

## **Patterns of Social Interactions and Moral Behavioural Change of Muslim Female Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria**

Hauwa'uTalatu Yusuf & Atiku Garba Yahaya

*Department of Islamic Studies Federal College of Education, Kontagora*

*Department of Islamic Studies Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto*

*Corresponding Author: Hauwa'uTalatu Yusuf*

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**ABSTRACT:** Change is a constant element in human lives. Thus many factors are very instrumental to behavioural change at any stage in human development and growth. This paper examines the relevance of social interactions and their differentiated patterns in behavioural change of female Muslim students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper argues that the layers of factors of interactions have varying implications on the behavioural change among female Muslim students. These layers of interactions must, therefore, be positively manipulated and exploited to make positive impact on the behaviours of female Muslim Students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. And, if negatively exploited, these patterns of social interactions would have tremendous negative implications on the already vulnerable female Muslim students.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It is evident in history all over the world that Muslim women had strived developed to become great intellectuals partly due to the encouragement and support they got from the precedence of the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and other social forces. It has been established that an educated woman is emancipated from the dirt of immorality due to ignorance and has given her awareness in all spheres of life, social, economic, political and moral. However, in her quest for intellectual growth and development a woman comes into contact with some social factors which have bearing on her behaviour as a *Muslimah* modern school system provide a good case of such social force. It is obvious that there are different types of interactions between female students only and between them and their male counterparts. There is also an interaction between them and the staff of the institutions. The impact of different types of interactions or relationships are described in this article with particular reference to Muslim female students in selected tertiary institutions in Niger State, Nigeria. The descriptions are based on observations made and the responses of data collected. The moral impact is examined on female Muslim students, the tertiary institutions, the immediate or host community and to potential Muslim female who want to be students in the study area. The positive and negative impacts of these interactions are also examined.

### **II. IMPACT ON THE FEMALE MUSLIM STUDENTS**

A female student who is morally trained and brought up by parents who have endeavoured to instill religious knowledge and morals in her will not become morally corrupt. This is because lack of religious knowledge and non compliance with religious and sometimes cultural ethics is a weakness in itself.

In Niger State Tertiary Institutions, there are many activities that encourage good moral behaviour amongst students in general. The activities of Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), and some cultural associations like the Nupe, Gbagi, Hausa, Yoruba etc. uphold the virtue of proper dressing amongst their members.<sup>1</sup>

The Tertiary Institutions also enable female Muslim students to interact with and understand different people better. This leads to the development of good human relation. The religious Associations and cultural Clubs also assist some students who came into the institution with bad habits to drop them and become reformed.

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<sup>1</sup> As observed at Collage of Education Minna, 25/4/14, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai 13/ 5/ 14, NSSHT Tungan Magajiya 7/5/14).

In order to curb general misconduct in the Institutions, there are stipulated rules and regulations in the students handbook. The handbook is issued to each student at the point of registration in all the Tertiary Institutions. In it also are penalties for violators of the rules.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from this, it was observed that some lecturers take time to preach the need to be of good moral conduct to the students. This is done during lectures, especially when a student appears not properly dressed or misbehave during lectures.<sup>3</sup> In all the institutions visited in conducting this study, there are dress code rules in place. The schools of Health Technology, Tungan Magajiya and College of Nursing Sciences Bida, have standard uniforms. As such, all students dress in the same outfit. The female Muslim students wear *Hijabs* on top of their dress which is long to the elbow level.

Some of the female Muslim students are also influenced by the behaviours of the few married women amongst them. These women do not have time for frivolities as such they mind their business and face their studies squarely. The activities of Islamic Organizations and programmes, which campaigned against indecent dressing and immoral behaviours have also impacted positively on the behaviour of female Muslim students.

Most of the female students enter into tertiary institutions as shy, naïve and unexposed to immorality and social vices. But due to their mixing with others, they wise up and want to become social. They also take undue advantage of the freedom they enjoy on campus. They see the Tertiary Institution as a “free world” where nobody can stop or scold them. That is the more reason why even those who are resident in the towns where the institutions are located prefer to live on campus. There, they can go on outings without being monitored, wear any type of dress they want and indulge in any type of relationship with people of their choice. This leads the female Muslim to indulge in unacceptable behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol, attending late night parties and being babies to “Sugar Daddies”.

