

A Project entitled

**The role of Islam in influencing the perception on tertiary education of  
senior secondary Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong**

Submitted by

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## Declaration

I, *BIBI Tayyaba*, declare that this research report represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, under the supervision of *Dr. LAM Chi Ming*, and that it has not been submitted previously in a thesis, dissertation or report to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abstract

The women literacy rate in the Muslim world is lowest globally and Pakistan is at the bottom of that list. In the Population By-census of 2011, upper secondary was the highest level of educational attainment of majority of the Pakistanis aged 15 and above. This paper investigates how senior secondary Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls perceive 'knowledge'; to what extent the religion of Islam influences their perception on tertiary education; and it identifies other factors influencing the participants' decision of pursuing tertiary education. The QUAL-Quan model was adopted for data collection in this research. The target participants were senior secondary (S. 5 – 6) Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls residing in Hong Kong. A qualitative study was conducted from 8 participants in the first phase to identify concepts and hypotheses, which were tested in the second phase by quantitative data collected from 20 participants. The results indicate that the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls perceive 'knowledge' differently with the former categorizing knowledge into worldly and religious knowledge, and see the pursuit of tertiary education as unnecessary or even non-religious, while the latter perceive knowledge holistically and state the pursuit of knowledge in general is crucial. This differentiated interpretation of knowledge is crucial to understand the influence Islam has on their perception on tertiary education. The results have also shown that apart from the Chinese language other factors that influence the participants' decision of pursuing tertiary education, include cultural and financial factors. These results suggest that the local educational bodies and the Islamic educational centers (*Madrassas*) need to work together to grow awareness on the significance of female education; *Madrassas* also need to review their curriculum and pedagogies to minimize literal interpretation of the Quran; and the government should increase the budget of the education sector, especially for Ethnic Minority girls.

## **The role of Islam in influencing the perception on tertiary education of senior secondary Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong**

### **1. Introduction**

Women's education in Islam is a subject of intense scrutiny at international level. The recent incident in which a 16-year-old girl, Malala Yousafzai, was shot in Pakistan for advocating women's education in Islam (Walsh, 2012) has yet again raised serious questions about women's education in Islam. In addition, women literacy rate in the Muslim world is the lowest globally, and Pakistan is at the bottom of that list with the lowest youth literacy rate; only 59 percent of females are literate as compared to 79 percent of males (Mirza, 2012).

Locally, according to Population By-census (2011), the school attendance rates for age groups 3-5, 17-18 and 19-24 for whole population were 91.3%, 86.0% and 43.8% respectively while 86.9%, 75.7% and 13.8% respectively for ethnic minorities (EM). Pakistanis in Hong Kong, majority of whom are Muslims, form 4.0% of the total ethnic minority population of 451, 183. The highest level of educational attainment by 2011 for Pakistanis aged 15 and over was upper secondary (36.1%) while only 17.1% of them reached post-secondary level (Population By-census, 2011).

## **2. Statement of the problem**

The purpose of this research is to investigate how the religion of Islam influences the perception on further education (i.e. Tertiary Education) of senior secondary (S.5 – S.6) Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong.

## **3. Significance of this research**

This research would serve as an additional resource that informs the current debate about women's rights to education in Islam, specifically focusing on the comparison between Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls who are acquiring education in a non-Muslim dominant city, Hong Kong. Given the impression that Ethnic Minorities, specifically Pakistanis, are not excelling in tertiary education, this research could shed light on reasons that serve as barriers to attaining tertiary education other than the Chinese language, which is the widely-accepted reason.



#### **4. Literature Review**

According to the Islamic doctrine, knowledge acquisition and application is a fundamental requirement upon all Muslims. The Holy Book of Islam - the Quran, places importance on gaining different kinds of knowledge (i.e. social and physical sciences, arts, or theology) to fulfill divine requirements, as well as various forms of human endeavor. This is demonstrated in numerous verses from the Quran which command, encourage, and advise Muslims to "observe the phenomenon of nature, to look into everything in the universe, to travel, investigate, explore, and understand them" (Abukari, 2014).

Abukari (2014) has conducted a critical analysis on the Quranic text to understand the perspective on women's education in Islam. Ultimately, he has generated six themes from the Quran which shed light on the subject of women's education. Due to word restrictions, I will only discuss three themes below:

##### **4.1. Purpose of human creation**

In Islam, the purpose of human creation is to "worship" God, however, many Muslims have narrowly defined the term "worship" as ritualistic activities involving the main pillars of Islam only, namely "the five daily prayers, fasting, alms giving, and pilgrimage to Mecca" (Abukari, 2014). In response to this misconception, the Quran says:

*"... it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messenger; to spend of your sustenance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity, to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing." [Quran 2: 177]*

The concept of worship in Islam is one which is comprehensive and not restricted to mere ritualism. It involves a complete obedience to the will of God by doing what He has enjoined, and avoiding what He disapproves of. A person can turn everyday activities into acts of worship by sincerely seeking God's pleasure through these activities (Kamil, 2006). Prophet Mohammad (PBUH<sup>1</sup>), said:

*"Helping a person or his belongings onto his mount is an act of charity. A good word is charity. Every step taken on the way to performing prayers is charity. Removing an obstacle from the road is charity." (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)*

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<sup>1</sup> PBUH is the abbreviation of 'Peace Be Upon Him'. It is a transition of the Arabic phrase '*alayhi as-salām*, which is a complimentary phrase attached to the names of prophets in Islam.

Even the most natural acts can become acts of worship. For instance, eating, sleeping, working and traits of good character, such as honesty, generosity, courage, and humbleness, can become worship through sincere intention and deliberate obedience to God (Kamil, 2006).

#### **4. 2. Knowledge as the foundation of Islam**

The first word of the Quran that was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was “*Iqra*”, meaning “*Proclaim*” or “*Read*” (Ahmed 2002 as cited in Abukari, 2014). This reflects a close relationship between the religion of Islam and knowledge. In addition, the Prophet (PBUH) was also reported saying: “*The acquisition of knowledge is the duty of every Muslim man and Muslim woman*” (Rahman 1980, as cited in Abukari, 2014).

However, despite the emphasis on knowledge, in most of the Muslim societies, *Madrasahs*, also known as Quranic schools in which children purely learn Quran literacy, are given more importance than other subjects (Abukari, 2014).

#### **4. 3. Responsibility for changing one’s own condition**

Knowledge acquisition is also crucial to enhance society's condition by improving one’s

own condition, to which the Quran says:

*“... verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves” [Quran 13:11]*

Education in modern disciplines, such as science and technology, will not only improve the socio-economic status of an individual but also enhance the general quality of life of a particular society. According to the 2001 Human Development Report (as cited by Abukari, 2014), the higher the value of the Gender Development Index (GDI) of a country, the better is its Human Development Index (HDI).

Moreover, earning a living is a form of worship (Kamil, 2006). The Companions of the Messenger (PBUH) lamented upon seeing a man working hard to earn a living, "If he were only doing this much work for the sake of God..." God's Messenger (PBUH) said:

*"If he is working to support his small children, then it is for the sake of God. If he is working to support his elderly parents, then it is for the sake of God. If he is working to occupy himself and keep his desires in check, then it is for the sake of God. If, on*

*the other hand, he is doing so to show off and earn fame, then he is working for the sake of Satan." (al-Mundhiri, as-Suyuti)*

It is thus evident that the Quran emphasizes on the importance of education for both men and women for various reasons. However, differences in interpretation of the Quran have led to interpretation that is against its own essential teachings. Women's education is one example of the areas that have fallen victim to the problems of misinterpretation of the Quran, and the recent incident in which a 16-year-old girl, Malala Yousafzai, was shot in Pakistan for advocating women's education in Islam (Walsh, 2012) has further consolidated the existence of this issue.

There are two main reasons which have led to problems of misinterpretation of the Quran: First, according to Scott (2009, as cited in Abukari, 2014), the interpretation of the Quran has been male dominant which could have eroded women's rights stipulated in the Quran. Second, according to Abukari (2014), "the status of women in Islam is a common confusion in understanding and differentiating between what may be termed Islamic<sup>2</sup>, emanating from the Quran and authentic sources<sup>3</sup>, and what may be viewed as a particular society's

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Islamic" refers to anything related to the principles and teaching of Islam, while "Muslims" refers to the believers of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from the Quran and ahadith (the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed), religious scholars

assumptions, originating from its sociohistorical experiences".

One would expect Muslim women acquiring education in countries that stipulate equal right to education for both male and female should excel in academia. However, the statistics show otherwise. According to the Population By-census (2011), among the 42, 079 ethnic minorities studying full-time courses, 62% were receiving primary education, but the number drops significantly to 6% at post-secondary level. Stakeholders have come to a consensus that the Chinese language poses as the major barrier to tertiary education ("Education for all", 2011). However, are there other possible reasons that policymakers, educators and social workers might be unaware of?

