

Research Articles

Perceiving University Education as More Important for Men than for Women: Gender Differences and Predictors of this Perception in Muslim Societies

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Abstract

Education for women in Muslim societies had been discussed widely. However, it remains unclear if the perception of the importance of university education in Muslim societies and its predictors are different between men and women. Therefore, this research examined the following misogynistic perception among both genders: university education is more important for men than for women. This research aimed to determine gender differences and predictors of this perception. Sample populations were from Malaysia ($N=820$), Singapore ($N=320$), India ($N=447$), and Pakistan ($N=1195$). Mean difference test and binomial logistic regression analysis were conducted. The results revealed that more than half of the men agreed that they perceived university education as more important for men than for women. Over half of the women had the same perception. Some demographic variables were significant predictors of perceiving university education to be more important for men than for women, albeit inconsistent based on groups and countries. Some of the findings included being religious predicted less likelihood of misogynistic perception in countries such as Malaysia and Pakistan, but not in the others. Consistently, for both genders, perceptions concerning men's superiority and women's role being at home predicted the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. This suggests the intricate influence of the perception of ability and gender stereotype among Muslims when it concerns university education. Further studies are necessary to understand the rationale behind these predictors.

Keywords: Islam, women in higher education, sexist attitude, gender roles, gender inequality

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Theoretical Background

University education among women had been a topic of interest among scholars (Becker et al., 2010; Fox, 2001). At times, it is even part of contentious topics in societies, especially among Muslims (Hamdan, 2005; Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2015). This is important because of how gender role is perceived for women in Muslim societies (Asadullah et al., 2019; Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2010). In some cases, women are barred from education due to families perceiving it as being not important and unnecessary (Saha, 2013; Shah & Khurshid, 2019). Today, the previously accepted paradigm had been undergoing a shift (Jones, 2017). Women are increasingly becoming highly educated in Asia, which is also true in Muslim societies in the region (Zainal, 2018). However, this does not mean that the current situation has changed entirely. Islam has been and is still being misconstrued to assert dominance over women in many societies (Shah & Khurshid, 2019). In the first place, Quran and Sunnah—the two primary sources of Islamic teachings—emphasize education as a universal right even among women (Abukari, 2014; Al-Hariri, 1987). Accordingly, if education is an Islamic right and virtue for all, then Muslim women deserve education, including at the university level. Hence, it is only natural that Muslim societies and their government to provide equal access and opportunities to all levels of education.

However, among Muslim women in India, traditions and gender roles seem to be the factor hindering getting education (Menon, 1979). When Muslim women of Pakistani Punjabi background living in Scotland were interviewed, the majority of them agreed that education was important for both genders (Siann & Khalid, 1984). Being a minority in a western country



may have influenced their worldview, other than the social norm. Furthermore, the religion, Islam, may also be an influencing factor, especially if the country adopted a strict version of the Islamic law (Rahman, 2012). However, in a more recent study, this effect was found to be less significant, especially as Muslim countries became wealthier (McClendon et al., 2018). At the individual level, if a Muslim boy comes from a wealthy family, he is more likely to go to school; while among the poor, it is more likely for the girls than for the boys (Sengupta & Rooj, 2018). Other studies had looked into the education system, gender stereotype, and comparing the perception of abilities (Asadullah et al., 2019; Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2010).

Although there is research on gender and education in the context of Muslims (e.g., Hamdan, 2005; Jaschok & Chan, 2009), there are still research areas ripe for researchers to delve into. One such research growth area is on perceiving the importance of university education based on gender and its predictors, especially in comparing the results of Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority populations. It remains unclear to what extent men and women have a favorable view of one gender over the other in having a university education, specifically the perception that university education is more important for men than for women. Therefore, further research is required to understand this misogynistic perception within the context of Muslims better.

Thus, this research attempted to address this paucity by expanding toward Muslim populations from several countries in examining the following research questions: (a) Do Muslim men and women perceive university education to be more important for men than for women? (b) What are the predictors of perceiving that university education is more important for men than for women?

Gender and Discrimination

Many countries had attempted to improve educational attainment among women. At the national level, India introduced inclusive education policies for castes that were discriminated (Cassan, 2019). However, when assessed based on gender among the castes, the policies primarily affected men positively, but not women (Cassan, 2019). Even though the policies are inclusive in nature, women do not benefit from it. This may be due to how education in general for women is not viewed in a positive light. This was also the situation in Bangladesh where the students of both genders from religious schools viewed females to be less favorable with regards to ability and the importance of having higher education (Asadullah et al., 2019). They also viewed the position of leadership to be more suitable for men than

women, and that former as more intelligent. This was attributed due to the teachers employed being less experienced and socially conservative, which suggested they were imposing their personal views to the students.

