Article

Actions to Promote the Employment and Social Inclusion of Muslim Women Who Wear the Hijab in Catalonia (Spain)

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Abstract: The current context of growing religious and cultural diversity requires, from societies, an adequate management of the expression of religious diversity in different social spheres, including the workplace. Muslim women who wear the hijab are one of the social groups that most frequently suffer prejudice and discrimination in work settings due to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including gender, ethnic origin, religion and the use of a visible religious symbol. With the aim of exploring the experiences of Muslim women with hijab and identifying barriers and opportunities in their access to employment in Catalonia (Spain), a qualitative study with a communicative orientation was conducted, involving twelve communicative daily-life stories with Muslim women who wear the hijab and eleven in-depth interviews with a communicative orientation with other relevant actors in the fields of training and employment (employers, managers of internship programs, political representatives, etc.). The findings revealed some pending challenges and effective pathways to improve the employment and social inclusion of Muslim women wearing the hijab. The implications of the study point to the need to incorporate respect for diversity as a necessary value to move towards more inclusive societies.

Keywords: hijab; Muslim women; diversity; social inclusion; employment

1. Introduction

Given the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the European context, the different states must address the claim to accommodate the expression of a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices in different social spheres [1] in order to ensure social cohesion and inclusion for all citizens. Furthermore, combating and alleviating inequalities and discrimination based on religion or belief is a decisive step for making strides towards the achievement of different Sustainable Development Goals included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [2]: end poverty (SDG1), guarantee gender equality (SDG5) and decent work and economic growth (SDG8) and move towards more peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG16), to name just a few [3].

Among the main challenges for Western European states in relation to the emergence of growing religious diversity, some recent studies [4] highlight the relationships with Islam, along with the need to adequately accommodate distinctive religious practices in public spaces. In this regard, the need to advance in the definition of tools and frameworks to regulate and manage religious diversity in employment is receiving growing attention in research and policy [5]. In recent years, efforts to explore and better understand religious and spiritual diversity within organizational contexts have proliferated in different countries [6]. Religious expression in the workplace can take more or less explicit forms, including speaking about one's beliefs, praying in public spaces, requesting accommodations for religious practice, abstaining from particular behaviors such as drinking or eating

certain types of food or wearing clothing or other distinctive religious symbols [7]. For the present study, our focus was placed on the latter form of expression of religious beliefs in the workplace and investigation is conducted through the analysis of the experiences of Muslim women who wear the hijab or Muslim headscarf in public spaces.

Prior literature has documented the economic disadvantages that the Muslim population experience in the labor market in Europe [8]. Among the forms of discrimination that this group face when accessing job opportunities, lower incomes, longer periods of unemployment, lower performance of their qualifications and slower job advancement and promotion can be highlighted [9]. Other situations of discrimination are related to receiving a perceived unfair treatment by supervisors and co-workers (i.e., reluctancy to adapt to a worker's right to religious freedom) or setting stricter standards to assess the professional performance of Muslim employees [10]. The analysis of the specific difficulties experienced by ethnic, cultural and religious minority groups in accessing employment reveals that the situation worsens when we introduce the gender variable, as Amador-Lopez pointed out [11] when studying the Roma women case. Consequently, looking into the situation of women belonging to cultural or religious minorities in employment requires paying attention to the unique barriers they face, while simultaneously ensuring a greater visibility of the efforts and initiatives led by these groups of women when it comes to contributing to the consolidation of the concept of citizenship for all in today's plural societies [12].

When analyzing the specific situation of Muslim women when accessing employment, attention should therefore be placed on the experiences of racism and discrimination based on the intersection of ethnic origin, culture and gender. Furthermore, those Muslim women who wear the hijab are more exposed to prejudice due to multiple discrimination [9,13]. As pointed out by Karaman and Christian [14], Muslim women who wear the hijab experience a unique form of racialization, not only due to their gender, but also to the fact that by wearing an externally visible symbol they are easily identifiable as Muslim. Likewise, Muslim women who wear symbols such as the hijab are often subject to stereotypical images. One the one hand, the Muslim headscarf as a symbol is frequently identified with forms of female oppression [14,15]. Along this line, Heiss and Herzog [16] drew on the contributions of decolonial theory and the concept of invisibility to analyze what is visible and invisible in public space. This led them to argue how Muslim women with hijab in Western countries are often part of the debate, but do not possess actual participation in it. Furthermore, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a shift in perceptions around the hijab occurred and Muslim women wearing religious clothing started to be seen with suspicion as a consequence of the stereotypes that relate the use of religious symbols with religious extremism [17,18]. The European Network against Racism [19] has revealed how the media frequently contributes to this binary and stereotyped representation of Muslim women, either as oppressed or as dangerous, while disregarding the diversity and heterogeneity that exists within this social group. In short, as revealed by a recent exploratory meta-analysis that reviewed the specific discrimination experienced by Muslim women who wear the hijab in the workplace in Western countries [20], this population is at higher risk of unemployment or underemployment, as they are much more likely to experience discrimination in employment, not only compared to other women or men who belong to majority religions or who are not religious, but also compared to Muslim women who do not wear the hijab or any other type of religious clothing. As the Pecheny et al. [21] pointed out, being seen only as victims makes it difficult for certain groups to participate in the feminist debate, this being the case for Muslim women wearing hijab.

Prior literature exploring the use of the hijab and other religious garments by Muslim women in the workplace in Western countries mainly focused on analyzing the range of situations of discrimination suffered by Muslim women who use the hijab in their entry and progression in employment, including fewer opportunities for access to job opportunities or difficulties in accommodating their right to express their religious belief in their work activity [13,22], together with the lack of access to network and mentoring support [23]. As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief [3] recently warned,

some forms of discrimination are indirect because they respond to policies that do not explicitly discriminate, but that produce negative impacts that may end up causing harm to certain groups. As an example, it is discussed how the laws that prohibit the wearing of headscarves in public places may appear neutral but in actuality result in making it difficult for Muslim women who wear the hijab to access job opportunities in the public sector. Furthermore, studies suggest that these forms of discrimination might end up discouraging Muslim women from gaining higher levels of education, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes [13]. A few studies looked into some coping strategies that may contribute to improve the professional opportunities and experiences of Muslim women who wear the hijab in the workplace, including accessing diverse networks (such as Muslim women's networks), seeking opportunities to increase their training and education or accessing volunteer work to acquire additional skills and knowledge [24]. Other studies [25] pointed to entrepreneurship as an opportunity and an increasingly attractive path to access the workplace for Muslim women wearing the hijab. Additionally, research [26] examined the forms of agency used by Muslim women, including dynamics such as negotiation and resistance, as a way to progress academically and to develop their professional careers. The findings revealed the decisive role played by the educational experiences in countering inequality and discrimination and as sources that provide women with new opportunities to gain further social recognition within their communities [27].

Our study focused on the situation experienced by Muslim women wearing hijab in the labor market in Catalonia (Spain). Recent studies that have explored the presence and governance of religious freedom across countries point to some trends that characterize the Spanish situation [28]: The fact that Spain is a country of recent immigration, which has seen a rapid growth of the Muslim population in recent years; the ongoing secularization of society; the strong impact suffered by the country as a result of the 2008 economic crisis. Furthermore, it should also be noted that despite having suffered major terrorist attacks claimed by radicalized Islamist groups (such as those in Madrid in 2004 or Barcelona and Cambrils in 2017), the anti-Muslim sentiment has not found a generalized representation in Spanish society. With regard to the management of religious diversity, despite the fact that the Spanish legal system is quite inclusive with minorities, the actual mechanisms adopted to ensure its implementation have been have been insufficient. This scenario makes the management of religious diversity an urgent issue that requires further analysis in order to make strides in its implementation [29].

In recent times, several cases involving young Muslim women who encountered obstacles when being admitted to complete university or vocational training internships in organizations due to the fact of wearing the hijab in Catalonia (Spain) reached public debate [30,31]. In managing some of these cases, religious entities are emerging as a key actor that can contribute to providing visibility and offer specific support to Muslim women who wear the hijab when facing the situations of discrimination that can limit their opportunities for employment and social inclusion [32]. Prior research [33,34] paid attention to the role that faith-based organizations—including religious congregations or other kind of religiously affiliated organizations—may play a role in supporting the inclusion of immigrant/religious minority groups in key areas such as education, economic activities, health or charity. Prior research also highlighted the need to further explore the ways in which these organizations are redefining their roles and forms of participation and interaction within the societies in which they are established [35].