Over the course of my secondary education, I have seen some of my Pakistani female schoolmates being sent off to Pakistan for marriage because according to the Pakistani cultural norm, early marriage can protect a girl's chastity and prevent her from any illicit temptation, which could result in losing "family honor". A few other Pakistani Muslim girls were not granted permission to pursue tertiary education by their parents who gave the classic Islamic literalist<sup>4</sup> argument that they are protecting their daughters' chastity and modesty

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have also established two other sources of authority regarding its principles, which include Ijma and Qiyas, consensus of scholars and individual interpretation respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Islamic Literalist are people who strictly adhere to the literal meaning of the message of Islam or

from a mixed gender education. However, to my observation, non-Pakistani Muslim girls, such as Chinese and Malaysians, were not affected by these issues. As a result, these queries have led me to investigate to what extent the religion of Islam influences the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls' perception on tertiary education.

## **5. Research Objectives**

This research revolves around the following three objectives:

- 5. 1.** To compare the understanding on 'knowledge' of senior secondary Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong.
- 5. 2.** To identify the extent religion of Islam influences the perception on tertiary education of senior secondary Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong.
- 5. 3.** To identify the factors that influence the decision of senior secondary Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong on pursuing tertiary education.

## **6. Research Questions**

By the end of this research, I will be able to address the following research questions:

- 6. 1.** How do senior secondary Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls understand

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Quranic text without understanding the complex network of verses that gives its totality or historical context (Barlas, 2002).

‘knowledge’?

**6. 2.** To what extent does the religion of Islam influence the perception on tertiary education of senior secondary Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong?

**6. 3.** What factors influence the decision of senior secondary Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong on pursuing tertiary education?

## **7. Methodology**

### **7. 1. Participants**

Muslim girls in general have a lower literacy rate than Muslim boys; hence this particular target group suited the purpose of the research. Muslim girls who are currently in senior secondary (Secondary 5 – 6) were the target participants of this research. The participants were grouped into two ethnic groups, namely the Pakistani Muslim girls and the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls.

For the purpose of qualitative data collection, a total of 8 participants, 4 Pakistani and 4 Non-Pakistani Muslim girls from Secondary 5 – 6, were invited for open-ended, semi-formal interviews. A total of 20 participants, 10 Pakistani and 10 Non-Pakistani Muslim girls from Secondary 5 – 6, were invited to participate in the questionnaire survey



for the purpose of collecting quantitative data.

The interviews and questionnaire surveys were conducted mainly from students of Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College (IKTMC) because this school has a high population of Muslim students from Pakistan and other nations. In addition, I had contacts with teachers and the principal of this school since it is my alma mater, hence it was easier for me to approach the students for data collection.

## **7. 2. Instruments**

Two sets of questionnaires were designed for the purpose of this research: (1) a questionnaire for the purpose of collecting qualitative data through open-ended, semi-formal interviews, and (2) a questionnaire survey for the purpose of collecting quantitative data.

## **7. 3. Design of the research**

In this research, I adopted a mixed-method approach. There are three common mixed-method models, however, for the purpose of this research, I implemented the QUAL-Quan model because in this model the qualitative data is collected first, and is more heavily weighted than quantitative data. In addition, the validity of the qualitative results is enhanced by the results retrieved from the quantitative study (Gay & Airasian,

2003).

#### **7. 4. Procedure**

The data was collected in two phases: In the first phase, a qualitative study was conducted in order to identify concepts and hypotheses. Open-ended, semi-formal interviews with 8 Muslim girls took place (i.e. 4 Pakistani and 4 non-Pakistani Muslim girls from secondary 5 – 6). The interviews were conducted over the telephone and via e-mail, depending on the availability and personal preferences of the participants.

In the second phase of the study, concepts and hypotheses derived from the qualitative analysis were tested with quantitative techniques. Hence, a questionnaire survey was conducted with 20 participants (i.e. 10 Pakistani and 10 non-Pakistani Muslim girls).

## 8. Findings

This section reports the data collected from the respondents through the qualitative and quantitative approach. The data collected is analyzed and characterized into three main factors that influence the respondents' perception on tertiary education, namely the religious factor, familial factor, and individual factor.

### 8.1. Religious Factor

Based on the data collected from the qualitative study and the set of data retrieved from the questionnaire survey (see table 8.1), the findings under the religious factor are categorized into the following sub-categories: Definition of Knowledge in Islam; Gender Equality and Education in Islam; and Comprehension of the Quranic (Arabic) text.

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<sup>5</sup> The five-level Likert scale was used, and the keys "SA", "A", "DK", "D", and "SD" refer to the Likert items "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Don't Know", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree" respectively.

<sup>6</sup> **P** is short of Pakistani Muslim Girls

<sup>7</sup> **NP** is short of Non-Pakistani Muslim Girls

| Religious factors  | SAs  |      | A   |     | DK  |     | D   |     | SD   |      |
|--|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
|  | P6   | NP7  | P   | NP  | P   | NP  | P   | NP  | P    | NP   |
| 1. "Knowledge" in Islam only refers to reading the Holy Quran.                   | 0%   | 0%   | 20% | 0%  | 0%  | 10% | 10% | 50% | 70%  | 40%  |
| 2. Worldly knowledge is different from Islamic/ religious knowledge.             | 30%  | 0%   | 40% | 30% | 30% | 10% | 0%  | 50% | 0%   | 10%  |
| 3. Islam teaches us about science, law and humanity.                             | 70%  | 70%  | 10% | 20% | 20% | 10% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%   | 0%   |
| 4. Islam does not allow you to learn about other subjects.                       | 0%   | 0%   | 0%  | 0%  | 10% | 0%  | 0%  | 10% | 90%  | 90%  |
| 5. Islam gives you the right to seek further education.                          | 100% | 100% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%   | 0%   |
| 6. Mixed gender education is permissible in Islam.                               | 0%   | 40%  | 10% | 50% | 10% | 0%  | 70% | 10% | 10%  | 0%   |
| 7. Islam does not allow you to seek tertiary education.                          | 0%   | 0%   | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 100% | 100% |
| 8. Men and women are not equal in Islam.   | 0%   | 0%   | 10% | 0%  | 20% | 0%  | 70% | 40% | 0%   | 60%  |
| 9. I have read the translation of the Holy Quran.                                | 0%   | 40%  | 10% | 60% | 0%  | 0%  | 80% | 0%  | 0%   | 0%   |
| 10. I do not understand the meaning of the Arabic scripture I read in the Quran. | 100% | 20%  | 0%  | 70% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 10% | 0%   | 0%   |

**8.1. Survey results on the religious factors influencing the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls' perception on tertiary education**

**8. 1. 1. Definition of Knowledge in Islam**

It has been identified in both the qualitative and quantitative studies that both the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls agree that knowledge in Islam is not limited to the reading of Holy Scriptures only. However, 70% of the Pakistani Muslim girls are in agreement that worldly knowledge is different from Islamic knowledge, whereas only 30% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls agree with this statement. This data consolidates the findings observed in the qualitative study as Non-Pakistani Muslim girls see "knowledge" in Islam from a broader and a more holistic perspective, whereas Pakistani Muslim girls have categorized "knowledge" into religious and non-religious knowledge; the knowledge they receive in *Madressas* and in day schools respectively. For instance, Non-Pakistani Muslim girls defined "knowledge" in Islam in the following ways: "...something I must

*acquire throughout life...*” (see appendix 7), “...*knowledge in Islam is a combination of both the knowledge of religion and the worldly knowledge...*”(see appendix 8). While Pakistani Muslim girls have defined and strongly associated “knowledge” to Islamic scriptures: “*The knowledge of Sunnah (the life of our Prophet) and the Holy Quran are... comprehensive guides...*” (see appendix 3), “...*the knowledge of Sharia (Islamic Law) and interpretation of the Quran...*” (see appendix 4).

Hence, it is understandable when the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls indicated that “fulfilling religious duty” is the first main purpose of tertiary education, while the Pakistani Muslim girls ranked that as the third (see fig. 1 and 2). Majority of the Pakistani Muslim girls considered the first main purpose of tertiary education is to gain access to better job opportunities, while that is the vice-versa for the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls. Due to this belief of the Pakistani Muslim girl, it is understandable that 70% of them do not consider “earning a living” as a form of worship (see fig. 3). However, along with the four out of the five main pillars of Islam, “earning a living” and “seeking knowledge” are considered to be forms of “worship” by majority of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls.