Gender, Marriage, and Family

Other than the type of teachers and the education system, cultural practices can also be a contributing factor leading to education attainment among women (Ashraf et al., 2019; Roy, 2015). In Indonesia and Zambia, educational attainment for females has a unique implication. Instead of perceiving it as less desirable, those who practice bride price—a form of payment prior to a marriage to be claimed by the bride and her family to the groom and his family—view higher educational attainment as an investment that increases the bride's desirability. The higher the education of a female, the higher the bride price her family can claim (Ashraf et al., 2019). The people that were observed in Indonesia and Zambia were also more supportive of education policies (Ashraf et al., 2019).

It is different in India, where families favor spending on education for males over females (Saha, 2013). However, at the same time, with reforms on inheritance law to provide for females equally with males, things are now changing; although not in the way the law intended it to be (Roy, 2015). Instead of dividing the inheritance equally, families attempted to circumvent the legal system by gifting their wealth to the male children, while compensating to the female children by providing higher education to them or higher dowries. Unlike in Indonesia and Zambia as earlier discussed, in India, the family of the bride will be the one paying the groom as compensation in the form of a dowry. Brides who have higher education would be paying a lower dowry to the groom and his family (Roy, 2015).

In fact, education for women is not without merits when concerning marriage and family. A mother's education can affect the survival likelihood of children (Bhuiya & Streatfield, 1991). However, the survival likelihood is different depending on the gender of the child, suggesting discrimination based on cultural norm and perception on gender (Bhuiya & Streatfield, 1991). Some studies had also shown that women education having outcomes such as on fertility in Turkey (Güneş, 2016) and Uganda (Bbaale & Mpuga, 2011). To a certain extent, education has also been linked to delay in marriage and childbearing (Güneş, 2016; Jones, 2017).



Gender and Religion

Religion can be confounding and complex. One study had observed religion showing conflicting effects on women (Norton & Tomal, 2009). For example, Protestant enhances women educational attainment, Buddhism only affects higher education attainment, Catholic only reduces secondary educational attainment, and Islam generally reduces women educational attainment. Due to the mixed findings, Norton and Tomal (2009, p. 981) argued that “the data seem to suggest that religion is a fruitful area for inquiry in enhancing our understanding of the substantial dispersion of female educational levels and the gender gap in human capital accumulation. Religion appears relevant in accounting for some patterns. Economic behavior does not take place in a vacuum. Context counts. For female education, religion is a big part of the context.”

Gender in the Workplace

The economy in Asia can be developed further by investing in women education (Hassan & Cooray, 2015). In order to promote this view, normalizing the gender gap in workforce in a region where there are fewer women employees, gender-based policies have been recommended (Kemp, 2013; Tatli et al., 2013). In the Asia Pacific region, gender quota should be part of a talent management strategy to attract and retain a pool of high performing female employees (Tatli et al., 2013). In the United Arab Emirates, an effective talent management strategy based on gender has also been recommended (Kemp, 2013).

Gender and Education

The gender situation has changed in education, i.e., more females than males enrolled in universities in countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2015). The same is observed in Southeast Asia such as in Brunei Darussalam (Aminnuddin, 2020b). It has been hypothesized that the reverse gender gap is less due to the labor market and family, and more due to females perceiving the necessary entry-level to the labor force is by graduating at the higher education level, as well as to deal with discrimination after schooling (Lauglo & Liu, 2018). This was found in a study in Brazil where education increased productivity among women, increasing their standing while reducing discrimination and earnings gap compared to men (Tai & Bagolin, 2019). The same was noted in Pakistan (Malik & Courtney, 2011).

However, at the same time, marriage can also be viewed as a barrier to education among female (Jones, 2017). It is also due to education that the culture of arranged marriage is less practiced nowadays in the majority of Southeast Asia countries (Jones, 2017). Another factor is urbanization, which can positively affect women educational attainment (Norton & Tomal, 2009), although this was not the case in some societies (Shah & Khurshid, 2019). In India, the female politicians were noted to be linked to female residents in their jurisdiction attaining better education, although this effect was only observed in urban areas and not in rural areas (Clots-Figuerasa, 2012). In Pakistan, women claimed not only did higher educational attainment provided economic independence, but it also improved their standing in family and society which further empowered them to stand against discrimination (Malik & Courtney, 2011).