The cases of conflict due to discrimination on religious grounds in the training and professional fields mentioned in the above point, reveal the need to shed light on mechanisms that allow an adequate accommodation of the right to free religious expression in work contexts. Hence, as in other European countries, despite the efforts and steps in handling in practice the demands for managing situations related to the expression of religious beliefs in the workplace in Spain, either through the formal legal framework or through more informal channels, more progress is required for adopting an employment policy that is truly inclusive and open to religious diversity [36]. Moreover, given the special way in

which Muslim women with hijab are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination in the workplace [13,22,23], it is necessary to look into the specific barriers that this social group face on their pathway to employment, as well as to identify some of the emerging trends that are enabling innovative initiatives to favor their inclusion and participation in employment. Furthermore, this renders it necessary to explore the role that various actors can play when supporting or hindering labor inclusion for this group of women (including Muslim women themselves, educational and training institutions, organizations, administrations, as well as other relevant stakeholders such as religious-based organizations, etc.).

In order to contribute to this research field, the present study aimed to explore the career paths and work experiences of a group of Muslim women who wear the hijab in Catalonia (Spain) in order to identify the barriers they face at the time of accessing a job, as well as the opportunities for their professional and social inclusion. In order to carry out this purpose, a study was designed and aimed at analyzing the prior educational and training trajectories, as well as the work experiences of a group of Muslim women who wear the hijab in Catalonia (Spain) in order to explore the barriers and opportunities encountered by them. Furthermore, the study paid attention to the role played by religious entities as an emerging social actor that may contribute to making this social reality visible and contribute to increasing job opportunities for this group. In order to gain a broader understanding of the dynamics that influence the entry and progress in employment of Muslim women wearing the hijab, the study not only collected the voices and experiences of a group of Muslim women who wear the hijab with diverse training and professional backgrounds, but it also comprised in-depth interviews with some relevant actors in the fields of training and employment (including coordinators of university internship programs, providers of employment, policy makers, etc.). In what follows, the methodological framework for the research is presented.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Questions

The focus of the study was two-fold. On the one hand, it was aimed at exploring the specific difficulties encountered by a group of Muslim women wearing the hijab in their access to the labor market and, on the other hand, to identify actions or initiatives that are contributing to the creation of opportunities for employment and social inclusion for this social group. In order to achieve this goal, the study followed two research questions:

1. What experiences of exclusion do Muslim women face in their entry and progression in employment related to the visible expression of their religious beliefs through the hijab?
2. What actions are contributing to the creation of opportunities for Muslim women who wear the hijab in their entry and progression in employment?

2.2. Data Collection

The study followed a communicative orientation [37]. This methodological approach is aimed at building an egalitarian and intersubjective dialogue between researchers (who contribute the latest scientific knowledge and evidence) and the end-users (who contribute their ideas, perspectives and personal experiences) [38]. This methodological orientation has been widely used in research aimed to include the voices of end-users, especially in the case of those belonging to culturally diverse groups [39]. Data collection took place between January 2020 and September 2020. The study involved the implementation of two data collection techniques and each of them were addressed to a different group of participants, as explained below:

*   Twelve communicative daily life stories with Muslim women wearing the hijab, with diverse training and professional experiences. At the time of the study, six of the participating women had faced situations of discrimination in the workplace due to their use of the hijab, while the other six participants had had professional experiences in which the use of the hijab had not been a ground for discrimination;

- Eleven in-depth interviews with a communicative orientation with different actors involved in the fields of training an employment.

Based on the research questions of the study and in line with the preliminary results of the literature review and international regulations for conducting research with human beings, informative letters and informed consent were designed to be shared with the participants, through which they were informed of the nature and objectives of the study as well as of their rights as participants, including the right to refuse to participate at any time.

Regarding the selection and recruitment of participants, various strategies were used depending on the groups involved in the research. With respect to Muslim women who wear the hijab, the contact was established through local religious associations that collaborate with the research team on a regular basis. This prior collaboration made it possible to reach out to potential participants who were contacted via phone or email and were asked to participate in the study. In addition, as in prior research focused on analyzing the experiences of Muslim women [17,40], once the data collection begun, a snowball sampling technique was used, which made it possible that some of the participants suggested other potential informants. Personal information about the Muslim women wearing the hijab that participated in the study is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Communicative daily life stories with Muslim women wearing the hijab.

Name	Level of Education	Age	Current Position	Professional Experiences
Zolaija	Vocational Training Diploma in Dietetics and Nutrition and Administrations Other training courses	26	Administrative staff	Exclusion related to the use of the hijab
Amira	Bachelor's Degree in Ophthalmology	25	Optometrist	Exclusion related to the use of the hijab
Najia	Bachelor's Degree in Nursing Master's Degree in Emergencies and Expert in Pediatric Management (in progress)	23	Nurse	Exclusion related to the use of the hijab
Noura	Dual Bachelor's Degree in Law and Labor Relations	25	Telephone operator	Exclusion related to the use of the hijab
Nouhaila	Bachelor's Degree in Technology Engineering and Telecommunications	25	Different work experiences	Exclusion related to the use of the hijab
Zouhra	Bachelor's Degree in Economics Master's Degree in Taxation (in progress)	25	Different work experiences	Exclusion related to the use of the hijab
Safia	Vocational Training Diploma in Administration. Bachelor's Degree in Social Education (in progress)	31	Immigration technician of the County Council	Inclusive management of the hijab
Houria	Vocational Training Diploma in Social Integration and Computer Programming Bachelor's Degree in Social Education Master's Degree in Educational Technology (in progress)	32	Social educator and programmer	Inclusive management of the hijab
Razan	Vocational Training Diploma in Dietetics and Nutrition Bachelor's Degree in Nursing Master's Degree in Pharmacology Master's Degree in Research in Nursing Sciences (in progress)	29	Nurse	Inclusive management of the hijab
Salima	Vocational Training Diploma in Auxiliary Nursing Care, in Laboratory and in Laboratory Technician She is currently enrolled in a University Bachelor's Degree	27	Intern at the university's services	Inclusive management of the hijab
Mariam	Bachelor's Degree in Journalism Master's Degree in Journalism and Telecommunications (in progress)	23	Telephone operator at the Tax Agency	Inclusive management of the hijab
Farida	Vocational Training Diploma in Trade and Marketing, in Administration and in Administration and Finance Bachelor's Degree in Economy Master's Degree in Teacher Training	26	Secondary Education teacher in Economics	Inclusive management of the hijab

Regarding the contact with relevant actors in the field of training and employment, a search was made to identify potential sources of information related to the fields of training and employment (i.e., employment companies and job search services, internship programs in different academic fields at various universities, political representatives, etc.). By means of a cover letter about the project, which was sent via email, contacts were established to formalize the invitation to participate in the research. A convenience sample of 11 professionals working in different fields was finally selected, as described in Table 2.

Table 2. In-depth interviews with relevant actors in the fields of training and employment.

Name	Professional Position
Oriol	University's Internship Coordinator, Health Sciences
Leandro	University's Internship Coordinator, Physiotherapy
Inma	Vice-Dean for Equality
	University's Internship Coordinator, Physiotherapy
Anna	University's Internship Coordinator, Health Sciences
Luz	University's Internship Coordinator, Nursing
Marcos	University's Internship Coordinator, Business Management
	Political leader
Carles	Secretary for Equality, Migration and Citizenship
	Member of Parliament
Ignacio	Director of Chemical Products Company
Meritxell	Teacher
	Coordinator of the Baccalaureate Program of a Religious Congregation
Carla	Responsible of the local Delegation, Temporary Work Agency
Mariona	Responsible of the local Delegation, Temporary Work Agency

Following the communicative organization of research [39], an Advisory Board was created at the beginning of the study and was composed by members of a local Muslim youth association. The functions of this Advisory Board were to provide knowledge on the topic under study, to facilitate initial contacts with potential key informants, to review relevant documentation throughout the research process (i.e., information letters and consent forms or scripts used for data collection) and to contribute to the revision and discussion of the preliminary results with the research team. Ultimately, the participation of the Advisory Board throughout the project ensured that the study's aims and results were oriented to transform the reality of the end-users, as well as to the identify the potential limitations of the study.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a communicative approach, aimed not only at exploring the barriers and obstacles that prevent the full participation of women with hijab in employment (exclusionary dimension) but also for identifying the actions and mechanisms that can favor overcoming situations of exclusion (transformative dimension).