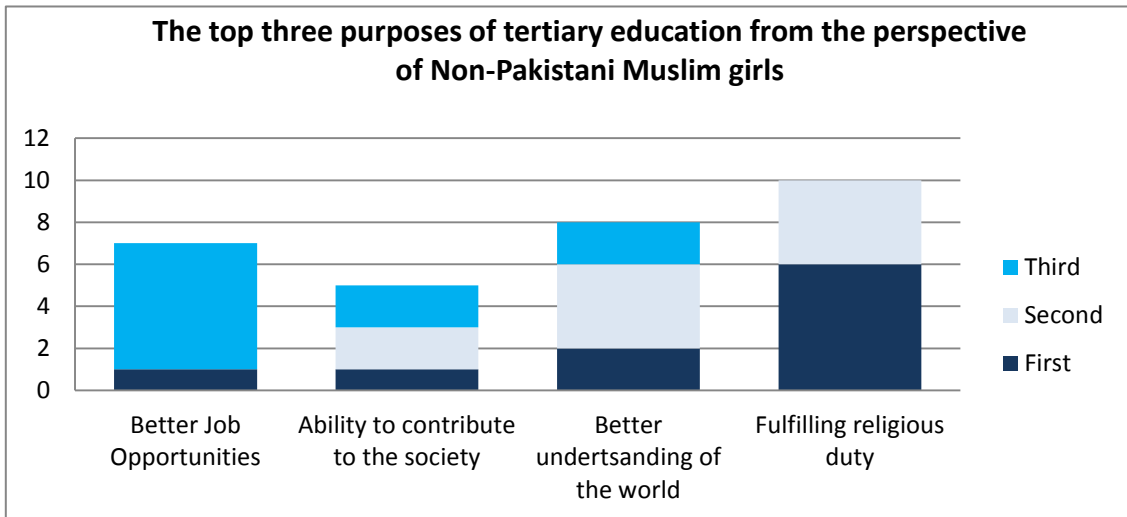


Figure 1: The top three purposes of Tertiary Education from the perspective of Non-Pakistani Muslim Girls

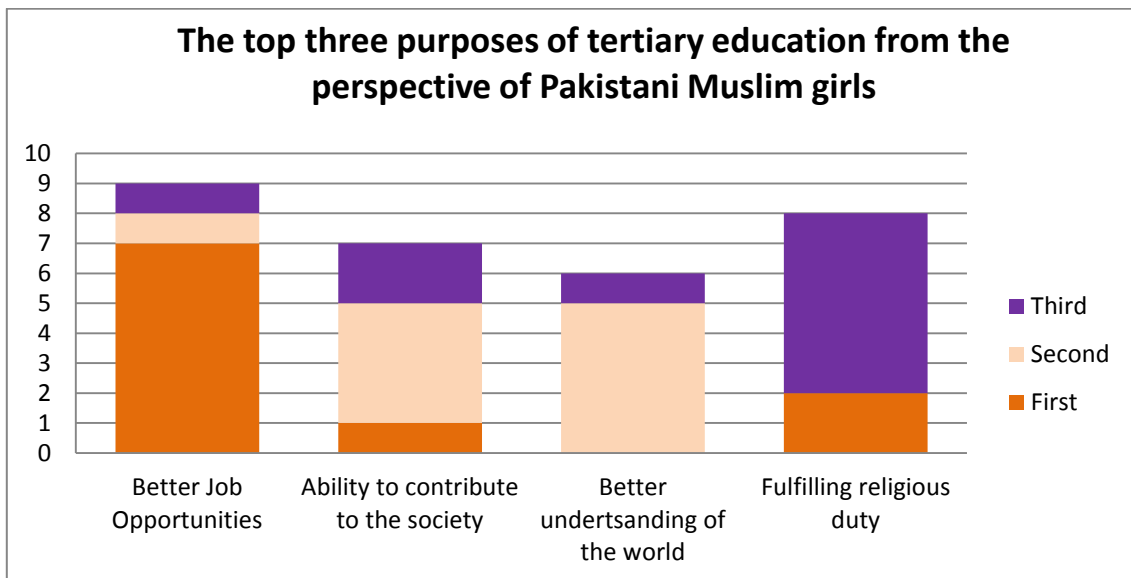


Figure 2: The top three purposes of Tertiary Education from the perspective of Pakistani Muslim Girls

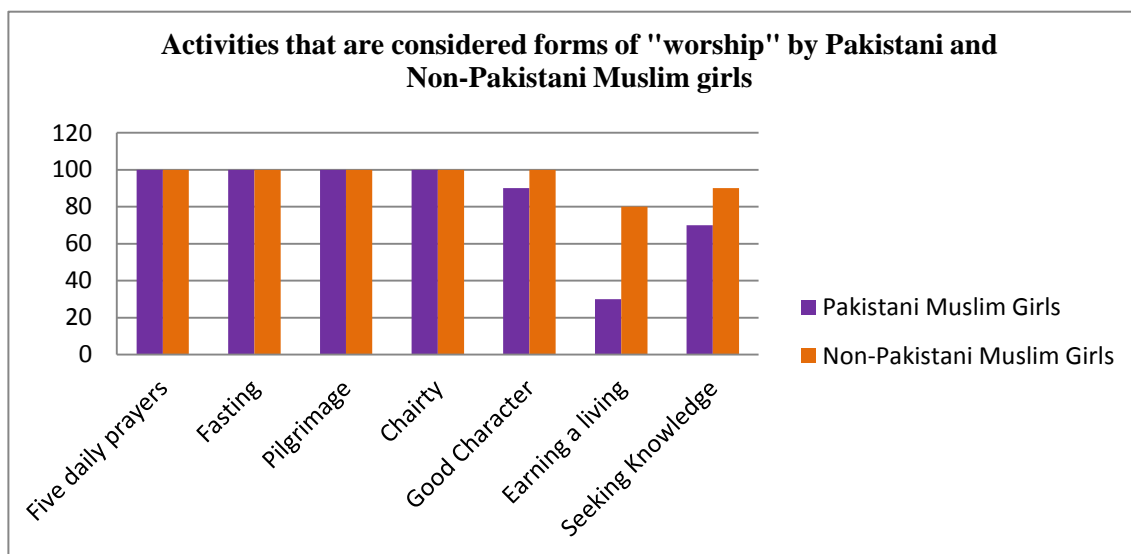


Figure 3: Activities that are considered forms of "worship" by Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls

### 8. 1. 2. Gender Equality and Education in Islam

A 100% of both Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls agreed strongly that Islam gives them the right to tertiary education. However, in response to the statement on gender equality (see table 8.1, statement 8), 10% of the Pakistani Muslim girls agreed that men and women are not equal, while 20% declared they don't know. These statistics reflect the findings from the qualitative study as two out of four Pakistani Muslim interviewees stated that gender equality is seen in Hong Kong but not in Pakistan despite the fact that their religious belief is the same. One stated that "(in Pakistan) *women are told that Islam requires women to stay at home to take care of the house and bring up children*" (see appendix 2). Another one shared a story of her religious teacher (*Ustaad*), who plans to enroll his sons in a school in Hong Kong but thinks religious knowledge alone is sufficient for his daughters (see appendix 3). In contrast, 100% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls were in disagreement that men and women are not equal (60% strongly disagreed). Similarly, 70% of the Pakistani Muslim girls disagreed that mixed gender education is permissible in Islam, while 90% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls were in agreement with the statement. From the qualitative study, a Non-Pakistani Muslim interviewee argued that "*mixed gender education is allowed in Islam under the right boundaries...also it would be unrealistic and impractical*" to segregate boys

and girls when there is no segregation in the real world (see appendix 8).

### **8. 1. 3. Comprehension of the Quranic (Arabic) scripture**

A 100% of the Pakistani Muslim respondents strongly agreed that they do not understand the meaning of the Quranic (Arabic) text. They just know how to read the text since they have learnt the phonetics of the Arabic alphabets. Whereas, only 20% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girl respondents strongly agreed that they do not understand the meaning of the Quranic text, while 70% agreed, and 10% disagreed. This indicates that the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls have a slightly better understanding of the Quranic text. This could be further consolidated as 60% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim respondents agreed to have read the translation of the Holy Quran, while 80% of the Pakistani Muslim girls have disagreed.



## 8. 2. Familial Factor

| Familial Factors  | SA  |     | A   |     | D   |     | SD  |      |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
|   | P   | NP  | P   | NP  | P   | NP  | P   | NP   |
| 1. Your parents encourage you to seek tertiary education.             | 60% | 60% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%   |
| 2. You need to help your family financially.                          | 60% | 50% | 30% | 30% | 10% | 20% | 0%  | 0%   |
| 3. Your parents want to get you married after completing Secondary 6. | 0%  | 0%  | 40% | 0%  | 30% | 0%  | 30% | 100% |
| 4. You are engaged.   | 0%  | 0%  | 40% | 0%  | 40% | 0%  | 20% | 100% |
| 5. Your family thinks education is not necessary for women.           | 0%  | 0%  | 10% | 0%  | 20% | 0%  | 70% | 100% |
| 6. Going to university will bring shame to your family.               | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 20% | 0%  | 80% | 100% |
| 7. Your family cannot support your tertiary education.                | 10% | 0%  | 20% | 10% | 40% | 30% | 30% | 60%  |
| 8. You will start working after completing Secondary 6.               | 10% | 0%  | 50% | 20% | 20% | 40% | 20% | 40%  |
| 9. Your family expects you to be a housewife in the future.           | 20% | 0%  | 40% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 20% | 60%  |
| 10. Your father is against mixed gender education.                    | 10% | 0%  | 10% | 0%  | 30% | 10% | 50% | 90%  |

### 8. 2. Survey results on the familial factors influencing the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls' perception on tertiary education

Based on the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative studies (see table 8.2), it appears that familial factors have a significant role in influencing the Pakistani Muslim girls' perception on tertiary education. When participants were asked during the qualitative study what they thought were the reasons not many Pakistani Muslim girls make it to tertiary education, all the respondents (both Pakistani and Non-Pakistani) provided one common reason, which was “*early marriage*”. This was further consolidated by the quantitative approach as almost half of the Pakistani Muslim girls (40%) agreed that they are engaged and their families want them to get married upon the completion of their secondary education. Moreover, 60% of the Pakistani Muslim girls are expected to become housewives, therefore the pursuit of further education may seem insignificant or unnecessary. However, almost a 100% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls strongly disagreed with these statements.