Therefore, based on current literature, various factors could affect women educational attainment up to higher education—for example, social norms (Hamdan, 2005), religion (Abukari, 2014; Al-Hariri, 1987), and the country itself (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2015). However, it is not known concerning gender differences and predictors of the following misogynistic perception among both genders: university education is more important for men than for women. Consequently, the perspective this research aimed to probe was on this perception that had not been examined in this manner before. What do Muslim men and women think about the importance of university education? Do they perceive university education as important for men and women equally? Do women perceive university education as more important for men than for women? Are there any other similar perceptions linked to this? Are there any differences between countries? These are matters that this research proposed to delve into, in order to understand the perception of the importance of university education between Muslim men and women.

Method

Data Set

This research employed Wave 6 data of the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2014). The next wave of the survey, Wave 7, had yet to be completed. Hence, data from Wave 6 was used. Although data collection was done all over the world, this research narrowed down the focus to Muslims. An important criterion in screening was for at least 200 Muslims (100



males and 100 females) in a single country. Following a screening, several countries were excluded due to not achieving the minimum number, such as Rwanda and Russia. Furthermore, while countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, and Egypt are dominantly populated by Muslims, these countries were excluded due to several necessary items were not included in the data collection. One such example was on identifying the religion of the person. At this point, there were 20 countries available.

However, the emphasis was for countries within the Asia Pacific region. Out of the 20 countries, the identified countries for this research were Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Pakistan. The selection is desirable because, first, Malaysia and Singapore are part of the Southeast Asia region, while India and Pakistan within the South Asia region. The countries within their respective region are comparatively similar, having shared history and background.

Although Wave 6 data had been completed in 2014, the information is still valuable for researchers and had been used recently in various context (e.g., Aminnuddin, 2019a; Bomhoff & Siah, 2019; Coşgel et al., 2019; Jung, 2018). Because of this, there is no issue on the data being outdated. The importance of using this data is further strengthened by the argument that the information required by this research could be highly difficult to get due to its sensitive nature. For example, as explained earlier concerning country screening, in several Muslim countries, some questions were barred from the survey, resulting in incomplete necessary data for this research.

The above arguments for this research to use an existing data set has been well justified. There is no issue on this aspect. Hence, using this data set would provide valuable information to literature concerning the importance of university education in Muslim societies, including comparison based on gender. Details of the original methodology of the survey and data set can be accessed online, with no further ethical approval is necessary (see Inglehart et al., 2014).

Data Coding

From the data set, the dependent variable was taken from the variable assessing the perception that '*A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.*' Responses that were '*Strongly disagree*' and '*Disagree*' were coded as 0, while '*Agree*' and '*Strongly agree*' were coded as 1. Hence, if a response was 1, then it reflected the perception that the

respondent perceived university education as more important for men than for women. While if it was 0, the respondent perceived this was not the case. The same approach was done with all variables and detailed out below.

Coding was done on gender: '*Female*' was coded as 2, while '*Male*' remained as 1. No changes were made on age. On education, responses indicating the person did not complete secondary education were coded as 0; while responses indicating the person completed secondary education or above were coded as 1. On the importance of religion, responses were reverse-coded; a lower number indicated religion was not important, while a higher number indicated it was important. A second variable concerning religiosity was on the religiousness of the person. Those who responded that they were '*A religious person*' were coded as 1, while '*Not a religious person*' and '*An atheist*' were coded as 0. On the importance of traditional values taken from the item '*Tradition is important to this person,*' all responses were reverse coded to indicate higher number reflecting increasing importance.

For independent variables concerning perception, there were four perceptions. For the first perception, it is on the perception of the democracy level of the country. This was assessed with the following question in the data set: '*How democratically is this country being governed today?*' Originally the ratings are 1-5 being undemocratic and 6-10 being democratic. It had been reverse-coded to reflect a higher number being more undemocratic. The other three items used in this research were '*On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do,*' '*On the whole, men make better business executives than women do,*' and '*When a mother works for pay, the children suffer.*' Responses that were '*Strongly disagree*' and '*Disagree*' were coded as 0, while '*Agree*' and '*Strongly disagree*' were coded as 1. These respectively represent the following perceptions: one perceives that men are better political leaders, one perceives that men are better business executives, and one perceives that children will suffer if women work outside. The first two concerns the perceptions of men's superiority, while the third perception concerns gender role, i.e., women's role as a mother and a caretaker at home.

