

# Mandatory Hijab, Religion, and Women Employment: Reality or Justification of the Hegemony?

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## Abstract

After the Islamic revolution in Iran, wearing hijab became mandatory for women in Iran by law based on the Islamic republic legal system in 1983. Many controversial debates have started since then about hijab. **Background:** Some studies mentioned that mandatory hijab excludes women from the public domain while others stated that policing hijab is necessary for Islamic society in order to make a safer society for women to participate in the public arena. So, such point of view assumes that women who are more religious and wear hijab could participate in the Islamic society after revolution easier than non-religious women who do not wear hijab. **Objective:** In this study, I want to examine the relationship between the level of religiosity of women and their employment status. **Method:** I used secondary data analysis in this study to examine this relationship. In order to conduct this study, I used the World Value Survey (WVS) 2005 dataset relate to Iran.

Keywords: Hijab, Religion, Women, Employment, Iran.

Debates on Hijab have a long discussion throughout the history of the Middle East, especially Iran. The governments have been trying to control women's ways of dressing in the public sphere based on their different points of view and ideology. In 1936, Reza Pahlavi, former king of Iran banned wearing hijab in public. In contrast, wearing the hijab became mandatory for women by law based on the Islamic republic legal system in 1983.

After Islamic revolution in 1979 Hijab was one of the most controversial issues. I found lots of messages that the hijab (cover or modesty) and revealing became one of the most pervasive symbols of the revolution, standing for Islamism, anti-imperialism and antiWesternism. The Islamic revolution was thus turning into a sexual counter-revolution, a struggle over women's sexuality. On March 29, 1979, Khomeini (the leader of Iran at the time) announced gender segregation of all beaches and sports activities, and three days later, he required all women to wear the Islamic hijab at work. Despite women's protests, wearing hijab became legally compulsory. It became a de facto national costume of Iranian women, when in 1983, the Parliament passed the Islamic Punishment Law that stipulated 74 lashes for violation of the hijab. In response to women's continued opposition to revealing, in 1995, a note to Article 139 of the Islamic Criminal Code reaffirmed governmental penalty by mandating 10 to 60 days of imprisonment against those who publicly resisted the hijab (Sedghi, 2007:199-201).

Such changes in laws toward concealing women's bodies, gender segregation and inequality became integral to state-building and its identity. In this paper I want to see if the new politics on hijab after Islamic republic helped women to participate in the social arena freely. I consider working as one important aspect of social participation. The main research question for this study is that is there a relationship between the level of religiosity of women and their employment status? In addition, the research hypothesis of this study is: there is a relationship between the level of religiosity of women and their employment status.

While many scholars believe that such laws proved in the early post-revolutionary days in the Islamic government in Iran sought to exclude women from the public domain and relegate them to the sphere of domesticity (Kian, 1997; Hoodfar, 1999; Afshar, 2000; Shirazi, 2001; Sedghi, 2007; Mirhoseiny, 2007; Keddie, 2007) the main argument of policing hijab as a compulsory law was making safer society for women who want to participate in. Since between 1941 and 1979 when Reza Shah collapsed wearing hijab was no longer an offence, but it was

a real hindrance to climbing the social ladder, a badge of backwardness and a marker of class. Hijab prejudiced the chances of advancement in work and society not only for working women but also for men, who were increasingly expected to appear with their unveiled wives at social functions. Fashionable hotels and restaurants refused to admit women wearing chador (the traditional Iranian form of hijab) and schools and universities actively discouraged it, although the headscarf was tolerated. Just as the rules and meanings of hijab became more subtle and nuanced, so did ways of promoting and identifying it in the emerging Islamic discourse. By the late 1970s, for many women hijab was a symbol of oppression and a badge of backwardness as it was transformed into a marker of protest and of a new Islamic identity (Mirhoseini, 2007:4).