The research team, through a deductive process, set a list of three main categories relevant to the study, which emerged from the state of the art and were in line with the research questions posed: (1) Educational experiences: previous educational trajectories of Muslim women with the hijab; (2) work experiences: job experiences of Muslim women wearing the hijab and the role played by companies/institutions when responding to religious diversity in professional contexts; (3) role of religious entities: actions by religious entities in intervening or providing support in the management of situations arising from the expression of religious diversity in professional contexts.

Based on the transcripts of the communicative daily life stories with Muslim women who wear the hijab and the in-depth interviews with relevant actors, the information collected by the research team was analyzed in order to explore the main exclusionary and transformative elements that emerged from the experiences and visions of the participants in relation to each of the three categories. A dialogue was established between

the researchers in order to refine and collapse the list of themes and reach a final agreement. Table 3 summarizes the main themes that emerged through the communicative data analysis.

Table 3. Coding scheme and themes emerging through data analysis.

	Categories		
Dimensions	**Educational Experiences**	**Professional Experiences**	**Role of Religious Entities**
Exclusionary dimension	Situations of exclusion (1) Lack of regulation (2) Difficulties during internship programs (3)	Barriers in the selection process (4) Prohibition to wear the hijab in the workplace (5) Situations of exclusion during the professional activity (6) Lack of commitment with the management of religious diversity by organizations (7)	Lack of visibility of the action of religious entities (8) Distance between religious entities and the reality faced by Muslim women (9)
Transformative dimension	Supportive relationships (10) Addressing issues of religious diversity in the management of the internship programs (11)	Efforts to regulate issues of religious diversity by organizations (12) Support from people in leadership positions (13) Opportunities for entrepreneurship and self-employment (14)	Support to combat discrimination (15) Opportunities for personal and professional development (16)

3. Results

In this section, the main results of the communicative analysis of the information are reported. Firstly, in order to address the first research question, the results referring to the exclusionary dimension (situations marked by discrimination related to the use of the hijab) are presented. Secondly, the results related to the second research question are presented and these refer to the transformative situations which have contributed to an inclusive management of the use of the hijab in the workplace. In each of the subsections, the findings related to the three categories analyzed are presented in the following manner: (1) educational experiences, (2) work experiences and (3) the role of religious entities.

3.1. Experiences of Discrimination Faced by Muslim Women Wearing the Hijab

3.1.1. Educational Experiences

Situations of Exclusion

Regarding the educational trajectories of the participating Muslim women with hijab, it should be noted that situations of exclusion occurred during the different educational stages (compulsory secondary education, post-compulsory secondary education, vocational training and higher education). These situations of discrimination were related to their relationship with their teachers and with peers or to the regulations set by the educational institutions, which were sometimes not inclusive enough when not non-existent. These situations had consequences for the academic progress of Muslim women who wear the hijab and sometimes they resulted in a negative impact on their future careers.

First of all, it is worth highlighting the situations of exclusion experienced by participants in their relationships with their teachers. Usually, these situations referred to the rejection by certain teachers of Muslim female students wearing the hijab in classrooms. Participants stressed how sometimes this rejection was based on the prejudice that the hijab was an imposition and on the idea that Muslim women must stop wearing it in the name of their alleged liberation. As one of the participants stressed: "you tell me . . . but if I was one of the best students, you know? In which sense was it oppressing me? But well, the woman thought it was oppressing me" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman).

There were several interviewees that described situations where teachers lowered their expectations regarding their professional prospects. One interviewee explained how teachers generated very low expectations concerning her future professional chances if she

did not give up the hijab. This participant related these low expectations with the school dropout of many Muslim girls: "there are many cases of girls who have left high school thinking that in the future they will not have the opportunity to study at university or have a job. I know many cases" (Amira, Muslim women). According to some interviewees, some teachers in the post-compulsory stages expressed negative opinions about their future work prospects. One participant who studied Engineering in Technology and Telecommunications Services echoed the words of one of her teachers: "pay attention to me, because if you wear this, you will go wrong during your career" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). In a different case, another interviewee explained a similar situation: "on the first day the teacher told me that with what I had in my head (the hijab) it was impossible for me to do either the higher degree (vocational training) or to work on what I wanted to study at that time" (Amira, Muslim woman). In another interview, Mariam, a participant with a visual impairment stated that, when her teachers were told that she wanted to go to compulsory education, they told her it was nonsense: "there are teachers who said that it didn't make sense for me to do Baccalaureate, instead of initial vocational training. And this is an experience that many migrants share" (Mariam, Muslim woman). While this interviewee considered that this experience is common among migrants, she also stressed how the fact that wearing a visible religious symbol and also having a disability aggravated this circumstance.

Nouhaila explained how many teachers asked the girls to take off their hijab while arguing that other Muslim classmates had already done it: "why not? If others have already taken it out!" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). According to this participant, the fact that some girls had given up wearing the hijab in the classroom possibly because they had received pressure, for these teachers, was a reason enough to think that they had the right to ask everyone to take it off.

In terms of relationships with their peers, some participants explained situations of discrimination or exclusion that may have been related to or aggravated by the fact that they wear a hijab. Some participants mentioned harassment, difficulties making friends or the little information and prejudices that existed. This was the case for Safia.

> In compulsory secondary education, I remember that classmates, I (had) very few. Very few. [. . .] I had very few friends at school and high school (. . .) I'm talking about compulsory secondary education, it was 2001. Then there was very little information for young people about Muslim women or what the hijab meant. Then, out of ignorance and mistrust, people tried not to approach me.
>
> (Safia, Muslim woman)

Salima shared a similar experience: "I wouldn't have made as many friendships as I would have made without the veil, in high school" (Salima, Muslim women). In her case, she explained that she did not wear the hijab during compulsory secondary education, in part because of the fear of being harassed even more: "When I was younger, I was bullied. Then I was afraid they would reject me. I never got to take the step and put on the veil" (Salima, Muslim woman).

Some of these situations, which also took place in the post-compulsory stages, such as vocational training or higher education occurred in the day-to-day life of the classroom. Noura, who studied Law, explained the discrimination that she suffered from her classmates due to the fact of wearing a hijab: "it could be that there was a section of the class who did not like (me) too much" (Noura, Muslim woman). As she explained: "we were in a group and talking to others and me, although I wanted to participate, I did not exist" (Noura, Muslim woman). Another participant explained that her classmates, especially the boys, excluded and ignored her: "Maybe they weren't talking to you, they were talking to the other girl. It's a bit like ignoring (you)" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). The same interviewee stated that those situations of exclusion were related to the prejudices of her peers: "it is also somewhat linked to sexism. I guess they have this idea of the woman also oppressed" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). Continuing with the account of situations related to prejudice, Houria explained that during her university degree and during vocational

training, she received offensive comments from her peers who asked if "I didn't [have to] be at home, married and with children" (Houria, Muslim woman). In her view, those comments were based on their peers' prejudices: "They had the idea that a Muslim woman should be married, with children, when she reached a certain age, sitting at home. This information was because of the labels they had or the media" (Houria, Muslim woman).

Lack of Regulations

It is worth noting that the rejection caused by the hijab in educational institutions took place due to the lack of clear regulations of the use of religious symbols in schools. In this context, and according to participants' accounts, it was common to be pressured not to wear the hijab in the classroom during secondary school. Often, this requirement was framed in the internal regime regulation of educational institutions and under the generic norms about clothing. Safia, who suffered this form of discrimination when she was in high school, explained how she currently deals with this situation in trying to help other Muslim female students who wear it today and preventing them from living the same situations that she lived.

> Girls who were wearing it have complained to me and, as I was already hurt by my situation (. . .) I didn't want these girls to go through the same situation. [. . .] I went with the law to schools and, in fact, in high schools for 3 years ago it is no longer prohibited. I went to the high school (and) I said: "why are they banning it?", I wanted them to show me the regulation. That they really did not have any law, that it was simply (. . .) some advice for the girls.
>
> (Safia, Muslim woman).

Najia recalled her school experiences and explained how in the face of the insistence that she stop wearing her hijab in Physical Education, which is one of the subjects in which more problems arise, she asked for a reason for the demand to take off her hijab and did not receive a clear answer. She asked to see the Principal, but she was ignored by the Physical Education teacher. Regarding the non-existence of rules that prohibit the hijab in classrooms, she explained.