Some of them indulge in such vices just to take care of their financial needs. Greed could also be another reason. On the other hand, some of them are children of well to do or affluent parents who see the tertiary institution as a ground to show off. They display their beauty and wealth and indulge in social outings and drug abuse. The location of these Institutions is also a contributory negative factor. As a result of their proximity to the town, the institutions are easily accessed by individuals from the community and beyond who take undue advantage of the girls.

### **III. HOW THE STUDENTS ARE AFFECTED**

The tertiary Institutions benefit a lot from the large enrollment of female Muslim students. The large number of female students serves as an encouragement for other prospective female Muslims to join the tertiary Institutions to further their studies. From the information gathered it shows that most schools that deal with health related courses have more of female students than male. The measures taken by the school authorities in ensuring that students comply with the rules and regulations of the institutions had boosted the morale of these students. Potential students, who seek to enroll there, use to go with seriousness to face their studies.

In institutions like Niger State Polytechnic, they lay emphasis on meeting up the required CGPA before moving to the next level. This makes the female Muslim and all other students to buckle up and face their studies properly. The ability of the female Muslim students to graduate with a good result has a positive impact on the institution. COE Minna being a College of Education is the most populated institution by females in general. Here, the staff-to-student interaction is very cordial and encouraging. Students do meet up with their academic demands in terms of acquiring the required CGPA. The way the students conduct themselves during teaching practice also has a positive impact on the Institution. That does not rule out the fact that some of the female Muslim students concentrate more on the social activities on campus than on their academics.

This is because some people see the tertiary institution as a breeding ground for all sorts of immoral behaviour. The fact that in tertiary institutions female students either Muslim or non Muslim, indulge in immoral behaviour has a demining impact on the Institution.

It is believed that when female Muslim students join Tertiary Institutions they throw away their morals, instead they pick up attitudes that are alien to the religion they profess. It is an established fact that Tertiary Institution students do indulge in armed robbery, prostitution<sup>4</sup>, drunkenness<sup>5</sup>, cultism and a host of other unethical behaviours. Now because of this, some parents are very skeptical about allowing their unmarried young Muslim girls to further their studies.

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<sup>2</sup>Students' Handbook of Niger State Polytechnic, Zungeru, pp. 52-66, NSCNS Pp. 10-14, NSSHT. T/ Magajiya P -11

<sup>3</sup>As observed at NS Poly Zungeru a male lecturer cautioned a female student who wore a top that exposed most of her chest 8/4/2010.

<sup>4</sup>Refer to page 69 Social Life on the Campus.

<sup>5</sup>Refer to page 72 Drug Abuse

#### **IV. IMPACT ON THE IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY**

The major positive impact to the immediate community has to do with economic upliftment of the people. Where ever a tertiary institution is situated becomes an urban area in no time. Because houses are built and rented to students who live off campus. The markets also grow because it provides necessary essential commodities needed by the students. It also uplifts the status of the area, it becomes known all over the nation. In terms of interaction with the people, some of the Muslim Organizations in the community do liaise with those of the tertiary institutions. Therefore, they usually invite prominent people and religious learned men to deliver lectures during their programmes. Some of the houses rented to students are specified by the landlords, as to be rented to male only or female only. In cases where only female rent the house they do put up an order "NO male visitors are allowed".<sup>6</sup> In some cases people from the host community do meet with decent girls and marry them.<sup>7</sup>

Another impact is the culture of the host community. In most of the communities where the Institutions are established they value their culture and traditions. As such it also influences the manner of interaction with the students. For example, at Bida where they are predominantly Muslims, female Muslim students of both NSCNS and Poly find it difficult to come to town wearing mini skirts, tight fitting clothes or being indecently dressed. Because the people of the community will mock at such a girl whether she is a Muslim or not.<sup>8</sup>

Conversely, intermingling of the Muslim and non- Muslim female students with people of the host community, has impacted them negatively. The people of the host community interact with people from different areas who come to socialize with their female friends. Some of these people are of questionable character. These people may interact with their wards thereby corrupting them and teaching them some bad behaviours.