So wearing hijab became a value for women and Islamic government brought up the idea that many women who are religion could participate in public easily when hijab is mandatory. In fact, wearing hijab made a safer society for women to represent themselves in the society (Hoodfar, 1994, Zahedi, 2007). The regime capitalize on all mediums of mass communication to justify hijab, propagating the link between hijab, morality, and Islamic virtue. Slogans such as “Veiling is divine duty,” “The worth of a woman is in her veil,” and “The stronghold of the Muslim woman is her veil” covered the walls of public places. Women who did not comply with hijab or who wore the hijab improperly were subjected to harassment and violence. Slogans such as “Death to the improperly veiled woman” or “The improperly veiled woman is a stain on the Islamic Republic of Iran who must be eliminated immediately” give a sense of the political atmosphere (Shirazi, 2001).

The use of the word “eliminate” indirectly authorized some Islamic zealots to attack unveiled and improperly veiled women (Zahedi, 2007:88). The early Islamization policies saw the first shift in the gender division of labor and the nature of women’s work. Women’s labor force participation decreased dramatically. Purification policies resulted in many women losing their jobs, including those who either held high-level positions under the Shah or were suspected of being monarchists. They were told to stay home and develop “Islamic consciousness” and practice modesty (Sedghi, 2007). Other women took advantage of a law mandating part-time employment for women and a severance payment edict and returned home as full-time housewives and mothers. A large number of educated and professional women left the labor force voluntarily because of modesty rules, strict gender segregation measures, and workplace harassment. As Zahedi points out “Re-veiling has served as an impetus for the

politicization of Iranian women, and they continue to contest the social meaning of the veil and protest its imposition” (Zahedi, 2007:75).

So, I could see how hijab became an indicator of a women in the public sphere after Islamic republic revolution. Based on the Islamic claim, women with proper hijab could participate freely in the society. Also, Islamic law helped the religious women to work without prejudiced negative ideas toward them from the secular eyes, while the secular women were expelled from their jobs because of their non-religion beliefs and not wearing proper hijab. Moghadam (1988) in *Women, work, and ideology in the Islamic Republic* truly address to this point that in the first two years of the Revolution, policies were enacted that adversely affected women and curtailed their participation in the public sphere. This resulted, in the first instance, in the loss of occupation by elite women, who were the main target of the regime's policies. Women's participation in the legal profession was the first and most seriously affected area. A new law barred women from acting as judges; women judges who had been appointed during the Pahlavi era were dismissed. This was followed by the removal of many secular women from top-level government posts; they were forced either to accept lower-level jobs or to retire completely. Many women in high posts resigned or retired rather than endure the hijab. So it would be a great playground for religious women who want to wear hijab to work as a citizen with high safety in the society. Examination the idea that the favorable social context for women who are more religious led them to have higher employment rate in comparison to secular women is the goal of this paper.

## Women, Religious, Employment

I found some articles which focus on the religious discrimination in workplace Rashed Ali, Yamada, and Mahmood investigated the impact of workplace discrimination on a selfselected sample of diverse Muslim women living across the United States. They try to explain their attitudes in the micro level. The results of this study revealed that workplace discrimination, job stress, social class, and religiosity were related to lower levels of job satisfaction. Implications of the results are discussed in terms of clinical intervention strategies. They found that women who chose to wear the hijab reported higher religiosity, and those who did not wear the hijab reported higher social class. Hijab-wearing women did not endorse stronger perceptions of workplace discrimination compared with Muslim women who did not wear the hijab. Women who reported higher levels of commitment to Muslim ideology,

stronger perceptions of workplace discrimination, and lower social class reported lower levels of job satisfaction in this sample (Saba Rasheed Ali, Torricia Yamada, and Amina Mahmood, 2015). Chadwick and Garrett explores the relationship between women's employment and religiosity. The hypothesis that a reciprocal relationship religion and work was tested with data from a sample between the ages of 20 and 60 years living along the Utah during the Spring of 1991. The results reveal that religiosity has a significant with LDS women's employment. Employment is related religious activity, primarily attendance and holding church position (Chadwick and Garrett, 1995). Morgan and Scanzoni (1987), however, found support for the hypothesis that religiosity is related to lower labor force participation. They surveyed 325 female college students about their current religious devoutness and their intentions to enter the labor force and pursue a career. Religious devoutness combined religious values, feelings, and activities. The researchers tested an elaborate path model that included four background factors, three mediating attitudes, and college major, along with devoutness, as predictors of intention to take and keep paid employment. Regardless of denomination, devoutness was related to lower intended labor force participation. The authors conclude that religiosity influences labor force participation. Heaton (1994) found the labor force participation rate for LDS women, whose religious values strongly favor traditional family roles, approximates the national average. However, religious beliefs were linked to work behavior as significantly more LDS women worked part time.