A family's economic status also plays a significant role in influencing the Pakistani Muslim girls' perception on tertiary education as 90% of them need to support their families financially, 60% of them will start to work upon high school graduation, and 30% of them stated their families cannot support their tertiary education. However, the figures are more optimistic for the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls.

After studying the graphs in figures 4 – 7 (see appendix 13), there is a strong linkage between the respondents' parents' academic and occupational background, family structure and the financial status of the families. Majority of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls' parents are bachelor degree holders or above (see fig.4), thus they have managerial or professional jobs (see fig. 5 and 6). They also have comparatively smaller families; 1 – 2 children per family (see fig. 7). Due to their higher paid jobs and smaller families, they are financially better off than majority of the Pakistani Muslim respondents' families.

### 8.3. Individual Factor

Individual factors influencing one's perception on tertiary education are categorized into two categories, namely the extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

| Individual Factors | Statements  | SA  |     | A   |     | D   |     | SD  |     |
|--------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|                    |   | P   | NP  | P   | NP  | P   | NP  | P   | NP  |
| Extrinsic          | 1. Chinese language serves as a barrier for me to reach tertiary education.               | 40% | 30% | 40% | 30% | 20% | 30% | 0%  | 10% |
|                    | 2. I want to seek further education to have better job opportunities.                     | 50% | 70% | 20% | 30% | 30% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  |
|                    | 3. The financial expenses of tertiary education serve as a barrier to tertiary education. | 40% | 20% | 60% | 50% | 0%  | 30% | 0%  | 0%  |
|                    | 4. Tertiary education can make me an independent woman.                                   | 70% | 60% | 30% | 40% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  |
| Intrinsic          | 5. I am passionate to receive tertiary education.   | 70% | 60% | 30% | 40% | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  |
|                    | 6. I will be a housewife in the future, therefore tertiary education is not necessary.    | 30% | 0%  | 40% | 0%  | 20% | 20% | 10% | 80% |
|                    | 7. I want to receive tertiary education to become a role model for my siblings.           | 70% | 40% | 10% | 50% | 20% | 10% | 0%  | 0%  |

### 8.3. Survey results on the individual factors influencing the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls' perception on tertiary education

In terms of extrinsic factors, Chinese language requirement does serve as a barrier in the path to tertiary education for majority of both the Pakistani (80%) and Non-Pakistani (60%) Muslim girls, just as it does for majority of the Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students in Hong Kong. However, there are some extrinsic factors that motivate them to pursue tertiary education, for instance, 70% and 100% of the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls respectively believe further education can provide them with better job opportunities in the future, thus enabling them to become independent women.

In terms of intrinsic factors, 60% of the Pakistani Muslim girls are in agreement that they

will become housewives; hence tertiary education may not be necessary, whereas, 80% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls strongly disagree with this statement. However, both the Pakistani (70%) and Non-Pakistani (60%) Muslim girls strongly agree that they are passionate to receive tertiary education, with 70% of the Pakistani Muslim girls strongly want to become role models for their siblings as compared to 40% of the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls. These statistics reflect the findings from the qualitative study in which three out of four Pakistani Muslim interviewees have stated intrinsically-driven reasons when asked to share the purpose of further education. Interviewee A and D both believe further education makes a woman independent (see appendix 2 and 5). Interviewee A continued that education enables a woman to become a better mother. Another respondent (interviewee B) has stated that literacy can enable her to better understand the religion and its teachings (see appendix 3).

## 9. Discussion

The aim of this research is to investigate how Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls residing in Hong Kong perceive 'knowledge'; to what extent the religion of Islam influences their perception on tertiary education; and whether or not there are other factors that influence their decision of pursuing tertiary education.

### 9. 1. The Tug-of-War: Religious education vs Worldly education

In Islam, knowledge in its entirety is considered religious, be it rooted in the social, physical sciences, professional or theological field (Islam, 2016). Unfortunately, this is the point where deviation starts amongst followers; those who follow literal meaning of the Quran denounce worldly education and give importance to religious schools, *Madrasahs*. However, in addition to the literal interpretation of the Quran, where "worship" is narrowly defined to the five pillars of Islam, lack of comprehension of the Quranic text, and blindly following the Islamic Literalists or scholars who blend the teachings of Islam with cultural norms, collectively result in the misconception that worldly knowledge is "un-Islamic". This explains why majority of Pakistani Muslim girls do not consider tertiary education as a way to fulfill their religious duty, nor do they strongly believe that anything more than the main pillars of Islam are considered forms of "worship". They almost never read the translation of the Quranic text, hence failed to

understand its teachings.

## **9. 2. Religion vs Culture**

Women's rights stipulated by the religion of Islam are overshadowed by the local cultural values and norms of that particular country, and the Muslim interpretive communities have shaped religious knowledge in ways that resulted in patriarchal readings of the Quran (Barlas, 2002). For instance, the belief that a girl's main duty is inside a house is still very pervasive in the Pakistani community in Hong Kong. Higher education is often directly linked to establishing a career. Since a woman is not expected to be the breadwinner in a patriarchal Pakistani household, investing in her for higher education is considered unnecessary. In addition, Pakistani girls living in Hong Kong are, very often, engaged to their male relatives in Pakistan who may not be highly educated, and they do not prefer their wives to be more educated than them. Having completed secondary education is already considered sufficient for the girl.

The above mentioned cultural norms are not as prevalent among the Non-Pakistani Muslim respondents. A plausible reason could be that their highly educated parents may have realized the impact of education on their daughters' personal development; the benefit an educated women can bring to the socio-economic development of the family; as well the as the impact on the development of a child brought up by an educated

mother.

### **9. 3. Other Factors**

#### **9. 3. 1. Finance: Money Matters**

The findings in this research are consistent with a previous research conducted by Cheung and Chou (2017) stating that Pakistani households have the highest poverty rate among all ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong. About 80% of Pakistani parents received secondary or a lower level of education. Due to their low educational attainment, the rate of Pakistani parents working at managerial and professional jobs is lower than other ethnic groups (Cheung & Chou, 2017). Therefore, it is predictable, that Pakistani Muslim girls are likely to fall in the vicious cycle of poverty and reach lower educational attainment than the Non-Pakistani Muslim girls, as it is proven by past research that children growing up in poor households are likely to have a bleaker economic outlook and have a higher chance of passing poverty on to the next generation (Lichter, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Stier & Tienda, 2001, as cited in Cheung & Chou, 2017). However, probably due to the underprivileged circumstances of the Pakistani Muslim girls that they showed stronger signs of intrinsic motivation to pursuing higher education and a desire to set themselves as role models for their

younger siblings. Hence there is a possibility that they will manage to break the vicious cycle of poverty if money was the only barrier.

### **9. 3. 2. Education: The Language Barrier**

Lack of proficiency in Chinese language is undoubtedly one of the main factors that reduce the opportunities of EM students for higher education because proficiency in Chinese language is an entrance requirement for tertiary education in Hong Kong. Ethnic minority students in general are deprived of the opportunity to immerse in a Chinese language learning environment during their formative years due to racial segregation in the education system of Hong Kong. Albeit in 2013, the Education Bureau abandoned the “designated school” policy, nevertheless, the problem of racial segregation of EM students from Chinese students persists as EM students are still concentrated in former “designated schools” (Cheung & Chou, 2017). As a result, majority of EM students often graduate from secondary schools with only primary school level Chinese language proficiency (Kapai, 2015 as cited in Cheung & Chou, 2017). However, based on the findings, Non-Pakistani Muslim girls are not significantly hindered by the language barrier because they have the financial capability to pursue further education overseas or at private tertiary institutions where Chinese is not a requirement.



## **10. Conclusion**

To encapsulate, the religion of Islam has a strong influence on both groups of respondents. However, to understand and differentiate the influence Islam has on them, in terms of influencing their perception on tertiary education, one must understand how the two groups of respondents define ‘knowledge’ in the light of Islam. The influence is positive where the religion is understood and ‘knowledge’ in its entirety is accepted as a form of worship. However, where the religion is misunderstood or narrowly defined, it is used as a formidable wall between women and education. In addition, patriarchal cultural values and norms are very prevalent among Hong Kong-Pakistani households that predetermine the female respondents’ familial and social responsibilities.

