

SCTCMG 2019
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural
Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»**

**PERCEPTION OF WOMEN WEARING HIJAB IN TATARSTAN:
SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF YOUNG STUDENTS**

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Abstract

The paper reflects results of sociological survey of young people in Tatarstan conducted in 2014 and 2019 regarding their perception of the image of a modern Muslim woman in a society. Within the survey students of higher and secondary educational institutions were asked to define their attitude to a woman wearing the hijab, as well as provisions in society and family. The analysis of the study showed that despite centuries-old traditions of Islam in the Volga Region, which is characterized by the authentic culture of the Muslim countries of the East, Central Asia and the North Caucasus, the appearance of people who openly express their religious commitment by demonstrating the attributes through wearing the hijab in 2014 caused the counter interest followed by sympathy and support, and hostility and even fright. Such trends could contribute to the development of situations of risk and intolerance. The 2019 survey of students shows more positive tendency. The attitude of students to women in the hijab openly expressing their religious commitment causes respect and tolerant attitude among the majority of young people. According to authors, youth projects on the development of voluntary movements, involvement of students as volunteers to large-scale international events related to interethnic and interfaith communication may foster the creation of favorable ethno-confessional environment in Tatarstan. To ensure further improvement of the favorable ethno-confessional environment the republic shall: strengthen social policy, improve educational work with young people at educational institutions, involve young people to public work, reinforce patriotic and international education.

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Keywords: Islam, migrants, Muslim woman, Republic of Tatarstan, hijab, ethno-confessional relations.



1. Introduction

At present, the representatives of 173 ethnic groups live in the Republic of Tatarstan. The experience of their coexistence in the territory of the republic is unique. Hence, preserving the ethno-confessional stability in the region is a priority task of the state policy regarding national relations bearing important scientific and public value.

Since 2000s substantial characteristics of problems related to the national policy have been changing in the Russian Federation. Due to the unprecedented inflow of migrants to Russian cities the problems of their integration and adaptation in foreign cultural environment became more distinct. In recent decades the contradictions, most of which are often defined as interethnic or interfaith collisions of interests among the migrants and the host community, came to the fore. However, the specifics of these conflicts and elaboration of new approaches to their settlement still lag behind some challenges.

The authors of the study believe that “despite the democratic reforms in Russia, the recent years are characterized by the tendency towards weaker spiritual and moral immunity. The development of tolerant consciousness in the society requires the improvement of the culture of international relations” (Kadyrov, 2015, p. 116). One of the indicators of ethno-confessional tolerance of the society is the attitude of young people and students to the representatives of other ethnic groups and confessions. Therefore, the study of the level of cultural development of tolerance among young students in Tatarstan is critical in maintaining the ethno-confessional stability.

2. Problem Statement

Over the past 30 years the image of a Muslim woman in the Russian public consciousness also underwent significant changes. Mass media had a tremendous impact on this opinion. In the USSR and in the Russian Federation this image has changed in the information space alongside with changes in the country. If in the Soviet period a Muslim woman on the screen was perceived as antiquity, then in the early nineties of the 20th century her image acquired the real shape. The Muslims dressed in traditional clothes and observing Islamic canons were perceived by TV audience as a guarantor of revival and conservation of the best national traditions.

From the middle of the 1990s due to the beginning of the Chechen company the federal TV channels were more often broadcasting news about guerilla fighters associating themselves with Islam.

Later, in the 2000s the researchers note: “... the world regularly learns about the terrifying terrorist attacks by Islamic radicals of both sexes. The image of a suicide bomber wound by the explosive throwing a bomb to people was strongly associated with Islam. From 2000 to 2013 the Islamic suicide bombers held 21 terrorist attacks in Russia” (Soboleva, 2016, p. 105). These factors contribute to the development of the negative stereotypes of a Muslim woman within the society, including the youth, which is associated with the belief that they are people dim-witted in family and society, helpless and tend to extremism. It would seem, the example of Iran and Pakistan, where in the conditions of gradual social and cultural modernization of the society the Muslim women clothes is not an obstacle for their active participation in life of the state and society, shall demonstrate lack of any threat for society in wearing the hijab. However, the return of

the Muslim population to a bosom of religious traditions after a 70-year era of domination of atheistic stereotypes is so painful that even wearing the hijab became a subject of fierce debate.