Most of the studies related to hijab focus on the micro level. But Hertel do his research on the meso level. Hertel (1988) attempted to test a causal link between church affiliation and labor force participation by comparing the religious affiliation of women to later labor force experience. Data from the NORC General Social Surveys from 1972 to 1985, was used to compare religious affiliation at age 16 with current affiliation at date of survey. Female respondents were placed into one of five categories: "stable religion," the same affiliation at age 16 and at survey; "stable none," no affiliation at age 16 or at the survey date; "apostates," affiliated at age 16, but not affiliated at survey; "converts," not affiliated at age 16, but affiliated at survey; "switched" changed affiliation between age 16 and the survey date. Also Gould provide an interpretation on veiling and its effects on the meso and macro level. He sees the state regulations regarding veiling incorporate the female body into the political economy of the commodity form. In addition to serving as an empty signifier to be filled with exchange value for the male observer, the veil operates as an ideological apparatus of the state. In showing

through fieldwork conducted in Iran how the fault lines of political agency are inscribed into the veil, he argue that subverting its commodity function radically relativises its meaning.

Because the veil is an empty signifier lacking intrinsic content, its meaning must be determined contingently (Gould, 2014).

## Iran, Women, Employment

There are some articles which are focus on the women's employment in Iran. Kian (1997) mentions after Islamic Revolution the importance of Islamic profession has heighten. As a result many professional secular women excluded from their positions. Also, she mention the rate of employment for women declined a lot in 1976-77 because of the war and Islamic Revolution from 10.8 to 6.1% (84). Bahramitash mentions the imposition of Islamic dress codes and the repression of middle-class women were encouraging to those from traditional and religious backgrounds, who formed a much larger segment of the Iranian population to become active member of the society (Bahramitash, 2004).

Based on Moghadam (1995) patterns of women's employment in Iran have been influenced by the oil-based nature of the economy; by the policy of import-substitution industrialization which has favored capital-intensive, male-intensive industries; by cultural attitudes and gender bias which render many occupations inappropriate or off-limits to women. Among the most startling findings of the 1986 census was the high rate of fertility and consequently of population growth, the growth in unemployment, the expansion of the selfemployed category of workers as opposed to those in regular waged and salaried jobs, and the extremely small size of the female labor force. Whether for economic need or for personal aspirations, more and more Iranian women are seeking employment-and finding that there exist extremely limited job opportunities for them. Demand for female labor is limited, especially in the bazaar, Iran's traditional market system, which has always been a male domain. "According to the 1986 census data, some 990,000 women (and 11 million men) were classified as employed, which is 6 percent of the female population aged 10 and over, and 9 percent of the total employed population" (Moghadam, 1995: 177). Also he focuses on the possible reasons for declination in female employment. He mentions "in 1976 the female share of the total labor force was 20 percent, but this appears to have been because of the inclusion of cottage industries by the 1976 enumerators, a sector that was not adequately counted in 1986." (Moghdam, 1995: 180). Methodological differences and undercounting may account for some of the decline in

female employment, but the emergence of the Islamic discourse on women and the family certainly contributed. Priority was assigned to the reproductive role of women and to their rearing of children. Women were considered secondary workers while men were regarded-and promoted-as the main breadwinners

Hoodfar focus on the Government role on the women's employment in Iran and says "The government has adopted several strategies to reduce women's employment, including the introduction of compulsory hijab (veiling), and packages which enabled women to retire after only 15 years of work, or transfer their full salaries to their husband and resign or only work part-time" (Hoodfar, 1994: 11).

All of the articles mentioned above are in macro level. But Moghadam (2009) in *undercounting women's work in Iran* has tried to focus on both macro and micro level. He explores the possibility of a considerable undercounting of women's labor force participation in the official surveys in Iran. He Points at the growing visibility of urban women in public space, the increasing share of skilled and educated women, rising cost of living, and the need for both male and female incomes to support an urban family, some observers have suggested that the official data underestimate urban female labor participation, as well. He undertook a micro study of 350 working age women in the affluent northern part of Tehran and found that a large number of educated upper and middle class women were active in the informal market. This finding was in sharp contrast to the studies in other developing countries in which informal participants are generally poor and unskilled and are unable to join the modern formal economy.