Participants

The following were the samples from countries involved in the analyzed data: 820 Muslims in Malaysia (404 women and 416 men), 320 Muslims in Singapore (178 women and 142 men), 447 Muslims in India (207 women and 240 men), and 1,195 Muslims in Pakistan (579



women and 616 men). A summary of the sample population and responses was presented as an appendix ([Appendix A](#)).

Statistical Analysis

Data from participants in two regions were to be analyzed: Southeast Asia and South Asia. In Southeast Asia, the countries analyzed were Malaysia and Singapore. In South Asia, the countries were India and Pakistan.

This research employed two tests: mean differences test and binomial logistic regression. Firstly, mean differences test was conducted. This test compared if there were any differences in mean values between men and women in all four countries. The results provided details on the mean and standard deviation of each gender concerning the perception they had concerning university education as more important for men than for women. The information was then analyzed to show whether the differences were statistically significant or not. Effect size using Cohen's *d* was also provided for the gender differences in each country.

Secondly, binomial logistic regression was conducted. Analysis for each country was done, and results were presented for each gender, as well as when pooled together. Therefore, for each country, three groups were analyzed: women, men, and both. For Pakistan, the analysis excluded the variable '*A religious person*.' This was because all participant said they were religious, except for three people. This would affect the result in a skewed manner; hence, this was excluded. Results included odds-ratio (*OR*), providing information on which variables could statistically predict a person perceiving university education as more important for men than for women, and the likelihood of this.



Results

Mean Differences

The mean differences of the perception that education is more important for men than for women are presented together with effect size (Table 1).

Table 1

Gender differences—the participants perceived that education was more important for men

Region	Country	Women		Men		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Southeast Asia	Malaysia	2.33	0.84	2.62	0.88	-4.75	818	< .001	0.34
	Singapore	2.03	0.85	2.24	0.82	-2.23	318	< .05	0.25
Southern Asia	India	2.45	1.03	2.57	1.08	-1.15	413	.25	0.11
	Pakistan	2.54	0.99	2.69	1.01	-2.56	1150	< .05	0.15

In all countries, it was found that men, compared to women, had higher mean on agreeing that university education was more important for them than for women. The differences were significant in Malaysia, Singapore, and Pakistan (see Table 1). Only in India, the differences were not statistically significant ($p = .25$). Comparing all countries, the mean ranged between 2.03 and 2.54 for women and between 2.24 and 2.69 for men. The country with the highest mean among women was India. For men, it was also India. For the lowest mean, it was Singapore for both women and men. The country with the largest effect size in differences was Malaysia, while the smallest effect size was observed in India, although the differences were not statistically significant for the latter.

Binomial Logistic Regression

Results from binomial logistic regressions were presented based on region: Southeast Asia (Table 2) and South Asia (Table 3). Predictors of having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women and their *ORs* were identified and presented.

In Malaysia, the model correctly classified 74% of cases in predicting having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. Among women, it was



80.9%, while among men it was 71.2%. If a person was religious ($OR = 0.58$) or valued tradition as being important ($OR = 0.76$), there would be a decrease in the likelihood that the person would perceive university education as more important for men, compared to not being religious or not valuing tradition as important. When the person had the perception that men were better business executives, then the person had a 7.10 times greater likelihood to perceive university education being more important for men than for women, compared to when the person did not have the former perception. Other predictors of having the perception of university education being more important for men than for women included perceiving men as better political leaders ($OR = 2.76$) and that children will suffer if women work outside ($OR = 2.32$).

