

Views of Muslim women emerge

Survey focuses on Islamic world, is part of broader study

**By EBA HAMID, Scripps Howard Foundation Wire
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WASHINGTON - Ask Muslims in the Islamic world what they admire most about the West, and two of the top answers are Western political freedom and gender equality.

Ask Americans what they respect about the Muslim world, and their top answers - "nothing" and "I don't know" - are more surprising.

The responses were part of a survey of Islamic societies released this week by Gallup. The results from "What Women Want: Listening to the Voices of Muslim Women" mostly focused on women in eight predominantly Muslim countries: Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

From August to October 2005, the Gallup Organization conducted at least 1,000 face-to-face interviews with Muslim women in each country.

Asked what they resented most about Western society, many Muslim women's responses centered around "moral decay," said Dalia Mogahed, executive director of Muslim studies at Gallup.

Hollywood movies have led Muslims to see the United States as a center of promiscuity, pornography and public indecency, the survey found.

One 22-year-old Moroccan woman said she resented "the disrespect of women by men" in the West, Mogahed said.

To improve American-Islamic relations, survey participants said a greater respect of Islam by non-Muslims in the West is needed. Participants also said Westerners should stop degrading the Islamic faith and Western society should stop seeing Muslims as inferior.

Mogahed said many Muslims felt that their faith wasn't respected or was "under attack."

The American responses were gathered as part of a broader study of 100 countries the Gallup World Poll is conducting. Among the many questions from 18-minute phone interviews with 1,000 adults were those about respondents' views of the Muslim world, said Eric Nielsen, a spokesman for Gallup.

The survey in Muslim countries also asked what societal rights Muslim women deserve.

Mogahed said the women in virtually all the countries said they should have the right to vote, drive, work outside the home and to lead and serve in government. "There is a consciousness of deserved rights," she said.

The results showed that very few participants associated gender equality with Muslim societies, but Mogahed said Muslim women were hopeful that societal changes would come.

"Optimism among Muslim women was higher than men," she said. "Things are getting better. The future is brighter."

Of all the survey results, Lynn Olson said hearing about Americans' lack of knowledge about the

Muslim world stood out most. Olson is director of organizational development for Sisters Cities International, which works to build relationships among countries.

"In Western culture, we think that right and normal is us," Olson said. "We have no perception of other cultures that have different views of the world."

Olson, who has traveled to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in her work, said Americans need more education about other cultures.

The results were the first phase of the study. Gallup expects to finish the final phases in late 2006 and to release more data in the fall. The Gallup Organization is aiming to interview Muslims in 39 countries with large numbers of Muslim people.

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