At the beginning of the 1990s since the “defrosting” of Islam in Russia some of its regions were building new or restoring old mosques, people openly positioned themselves as “Muslims”, performed Islamic religious ceremonies, which in the Soviet times were not welcomed.

Now the situation in the Republic of Tatarstan is quite stable, which confirms the actual lack of tensions in relations between the representatives of the main faiths, Orthodox Christians and Muslims treat each other with favor. This situation is reflected in the previous study: “... 80% of Orthodox Christians “trust” or “rather trust” the Muslims, 79.7% of Muslims “trust” or “rather trust” the Orthodox Christians” (Drobysheva, 2013, p. 83).

3. Research Questions

The main focus of the study is to understand how the younger generation perceives a modern Muslim woman openly showing her religious commitment in foreign cultural environment. The social attitude to her as to an object of foreign culture sometimes causes discontent and danger. Besides, in many cases such manifestations promote extremism among young people under the influence of external factors.

It is known that the following factors contribute to the development of extremism among young people:

First, deterioration of social, economic and political stability (Zinnurova & Tuzikov, 2012).

Second, low level of political and cultural education, a lot of noise over international conflicts between cultures and ethnic groups (Tuzikov, 2011).

Third, increasing migration flows (Salikhova, 2014).

Since the beginning of the 2000s the number of migrants has been constantly increasing. The demographic situation in Russia demonstrated the annual inflow of up to million migrants to the country. According to authors, “at the beginning of 2015 the age contingent of the citizens of Tatarstan (15-24 years old) made 8.6% of the population (449,373 people). The majority of them were students of higher and secondary educational institutions. It is the most perspective and intellectual part of the population. Future stability of Tatarstan depends on the level of their culture of tolerance” (Kadyrov, 2016, p. 150). Further study of the opinion of students regarding the role of a Muslim woman in modern multiethnic and multi-religious society will allow defining the level of development of ethno-confessional tolerance within the society.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the most typical features of a modern Muslim woman as perceived by students of higher and secondary educational institutions in the Republic of Tatarstan, as well as to study problems and prospects of their adaptation on the basis of comprehensive and complex analyses.

5. Research Methods

In order to gain a complete understanding of the problem related to the perception of a modern Muslim woman by young students in the Republic of Tatarstan, the authors applied the methods of sociological survey: the online survey concerning the main problems presenting the highest interest to modern students in Tatarstan concerning the studied topic. Besides, to identify potentially conflict groups of the urban youth in Tatarstan and to diagnose conflict situations of interethnic relations, a new set of methods, in particular, the study of Internet communities (analysis of discourses) in combination with sociological methods was used.

On the basis of the obtained data the authors made questions for the sociological survey of students of higher and secondary educational institutions of the republic.

The survey covered 500 youth representatives (250 young men and 250 women) from 15 to 24 years old – students of higher educational institutions and secondary specialized colleges of Tatarstan. The survey was conducted in 2014 (April) and in 2019 (January-February), i.e. with an interval of almost 5 years.

The survey was aimed to study the opinion of students of the Republic of Tatarstan regarding the following groups of questions:

- attitude towards women in the hijab (7 questions);
- position of a modern Muslim woman in a family (4 questions);
- public activity and social status of a Muslim woman in the society (9 questions).

Methods of system and comparative analysis, as well as general-theoretical methods were used in the study: analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction.

The study was also based on methodological approaches of a famous American sociologist Goffman (1959). His theory allowed revealing their status and living strategy through the analysis of features in self-expression of social groups. The application of Goffman's (1959) methodological approaches in this study made it possible to reveal the phenomenon of a woman in the hijab as an element of social subculture in modern secular environment.

Moreover, the authors adhered to methodological approaches to study the development of multiculturalism in urban agglomerations. These methodological approaches were actively developed by Canadian philosophers Taylor (1992) and Kymlicka (1995), who opened the limits of multiculturalism and proposed new approaches to manage urban diversity.