Table 2

Southeast Asia—Education perceived as more important for men

		Women		Men		Both	
		OR	p	OR	p	OR	p
Malaysia	Male					1.29	.14
	Age	1.02	.09	0.99	.24	1.00	.78
	Did not complete secondary education	0.59	.07	1.03	.92	0.78	.21
	Religion is important	1.60	.49	1.30	.57	1.50	.28
	A religious person	0.59	< .05	0.58	< .05	0.58	< .01
	Tradition is important	0.69	< .01	0.80	< .05	0.76	< .001
	Perceives country as undemocratic	0.89	.14	1.00	.95	0.96	.35
	Perceives that men are better political leaders	3.49	< .001	2.27	< .01	2.76	< .001
	Perceives that men are better business executives	7.38	< .001	7.08	< .001	7.10	< .001
	Perceives that children will suffer if women work outside	3.39	< .001	1.75	< .05	2.32	< .001
Singapore	Male					1.96	< .05
	Age	0.98	.17	0.97	.07	0.98	< .05
	Did not complete secondary education	2.19	.10	4.40	< .01	2.75	< .01
	Religion is important	0.94	.88	0.53	.19	0.80	.43
	A religious person	1.87	.27	0.40	.12	0.93	.85
	Tradition is important	1.04	.83	0.83	.39	0.90	.43
	Perceives country as undemocratic	1.16	.27	0.95	.75	1.06	.54
	Perceives that men are better political leaders	1.99	.26	4.37	< .05	3.41	< .01
	Perceives that men are better business executives	5.73	< .01	6.18	< .01	5.24	< .001
	Perceives that children will suffer if women work outside	0.83	.67	3.15	< .05	1.44	.26



When gender-based models were tested, similar predictors were observed, although the *ORs* varied. For example, men were 1.75 times more likely to agree that university education was more important for them if they perceived children would suffer if women worked outside, compared to an *OR* of 3.39 for women.

In Singapore, the model correctly classified 78.5% of cases in predicting having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. It correctly classified 78.4% among women and 80.3% among men. Although gender, age, and education were not predictors in Malaysia, they were in Singapore. Men were 1.96 times more likely to perceive university education as more important for them than for women. Men who did not complete secondary education were 4.40 times more likely to perceive this, compared to men who completed secondary education. However, among women, education was not a predictor for having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. When both genders were grouped together, the likelihood decreased to 2.75. The older both were, the likelihood also decreased, albeit slightly (*OR* = 0.98) and almost negligible, even when the analysis was done on each gender separately. On perceiving that men were better political leaders (*OR* = 4.37) and that children would suffer if women worked outside (*OR* = 3.15), only among men, but not among women, the two perceptions could predict having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. However, when both men and women were grouped together, the result became statistically significant: perceiving men were better political leaders was a predictor (*OR* = 3.42) of having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. In all instances, perceiving men as better business executives was found to be a predictor of the perception that university education was more important for men than for women; the *ORs* were 5.73 among women, 6.18 among men, and 5.24 when grouped together.



Table 3

South Asia—Education perceived as more important for men

		Women		Men		Both	
		OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>	OR	<i>p</i>
India	Male					1.15	.56
	Age	1.01	.65	0.99	.46	1.00	.87
	Did not complete secondary education	1.60	.28	2.11	< .05	1.84	< .05
	Religion is important	1.30	.45	0.93	.79	1.06	.77
	A religious person	0.55	.32	1.09	.88	0.78	.55
	Tradition is important	0.95	.67	0.98	.85	0.99	.89
	Perceives country as undemocratic	1.00	.97	1.13	.10	1.07	.20
	Perceives that men are better political leaders	1.83	.16	1.14	.75	1.43	.21
	Perceives that men are better business executives	2.44	< .05	4.02	< .001	3.25	< .001
	Perceives that children will suffer if women work outside	1.89	.19	2.22	< .05	1.99	< .05
Pakistan	Male					0.99	.96
	Age	0.99	.09	1.01	.13	1.00	.85
	Did not complete secondary education	0.96	.84	1.07	.71	1.04	.78
	Religion is important	0.66	.06	0.42	< .05	0.59	< .01
	A religious person	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Tradition is important	0.96	.60	0.83	< .05	0.90	< .05
	Perceives country as undemocratic	1.10	< .01	1.15	< .001	1.13	< .001
	Perceives that men are better political leaders	1.63	< .05	3.05	< .001	2.14	< .001
	Perceives that men are better business executives	1.94	< .01	1.73	< .05	1.73	< .001
	Perceives that children will suffer if women work outside	0.81	.28	0.55	< .01	0.69	< .01

The model correctly classified 67.3% of cases in India (68.8% among women and 68.6% among men) in predicting having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. Only three predictors were found for the population in India that could predict having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. The predictors were level of education ($OR = 1.84$), perceiving that



men were better business executives ($OR = 3.25$), and that children would suffer if women worked outside ($OR = 1.99$). The same predictors were observed among men, while only one was a predictor among women.