> It can't be that I go into high school, and no one tells me anything and I haven't had any problems and come here and tell me that [to stop using the hijab]. And they say to me: "it's just that [there are] rules, whatever . . . " And then you say, "What rules?" and they (just) stare at you, they don't tell you anything.
>
> (Najia, Muslim woman)

Difficulties during Internship Programs

According to participants, many of the most common exclusionary experiences during post-compulsory education were related to the internship programs. Internships are often a first approach to the workplace for students. The participants reported many negative experiences related to the internship period during vocational training and university studies. Some of these discriminatory situations did not come from the organizations, but from the educational institutions themselves. Several Muslim participants argued that they were discriminated against in their allocation process. This was the case for Safia, who studied a vocational training program in Administration.

> I felt discriminated against because most of them [classmates] were sent to companies, right? Administration. And I was sent to the library. In the library you do not learn anything, nor to make invoices, nor to learn accounting, nor anything. Simply book lending [. . . .]. And I felt very discriminated against then, because then a lot of people had a chance to be hired depending on which company. Obviously, in the library, when I was sent there, I knew I didn't have any, zero opportunities.
>
> (Safia, Muslim woman)

The Health Sciences stands out as one of the fields where Muslim women have had more difficulties when completing their internship wearing a hijab. Razan, who at the time of the interview was working as a nurse, explained how, "before I started the internship, they emailed me because they wanted to talk to me about the veil, to (ask me to) take it off before going to the internship" (Razan, Muslim woman). The then-nursing student did not feel sufficiently supported by her institution: "I did not have the support of the university. On the contrary, the university is the one that required me, and the one that asked me to take off my veil during my internship" (Razan, Muslim woman). At one point, the interviewee expressed how she ended up giving in and renounced to wear the religious and cultural symbol that identifies her: "At that time, I chose to take off my veil during the internship. It was a personal decision, and I did the internship without a veil" (Razan, Muslim woman).

During the interview with Luz, one of the University's Internship coordinators in the field of Nursing, she explained the difficulties encountered in assigning students who wear the hijab to different health centers: "they want to use the hijab [. . .]. Then there are centers that do not allow them" (Luz, internship coordinator). She mentioned a case in this regard: "And there was a very serious problem, that this veteran nurse, on a racist level, (. . .), she said 'no, no, no' and 'I didn't want her'" (Luz, internship coordinator). Finally, the conflict was resolved by assigning the student to another service in the hospital: "luckily, inside the hospital they managed it very quickly, very quickly, to assign her to another service [. . .] The conflict was managed internally" (Luz, internship coordinator).

The same participant described a problem that arose when the internship selection process was computerized. At that point, for confidentiality purposes, the system did not ask the students for their clothing or for the visible expression of their religion: "we never thought it was appropriate to include if the student could go in hijab or not, because we don't think it was an important feature" (Luz, internship coordinator). Then, they began to have problems, because some Muslim candidates chose centers where they were not allowed to wear a hijab.

In some cases, wearing a hijab meant a limitation on the tasks that students were allowed to do during their internship period. Houria, a social educator explained how, at first, she was asked to take off her hijab. Faced with her refusal, she was suggested that "in some activities you could wear it, in others not" (Houria, Muslim woman). Likewise, the difficulties in finding an internship placement and the scarce support in the process could have consequences on the academic progress of the students. This is the case for Zouhra, who explained how, due to the problems she faced when finding a placement to complete her internship, she was very worried as this could mean a delay in her academic progress, making it difficult for her to graduate on time and to enroll in a Master's degree: "you see all the classmates who have already started doing the internship and that you are lagging behind, (. . .) you do not understand why the university is not finding internships for you" (Zouhra, Muslim woman).

3.1.2. Professional Experiences
Barriers in the Selection Process

When analyzing their professional experiences, many interviewees agreed in pointing to the use of the hijab as an aspect that caused situations of discrimination. In the field of education, Muslim women wearing the hijab were more likely to suffer discriminatory situations in the workplace. Amira, a participant who worked as an optometrist at the time of the study argued that she was convinced that the hijab and no other aspects was the basis of the discrimination she received when accessing to the workplace: "in reality, those who wear a hijab suffer more than those who do not. But it does not mean that those who do not wear it do not suffer" (Amira, Muslim woman). Nouhaila, another participant, reflected about the multiple forms of discrimination they faced: "look, it's a mix, I won't tell you it's just the hijab's fault, it's a bit of a mix" (Nouhaila). In addition to the hijab,

she explained that "the second (form of) discrimination can be by name and surname" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman).

Carles, the political representative interviewed, also highlighted the special discrimination suffered by Muslim women who wear hijab in their access to employment: "in the workplace, basically, the most common issue has been labor discrimination against women of Muslim faith who express this faith or want to express this faith in clothing such as it is the veil" (Carles, political representative).

These forms of discrimination begin when looking for a job and in relation to the selection process. Razan explained how, when applying for a job, she is in an awkward situation because she has to investigate whether the hijab will be a problem for her at work or not: "it's like doing an initial research to see if I will be accepted in this job" (Razan, Muslim woman). In her opinion, the hijab limits her options to find a job in accordance with her interests or her educational level.

The experiences reported by many participants revealed that many Muslim women with the hijab claimed to have received or be aware of different discriminatory situations faced by Muslim women with a hijab in the selection process compared to other candidates. Razan argued that Muslim women who want to work wearing the hijab have "this difficulty, that does not depend on the person wearing the veil, but on the acceptance or rejection of institutions, centers or human resources managers, for example" (Razan, Muslim woman). Talking about the experiences of other women around her, Najia explained: "I know a lot of girls who are said in an interview, 'Would you take off your headscarf?' (Najia, Muslim woman). In a similar vein, Nouhaila explained how these situations are common in job interviews: "Are you ready to take off your headscarf?" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). The same participant related the fact of being discarded in many selection processes due to wearing the hijab: "the main reason is not for the knowledge I have, for my training, but for a piece of garment" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman).

Amira, an optometrist, explained that in some cases it was not even possible to conduct an interview, since the rejection occurred earlier: "you already feel the rejection the moment you start talking to the person, for the simple fact of handing in the curriculum" (Amira, Muslim woman). In the same vein as other interviewees, she explained how, before applying for job offers, she usually collects information about which organizations would allow her to wear a hijab: "I always look for other alternatives, places where they can accept me with a hijab" (Amira, Muslim woman). When she receives an offer, she acts in a similar way: "When they call me for a job, [. . .] I say, 'I'm wearing a hijab, can I wear it or not?' If they say no, I say, "I'm not interested in the offer" (Amira, Muslim woman). She also explained that she always makes sure to include a photo with the hijab in her resume. Although she was aware that this can cause her to be discarded from the start, this also saves her awkward situations: "It gives me a plus, it saves me from someone wondering if I'll take it off. If there is a photo, it means that this is me, and I will not take off my hijab" (Amira, Muslim woman).

Zouhra described the difficulties they have for finding a job within their field of expertise and how, usually, employers make excuses, such as that the hijab will not be accepted by customers.

> There are companies that directly say that they do not accept that you wear the headscarf, they tell you that it is not part of the uniform, or that it is not part of our ethics, or whatever. A girl I know, in an interview, the interviewer compared her as if wearing the hijab was a disability, told her that she was not normal and that she does not have the same abilities as others. You really get hired as a hotel waitress or cleaner, but if it's in front of the public. As an administrative, clerk, receptionist, they tell you no, that in front of the customer it can't be, that customers don't accept it, that they don't want problems.
>
> (Zouhra, Muslim woman).

Prohibition to Wearing the Hijab in the Workplace

Another situation that was repeated in the participants' experience is the prohibition of wearing the hijab during work activity as a requirement for accessing a job opportunity. One of the most common arguments used to justify the ban was the fact that the employee who wears the hijab will in some way affect the customers or users of the organization/service due to their rejection of this religious symbol. Narrating a case of an acquaintance, Razan explained this situation as follows: "a person was rejected at work for this criterion that clients do not want people who wear the veil. So, this company directly rejects this person for this economic interest of not losing customers" (Razan, Muslim woman). This illustrates how the concept of neutrality in public space is often confused with that of homogeneity. Precisely neutrality means reflecting the cultural and ethnic diversity present in our societies. Prohibition or coercion in order not to wear symbols such as the hijab (among others) precisely means the violation of the principle of neutrality in public space. It also violates the right to freedom of worship of all people.