Some article focus on the role of politics and Islamic revolution and notion on the women's employment. Moghadam (1988) examines the Islamic regarding women's roles (as well as the inconsistencies within with women's employment patterns. The data reveal that the massive expulsion of women from modern-sector employment initially envisioned by the new ruling authorities has not been effected, although elite, professional women of the upper classes have been most stigmatized. "Labor-force participation rates have declined and unemployment has increased for both women and men (especially the latter), reflecting overall depressed economic conditions. The female share of the urban employed population has not changed, while female government employment has increased rather than decreased. Still, the cultural and ideological climate remains hostile to working women, despite certain countervailing tendencies." (222). Baharmitash in *Myths and realities of the impact of political*

*Islam on women: Female employment in Indonesia and Iran* shows that out that “it might have been expected that women's formal employment would have declined after two decades of Islamisation, but in fact it has increased” (Baharmitash, 2004: 508).

Many articles talk about religiosity and employment of women. Some articles especially focus on Iran. But I could not find any article which tries to find the result of the religious mandatory law (compulsory hijab) on the rate of employment of women in the social scene. In this paper, I want to fill out this gap and see the impact of politics of the Islamic republic toward hijab on women's employment. I am going to do a survey based on 2005 data which is the most recent data available source. I am going to see the relationship between religiosity of women and employment between women with more secular beliefs and women who have more religious beliefs to see if compulsory hijab after 25 years led the more religious women to the job market more than secular ones. The main research question of this study is asking: Is there a relationship between religiosity of women and their working status? The main research hypothesis of this study is: There is a relationship between religiosity of women and their working status. I am going to examine the research hypothesis by assessing the relationship between the level of the religiosity of women as a dependent variable and the employment status of women as dependent variable.

## Research Design

I am going to use secondary data analysis since I want to assess the relationship between the level of religiosity and the employment rate of women in Iran. Using secondary data analysis would be the best research design for this study since it is one of the most efficient methods in social sciences. The advantage of using secondary data is the big number of sample size. In big data sets for example World Value Survey the sample size is usually high in the data sets which increase the validity of the study. In addition, “the cost of obtaining the data for analysis is usually a small fraction of the cost of collecting and coding the data” (Singleton & Straits, 2005: 226-227). Time efficiency is the other advantage of using secondary data as well. One of the most disadvantage of the secondary data analysis is “surveys are quite flexible with respect to the topics and purposes of research, they also tend to be highly standardized. This makes them less adaptable than experiment and other approaches in the sense that is difficult to change the course of research after the study has begun” (Singleton & Straits, 2005: 227). In such situation, the researcher need to find other available questions in the data set which could be most relevant to the one's study. For this research design I am going to use World Value Survey data 2005 which includes the Iranian population. . Sample size is 2667 but I am going to focus on the subsample of women. The subsample size



is 1,316. One of the disadvantage of this method is that I do not have access to the recent data set and the latest available data is for 2005.

The World Values Survey ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)) is a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life, led by an international team of scholars. The field work dates was between 01-06-2005 to 01-082005. The data was gathered by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The questionnaire was Persian. The modes of data collection was through a personal face to face interview. The fieldwork was supervised by researchers from the College of Arts and Science at the University Of Tehran, Iran. The SPSS data entry program was used for data entry and checking. The data Collection Organization was the Institute of Social Research and Studies at the University of Teheran. Because of the size and complexity of the survey population, multistage probability sampling methods were used to develop the sample frame for this study. I do not need to be concerned about confidentiality since I am using an open source data set which contains anonymous information of the respondent’s attitude.

### Constructs

Constructs that will appear within the proposed research are: Employment, religiosity, level of education of respondent, age of respondent, geographical location which ask if the respondent live in rural or urban areas, and marital status.