In Pakistan, the model correctly classified 64.4% of cases in predicting having the perception that university education was more important for men than for women. Among women, it was 63.2% of cases, and among men, it was 67.5% of cases. Compared to the model analyzing predictors of having the perception that university education as being more important for men than for women in India, relatively more predictors were identified for the population in Pakistan. Perceiving the superiority of men as political leaders ($OR = 2.14$) and as business executives ($OR = 1.73$) were predictors, including the perception of gender stereotype which was perceiving children would suffer if women worked outside ($OR = 0.69$). The same predictors were also found among men. Similarly, among women, the two perceptions regarding the superiority of men were predictors of perceiving university education as more important for men than for women. However, the perception that children would suffer if women worked outside was not a predictor. While education was a predictor in India, it was not in Pakistan. However, the variable concerning viewing religion as important, it was a predictor ($OR = 0.59$). Similarly, tradition was a predictor ($OR = 0.90$). Both were predictors among men and when both genders pooled together, but not when women were analyzed alone.

Discussion

Using the data from Wave 6 of the World Values Survey, this research examined gender differences and predictors of perceiving university education as more important for men than for women. In Southeast Asia and South Asia, when gender was considered among the sample population, this perception was more frequent among men than among women. Majority among both genders agreed that university education was more important for men than for women, as indicated by all mean values being above 2, when analyzed separately by gender and pooled together. This is consistent with similar studies that had found both genders having similar views concerning education (e.g., Asadullah et al., 2019). The differences observed were statistically significant only in Malaysia, Singapore, and Pakistan, but not in India.



However, an interesting finding at this point is that the mean differences were not considerably large. Initially, it was assumed that men would score significantly high on this (perceiving university education as more important for men than for women), while among women it would be low. However, this was not the case for women, and the majority of the women agreed on university education being more important for men than for their own gender. Majority of the women had this misogynistic perception. Due to this, it is argued here that instilling confidence and empowerment among girls and women are among the priorities when it comes to addressing this issue. Changing the mindset of women is important, other than to address the issue among men themselves. It should be a two-way action, rather than assigning the blame and solution only on one specific gender.

The notion of the importance of university education for men over women is further strengthened by a society's culture that it is not necessary for women to have a university education (Saha, 2013; Shah & Khurshid, 2019). Their role is emphasized as a family caretaker instead of having a career outside. This may be due to religious beliefs, societal norm, and tradition. For example, in many cultures, men are viewed as earners and women as family caretakers: men go out and make a living for the family, while women stay at home taking care of the household (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2010). This is also linked to religious beliefs, such as in the case where Islam has outlined certain gender roles for men and women: men as earners, and women as family caretakers (Sakai & Fauzia, 2016). However, the concept itself is not rigid with Muslims having differing narrative concerning gender roles (Piela, 2010), with changes due to external factors such as cultural differences and economic reasons (Samani, 2016). For example, in Islam, women are viewed as more suitable to have a caretaker role such as teachers, and sometimes certain roles are necessary for women to hold, such as being a doctor for other women (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). In highly democratic countries, women tend to have better rights and access to education due to democracy (Cooray & Potrafke, 2011). Even so, democracy is not the only factor. For example, following the transition to democracy in South Africa, success of inclusive education policy is limited with more need to be done (Engelbrecht, 2006).

Therefore, there is support for the discussed factors as predictors of this perception: university education is more important for men than for women. The factors include religiosity, the importance of tradition to a person, and whether the country is democratic. Similarly, other perceptions of the superiority of men over women and gender stereotype may also be predictors.

Hence, several predictors were identified and examined using binomial logistic regression analysis. The findings showed that gender, age, education level, religion, tradition, and perception of the country's democracy were not consistent predictors. In one country, it might be a predictor, but in others, it might not be one. The same was found when analysis was done at the gender level.

One such predictor was for the person to not complete secondary education. In Singapore, among men, the *OR* was 4.40. However, among women, the *OR* was not statistically significant. This may be due to men in Singapore feeling threatened if women have a university education while men do not. This explanation is further strengthened when it was observed that being a male was a predictor in Singapore, but not in other countries. The same predictor—not completing secondary education—was observed in India, but this time, gender was not a predictor. This might be due to the increasing trend that families in India are willing to spend more money to send their female children to pursue higher education as compensation for not giving them inheritance (Roy, 2015).