6. Findings

According to young people, the priority activities for Muslim women are motherhood and marriage, which was confirmed by the survey results: 2014 – 64.9% of respondents, 2019 – 85.2%. At the same time the youth considers that the professional career, as well as public and political work are typical for women of the world, and over the past five years the number of people sharing this view increased from 48.1% in 2014 to 64.9% in 2019.

The analysis of answers also considered the religion of respondents indicated in questionnaires. 58.9% practiced Islam, 21% – Orthodoxy, 14.5% – atheism, 5.4% – other religions, three people referred themselves to agnostics, and one answer was: “modern youth has no religion”.

Attitude towards a Muslim woman in the hijab.

The analysis of the 2019 survey showed that the distribution of answers concerning the perception of a Muslim woman almost does not depend on the religion of respondents.

To the question “a woman in the hijab is ...” 79% of respondents of both groups gave the following answers: “a believer observing religious canons” or “a natural phenomenon in polyconfessional society”. Neither of respondents gave such answers as “an indicator of backwardness and ignorance”, however in both groups of questions, about 4.5% of respondents answered that a woman in the hijab is a tribute to fashion.

To the question on associations caused by a Muslim woman about 40% of answers were non-evaluative and mainly concerned the appearance (“a woman in a scarf”, “a woman in a long dress”, etc.) or neutral answers like “an ordinary woman”, “no particular associations”.

The most frequent answers characterizing a woman in the hijab were as follows: “modest”, “religious”, “decent”, “quiet”, “obedient”, “unapproachable”, “reserved”. Only one respondent (less than 1%) out of all respondents connects a Muslim woman with terrorism.

The traditional national clothes of the Muslims living in Tatarstan, mainly the Tatars, has its features and does not imply the hijab. Recently the society has been discussing the issue of imposing the Arab culture on the Russian Muslims. Therefore, the 2019 survey included a question on the attitude of young people to the hijab: “Do you consider the hijab an imposed “foreign” clothes, an Arab tradition?”. Over a quarter of respondents (27%) gave positive answers, while 51.5% were negative. Moreover, 54.8% of students that gave negative answers designate themselves as Muslims.

The results of the 2014 survey are slightly different: despite the fact that a Muslim woman generally had a positive image, 21.1% of respondents associated her with a woman dressed in shapeless clothes, 10.2% – with oppressed woman (modern youth has no similar answer), and 7.3% – with terrorism (female suicide bomber).

To the question “if a woman in the hijab sits next to you in a public transport” in most cases (85%) irrespective of their religion the modern young people of Tatarstan answered that they will be quietly sitting next to her. However, 10% of respondents said that they would feel discomfort. None of the respondents said that they are ready to leave a transport at the next stop because of a woman in the hijab. This confirms that the respondents do not consider a Muslim woman in the hijab a danger, but in some cases she causes fear.

Attitude to a Muslim woman in a family.

In recent years the society quite often expresses the opinion to legalize polygamy. The matter caused negative reaction among young people of the Republic of Tatarstan: in 2014 – 68.4%, in 2019 – 73.1% (the negative attitude of non-Muslim respondents is 10% higher than that of the Muslims: 68.5% and 78.9% respectively). The positive attitude to this question is observed among 9.6% of the Muslims, whereas non-Muslims take only 1.8%. The answers of respondents significantly differ according to gender: irrespective of religion the majority (about 85%) of women are negative to polygamy. However, there is a small group (5.45%) of Muslim women, which are positive, there are no such opinions among female representatives of other religions. Men perceive legalization of polygamy differently: nearly 3/4 of Muslim men have

positive or neutral attitude to this issue. Among non-Muslim men only 5.26% gave positive answers and 68.4% answered negative.