Nouhaila explained her experience working at a summer camp where she was told by her employer: "it's not for me, it's for the parents who will reject you" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). In relation to other previous work experience, in that case in the public administration, Nouhaila explained how, when she wanted to wear the veil to work, the manager told her that "this will create a lot of problems, it will create a lot of confusion" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). Reproducing the manager's comments, she said: "People are very racist, people are not ready to accept an employee with a hijab in the public administration yet. This will create a lot of confusion, they will think that we work for immigrants, that we only work for Muslims ... " (Nouhaila, Muslim woman). Noura shared the experience of an acquaintance. In that case, they justified the ban of the hijab by saying it was the company's policy and she said, 'If it's business policy, show it to me.' And there was nothing to prove that" (Noura, Muslim woman).

Salima, recalling a prior work experience in the chemical industry, described another of the paradigmatic reasons for the prohibition of the hijab in the workplace: banning the hijab for safety reasons. She reproduced what she was told: "no, of course, you can't do it (wear the hijab) because of a security protocol, because, of course, it could get tangled up in a machine" (Salima, Muslim woman). She explained that, at that time, she needed the job and agreed to take off her hijab and that, in the long run, she realized that there was no security protocol that prohibited the use of the hijab.

Another paradigmatic justification used when banning the hijab was hygiene. In Razan's words: "This is the argument that is usually given in the health field" (Razan, Muslim woman). In relation to this issue, Najia argued that it does not seem reasonable to her, as she found that wearing a hijab is, in fact, more hygienic than not doing so. In her own words: "I told them, 'you're telling me that a person wearing a ponytail is more hygienic than I'm wearing a veil. Well, do me a comparative study and let's prove it and then, you'll be right'" (Najia, Muslim woman). She considered that it was not justifiable that other colleagues are allowed to have practices that, according to her, could be considered unhygienic: "people go out to lunch in uniform, go out to smoke in uniform, go to the toilet in uniform. All this does not matter, but the other (the hijab), it does" (Najia, Muslim woman).

Another argument given by employers when banning the use of the hijab is that the organization wanted to offer an impartial and secular image. Salima told us the following.

> They tell you, 'Of course, we want, for example, a uniform image of our customers. No one here can impose or make their ideology visible.' As if a person, for example, carried a cross, right? [...] They make these comparisons to you.
>
> (Salima, Muslim woman)

In the same vein, Najia reproduced a similar argument she received: "And this is what they say most: 'we want to maintain the uniformity of the center'" (Najia, Muslim woman). In the case of Nouhaila, they also referred to the obligation to give a standard image: "many jobs make this excuse of 'you have to wear a uniform like the others', I don't know how to defend myself from this anymore" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman).

Situations of Exclusion during the Professional Practice

Among the participating women who obtained a job in which they were allowed to wear the hijab, there were some situations of exclusion during the professional practice linked to wearing this religious symbol, either by coworkers, customers, users of the service offered by the company/institution or simply anyone who may be in contact with Muslim women wearing the hijab during their workday.

Nouhaila, when describing her experiences at the workplace she was employed at the time of the interview, which is on a TV show, explained the different situations where she felt discriminated against for wearing a hijab. In this case, by people outside the company who saw her on the street doing her job.

> I've been told, I've been seen with cameras, and with producers and directors, with the director on the street for a street interview, and one of the girls said, "why did you choose this 'moor'? Why don't you choose me?" So, she thought, that girl, that she was better than me and I was just a "moor", and (then) why should they hire me, you know?
>
> (Nouhaila, Muslim woman)

As this was a job where she was socially exposed, she explained that she also received insults through social media.

> And then the attacks I received on Twitter or whatever, they said to me, "You've only been caught because of the veil." "Damn, dude, are you just seeing the veil?" [. . .] You're not seeing my skills, how I talk to people, the interview show, you're just seeing what I carry in my head, you know? They end up making you invisible.
>
> (Nouhaila, Muslim woman)

Other cases collected in the communicative daily life stories revealed how the health field was, again, a sector where Muslim women mentioned problems when dealing with patients. As Razan put it in the following manner.

> The problem is when you are with patients. There are always some cases that have a different mindset and don't want to deal with people wearing the veil. I've had some cases, some people, and now I don't visit him. I don't do the analytics or anything.
>
> (Razan, Muslim woman)

In this case, the rejection came directly from the patient, who did not want to be treated by a Muslim and Moroccan woman wearing a hijab: "And he said it clearly on my face. He rejects me, he does not want me to have contact with him, because I wear the veil, that I am a Muslim, that I am from Morocco" (Razan, Muslim woman). In a similar case, Amira explained a situation working as an optometrist where a customer did not want her to test her sight: "There are people who come to you and tell you: 'I don't want you to test (my sight), I want someone else to do it'" (Amira, Muslim woman). As this was a job that required qualifications, she considered that people were surprised to see her working with a hijab: "I still have strange looks, like 'I can't believe you're in this place (Amira, Muslim woman).

Leandro, a University's Internship coordinator in the field of Physiotherapy, explained in his interview that, in his view, rejection by patients may be related to the existence of prejudices about women wearing the hijab.

The reluctance that there may be [...] on the part of the users or patients themselves [...] to be treated by people with whom they [...] consider that they will not receive a treatment that provides them with sufficient confidence. Their prejudices, [...] basically, I understand.

(Leandro, internship coordinator)

Lack of Commitment with the Management of Religious Diversity by Organizations

Regarding the role played by organizations in managing and responding to religious diversity in work contexts, the insufficient commitment on the part of organizations in the management of religious diversity was considered an exclusionary element. Oriol, who works as a University's Internship coordinator in the field of Health Sciences, when answering the question of how he valued the efforts of organizations to change the legal frameworks to improve the management of religious diversity in the workplace, responded that: "I, I don't think there is any specific effort" (Oriol, internship coordinator).

Many of the barriers to social transformation in terms of freedom of religious expression stemmed from the role of the same companies or institutions that offer job opportunities. Mariona, who is responsible for the local delegation of a Temporary Work Agency, stated that: "there are companies in every field, we work with all types of sectors and activities, so we in (our territory) have found companies that directly tell you 'I do not want a person with hijab, or I don't want such a nationality'". (Mariona, Temporary Work Agency employee). Carla, a colleague working in another Temporary Work Agency, explained that: "there are unwritten rules ... " (Carla, temporary Work Agency employee).

This vision was shared by many of the participating Muslim women. Nouhaila mentioned that the same companies allowed situations of discrimination to be generated: "many are aware of what they are doing, but then they practice this privilege (...) choosing what you can be you and what you can't" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman).

In her case, Mariam complained that many companies have exclusionary policies. According to her point of view, some companies discriminate against Muslim women who wear hijab at the workplace but, at the same time, they have no problem with the Muslim community being customers: "and they are companies that, for example, Muslim people consume a lot [...]. They like us to be consumers, but not workers" (Mariam, Muslim woman). In order to denounce this situation, the participant proposed to make a list of companies that do not allow Muslim women employees to work with the hijab. The interviewee considered that "it would be good to expose them and (that) they can reach a boycott or change their policies" (Mariam, Muslim woman).

Another theme that was addressed in Mariam's interview was the lack of commitment on the part of public administrations. She expressed her surprise that exclusionary actions can take place in public administration, which, in her opinion, should by definition be more inclusive than other work fields. She described the attitudes of some coworkers: "my colleagues who run other programs were freaking out, [...] to say: 'how can they be at a public administration ... wearing a hijab', right? It is equality, inclusion. It doesn't fit" (Mariam, Muslim woman). She detailed her reasons for complaining as follows: "Sometimes, we think, 'no, (this happens) in private companies [...]'. But what does the administration do? The administration ... some very nice leaflets, a pretty clear law, but is it really being enforced or (instead) is everyone here doing what they want?" (Mariam, Muslim woman).

Another relevant aspect in relation to the role of organizations was the insufficient transparency in the management of religious diversity. Again, the management of university internship programs (which has already been highlighted in Section 3.1.1) was highlighted as an area in which difficulties arise regarding the management of religious diversity. On the one hand, this was evident in the lack of clear regulations regarding clothing and the expression of visible religious symbols. Luz, one of the university's internship coordinators in the field of nursing, pointed out that, in hospitals, there are usually no clear dress codes when it comes to receiving internship students wearing the hijab: "We have

asked hospitals if they have regulations on this subject. Few hospitals have regulations" (Luz, internship coordinator).