This research also sheds light on other factors that could influence the participants’ decision of pursuing tertiary education. Apart from the widely accepted reason that Chinese language serves as a barrier for NCS students to pursue further education, the financial status of one’s family is another major factor that has come to light.

### **10.1. Recommendation**

The results have important implications for the education sector of Hong Kong; hence the government, educators and social workers can make informed decisions on

education-related policies for the Muslim community in Hong Kong.

Firstly, the local educational bodies and the Islamic educational centers, *Madrassas*, need to work together to grow awareness on the significance of female education as stipulated in the Quran. Secondly, the leaders of *Madrassas* need to review their curriculum and pedagogies in order to minimize literal interpretation of the Quran and enhance the understanding of the Quranic text among their students. Thirdly, there should be an increase in the budgetary allocation to the education sector, especially for girls from EM background.

## **10.2. Limitations**

Due to the scale of this research and word restriction, the sample size was narrow, thus the results generated should not be generalized to all Pakistani and Non-Pakistan Muslim girls in Hong Kong. Moreover, the research could have been more holistic if it had taken into account the extent of how the religion of Islam influences Muslim boys' perception on tertiary education.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Survey

Nationality:  Pakistani  Non-Pakistani ( Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_ )

1. What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you? (*Hint: memorizing Quran only and/or learning about other subjects, e.g. sciences, arts etc.*)
2. Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?
3. Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? (*Yes/ No. Why? Any case/ story to share?*)
4. What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education? (*Hint: Individual factors/ Family reasons/ Cultural factors/ Religious reasons?*)
5. What do you think is the purpose of further education? (*Better job opportunities/ higher social status/ the ability to contribute to the society?*)
6. From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?
7. Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? (*school, school teachers, madrasa, parents, internet*)
8. Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?

## Appendix 2: Transcript – Pakistani Muslim Girl A

**This interview was conducted over the telephone (only the main content of the interview is transcribed to save time).**

### Keys:

**I:** Interviewer

**A:** Pakistani Muslim Girl Respondent A

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**I: What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you?** For instance, do you think only memorizing the Quran refers to knowledge or learning about other subjects, such as sciences, arts etc. is also included in knowledge?

**A:** I think Islam is not only about memorizing or reading the Quran. Sciences and other subjects are necessary as well. In fact scientific knowledge is mentioned in the Quran as well.

**I: Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

**A:** Yes. Culture is different from country to country, but religion is a universal belief system. But I would say many people easily mix them up.

**I: Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males?** Yes or No and why?

**A:** In Hong Kong, yes both females and males have the equal right but not in Pakistan. Women are told that Islam requires women to stay at home; take care of the house and bring up children.

**I: What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education?** It could be an individual factor or family reason or religious reason?

**A:** My parents encourage me to seek further education but I have health issues due to which I get discouraged.

**I: What do you think is the purpose of further education?** Is it to have better job opportunities, higher social status or have the ability to contribute to the society?

**A:** I think further education makes us independent. It enhances our knowledge, and we also get to meet different people from around the world so it helps to broaden our understanding and knowledge. Also, education helps us to become good mothers in the future as we will know how to teach our child.

**I: From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

**A:** I think Chinese language is one of the barriers. Besides this, culture is another major reason because many Pakistani girls get engaged while they are still in secondary school, and once they graduate, they get married. Actually, all the girls in my class are engaged.

**I: Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? Was it at school, from school teachers, at madrasa, or from parents or the internet?**

**A:** Mainly from the madrasa but I also do independent learning and research on the Internet.

**I: Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

**A:** I don't think it's allowed, especially after the age of puberty when one is considered to be an adult in Islam. My parents are okay because our school provides segregated classrooms, especially from S.1 – S. 3.

### Appendix 3: Transcript – Pakistani Muslim Girl B

**This interview was conducted over the telephone (only the main content of the interview is transcribed to save time).**

#### **Keys:**

**I:** Interviewer

**B:** Pakistani Muslim Girl Respondent B

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**I: What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you?** For instance, do you think only memorizing the Quran refers to knowledge or learning about other subjects, such as sciences, arts etc. is also included in knowledge?

**B:** The knowledge of Sunnah (the life of our Prophet) and the Holy Quran are two important and comprehensive guides that teach us how to live our lives.

**I: Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

**B:** Yes. For example, arranged marriages are practiced in the culture mainly but according to the religion of Islam, both the boy and the girl have the right to choose and reject the proposal. Similarly, girls are not encouraged and sometimes even not allowed seek education but the religion does not stop them from it. It is the culture.

**I: Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? Yes or No and why?**

**B:** Yes, the religion allows but our people do not follow the religion correctly. For example, my Ustaad (religious/ Quran teacher) looked for secondary schools for his sons but not for his daughters. He has no intention to send them to school. He probably thinks school is for boys and girls are supposed to stay at home or just learn about Islam.

**I: What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education?** It could be an individual factor or family reason or religious reason?

**B:** My mother really wishes that I become a nursery teacher one day but my father is against further education because he does not want me to work. Financial difficulties is another factor that discourages me as well because university education is so expensive.

**I: What do you think is the purpose of further education?** Is it to have better job opportunities, higher social status or have the ability to contribute to the society?

**B:** I think further education is for the betterment of ourselves (for our own good). We do not have to seek further education just to find a good job later on but if we have the knowledge and skills, we could help other people. Also, the more knowledgeable we are, the better we

understand our religion and its teachings.

**I: From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

**B: I think early marriage is the biggest reason. Also, parents usually do not allow girls to work so seeking so much education sometimes seems useless. Some parents, especially fathers, might feel ashamed or “loose face” if they send their daughters to study with other men in a mixed gender environment.**

**I: Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? Was it at school, from school teachers, at madrasa, or from parents or the internet?**

**B: Mainly from the madrasa but I also from school and the Internet.**

**I: Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

**B: I’m not sure if it’s allowed in Islam. My parents are okay for now. I personally think mixed gender education is very close to the reality. Also, we can learn about social norms and how to behave and talk to others (boys).**



#### Appendix 4: Transcript – Pakistani Muslim Girl C

**This interview was conducted over the telephone (only the main content of the interview is transcribed to save time).**

**Keys:**

**I:** Interviewer

**C:** Pakistani Muslim Girl respondent C

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**I: What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you?** For instance, do you think only memorizing the Quran refers to knowledge or learning about other subjects, such as sciences, arts etc. is also included in knowledge?

**C:** Knowledge in Islam I guess refers to the knowledge of Sharia (Islamic Law) and interpretation of the Quran, and not just memorization of it without understanding.

**I: Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

**C:** Yes. They are different. I don't really know how to explain and I can't think of an example right now. I'm sorry.

**I: Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? Yes or No and why?**

**C:** I guess. No, I'm not sure.

**I: What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education?** It could be an individual factor or family reason or religious reason?

**C:** I'm personally not very interested in academics, plus my family won't allow me to work. Also, universities are expensive, if I'm not going to work in the future, why waste my parents money now.

**I: What do you think is the purpose of further education?** Is it to have better job opportunities, higher social status or have the ability to contribute to the society?

**C:** I think further education helps us find jobs with higher salary. It also makes our future easier. For example, uneducated people might have to work hard under the sun at construction sites or do security jobs but educated people can work in an air-conditioned room, like an office.

**I: From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

**C:** Early marriages and family mentality. Our family structure is quite different from the locals, like Chinese. Women have the responsibility of raising kids and husband work and earn for the family.

**I: Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? Was it at school, from school teachers, at madrasa, or from parents or the internet?**

**C:** From madrasa and school.

**I: Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

**C:** I'm not sure but my parents are okay with it. I think it's normal for boys and girls to study together.

## Appendix 5: Transcript – Pakistani Muslim Girl D

**This interview was conducted via email.**

**Nationality :**  Pakistani  Non-Pakistani ( Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_ )

**1. What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you? (Hint: memorizing Quran only and/or learning about other subjects, e.g. sciences, arts etc.)**

To me, knowledge in Islam does not mean memorising Quran but understanding Quran and of course the knowledge of the other subjects as well. As memorising will not help a person to live a better life but understanding of Quran can guide people about the course of life and continuous reading of the translation serves as a reminder of the guidance.

**2. Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

Yes, two of them are very different but unfortunately a lot of people mix these two concepts and make cultural practices part of religion and vice versa. I think religion is what you cannot question or change but cultural practices are dynamic. They are adopted by people and can be modified or disowned by people depending the situation and other contributing factors.

**3. Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? (Yes/ No. Why? Any case/ story to share?)**

Yes, Islam does give equal right to education to females just as the males. Considering the reasons for why one needs to be educated, I think it's because females are the ones who practically raise the future generation, therefore there is no better way to start educating the upcoming generations than getting them to start learning from their mothers. Although people learn the knowledge of subject and about the world mainly from schools and institutions, their way of perceiving that input is strongly influenced and sometimes completely shaped by people around them especially those whom they are close with (which to most people are their parents especially moms).