In the same way as five years ago about a half of respondents who deny the opportunity to legalize polygamy considers that this legislative initiative can have pernicious effect on the society (43.6% in 2014 and 51.2% in 2019), that it will be more difficult for men ready to use such right to provide the families (30.5% and 20%), the participation of a father in upbringing of his children will be reduced (11.6% and 30.7%), some respondents expressed the opinion that “this is the disrespect for a woman”, “love will disappear”, “this is strange”. The opponents of this opinion, on the contrary, see positive dynamics of polygamy for the Russian society (4.4% and 6.1%). This is caused by the opportunity to improve the demographic situation in the country (12.7% and 7.2%) and increase the chances of lonely women to get legally married (12% and 18.9%).

The young people still agree with the established opinion that the Muslim families are stronger than secular ones. In 2014, this was the opinion of 40.3% of young citizens. Now 45.6% of respondents not belonging to the Muslims and 67.1% of respondents practicing Islam share this viewpoint. Besides, the stereotype of a Muslim woman deprived of rights in family and society takes place and is more obvious in the answers of non-Muslim respondents. Thus, 12.3% of Muslim and 15.8% of non-Muslim respondents agree that a Muslim woman is deprived of any rights and freedoms in the world. The question “Do you agree that in comparison with men, Muslim women have less rights in the family?” 58.9% of Muslims and 70.2% of non-Muslims gave positive answers.

Attitude to a Muslim woman in the society.

The 2019 survey showed that the Muslim youth is more confident that a Muslim woman has equal rights in the society with the women of the world, i.e. a stereotype of a Muslim woman as of a woman deprived of civil rights is less widespread among Muslims. A half of non-Muslim respondents consider that a Muslim woman is less initiative and independent – 50.1%, the number of the Muslims who gave such answer is almost twice less – 26%. The majority of respondents practicing Islam (56%) considers that the religion does not affect initiative and independence of a woman.

Regarding the question on the right to higher education and successful employment, the answers in each group were similar, but regarding actual opportunities the Muslim respondents are more confident in equal conditions for a Muslim woman and the women of the world.

In comparison with 2014 the number of young people considering it illegal to reject employment to a Muslim woman because of her attire in the hijab increased from 50.9% to 78.9%. Nevertheless, in case of equal educational and intellectual characteristics of secular and Muslim women, the respondents would prefer the woman of the world (42.8% in 2014 and 34.4% in 2019).

7. Conclusion

The study showed that the youth of the Republic of Tatarstan is generally tolerant regarding interfaith and interethnic relations. The majority of them is interested in culture and traditions of other people, has friends from other ethnic and confessional communities. The difference in the opinion of respondents in 2014 and 2019 makes not more than 10%. Similar answers are received to the following questions: “what is the priority activity for the woman of the world”, “who has more rights in getting higher

education and successful employment”, “what is the image of a Muslim woman associated with” and to a question on behavior of a respondent if a woman in the hijab sits down next to him in a public transport.

If the 2014 survey showed about 8% of respondents feeling hostility seeing a Muslim woman in the hijab, then in 2019 the attitude to her became tolerant almost among all respondents. Only a small part of respondents feel concern in such cases. Generally, this concern is caused by an image of a Muslim woman as a suicide bomber imposed by media.

The majority of young people believes that in Tatarstan there are no restrictions in the rights for the Muslims compared to the women of the world. Nevertheless, the answers of 2014 and 2019 showed that from 30 to 40% of respondents would prefer “to employ” the woman of the world at equal educational and professional qualities with the Muslim woman.

The respondents think that modern Muslim women have less rights in the family than men. But nevertheless, the majority of respondents noted that Muslim families are stronger and more stable.

New approaches to the improvement of youth policy imply additional understanding and scientific analysis. Thus, the research showed that at the first study phase, in 2014, “the answers of the majority of respondents, though reflected the elements of ethno-confessional tolerance, interest in customs and traditions of other people, nevertheless, there is a tendency towards gradual decrease in tolerance” (Kadyrov, 2015, p. 115). At the second phase in 2019, these indicators were stabilized. Most likely, according to authors, the involvement of students to voluntary activity during international events, patriotic education, as well as the increased number of students in higher educational institutions from foreign states and better foreign language training had positive effect and reinforced tolerant attitude towards the representatives of other ethnic groups (Ziganshina, Mendelson, & Plastinina, 2013). These factors foster the expansion of cross-cultural communication of students in Tatarstan.

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