The community of host tertiary institutions are seen as a social community (Bariki) where all sorts of immoral behaviours are condoned. For example, some of these girls who come to school and become corrupt do refuse to go back home, even after their studies or if they are penalized and rusticated for misbehaviour by the Institution. For example, some female Muslim students were withdrawn from Niger State Polytechnic, Zungeru, but they refused to leave the town for their home town.<sup>9</sup> Another negative impact on the host community is in the fact that the youth (both boys and girls) copy the dress pattern of the students. Small female children are seen painting their faces and using more of English dresses instead of the native attires.

#### **V. ON FEMALE MUSLIM STUDENTS AND OTHER POTENTIAL STUDENTS**

There are a large number of female Muslim students who are committed to studies and wish to achieve their purpose of being in the Institution. Such students busy themselves with academic activities such as assignments, tests, tutorials, presentations and studying at the libraries. The fact that they want to pass their exams with good grades makes them more dedicated. The situation is particularly more demanding for students of College of Nursing Sciences and those of College of Education, Minna. For the students of Nursing Sciences, any student who failed two papers in the first year will be withdrawn. Before graduation they sit for six examinations with only one chance to repeat, a re-failure of the repeated course or class leads to withdrawal.<sup>10</sup> In College of Education, Minna, the students are loaded with course work from departmental to education and General Studies. Any student who could not score 1 point in all of the sections mentioned at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year is asked to withdraw.<sup>11</sup> All of this have positive impact on the behaviour of female Muslim students towards their educational pursuit.

The students also associate themselves with religious association like Muslim Students' Society, where they attend lectures and programmes. The lectures and programmes occupy their leisure time and make them more aware or enlightened on their religion. Their affiliation with MSS helps a lot in curbing their desire to indulge in immoral acts. Some of those who are very active in MSS use to influence those who have not strayed far in immoral conducts to change and be of good behaviour.

It was observed that some female Muslim sisters use to teach other female students the Qur'an, *Hadith* and *Arabic* at the various *Masajid* of the Tertiary Institutions visited.<sup>12</sup> The introduction of dress code which is taken seriously in all the Tertiary Institutions visited, is a blessing for the Tertiary Institutions. Because on first

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<sup>6</sup>As observed at Lapai town 14/05/2014 and at Zungeru 10/04/2014.

<sup>7</sup>At NSSHT Tundan-Magajiya, a student (name withheld) is to wed on 29/06/2014 with a man she met there. She is from Salka town.

<sup>8</sup>Observation visit 19-25/05/2014.

<sup>9</sup>Dan Malam Bawa, statistics officer, Niger State Polytechnic, Zungeru, interviewed on 8/4/2014

<sup>10</sup>Niger state College of Nursing Sciences, students' Handbook Revised edition 2012 Pp. 8-9.

<sup>11</sup>Niger State College of Education, Students' handbook Revised 2011, Pp. 10-11.

<sup>12</sup>At NSCNS, Bida. The lessons are taken between *Magrib* and *Isha'*

hand observation you see almost all of the female Muslim students both single and married in *Hijabs*. This change of attitude in dressing gives parents and guardians who are skeptical about the situation in Tertiary Institutions to have a rethink. This is a great positive impact for prospective female Muslims who want to join Tertiary Institutions to further their education.

However, there are some Muslim female students who care little about the purpose of their being to the Tertiary Institution. Such students busy themselves with things that will not benefit them in anyway. They believe in the unwise saying “use what you have to get what you want”. Because of this myopic thought they are not regular in attending lectures, especially on Mondays. This is because they have had a busy weekend either at parties or attending to their “financial supporters”<sup>13</sup> needs.

The female students who busy themselves with such immoral activities end up not graduating, or they follow male lecturers to lobby for C.A and attendance result. As a result some corrupt lecturers take advantage of them and further corrupt the students by indulging in illegal affairs. This is a gross misconduct on the part of the lecturers and a high level of immorality on the part of the female Muslim students. These types of behaviours are of negative impact to the life of the female Muslim students, and serve as reasons for some parents/guardians to refuse their wards from going into Tertiary Institutions while still single.

