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Muslim Women Don't See Themselves as Oppressed, Survey Finds

By HELENA ANDREWS

WASHINGTON, June 7 — Muslim women do not think they are conditioned to accept second-class status or view themselves as oppressed, according to a survey released Tuesday by The Gallup Organization.

According to the poll, conducted in 2005, a strong majority of Muslim women believe they should have the right to vote without influence, work outside the home and serve in the highest levels of government. In more than 8,000 face-to-face interviews conducted in eight predominantly Muslim countries, the survey found that many women in the Muslim world did not see sex issues as a priority because other issues were more pressing.

When asked what they resented most about their own societies, a majority of Muslim women polled said that a lack of unity among Muslim nations, violent extremism, and political and economic corruption were their main concerns. The hijab, or head scarf, and burqa, the garment covering face and body, seen by some Westerners as tools of oppression, were never mentioned in the women's answers to the open-ended questions, the poll analysts said.

Concerning women's rights in general, most Muslim women polled associated sex equality with the West. Seventy-eight percent of Moroccan women, 71 percent of Lebanese women and 48 percent of Saudi women polled linked legal equality with the West. Still, a majority of the respondents did not think adopting Western values would help the Muslim world's political and economic progress.

The most frequent response to the question, "What do you admire least about the West?" was the general perception of moral decay, promiscuity and pornography that pollsters called the "Hollywood image" that is regarded as degrading to women.

An overwhelming majority of the women polled in each country cited "attachment to moral and spiritual values" as the best aspect of their own societies. In [Pakistan](#), 53 percent of the women polled said attachment to their religious beliefs was their country's most admirable trait. Similarly, in [Egypt](#), 59 percent of the women surveyed cited love of their religion as the best aspect.

At 97 percent, [Lebanon](#) had the highest percentage of women who said they believed they should be able to make their own voting decisions, followed by Egypt and [Morocco](#) at 95 percent. Pakistan was lowest, at 68 percent.

The survey, "What Women Want: Listening to the Voices of Muslim Women," is a part of The Gallup World Poll, which plans to survey 95 percent of the earth's population over the next century.

Dalia Mogahed, the strategic analyst of Muslim studies at The Gallup World Poll, said the new data provide fresh insight into the Muslim world, where Western perceptions generally cast women as victims. "Women's empowerment has been identified as a key goal of U.S. policy in the region," said Ms. Mogahed, adding that Muslim women's rights have generated a lot of interest without much empirical information on "what Muslim women want."

Ms. Mogahed, who was born in Egypt and wears a Islamic head scarf, rejected the idea that Muslim women had been brainwashed by the dominant male culture, citing as proof the fact that women freely stated that they deserved certain rights.

"In every culture there is a dominant narrative, and in many cases it is constructed by people in power who happen to be men," Ms. Mogahed said.

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