Another significant predictor was for the person to be religious. It predicted less likelihood of perceiving university education as more important for men than for women in Malaysia and Pakistan. These two countries are dominantly Muslims, unlike Singapore and India where Muslims are the minority (Pew Research Center, 2012). This suggests that where the influence of Islam is dominant, education for women may be viewed positively. This provides support that Islam is not the reason behind low educational attainment. However, this present finding contradicts with a previous study where education among Muslim women is low where Islamic law is implemented (Rahman, 2012), although this may be due to the differences in interpretation of Islamic law (Abukari, 2014). It can also be due to historical and cultural reasons, rather than religion itself (McClendon et al., 2018). In fact, other studies had discussed how Islam and government protected the rights of women, for example as politicians (Abdul Shukor, 2016), judges (Md Noor & Che Omar, 2016; Mohamed Adil & Roslan, 2016), and working mothers (Mohd Zin, 2017).

However, in Singapore and India, being religious was not observed as a predictor of having the misogynistic perception of university education being more important for men than for women. Even though the sample population in Singapore and India were Muslims, they lived in a country that has different dominant religious values. This may negate or lessen their personal religious values and beliefs. This decreasing effect is consistent with previous



studies concerning Muslim minorities (e.g., [Carol & Milewski, 2017](#)) and the enhancing effect of religion where it is dominant ([Aminnuddin, 2019b, 2019c, 2020a](#); [Mohamed Noh et al., 2014](#); [Wan Husin & Zul Kernain, 2019](#)).

Among Muslim women in Singapore and Pakistan, but not in Malaysia and India, if they perceived children would suffer if they had a career, the likelihood of perceiving university education was more important for men decreased. This result is extremely confounding, even if not statistically significant. Initially, the expected result was that the perception concerning children would suffer if women had careers outside the home would then predict a greater likelihood of perceiving men as deserving university education more. This is a common stereotype of gender role. However, in this research, it predicted less likelihood. One explanation is that women may not see any relationship between taking care of children and importance of university education, believing the latter is a gender-free universal right, even if they have kids and a career outside, and even if they think children will suffer. This may also be due to a change in the paradigm where the rate of university education among women is rising together with the delay in marriage. Furthermore, this can also be linked to how Islam views education as a universal right, regardless of gender. However, this may have been misconstrued in some societies to assert the superiority of men over women; although women have recently been observed to be able to challenge this through religious arguments challenging this misconstrued religious ideas and gender stereotype ([Zainal, 2018](#)).

This is not uncommon in Muslim societies. For example, one ethnography study narrated the following: “She shared how people in her ancestral village ensured that both boys and girls received education irrespective of the resources that were available to them. She believed that this showed how the community understood and valued education as an Islamic virtue. They were willing to make sacrifices to educate their children because they saw it as their duty as Muslims,” ([Shah & Khurshid, 2019, p. 467](#)). This was a comparison made on what the person experienced in her village—which was far away from urban area—while pointing out it was the opposite at where she was staying at that time. At the latter, education was not viewed favorably for women, even though it was more urban. One of the approaches Muslim women in these societies had consistently argued for was to create and promote the awareness of education for both genders as a universal Islamic right and virtue ([Shah & Khurshid, 2019](#)).

Perceptions of men's superiority over women were mostly consistent predictors of having the perception of university education being more important for men than for women. In Southeast Asia—Malaysia and Singapore—one predictor stood out in all three groupings due to high *OR*, which was to perceive that men were better business executives. In Malaysia, respectively among women, men, and both, the *ORs* were 7.38, 7.08, 7.10; while in Singapore, they were 5.73, 6.18, and 5.24. The same predictor was observed in South Asia—India and Pakistan—there were relatively high *ORs* among women, men, and both; in India, the *ORs* were 2.44, 4.02, and 3.25; and in Pakistan, they were 1.94, 1.73, and 1.73. Among all four countries, only in Pakistan the *ORs* were relatively low. It is argued here that for this perception to be a predictor, it reflects the influence of a person's self-judgment of own ability based on gender. This finding suggests that men believe they have better abilities than women. Conversely, it can be interpreted that women are of the opinion they have lower ability than men. All these may also be argued as evidence that the mindset of men's superiority is highly prevalent in Muslim society, even among women and when it concerns education.

Conclusions

This research examined the differences in perception among Muslim men and women, concerning the perception of university education as more important for the former than for the latter. This research also examined the variables that can predict this. Results showed that both genders, majority of them, viewed university education as being more important for men than for women. Demographic factors were not consistently predictors. In some cases, it even predicted less likelihood, such as religiosity and tradition. Furthermore, some predictors were significant in one country but not in another. Consistent predictors were having perceptions of superiority in the ability of men compared to women, as well as gender role stereotype. However, interpretations of results need to be done carefully, keeping in mind the context of the population.