**Table 1: Variable Table**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Independent, Dependent, or Control</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Employment</b>	Dependent Variable	1: Employed, 0: not employed
<b>Religiosity</b>	Independent Variable	1: High, 2: medium, 3: low
<b>Level of Education of Respondent</b>	Independent Variable	0: 0 years of schooling-high school, 1: above high school
<b>Age of Respondent</b>	Independent Variable	Measured in numbers of years

<b>Rural/ Urban</b>	Independent Variable	0: Rural Areas, 1: urban areas
<b>Marital Status</b>	Control Variable	1: Married/ 2: Single/ 3: Divorced

### Operationalization

For the purposes of this research project; constructs will be defined and operationalized within this study as follows:

#### **Employment**

Employment is defined by the respondent categorization of herself as an employed or unemployed. 1: Employed, 0: not employed

#### **Religiosity**

Religiosity is categorized to three different level of high, middle, and low level of religiosity in this study. Since religiosity is an abstract concept, I examine the level of religiosity of women in three different levels of high, medium, and low by using the three main questions related to religiosity in the data set to provide a new variable of level of religiosity. I try to draw a measurement model to provide more detailed questions to assess this variable (Model 1). 1: High, 2: medium, 3: low

#### **Level of Education of Respondent**

Level of Education of Respondent is defined as the highest year of education which is completed by respondent and categorized into two levels of low 0- high school and high above high school. 0: 0 years of schooling-high school, 1: above high school

#### **Age of Respondent**

Age of Respondent is measured in years based on the response of the respondent. Measured in numbers of years

(Interval ratio)

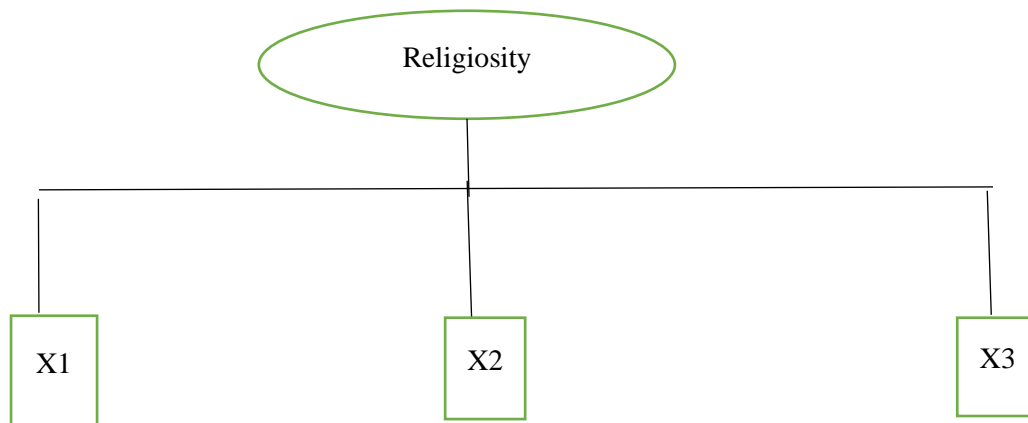
#### **Rural/ Urban**

Rural/ Urban is defined by the way that respondent categorized her living location rural or urban area. 0: Rural Areas, 1: urban areas

## Marital Status

Marital Status is defined as the marital situation of the respondents as measured by her and will be measured as 1) married, 2) single, and 3) divorced. 1: Married/ 2: Single/ 3: Divorced

