not.

Table 5. Religious Commitment Based on Reasons for Veiling Among 200 Veiled Participants

		N	Mean	SD	F	p
<b>Religious Commitment</b>	Practices religious obligations/own willingness	182	45.16	7.432		
	Family demands	12	42.67	5.314		
	Regulation	5	40.60	12.239	16.721	.000**
	Social	1	44.00	.		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>42.60</b>	<b>9.073</b>		

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Table 6. Sexual Behavior Based on Reasons for Veiling Among 200 Veiled Participants

		N	Mean	SD	F	p
<b>Sexual Behavior</b>	Practice religious obligations/own willingness	182	42.65	19.399		
	Family demands	12	48.17	22.127		
	Regulation	5	53.20	39.619	7.712	.000**
	Social	1	73.00	.		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>47.14</b>	<b>21.702</b>		

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Although a significant difference was found in religious commitment between young adult Muslim women in Indonesia who were veiled and not veiled, the veiled women still engaged in sexual behavior, even in sexual intercourse. Emphasizing the importance of religious values that are applied in daily life for this population is necessary (Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Winchester, 2008), specifically in terms of all behavior, not just in term of dress (such as veiled or not veiled). Like one of the examples in the Winchester (2008) study, religious values can have effects on moral values, behavior, and self-change. The status of being veiled as a bodily practice is related to normative gender relations between men and women. In this context, sexual behavior and religious commitment have moderate significant correlation.

However, it is possible that the correlation arises from many factors that could influence sexual behavior, including factors that were not examined in this study. In the further research, it is necessary to look at other factors related to sexual behavior other than religious commitment.

Moreover, the findings in this study could be related to a double-standard in Indonesia (Sarwono, personal communication, 2015). Veiled women in this study carried out their obligation to cover their magnificence as a rule in Islam but also did something forbidden in Islam – in this case, engaging in sexual behavior. According to Winchester (2008), being veiled is one of the characteristics of religious commitment associated with becoming a good Muslim. Ideally, when people practice their religious guidance,

they will be synchronized in daily life.

Furthermore, the religious practices of Islam in real life for most people may be interpreted as only being about rituals, so a lack of internalization of the comprehensive Islamic teaching into practice in the daily life naturally occurs. At the same time, the contradictory way of life in this society also indicates a lack of knowledge and belief in their religion or that the individual may have sufficient knowledge but also unsure of this knowledge. In this context, religious individuals can be easily swayed or have doubts about their religion (Sarwono, personal communication, 2015).

The application of double standards in Indonesia could be also influenced by exposure to other cultural values in many societies, such as those of the Western culture, in which dating and sexual behaviors are perceived as acceptable (Sarwono, personal communication, 2015). Overall, the study results showed that it is highly possible for sexual behavior to occur in dating. Evidence in this study indicates that neither veiled nor not-veiled young adult Muslim women engaged in sexual behavior in dating, despite significant differences, which becomes the reason why dating is not permitted in Islam (Huda, 2018).

Moreover, in terms of human development, individuals typically start to have sexual desires during puberty (Lefkowitz et al., 2010). It is the obligation

of parents, caregivers, and teachers to train young people to manage and channel their sexual desires in accordance with Islamic teachings (Athar, 2018).

This study has some limitations. The results cannot be generalized to the wider population because it uses a nonrandom sampling method. The number of participants who were veiled and not veiled was not proportional, which could affect the study results. A moderate significant relationship between religious commitment and sexual behavior indicates that other variables may be related to sexual behavior. Collecting data online has advantages and disadvantages; for example, this approach can save energy, time, and money, but there is a potential for participants to manipulate their responses, such as providing duplicate responses or providing the same response on each item. In addition, although this study could have included many other individuals in the young female Muslim Indonesian population, an online questionnaire can only be completed by people who have access to the internet and web address. Future research should include evaluation of cultural factors, residential area (cities/suburbs/villages), socioeconomic class, family background, social relations, and challenges an individual may encounter. Moreover, future research should measure the knowledge and application of Islamic teaching in daily life and the double-standard attitude among Indonesians.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The key findings of this study are as follows:

- (1) Both veiled and not-veiled young adult Muslim women in Indonesia had moderate religious commitment and engagement in sexual behavior.

- (2) Both veiled and not-veiled Muslim women engaged in all kinds of sexual behavior in dating.
- (3) The higher the religious commitment of veiled and not-veiled Muslim women, the lower their involvement in sexual behavior.
- (4) Veiled young adult Muslim women had a lower involvement in sexual behavior than those who were not veiled.
- (5) Among veiled women, their reasons for veiling were related to religious commitment and sexual behavior. Those who wore the veil because they were practicing their religious obligation and manifesting their own willingness to wear the veil had higher religious commitment and lower involvement in sexual behavior compared with those who were veiled because of religious regulations.

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