Razan, who at the time of the interview worked as a nurse, shared a similar view in relation to the existing protocols. Specifically, she described the lack of application of the legislation in practice.

> There are legal frameworks that are written, but not being implemented. [. . .] You go to an institution, and they can recognize that yes, that there is this religious freedom, that it is included in the Constitution, or the Catalan Statute or whatever you want, but then, to put it into practice, it is necessary a bit of effort on the part of the institutions, to put these texts into practice and that (the expression of religious freedom) is something palpable and that it is something real.
>
> (Razan, Muslim woman)

It is also worth noting the lack of clarity on which body is responsible when it comes to managing and intervening in situations of religious discrimination in the workplace. As Carles, the political leader interviewed, pointed out: "We would love to see, in a much clearer way, the reference group or the place of reference where we could go to talk about these situations" (Carles, political representative). Luz, drawing on her experience as a university's internship coordinator, argued that universities do not always give enough support on this matter, and that, in the face of a possible problematic situation, all the responsibility falls on her position as coordinator of the program. She lamented that this is a situation that "happens every year" (Luz, internship coordinator) and that no durable solutions are offered from the university.

3.1.3. The Role of Religious Entities

Regarding the role of religious entities in the intervention and support in the management of situations arising from the management of religious diversity in professional contexts, the communicative analysis revealed that more work is required to make visible and expand the role of these entities and strengthen their connection with the real needs of Muslim women who face exclusionary situations related to the hijab in the workplace.

Lack of Dissemination of the Action of Religious Entities

One of the issues that may require a more intense work of religious organizations was the fact that, according to the interviewees, there was a lack of dissemination in terms of the actions of religious entities. Some participants complained that there are not enough religious entities to support Muslim women in these specific issues or argued that those that already existed were not known enough. Salima, in the face of the question of whether she knew any organization that supported the rights of Muslim people, answered that she did not know any official entities (Salima, Muslim woman). These were Amira's words in relation to the work of Muslim entities in her geographical area: "I did not have the opportunity to ask for help. There is no association in my city that has knowledge in the field" (Amira, internship coordinator). In a similar vein, Safia talked about the lack of religious entities offering specific support for Muslim people in terms of discrimination in the workplace: "we need more associations, not cultural associations, but religious communities, that can work from mosques, that can really fight for the rights that all Muslims in this country have" (Safia, Muslim woman).

In the interviews with coordinators of internship programs, some of them revealed that they did not know any organizations that support Muslim people. Meritxell, a Baccalaureate program's coordinator at a Jesuit high school offered a similar answer: "We do not have established, let's say, activities with other religious communities, which I know" (Meritxell, High school program's coordinator). Furthermore, some of the Muslim women interviewed explained that they did not know religious organizations that confront specific issues related to the management of religious diversity in the workplace. Amira, a Muslim woman, argued that either there were not enough associations or that they were not made known but, in any case, she was not aware of any that dealt with that specific matter.

> I think it is very necessary that there are more associations that support and advise us, or that they are made known. Many of the people who suffer this type of rejection are unaware that there are alternatives to asking for outside help. We are not aware that there is an association or NGO or whatever.

> (Amira, Muslim woman)

Thinking back on her past experiences, she expressed how useful these types of associations could have been at some moments when she suffered discriminatory situations related to religious expression in professional contexts: "I personally would have loved to find someone who has gone through some experience, who can tell me what she did at that time or whether she has knowledge" (Amira, Muslim woman).

In that sense, while some participants expressed that those entities did exist, they argued that they do not make themselves visible enough. In the words of Najia: "I think there is support, what happens is that not everyone knows it" (Najia, Muslim woman). Safia expressed a similar opinion.

> I think they are there, but they lack a lot of visibility. If you are not in this world, you do not know these services. You don't know your rights; you don't know where you can go. These services must be visible and publicized. And they must reach all citizens.

> (Safia, Muslim woman).

Distance between Religious Entities and the Reality Lived by Muslim Women Who Suffer Discrimination in the Workplace

Data collection revealed another theme that pointed to the need for religious entities to deepen their work to support Muslim women facing difficulties in their access to employment: The distance between the existing religious entities and the reality of Muslim women who suffer discrimination in the workplace. Safia explained that, according to her point of view, the existing religious entities are often too far from the social reality: "the representatives we have are not prepared to defend the rights that we have, that we want to defend, and they are not aware of the barriers that we have to break every day, and they do not live in the world where we are living" (Safia, Muslim woman). She explained that there was too much distance between the Muslim population and the representatives of religious entities: "they do not understand us. And there is a brutal difference between us and the representatives, who represent the Islamic communities." (Safia, Muslim woman). Oriol, a university's internship coordinator in the field of health sciences highlighted that those Muslim women themselves were those who were fighting to be recognized: "they are doing it alone, because religious cultural associations are not facilitating it" (Oriol, internship coordinator).

3.2. Inclusive Experiences Lived by Muslim Women in the Workplace

3.2.1. Prior Educational Experiences

Building Supporting Relationships

As for the previous educational experiences of people belonging to religious minorities, data collection also featured experiences that could be considered transformative since they could serve as an example for the possibility of overcoming barriers to social transformation in the field.

One of the most transformative aspects in relation to the experiences lived by the participating women in relation to their pathway through the different educational stages was the establishment of supportive relationships with other people. Some of those supportive relationships experienced by some of the participating Muslim women were built with teachers. Sometimes, after experiencing negative reactions, a teacher appeared who showed a different attitude and marked by an inclusive approach to the expression of religious belief through the use of the hijab. This was the case for Najia, a Muslim participant who had had negative experiences with previous teachers and explained how

she turned to another teacher to find out if wearing the hijab could be problematic in his class: "then in 4th (year of secondary education) we had another teacher and I thought, "Let's see, I'll go and ask before he says it in front of everyone." And the teacher stares at me and says, "What should I care about?" (Najia, Muslim woman).

Some Muslim participants, who worn the hijab during their college years, explained positive experiences regarding the expression of their religion through a visible symbol such as the hijab in the university context. Nouhaila explained how the university was, in her experience, a more tolerant space in terms of the acceptance towards the use of the hijab in relation to what she had seen in high school: "(in) the uni(versity) they don't ban it, just to go to class, I didn't get any ... that is, no complaints, so to speak, or any anecdote that some teacher did not let me be in class "(Nouhaila, Muslim woman). Similarly, Razan explained her positive experience in this regard, in this case in the field of nursing

> Academically, I have to admit I had no problems. And at the level of attending class with a veil, doing laboratory practices in class ... because Nursing consists of a theoretical part and a practical part that are done in class. In this aspect with the teachers, I have never had any problems.
>
> (Razan, Muslim woman)

The role of classmates also became a key support for some participants. Noura explained a specific case where she received the support of her college classmates when she took the step of wearing the hijab to college.

> I remember that I had two friends who are my best colleagues from university and, moreover, they were Catalan, and they said: "look, let's do something: the first day we will come a day earlier so that you can be with us"—which was also the first day they saw me in a veil— "we will both accompany you to class"
>
> (Noura, Muslim woman)

She stressed how important it was for her to receive the support of these two colleagues at that time.

> And I liked it a lot, because it was a very important foothold to get into class. And knowing that two people accepted me already gave me more willpower and said, "I can do this"
>
> (Noura, Muslim woman).

Some interviewees related the fact of having positive experiences to the choice of certain careers that may, a priori, be more receptive to diversity. Mariam admitted that "she [didn't] have such explicit scenarios" and related it to the characteristics of the degree she chose, in that case, Journalism: "think that we study a lot what the subject of culture is, diverse perspectives in itself ... So, being such a more open Degree I also see it as very focused on the subject of traveling ... " (Mariam, Muslim woman). Although the same participants mentioned some negative experiences with university professors, she acknowledged that "the truth is that, with my classmates, it was great. I have never had a problem with anyone" (Mariam, Muslim woman).

Addressing Issues of Religious Diversity in the Management of the Internship Programs

The results revealed, as another key transformative aspect, the importance of normalizing the issue of religious diversity in the management of external practices, while simultaneously providing students with a wide range of placements in which to carry out this training activity in an inclusive context. Marcos, a university's internship coordinator in the field of business management, when asked if he had had to deal with problems arising from the expression of religious freedom, replied that "in no case" (Marcos, internship coordinator). He explained that, within this degree, there are students from different origins and religions but that no problems have arisen that derive from this diversity, "both as a matter of religious belief, but also of physical origin" (Marcos, internship coordinator). This

was also the case for Muslim female students: "there were quite a few, so there were like ... I can count between 8 and 10 people wearing veils" (Marcos, internship coordinator).

