



Woman in Development and Politics

An Investigation on Identity Challenges Faced by Muslim Women Immigrants in Europe

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 5 September 2024 Received in revised form: 8 November 2024 Accepted: 3 December 2024 Published online: 21 April 2025</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Diaspora,</i> <i>Europe,</i> <i>Identity Challenges,</i> <i>Muslim Woman,</i> <i>Religious Identity.</i></p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Muslim immigration to Europe is not new. However, the necessity for labor in European countries led to a significant expansion in the Muslim diaspora in these civilizations, as well as the growth of Islamic communities. In this sense, the flood of Muslim immigration to Europe paved the ground for the development of legal, social, and cultural challenges. In 2010, the Muslim population in Europe was estimated at 4,413,800. This figure is predicted to reach 58209000 million people by 2030. Currently, Muslims account for 6% of Europe's population. According to predictions, by 2030, Muslims will account for 8% of the European continent's population. (Noorbakhsh, 2019).</p> <p>Muslims in Europe, as a recognized minority, face numerous challenges in their everyday lives, with one of the most significant being the quest to maintain and define their Muslim identity in European contexts. Migration often takes them to environments vastly different from their countries of origin. Many Muslim minorities in the West come from predominantly Islamic societies and settle in secular, non-religious communities. This shift frequently causes them to reexamine and confront questions about their identity, which, before migration, may have seemed stable and unquestionable (Duderija & Rane).</p> <p>It is important to highlight that many challenging Islamic laws, such as the hijab, are observed more prominently by immigrant Muslim women than by men (Ali, 2006). In Western societies, these laws create challenges specific to Muslim women that do not typically affect men. Moreover, the distinction in gender roles becomes more evident for women, particularly through roles like motherhood and being a wife. These roles are culturally defined in ways that may differ significantly between Islamic and European societies, potentially leading to difficulties for Muslim immigrant women. Consequently, this study focuses on the issues related to the religious identity of Muslim immigrant women in Europe. The research specifically examines the challenges related to their religious identity, excluding other types of identity. Additionally, it explores the strategies employed by these women to deal with religious identity challenges.</p> <p>Finally, considering all the points discussed, the present study aims to specifically address the following questions regarding the religious identity challenges faced by Muslim immigrant women in Europe:</p> <p>What types of challenges related to their religious identity do Muslim women experience in European societies? How do Muslim women cope with these challenges? Or, more precisely, what strategies do they employ to confront these challenges?</p> <p>Numerous studies, adopting a holistic approach and conducted as meta-studies, have examined the condition of Muslim immigrants in Western societies. Topics such as experiences of discrimination—particularly workplace discrimination—encounters with Islamophobia, and the impacts of these experiences and challenges on the mental and physical health of Muslim immigrants have been key areas of focus in these meta-studies. Despite the significance of existing meta-studies, it appears that previous studies have paid</p>

less attention to the religious identity challenges faced by Muslim immigrant women. This gap highlights the need for comprehensive and holistic studies that specifically address the experiences of Muslim immigrant women concerning religious identity challenges and the strategies they employ to navigate them. In response to this need, the researcher in the present study has aimed to provide a broad and inclusive analysis. This study seeks to examine the religious identity challenges faced by Muslim immigrant women in Europe and the strategies they adopt to deal with these challenges.

Methodology

This study sought to assess research conducted over the past 14 years (2010–2023) on Muslim immigrant women in European countries through a qualitative meta-analysis approach. To identify relevant studies, keywords such as "Muslim women," "Muslim immigrants," "identity," "Europe," "the West," "identity challenges," "religious identity," and their combinations were used to search scientific databases, including Taylor and Francis, Springer, JSTOR, Elsevier, Sage, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar.

Initially, all studies—including articles, treatises, dissertations, and books—on the topic of identity issues experienced by Muslim women in Europe were considered. The search began with the selection of 76 publications based on their titles within the time period chosen. Following a review of their abstracts to ensure their relevance to the core research issue, 38 papers were picked for the following phase. Finally, a thorough review of the content, including theoretical frameworks, methods, and findings, resulted in the selection of 24 qualitative studies for the meta-study.

Thematic analysis was employed to evaluate the findings of the prior studies in order to conduct qualitative meta-analysis. Therefore, the findings of twenty-four selected qualitative studies were open-coded in accordance with the research's two main goals (identity challenges faced by Muslim women and strategies applied by them). The codes were then categorized again in the second stage, resulting in the formation of categories. The categories aligned with the primary research issues. In fact, a number of categories formed, one for the identification challenges experienced by Muslim women and another for the strategies applied by immigrant Muslim women to overcome these challenges. In the third stage, the collected categories were recategorized, and the primary themes were identified.

Results

The results of the meta-synthesis highlight six important challenges to immigrant Muslim women's religious identity. These challenges include negative perceptions and mistreatment by host society, the imposition of a specific lifestyle on Muslim women, immigrant Muslim women's uneven path to advancement, surveillance and prejudice from their own community, tensions and differences between Islamic and European lifestyles, and the experience of double marginalization.

Regarding the strategies adopted by immigrant Muslim women to deal with religious identity challenges, four main strategies were identified: personalizing their religious identity, adopting the discourse of "pure Islam," participating in and affiliating with Islamic centers, and embracing multidimensional and flexible identities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Muslim migrant women in Europe experience mutual pressures from both the host society and their own community to define their identity. They attempt to cope with these challenges and achieve balance in their daily lives through applying a variety of strategies. The findings shed insight on the complexities of identity formation among Muslim women in Europe, emphasizing the necessity for increased attention to this topic. Finally, the study suggests that future research should look at the problem of double marginalization and how it affects Muslim migrant women and subsequent generations. Furthermore, it emphasizes concentrating on Muslim migrants' active agency and influence on host societies, since this can help to more effectively policymaking for peaceful coexistence.

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