**4. What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education? (Hint: Individual factors/ Family reasons/ Cultural factors/ Religious reasons?)**

Dream of becoming independent encourages me to further my education and family reasons somehow discourage me. Actually what really discourages me is the way my mind-set is changing. I am not sure if the change is good or not but because of this change, I often get in arguments with my parents so I feel like the more I will further my education the farther away I will become from my family. Another thing, which discourages me is the qualification of my fiancé. I think if I further my education, there will be a difference and with typical Pakistani men's ego and mind-set, he will not feel good about it.

**5. What do you think is the purpose of further education? (Better job opportunities/ higher social status/ the ability to contribute to the society?)**

To be honest, my purpose for furthering my education is so that I can become independent. So that I wouldn't have to depend on my parents and hence wouldn't be forced to do thing which I don't want to do.

**6. From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

I think it's because of the cultural reasons. In Pakistani culture, girls are supposed to get married at early age and become housewives. Their job is that of a house maid, doing household chores and taking care of the children. With this kind of mentality, why would education seem important to them? Even if some of them want to make it to tertiary education, they will come across with so many hurdles that they will give up. They lack support and courage to make a change in their lives. The change, which will also be helpful in breaking the norms, hence making the path easier for the girls following them.

**7. Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? (school, school teachers, madrasa, parents, internet)**

I learnt about Islam from my parents, the Baji who taught me how to read Quran, the school, madrasa (Ijtamah) and internet.

**8. Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

I am not sure about that. Yes, they are okay (I suppose).

## Appendix 6: Transcript – Non-Pakistani Girl A

**This interview was conducted via email.**

**Nationality :**  Pakistani  Non-Pakistani ( Please indicate: Indonesian )

**1. What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you? (Hint: memorizing Quran only and/or learning about other subjects, e.g. sciences, arts etc.)**

I think knowledge in Islam means something that we have to seek and pursue no matter wherever and whenever we are. It’s not only learning about my religion or subjects from school but all the things about the world. It makes me know how to distinguish which one is right and which one is wrong. It also makes me know how to think and making decisions in a right way.

**2. Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

Yes, I do think there are some differences between culture and religion. Even though they both exist a long time ago, I think culture is the way we are socializing and behaving with each other, while religion is our way of living. I do think sometimes the differences between them can really be the opposite, but in my opinion, it’s not a barrier for me to learn about other cultures.

**3. Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? (Yes/ No. Why? Any case/ story to share?)**

Yes, I do think Islam gives females the equal right to education as the males. From what I read, seeking knowledge is an obligation for all Muslim. We all have the same moral duties and responsibilities, we will also face the same consequences depend on what we do.

**4. What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education? (Hint: Individual factors/ Family reasons/ Cultural factors/ Religious reasons?)**

For now I don’t have intention to furthering my education, but if I have it may comet from individual factors or family reasons. The things that discourages me from furthering my educations are individual factors, family reasons, cultural factors and religious reasons. In Islam, seeking knowledge is an obligatory for all Muslim. In my culture, it’s easier to find a job if we have a good education. In my family, they want me to be more successful than my parents in the future. And lastly, I don’t want to waste my life doing nothing but rather make me and everyone that knows me feel proud about myself.

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**5. What do you think is the purpose of further education? (*Better job opportunities/ higher social status/ the ability to contribute to the society?*)**

I think the purpose of further education is to makes our lives become easier. For example it makes us easier to find a good job, improves our social and personal lives, learn more about other or our cultures and our religion. Therefore, we will have the ability to contribute to the society.

**6. From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

In my perspective, I think it's because they do early marriage. It's already become their culture.

**7. Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? (*school, school teachers, madrasa, parents, internet*)**

I learnt about Islam mostly from my parents and other relatives, Internet and school. Others can be from the school teacher and when I was inside the mosque listening to the speeches.

**8. Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

I don't really know about mixed gender in Islam. But I think it's allowed in Islam because seeking knowledge is our duty, therefore, we have to do our duty as good as possible. My parents are okay with me seeking education in a mixed gender environment, we don't really have problem with that.

## Appendix 7: Transcript – Non-Pakistani Girl B

This interview was conducted via email.

Nationality :  Pakistani     Non-Pakistani ( Please indicate: Indonesian )

**1. What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you? (Hint: memorizing Quran only and/or learning about other subjects, e.g. sciences, arts etc.)**

I think knowledge in Islam means something I must acquire throughout my life, it is really essential as it can help you to distinguish between right and wrong and also to teach other people about your knowledge. It's also how you discover new things e.g. Science, inventions etc. Without knowledge you won't know what's going on and how things work.

**2. Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

Yes, I think there's a difference between culture and religion. Culture is a tradition, something that you have followed from your ancestors since a long time ago to be a part of the society. Religion is something you believe in out of your own free will, it is also a way of life and also something you dedicate yourself to throughout your whole life.

**3. Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? (Yes/ No. Why? Any case/ story to share?)**

Yes, I think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males, as knowledge is closely related to education, it is said that seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim whether male or female.

**4. What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education? (Hint: Individual factors/ Family reasons/ Cultural factors/ Religious reasons?)**

What encourages me to further my education is my parents, although they want me to be a doctor, as long as it is not something bad and it helps a lot of people, they will support me no matter what I become in the future.

**5. What do you think is the purpose of further education? (Better job opportunities/ higher social status/ the ability to contribute to the society?)**

I think the purpose of further education is to get better job opportunities in the future, to pursue more knowledge and also preparing yourself before you become an adult.

**6. From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

In my opinion, the reason why not many Pakistani Muslim girls can't make it to tertiary education is because they usually get married right after they have graduated from high school. For them, it might be a tradition to do early marriage but it's also one of the reason why they cannot do further studies.

**7. Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? (*school, school teachers, madrasa, parents, internet*)**

I learned about Islam at school and the ones who taught me are my parents, grandmother and teachers. I also learned something when my friends talk about Islam.

**8. Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

In my experience, I think mixed gender are allowed in Islam, as Muslim schools also have co-ed classes. I think my parents are okay with me seeking education in a mixed gender environment, actually it doesn't matter to them as long as I can study.



## Appendix 8: Transcript – Non-Pakistani Girl C

**This interview was conducted via email.**

**Nationality:**  Pakistani  Non-Pakistani (Please indicate: Bangladesh )

**1. What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you? (Hint: memorizing Quran only and/or learning about other subjects, e.g. sciences, arts etc.)**

From my perspective, knowledge in Islam is a combination of both the knowledge of religion (Islam) as well as the worldly knowledge, such as science. We must acquire as much knowledge as possible because it teaches us why we were created and how we were created, for instance, there are references in the Quran on the embryonic development of a human being.

**2. Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

Yes, I think there’s a difference between culture and religion. Culture is man-made and may change or evolve over a period of time due to the influence of other cultures. Whereas religion is clearly defined and has been established, like a law. For example, in the religion of Islam, both men and women have the equal right to seek education, however, the religious teachings are distorted by society because their mentality is culturally influenced. Muslim men from patriarchal societies, such as Pakistan, believe women should stay at home, but men are allowed to seek education for the purpose of future job hunting.

**3. Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males? (Yes/ No. Why? Any case/ story to share?)**

Yes, I believe Islam gives both females and males the equal right to education. I also read about this in Chapter 96 - Iqra of the Holy Quran.

**4. What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education? (Hint: Individual factors/ Family reasons/ Cultural factors/ Religious reasons?)**

My family runs an Italian restaurant (family business), hence my parents encourage me to seek further education, especially in the field of Business so that I can help with the family business in the future. The only discouraging factor that I am facing at the moment is the highly competitive public exam – HKDSE. It does discourage me from tertiary education some times.

**5. What do you think is the purpose of further education? (*Better job opportunities/ higher social status/ the ability to contribute to the society?*)**

I think the purpose of further education is to gain professional and practical skills that are applicable in our future lives. University education also gives us the recognition, which enhances or improves our social status. However, it's not about getting to earn higher salaries only.

**6. From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

One of the major reasons would be early marriages. Many Pakistani girls that I know got married or will get married upon completing their secondary education. Another reason could be the family environment, for instance, their family might not put a lot of importance on their studies and schooling. Instead, they would ask the girls to learn housework, such as cooking and cleaning, as these are more practical skills for them because they will become housewives in the future.

**7. Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? (*school, school teachers, madrasa, parents, internet*)**

I learned about Islam from school and my parents. Before, I wouldn't wear hijab (headscarf), but ever since I started my schooling at Islamic College, I learn the importance of Hijab.

**8. Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

I think mixed gender education is allowed in Islam under the right boundaries. I also think it would be unrealistic and impractical if we segregate boys and girls throughout their school because in the real world, there is no segregation. So, why not teach them how to adjust and learn together in a decent way.

## Appendix 9: Transcript – Non-Pakistani Girl D

This interview was conducted via email.

