

Portable Seclusion: Religious Veil and The Public Role of Women

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This study focuses on understanding how societies negotiate religious identity and economic modernization. It examines a particular religious expression among Muslim women—the use of religious head scarfs. While this practice is commonly seen as a sign of religious fundamentalism or of oppression toward women, the current study attempts to offer an alternative explanation.

I collect a novel dataset, based on human coding of high school yearbook pictures, for 46 districts in Indonesia over a 25 year period. Using an instrumental variable method, I test a hypothesis which posits that the headscarf is a mechanism used by Muslim women to integrate themselves in public spheres. In particular, I show that the increasing trend of religious veil can be explained by the availability of new economic opportunities for women.