Some insights had also been discussed. For example, the finding suggests where Muslims are the majority, religion can be a predictor, but not where Muslims are the minority. Religion showed less likelihood of perceiving that university education as more important for men. This can be interpreted that religion—in this case, Islam—to be supportive of women pursuing education even at the university level.



In all countries examined, ability is being attributed to gender, and this belief seems to be strong and prevalent among both genders—i.e., the perception of superiority of men over women—for example, both men and women viewed women as being less able when it comes to being a politician or a business executive. Hence, because these positions commonly need higher education as a qualification, it may cause a high prevalence of perception concerning university education as more important for men than for women. The same argument can be extended toward gender stereotype of women being a mother and a home caretaker, instead of having a career outside.

This research had identified gender differences concerning the perception of university education in Muslim societies. The research also found evidence to support variables that can predict this misogynistic perception. The findings in this research had contributed by expanding literature concerning education and women in Muslim societies in several countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia.

Limitations and Implications

Several limitations were identified. Firstly, the populations were from Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Pakistan. While the populations can represent the region of Southeast Asia and South Asia to a certain extent, this needs to be treated with proper care. Even predictors between countries in the same region were found to be different. Hence, findings from one country cannot be generalized to others. Secondly, while this research used an existing data set and had been justified earlier, it is still a dated data set, nevertheless. Things may have changed at present. Hence, once data set for Wave 7 of the World Values Survey had been published, it should be analyzed to make a comparative analysis, especially time series analysis.

This research had also found some findings that have implications in real life. Within this population, in Southeast Asia and South Asia, it is important for belief concerning capability based on gender to be addressed. This begins during childhood and what they are to be taught. Children should not be brought up with the notion that girls are less superior in terms of capability and learning. The notion of equality in capability and learning—or in their pursuit of them—should be emphasized repetitively, and that it is not determined by gender. This will ensure it becomes part of their worldview as they grow up. As this research concerned Muslims, it is also emphasized that education, including university education, should not be limited to just men. Education should be a universal right even for women, and this should

always be attributed as an Islamic right and virtue to enhance inclusivity. In the workplace, an organization should avoid hiring, giving promotion, or assigning work based on gender, unless the disparity is too great, or it is not contextually suitable. By making sure that this does not happen, and that everyone receives equal treatment, it will create preventive and regulatory mechanisms within the workforce. If not handled properly, in the worst case, it will foster misogyny.

Several questions arise from this research. How can we educate women—as well as men—that university education is important for both genders? How can we emphasize that education—whether primary, secondary, or university education—is a universal right and that it is not just for men? How can the perception that education for women is also an Islamic right and virtue? How can this be done while considering the sensitivity of cultural aspects, such as tradition and societal norm? Can a balance be achieved between career and family? These are some of the questions that future research can attempt to address and add to existing literature.

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Appendix A

Summary of sample population and response

Variable	Malaysia (N)	Singapore (N)	India (N)	Pakistan (N)
Education				
Completed secondary education	522	162	162	430
Did not complete secondary education	298	154	283	765
Religion is important				
Not at all important	0	5	10	7
Not very important	1	8	4	14
Rather important	38	68	69	95
Very important	781	239	352	1071
A religious person				
Not religious	346	67	48	3
Religious	474	228	389	1191
Tradition is important				
Not at all like me	12	12	30	8
Not like me	25	8	43	60
A little like me	72	31	0	125
Somewhat like me	148	107	115	233
Like me	276	86	0	371
Very much like me	287	77	224	376
Perception of democracy in the country				
1 = Completely democratic	126	21	61	158
2	93	33	21	106
3	218	85	73	219
4	134	82	86	219
5	135	49	66	139
6	64	28	74	84
7	21	9	24	101
8	9	2	14	61
9	7	7	9	36
10 = Not at all democratic	13	4	16	73
Perceives that men are better political leaders				
No	224	150	152	302
Yes	596	171	236	860
Perceives that men are better business executives				
No	340	180	152	283
Yes	480	141	235	879
Perceives that children will suffer if women work outside				
No	635	174	103	347
Yes	185	146	310	835



Perceives that university education is more important for men than for women

No	447	233	229	540
Yes	373	87	186	612

Note: Age in Malaysia ($M = 39.9$, $SD = 13.93$); Singapore ($M = 39.44$, $SD = 15.76$); India ($M = 40.41$, $SD = 13.97$); Pakistan ($M = 34.45$, $SD = 11.99$).