Similarly, Anna, another coordinator of a university's internships in the field of health sciences, acknowledged the importance of maintaining a close and constant communication with internship centers in order to establish common operating criteria: "always we, from internships, must agree on all these issues with internship centers, because we can have our internal regulations, but then obviously the internships are carried out by an external center" (Anna, internship coordinator).

Houria, who studied a Bachelor's Degree in Social Education, explained how her internship placement with senior people was very enriching: "in the end I took part in all the activities and did them well, my grandparents were delighted" (Houria, Muslim woman). The participant expressed how much she enjoyed the university internship experience.

> In addition, many activities related to the veil arose due to the hijab. We worked on very cool topics, for example, there were some cultural activities one day a week, they talked about different topics, one of the topics that arose was cultural equality, respect, the veil, and so on.
>
> (Houria, Muslim woman)

Mariam explained a positive internship experience within the Degree in Journalism, attributing it to the context of respect for diversity that she encountered.

> And then, when I worked there, I noticed that they were very open people. In addition, the projects they were doing were projects that were not here in Barcelona, they were projects in Mali, in the Sahara, they were about international cooperation. And, of course, the truth, they never told me anything. I was very comfortable, my privacy was respected, no one judged me for what I wore, nor did anyone judge what I was.
>
> (Mariam, Muslim woman)

3.2.2. Professional Experiences
Efforts to Regulate Religious Diversity in the Workplace

Among the transformative elements in the professional experiences of Muslim women who wear hijab, it is worth highlighting, in the first place, the efforts to regulate religious diversity in the work environment.

Different participants explained some experiences in which they found support and understanding from the organizations, which allowed them to develop their professional activity with the hijab. In those cases, dialogue was placed as a key tool for reaching agreements and for creating opportunities to accommodate the expression of religious diversity. This was the case for Amira.

> In this sense, one of the participants expressed her current job as an optometrist: "I talked to them if the veil was a problem for them. They told me no and that they lived in a neighborhood where there were a lot of Muslim people and it would not be a problem for them".
>
> (Amira, Muslim woman).

Drawing on her particular experience, Razan stated that she did not suffer discriminatory situations for the hijab during the selection processes: "on a personal level of being rejected in a company for wearing the veil, I did not have this situation" (Razan, Muslim woman). Mariam, in her case, explained some transformative experiences during the selection process in which the hijab was not a cause for exclusion.

> I went to the interview, and they hired me and, honestly, I can't complain about that. I had some really good experiences, because in none of the interviews I did, they never told me anything about the veil and neither did the Tax Agency. They simply asked me questions related to work, telephone communication and all that. I was never told the theme of the veil or religious theme.
>
> (Mariam, Muslim woman)

It is worth noting some transformative experiences reported by participants that were related to other religious practices beyond the use of the hijab. For example, the possibility of having spaces to pray. This was the case for Mariam, who explained that she was allowed to pray during her working day: "you can pray, for example. I, at times, did pray there once. Not much, because I come home very soon, but sometimes I have prayed (. . .) and there is no problem" (Mariam, Muslim woman).

It is relevant to note that, among the inclusive experiences lived by some participants, some of them corresponded to job opportunities developed in professional organizations belonging to other religions (for example, the Catholic confession). Razan explained a past experience from volunteering: "I was teaching as a review volunteer in a Catholic church, and, in this case, I had no problem wearing it (the hijab)" (Razan, Muslim woman). This was not the only case where transformative experiences occurred in job positions related to other religions. Noura, who at the moment of the interview worked as an administrative assistant in a clinic for senior people run by a Catholic congregation, explained that she felt highly valued in her organization and she related it to their attitude of respect and understanding towards religious aspects: "they understand religion, they respect it" (Noura, Muslim woman). According to her account, at work they allowed her to pray without any limitation: "I can pray without any problem, take five minutes and pray. Go to a place and without any problem" (Noura, Muslim woman). In that sense, she considered that working with Catholic nuns, who also wore visible religious symbols, made them respect the hijab and her faith in the workplace: "with the director, who is a nun, she is also super nice, and she understands you and so on. Because she is a religious person, she understands you better" (Noura, Muslim woman).

Houria argued how the efforts to normalize religious diversity in organizations may end up creating opportunities for companies to include aspects related to diversity within their activities. She explained how, from her incorporation in her current company, initiatives have been promoted to work on issues on diversity in the workplace: "some workshops, round tables, to work on these issues" (Houria, Muslim woman). Anna, a coordinator of external university internships in the field of health sciences, explained the value of including issues of respect for diversity in organizations, while taking into account the religious beliefs of their employees: "maybe you, you start saying: "[. . .] I am part of this institution, which takes into account minorities", because I am starting to think that this is not just a personal thing, but part of the professional side" (Anna, internship coordinator). Marcos, another internship coordinator in the field of business management, shared a similar vision: "I believe that companies are becoming clearer every day that what needs to be sought is the talent and value of the worker" (Marcos, internship coordinator), above other parameters such as religion or origin.

It should be noted that only in one of the cases analyzed that the respect for religious diversity was explicitly included in the statutes of an organization. This was the case for Mariam, when working in a magazine in the field of education.

> I liked it a lot, because one of the principles of that company or magazine was that the religious and free speech of any worker was respected. Then every person who comes in, when he/she is going to sign the contract, (. . .) "you can't help create awkward situations for religious or expression issues in general." I found it very interesting, because in other places they do respect it and such, but they do not reflect it in their policy.
>
> (Mariam, Muslim woman).

Although this was not the case for all participants with inclusive experiences, the described efforts to harmonize the work practice of participants with the visible expression of their religious belief may be understood as a starting point for moving towards the effective inclusion of the management of religious diversity in the protocols and regulations of organizations.

Support from People in Leadership Positions

Another key element to ensure more inclusive experiences for Muslim women wearing the hijab is to build relations of support in the workplace. In this regard, receiving support from people in leadership positions was decisive in preventing and combating potential situations of discrimination. Some participants explicitly mentioned positive experiences with their managers or other types of senior officials: "I have had my Head by my side" (Amira, Muslim woman); "I came across a fairly open-minded director and I really liked it" (Mariam, Muslim woman); or, in relation to both superiors and colleagues: "in the place where I work, I haven't had this problem of being rejected by colleagues or a responsible" (Razan, Muslim woman).

Amira, who worked as an optician, described a situation where the support of her boss in the face of possible discrimination by customers was crucial: "my boss said that if I didn't test him/her, no one would do it, that yes, (maybe) they would lose a customer, but if he/she is a customer with those thoughts, they would rather lose it than have it as a customer"(Amira, Muslim woman). Noura explained a situation where she felt very supported by her boss after being discriminated against by some of her colleagues during a training session.

> The boss confronted them, in front of everyone, he said: 'what are those who make you feel inferior?' The boss confronted them and said clearly, 'who wants to follow the training, well, and who doesn't want to, he/she can go, the door is quite big, but here we are all the same.'
>
> (Noura, Muslim woman)

The importance of people in positions of responsibility having an open and respectful attitude was also reflected in the words of Marcos who, drawing on his experience as internship coordinator, explained how the Vice-Dean of Students in his university was a sensitive person to religious diversity, which has been a decisive aspect to make strides in the recognition of these issues in the management of university internship programs: "the Vice-dean of students is carried by a person, who is a sociologist, who has a fairly significant sensitivity to all these issues of inclusion" (Marcos, internship coordinator).

Opportunities for Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

Among the positive professional experiences lived by the participants, many pointed to the creation of new professional opportunities through entrepreneurship or other forms of self-employment. During the communicative daily life stories with Muslim women who wear the hijab, some cases of Muslim women who opted for entrepreneurship as a way to wear the hijab to their workplace without restrictions were described. In this sense, Noura described the situation of a friend who worked as a podiatrist and had chosen to open her own clinic: "the podiatrist who [. . .] did her own clinic, which is very good" (Noura, Muslim woman). In the same vein and referring to Muslim women who wear hijab and opt for entrepreneurship, Nouhaila explained: "they have their own business and that is why they are self-employed, that is why they can work from what they have studied" (Nouhaila, Muslim woman).