Nationality:  Pakistani  Non-Pakistani ( Please indicate: Indian )

**1. What does “knowledge” in Islam mean to you?** (*Hint: memorizing Quran only and/or learning about other subjects, e.g. sciences, arts etc.*)

Seeking knowledge is essential to all human beings. We should seek knowledge that will benefit us in this life and in the hereafter. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said we should “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave”.

**2. Do you think there is a difference between culture and religion?**

Yes, there is a difference. “Culture” is established by a society, whereas “religion” could be universal because it refers to the faith or belief system of people from all around the world. Once, a Pakistani scholar came to Hong Kong and visited our school. He gave a lecture saying that seeking worldly education/schooling is a western concept. But I believe Islam encourages us to seek all types of knowledge.

**3. Do you think Islam gives females the equal right to education just as the males?** (*Yes/ No. Why? Any case/ story to share?*)

Yes, Islam gives both men and women the right to education. However, women have to face lots of challenges or obstacles set by social norms, whereas, men are free from that.

**4. What encourages and/or discourages you from furthering your education?** (*Hint: Individual factors/ Family reasons/ Cultural factors/ Religious reasons?*)

My family encourages me to seek further education for the sake of my personal development. However, I do get discouraged by the HKDSE as it is very competitive.

**5. What do you think is the purpose of further education?** (*Better job opportunities/ higher social status/ the ability to contribute to the society?*)

I think the purpose of further education is to develop the ability or gain the knowledge to contribute to the society or help people. I also think higher education is beneficial for our personal development.

**6. From your perspective, why do you think not many Pakistani Muslim girls can make it to tertiary education? What are the reasons?**

I think early marriages is one of the major reasons why Pakistani girls cannot make it to tertiary education. In addition, they are not as hardworking as the local Chinese students. Also, their family might not be as supportive for university education.

**7. Where did you learn about Islam or who taught you about Islam? (*school, school teachers, madrasa, parents, internet*)**

I learned about Islam at school mainly. I also learn about Islam from my parents, and from the Tamil Islamic center.

**8. Is mixed gender education allowed in Islam? Are your parents okay with you seeking education in a mixed gender environment?**

Yes, it is allowed to a large extent. First of all, Muslim men and women are brothers and sisters in Islam. However, we need to learn how to behave properly in a mixed gender setting. Some parents might not be okay with mixed gender education or if they were given a choice between a mixed gender classroom and a segregated one, they would opt for the latter. But I guess it's normal for parents, especially fathers, to look out for their daughters.

**Appendix 10: Questionnaire Survey**

**Part A: Personal Information** (please put a ✓ in the appropriate box or fill in the blanks)

1. **Class:**      S. 5     S. 6
  
2. **Nationality :**     Pakistani     Non-Pakistani ( Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_ )
  
3. **Were you born in Hong Kong?**     Yes     No ( Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_ )
  
4. **Did you receive your primary education in Hong Kong?**  
 Yes     No ( Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_ )
  
5. **Did you receive most of your secondary education in Hong Kong?**  
 Yes     No ( Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_ )
  
6. **Father's Occupation:**  
 Teacher     Construction Worker     Security Guard     Businessman  
  
 Others: \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. **Mother's Occupation:**  
 Teacher     Housewife     Businesswoman     Others: \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. **Father's Education level:**  
 None     Primary     Secondary     Diploma     Bachelor Degree  
  
 Master Degree
  
9. **Mother's Education level:**  
 None     Primary     Secondary     Diploma     Bachelor Degree  
  
 Master Degree
  
10. **How many siblings do you have (exclude yourself)?**  
 None (skip Q.11)     1     2     3     4     5 or more
  
11. **How many of your siblings have reached tertiary education in your family?**  
 None     1     2     3     4     5 or more

**Part B: Islam and Education**

How does the religion of Islam influence the perception on further education (i.e. Tertiary Education) of senior secondary (S.5 – S.6) Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong?

**Strongly Agree: SA Agree: A Don't Know: DK Disagree: D Strongly Disagree: SD**

**12. Religious Factors** (Please put a ✓ in the appropriate box.)

| Statements   | SA | A | DK | D | SD |
|--|----|---|----|---|----|
| 12.1. "Knowledge" in Islam only refers to reading the Holy Quran.                  |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.2. Islam gives you the right to seek further education.                         |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.3. I have read the translation of the Holy Quran.                               |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.4. Men and women are not equal in Islam.  |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.5. Islam does not allow you to seek tertiary education.                         |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.6. Islam does not allow you to learn about other subjects.                      |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.7. Islam teaches us about science, law and humanity.                            |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.8. I do not understand the meaning of the Arabic scripture I read in the Quran. |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.9. Worldly knowledge is different from Islamic/religious knowledge.             |    |   |    |   |    |
| 12.10. Mixed gender education is permissible in Islam.                             |    |   |    |   |    |

**13. The purpose of human creation is to "worship" God. What activities do you think are considered forms of "worship"?** (Please put a ✓ in the appropriate box. You may choose more than one box.)

Five daily prayers       Fasting       Pilgrimage       Zakkat (Charity)

Traits of good character (e.g. honesty, humbleness, generosity etc.)

Earning a living       Seeking knowledge

**14. What do you think is the purpose of tertiary education?** *(Please put a ✓ in the appropriate box. You may choose ONE box only.)*

- Better Job Opportunities
- Better understanding of the world
- Ability to contribute to the society
- Fulfill religious duty

**Part C: Other factors influencing one’s perception on tertiary education**

**Strongly Agree: SA    Agree: A    Disagree: D    Strongly Disagree: SD**

**15. Individual Factors** *(Please put a ✓ in the appropriate box.)*

| Statements  | SA | A | D | SD |
|---|----|---|---|----|
| 15.1. Chinese language is the main barrier for you to reach tertiary education.         |    |   |   |    |
| 15.2. You are passionate to receive tertiary education.                                 |    |   |   |    |
| 15.3. Tertiary education is not important for housewives.                               |    |   |   |    |
| 15.4. You want to seek further education because you can find a good job in the future. |    |   |   |    |
| 15.5. Tertiary education can make you a better mother in the future.                    |    |   |   |    |
| 15.6. Tertiary education is expensive.  |    |   |   |    |
| 15.7. Tertiary education can make you an independent woman.                             |    |   |   |    |
| 15.8. You want to receive tertiary education to become a role model for your siblings.  |    |   |   |    |

**Strongly Agree: SA    Agree: A    Disagree: D    Strongly Disagree: SD**

**16. Familial Factors** *(Please put a ✓ in the appropriate box.)*

| <b>Statements</b>  | <b>SA</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 16.1. Your parents encourage you to seek tertiary education.             |           |          |          |           |
| 16.2. You need to help your family financially.                          |           |          |          |           |
| 16.3. Your parents want to get you married after completing Secondary 6. |           |          |          |           |
| 16.4. You are engaged.   |           |          |          |           |
| 16.5. Your family thinks education is not necessary for women.           |           |          |          |           |
| 16.6. Going to university will bring shame to your family.               |           |          |          |           |
| 16.7. Your family cannot support your tertiary education.                |           |          |          |           |
| 16.8. You will start working after completing Secondary 6.               |           |          |          |           |
| 16.9. Your family expects you to be a housewife in the future.           |           |          |          |           |
| 16.10. Your father is against mixed gender education.                    |           |          |          |           |

\_\_\_\_\_ **Thank You** \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix 11: Information Sheet**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **“The role of Islam in influencing the perception on tertiary education of senior secondary Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong”**

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Dr. Lam Chi-ming and conducted by Ms. BIBI Tayyaba, who are staff / students of the Department of International Education and Lifelong Learning in The Education University of Hong Kong.

#### **A. The introduction of the research**

Women education in Islam is a subject of intense scrutiny at international level. The recent incident in which a 16-year-old girl, Malala Yousafzai, was shot in Pakistan for advocating women’s education in Islam (Walsh, 2012) has yet again raised serious questions about women’s education in Islam. In addition, women literacy rate in the Muslim world is the lowest globally, and Pakistan is at the bottom of that list with the lowest youth literacy rate; only 59 percent of females are literate as compared to 79 percent of males (Mirza, 2012).

Locally, Pakistanis in Hong Kong, majority of whom are Muslims, form 3.2% of the total ethnic minority population of 342,198 (Population By-census, 2006), which is not thriving in academia either despite the fact that all eligible children in Hong Kong, including non-Chinese speaking (NCS) or ethnic minority (EM) children, are entitled to 12-years of free education, 9 of which is compulsory. However, the number of EM students attaining higher levels of education is inexplicably low (“Education for all”, 2011). According to the Population By-census (2006), EM students accounted for 3.2% of the total student population at pre-primary level (5,452 out of 166,394). However, the percentage dropped significantly to about 0.59% at the Post-secondary level.

Hence, this research would serve as an additional resource that informs the current debate about women’s rights to education in Islam, specifically focusing on the comparison between Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls who are acquiring education in a non-Muslim dominated place, such as Hong Kong. Given the misleading impression that Pakistanis as Ethnic Minorities are not excelling in tertiary education, this research could shed light on reasons other than Chinese language, which is widely accepted as a barrier to attaining tertiary education.