## VI. CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, considering the above findings on the impact of the behaviour of female Muslim students in Niger State Tertiary Institutions on the various stakeholders mentioned, it becomes pertinent to proffer some solutions to that effect from Islamic point of view. These include:

In Islam the protection of the life and honour of the *Muslimah* is a collective responsibility of the Muslim *Ummah*. As such all the Muslim staff in these tertiary institutions are tasked with the responsibility of being their brothers’ keepers. The Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said:

None of you is really a believer until he loves (likes) for his brother what he loves (likes) for himself. <sup>14</sup>

Therefore, since none of the staff will like any of their relations to be of bad behavior, then it becomes incumbent on them to use every available means to caution the female Muslim students and others of the need to be of good behaviour. Advice them be the good advocates of Islam as Allah *Ta’alah* states in the Qur’an thus:

...Let there arise a band of the righteous from amongst thee, enjoining the doing of right and prohibiting the evil...<sup>15</sup>

In order to control the issue of indecent dressing, apart from the dress code rule instituted, the school authorities should make decent dressing a condition of admission for female students as is done in some institutions that are Islamic oriented.<sup>16</sup>

At the hostels tough security measures should be put in place, especially at night to curtail the activities of male visitors. The matrons can be empowered to report violators to the institutions’ disciplinary committee. This will assist the institutions and the students could be counseled on the evil of what they do. This includes those who take drugs and the lesbians. Doing this could help in changing their behaviours from bad to good. The Prophet (SAW) was quoted as saying: “Verily, the best among you is the one who is best in manners.”<sup>17</sup> Penalties should be recommended for violators to check recurrence of such behaviours and to deter.

Muslim organizations should also be active especially during orientation. They should organize lectures and programmes, aimed at enlightening the *Muslimah*. On the sacredness of her honour and the trust bestowed on her by her family and the Muslim *Ummah*, she is described to be a mother, sister, daughter, aunty, grandmother or wife of one man or the other in the various degrees of relationships. Therefore, protecting her honour is a collective responsibility, which should not be violated. Allah *Ta’alah* says: “And do not go near *Zinah* (adultery), indeed it is ever an immorality and an evil way.”<sup>18</sup>

Parents should endeavour to give their female children adequate Islamic moral education from childhood. If the Islamic moral values are properly taught and embibed by the female child it will help her greatly as an adolescent staying in school away from parental guide. Parents should make time to visit their wards at school and take along a little supplementary provision. They should also make sure they provide for their needs to the best of their ability. The Prophet said: “All of you are shepherds and all of you will be asked concerning your flock...”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>This is the new slogan for ‘Sugar Daddies’ and their well to do men friends.

<sup>14</sup>Sahih Bukhari Vol. 1 and Muslim, Vol.1, *Book of faith (Iman)*, Hadith 1.12 p. 91 .Sahih Muslim vol.1 chapter 10 *Hadith* 24, p.52. See also An- Nawawi *Hadith* 13.

<sup>15</sup>Qur’an 3:110

<sup>16</sup>Fati Lami Abubakar College for Legal and General Studies, Minna, College Handbook, 2012-2015.

<sup>17</sup>Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 8 *Book of al- Adab (good manners)*, chapter 38, *Hadith* 8. 56 (B), p.31

<sup>18</sup>Qur’an 17:32

<sup>19</sup>Sahih al- Bukhari ,Vol. 7, *Kitab Nikah*, *Hadith* 7. 128, p. 88

The female Muslim students should also fear Allah in all their undertakings. They should remember that whatever they do today may be concealed from their parents and future spouses. But it is not concealed to their creator and He, Allah (SWT) will make known their hidden secrets on the Day of Resurrection. They should also watch the type of company they keep as friends. Allah *Ta'alah* says:

...Oh! Would that I had taken a path with the Messenger (Muhammad SAW). Ah! Woe to me! Would that I had never taken so-and –so as a friend! He indeed led me astray from the Reminder (Qur'an) after it had come to me...<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Qur'an 25:27-29