### 1: Religiosity Measurement Model

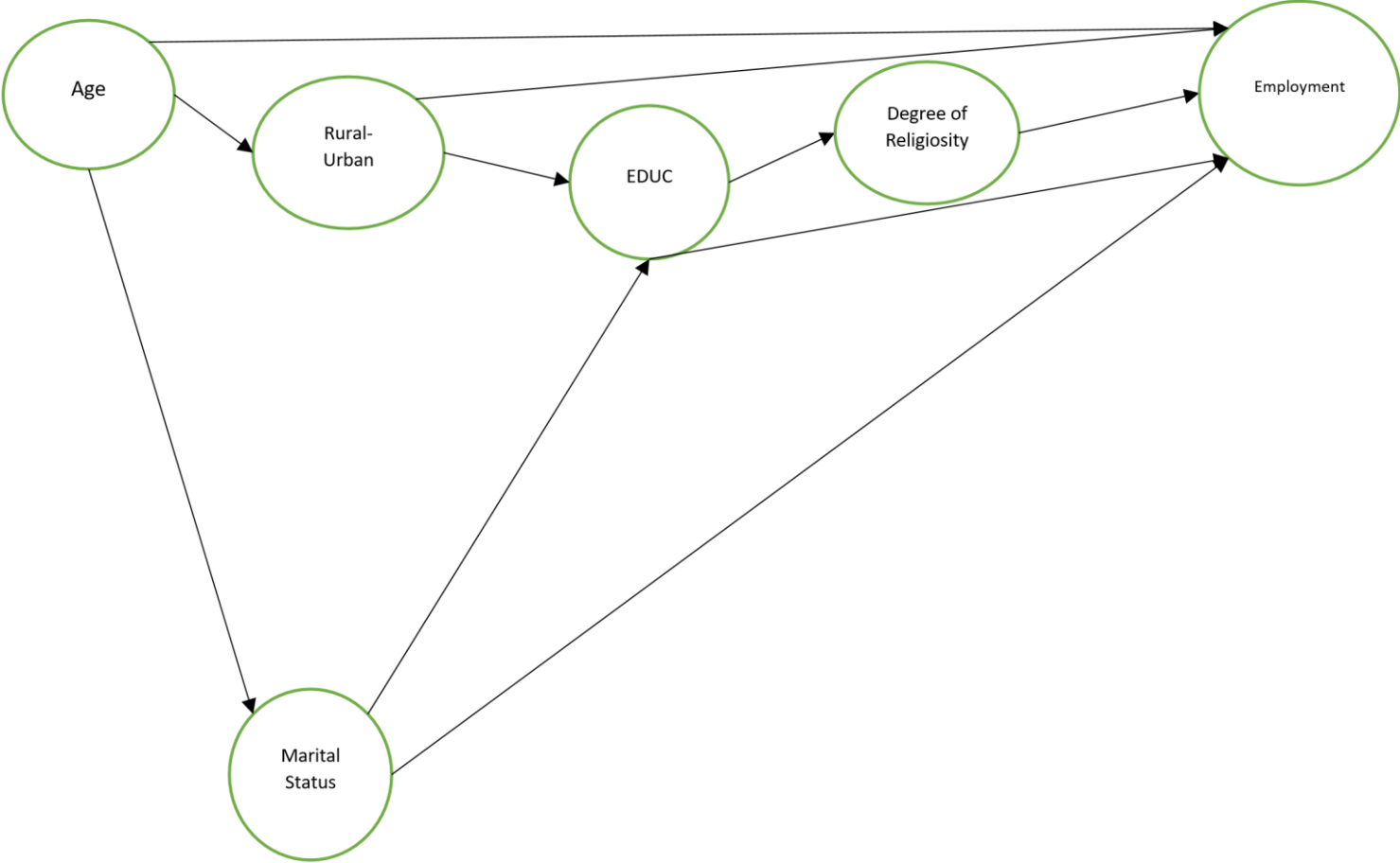


X1: How do you categorize yourself? 1: A religious person/ 0: not a religious person

X2: How often do you attend religious services? 1: More than once a week/ 2: once a week/ 3: once a month/ 4: only holy days/ 5: once a year/ 6: less often/ 0: never

X3: Do you have moments of prayer? 1: Yes/ 0: No

**Model 2: Conceptual Model**





## Data Analytic Strategies

In order to analyze the data, I will use SPSS to compile all valid responses and findings. I am going to conduct a bivariate analysis of the relationship between the level of the religiosity of women and the degree of employment between them. I incorporate a chisquare test to display the relationship between the variables and use the Pearson correlation to analyze the strength and direction of any available associations between the variables.

## Limitations

Using the 2005 WVS is the latest available data set for Iran could be one of the limitations since this data set is old one. The possibility of generalizability of the finding to the women's population of Iran in 2018 could be questioned. In addition, I could not find the most proper questions related to the level of religiosity of women in the data set. I chose three questions related to the religiosity but if I could conduct a survey myself I would ask more detailed questions related to the religiosity. So, it was possible the validity of the study could increase.

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