**B. The methodology of the research**

Muslim girls in general have a lower literacy rate than Muslim boys; hence this particular target group suits the purpose of the research. The aim is to collect data through an open-ended, semi-formal interviews and questionnaire survey from Secondary 5 – 6 Pakistani and non-Pakistani Muslim girls only. A total of 8 participants, 4 Pakistani and 4 non-Pakistani Muslim girls from Secondary 5 – 6, will be invited for open-ended, semi-formal interviews. And a total of 20 participants, 10 Pakistani and 10 non-Pakistani Muslim girls from Secondary 5 – 6, will be invited for a questionnaire survey.

**C. The potential risks of the research**

This research involves no potential risks.

Your participation in the project is voluntary. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

**D. How results will be disseminated**

The research results will be published in the form of a thesis paper.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Ms. BIBI Tayyaba at telephone number \_\_\_\_\_ or her supervisor Dr. Lam Chi-ming at telephone number \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at \_\_\_\_\_ or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Ms. BIBI Tayyaba  
Principal Investigator

**Appendix 12: Consent Form**



**THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**

Department of International  
Education and Lifelong Learning

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**“The role of Islam in influencing the perception on tertiary education of senior secondary Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim girls in Hong Kong”**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by Dr. Lam Chi-ming and conducted by Ms. BIBI Tayyaba.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of participant

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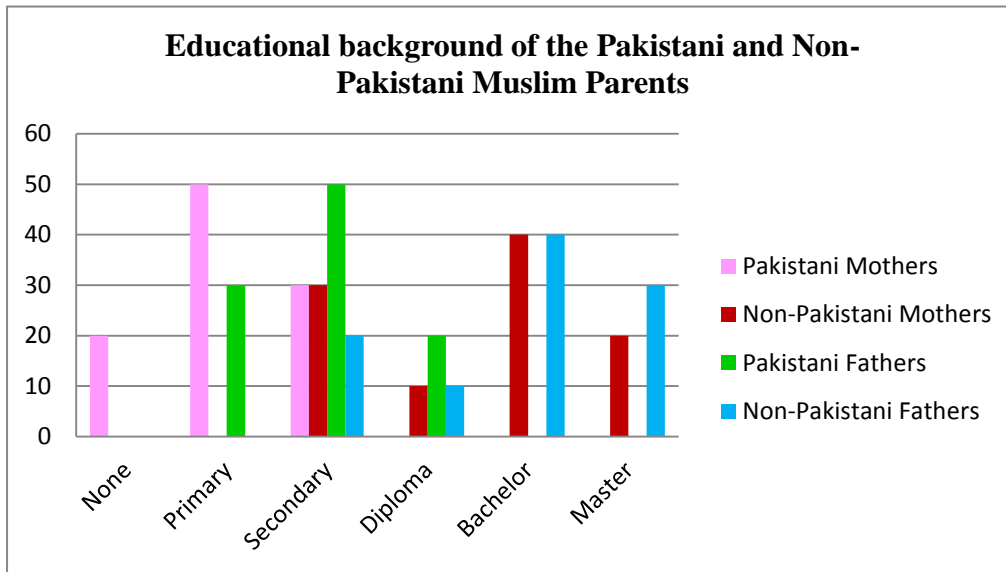
Signature of participant

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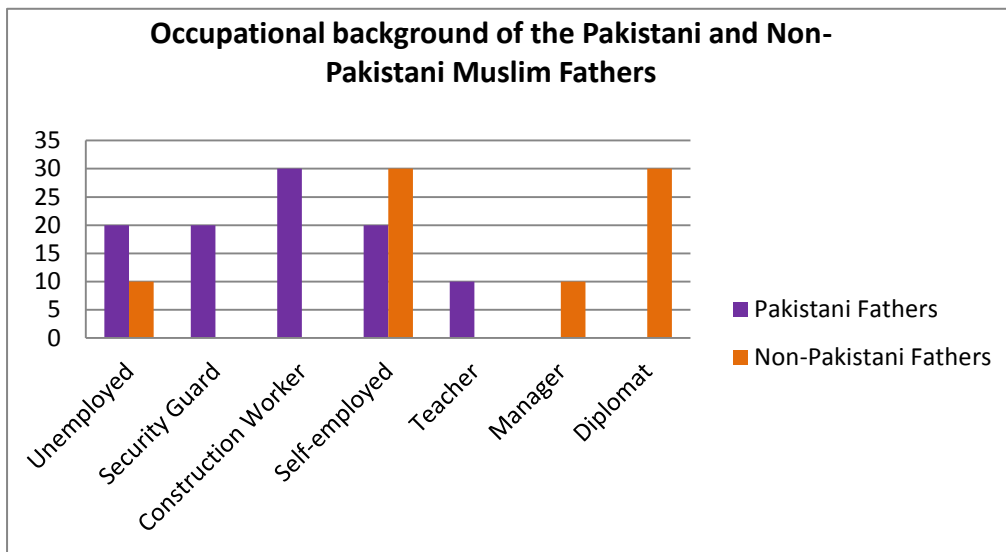
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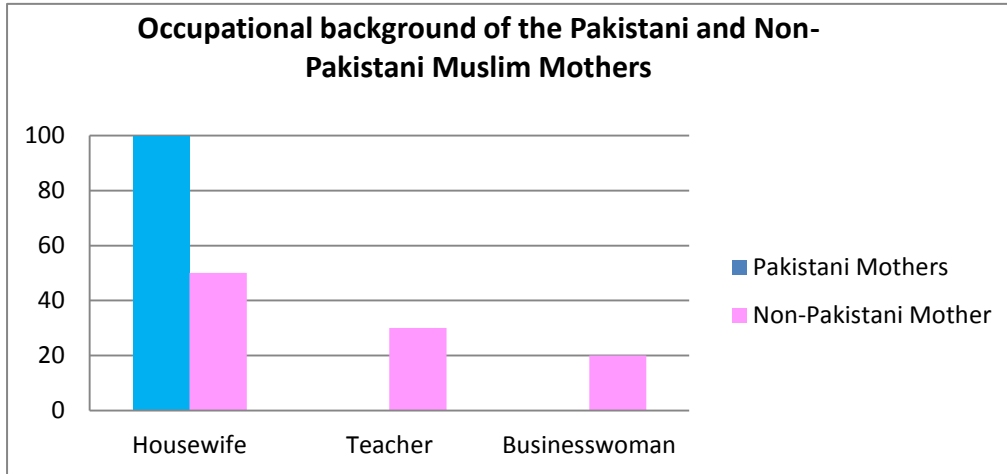
**Appendix 13: Figures 4 – 7**



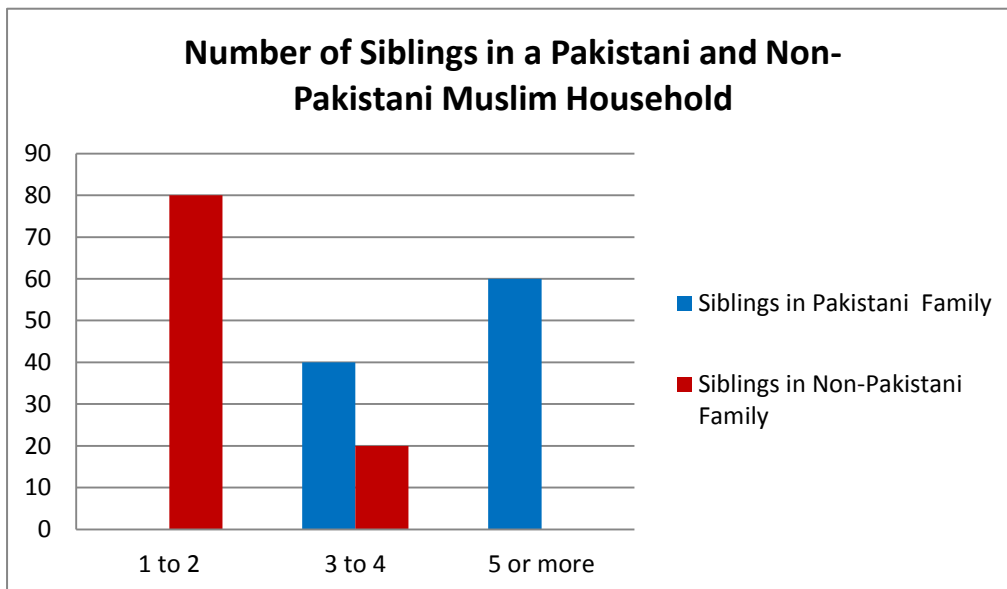
**Figure 4:** Educational background of the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim parents



**Figure 5:** Occupational background of the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim fathers



**Figure 6:** Occupational background of the Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim mothers



**Figure 7:** Number of Siblings in a Pakistani and Non-Pakistani Muslim Household