For her part, Razan explained the case of her sister, who like other Muslim women who wanted to work with a hijab, had chosen to work independently: "then, I have other people who are already working independently. My sister, however, in her case is autonomous, she decides herself to work with or without a veil, it is up to herself" (Razan, Muslim woman).

3.2.3. Role of Religious Entities

Support When Combating Discrimination in Work-Related Situations

In relation to the support received when facing possible obstacles in their access to employment, some participants recalled transformative experiences in which religious organizations offered support when combating discrimination in work-related situations related to Muslim women, specially related to the expression of a visible religious symbol such as the hijab. Safia mentioned the task conducted by a Muslim association, with which she collaborated, in relation to the support to Muslim female employees who did not want to give up wearing the hijab in their place of work: "from the association, I am already working hard on the issue of the hijab (. . .) The main idea of the creation of the association was to fight for our rights and one of these struggles, one of these rights, was the issue of the veil." (Safia, Muslim woman). Other participants mentioned a Muslim youth association that acted in support of Muslim young women who were not allowed to wear the hijab in their workplace. In the following excerpt, Houria explained part of its activity.

> I know of a case of a girl who came to the Muslim Multicultural Association for help. These girls, due to wearing the veil, could not do external internships or participate in day-to-day class activities. They were in intermediate vocational training. Also, from a university degree.
>
> (Houria, Muslim woman)

Razan explained how, in some cases, these organizations had to act as mediators in conflicts related to health centers and employees wearing the hijab.

> We have had enough action at the level of intermediaries and at the level of acting to solve the problem. Then, in this case, what is done is to talk to the affected person, try to talk to the health center or the responsible center and try to act as an intermediary to see if a solution can be reached.
>
> (Razan, Muslim woman)

She also talked about the transformative role that these associations play for Muslim women: "when you see that there are different associations that you see acting, you see that there are people who are denouncing situations, and this gives you more strength that you have a right and you must defend this right" (Razan, Muslim woman).

Opportunities for Personal and Social Development

Another transformative element related to the role of religious entities was the way in which they worked to promote Muslim women's opportunities for personal and social development. Salima explained how religious entities usually encouraged Muslim students to continue their education: "I restarted my studies thanks to the support that I had from the community, we can say, or associations where I belonged" (Salima, Muslim woman). She explained how they inspired her to move on: "that more girls needed to impose themselves on all that is happening and show and give visibility to their factors, to their lives and that we really don't get there they don't let us get there" (Salima, Muslim woman). She also explained how the association allowed her to meet people in similar situations: "when I was already in high school and all that, I think I didn't know anyone, but later, through the association and all that, yes, I found people, yes" (Salima, Muslim woman).

For her part, Mariam emphasized the key role of associations in empowering young Muslim to make themselves visible and claim their role in society.

> I think it is a way of helping to break these stereotypes. And also, when they make visible the initiatives of young people who are here in this society, and who are contributing directly to this society. And it is a way of saying that we are also part of this society, and we are not here only to study and work, but we are contributing and contributing. And if those who are from here care about Catalonia or Spain, then let them know that we also contribute for the welfare of

the country and contribute new things and help it improve. I think that making things visible helps a lot and helps to report, of course.

(Mariam, Muslim woman)

4. Discussion

In the current scenario of cultural and religious diversity in European societies, the management of religious diversity in work contexts is an urgent matter to move towards more inclusive societies [4] and to contribute to the achievement of different Sustainable Development Goals included in the 2030 Agenda [3]. However, prior research pointed to the difficulties experienced by minority religious communities in advancing their academic careers and accessing employment, with a special focus on Muslim women wearing the hijab [9,13,18], which are one of the social groups most at risk of suffering unemployment or underemployment [15] in Western societies due to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, related to gender, ethnic origin and the use of visible religious symbols. Progress in overcoming this problem requires considering the key role that various actors must play (including educational and training institutions, organizations, administrations and other relevant stakeholders, such as religious-based organizations). In addition, it is necessary to delve into the trajectories lived by women with the hijab to be able to observe the forms of discrimination suffered and identify actions that allow them to overcome them. Furthermore, as previous studies [11,12] pointed out, it is necessary to pay attention to the efforts carried out by women themselves when it comes to overcoming these barriers and, ultimately, contribute to transform social dynamics related to employment.

Against this backdrop, the present study permitted an in-depth analysis of the experiences of the Muslim women wearing the hijab in Catalonia (Spain). Through a qualitative study with a communicative orientation [38,39] that comprised of communicative daily life stories with a group of Muslim women who wear the hijab, as well as in-depth interviews with different relevant agents in the field of training and employment (i.e., coordinators of university internship programs, providers or employment, policy makers, etc.), the findings illustrated, on the one hand the different situations of discrimination in work contexts suffered by Muslim women wearing the hijab. These include difficulties in the transition from education to the workplace, inequality in the selection processes, situations of exclusion or discrimination during their professional activity and pressures to stop using the hijab in the workplace, etc. In addition, the findings also pointed to the pervasive effects of the lack of transparency of regulations on the use of religious symbols, such as the hijab, which generates a context of ambiguity and lack of protection and point to the insufficient commitment on the part of organizations to ensure respect for religious diversity. These results are consistent with prior studies that described processes of exclusion or lack of opportunities experienced by Muslim women in their access to employment [13,19,20,22].

Furthermore, the findings revealed the lack of visibility of the work performed by religious entities, which sometimes could make it difficult for the existing resources to reach out to all women who are in need of support, while simultaneously showing that a stronger effort is needed for such organizations to address the real needs of Muslim women who wear the hijab in their pathway to employment.

On the other hand and, in line with prior studies that have illustrated the efforts of Muslim women who wear the hijab to advance in their careers despite the existing obstacles [24,25], the transformative orientation of the communicative methodology has allowed us to identify some inclusive actions that may contribute to overcoming situations of exclusion and promote a more effective management of the use of the hijab in the workplace. Among the strategies that contribute to overcoming situations of discrimination in employment related to the use of the hijab by Muslim women, our findings have pointed to the relevance of establishing supportive relationships (with teachers, classmates and co-workers), as well as the decisive importance of receiving the support of people in leadership and managerial positions that may contribute to fostering a climate of respect for diversity. This finding is in line with prior research stressing the need to promote religious literacy

together with interreligious dialogue [29,41] as tools for the prevention of conflicts and the management of religious diversity in organizations. Likewise, the power of making visible and opening a dialogue about religious diversity in organizations has been identified as a necessary step to move towards the explicit inclusion of respect for religious diversity in the protocols and regulations of the organizations. Furthermore, the analysis carried out shed light on the relevant role played by religious organizations in supporting Muslim women wearing the hijab in the face of situations of discrimination, as well as in promoting their personal and social development; an aspect that had been revealed in some recent cases that had found an echo in the media [30–32] in the Catalan context. In this sense, the findings are in line with prior studies [33,34] that explored the role played by faith-based institutions in supporting the social inclusion of minority communities and points to the need to guide future research to the study of these emerging social actors.

The study has some limitations that should be noted. For example, while the views of a diverse group of Muslim women who wear the hijab in their access to employment have been collected, the participants in communicative daily life stories are mostly Muslim women with post-compulsory education who may enjoy better opportunities and have more resources when dealing with situations of discrimination in their access to employment. In order to overcome this limitation, further research may broaden the focus of the study by exploring the experiences of women with different levels of educational attainment such that the reality experienced by more invisible women (i.e., women who have not reached compulsory education) can also be considered. In addition, further research may deepen the views of providers of employment in more diverse professional fields in order to look into the difficulties and resistances that organizations may face when regulating the expression of religious diversity, as well as to know, in more detail, the existing actions that are already being carried out in the interest of moving towards the creation of more respectful work environments.

In response to the challenge of accommodating the religious diversity faced by various European countries and countries worldwide [4,6], the study has not only helped illustrate the specific situations of exclusion experienced by Muslim women in Catalonia (Spain) who decided to wear the hijab in the public arena, including the workplace, thus contributing to the body of existing studies on the field [13,14,17], but also created new knowledge on ways to improve the professional opportunities for this social group. Consequently, our findings complement those of earlier studies [36,42] which pointed out that, while the management of religious diversity in the workplace is complex and may generate resistance among the different actors involved, it can also become an opportunity to improve organizations, since incorporating issues of diversity in the workplace can afford ground for accommodating and recognizing a wide range of individual, cultural and social aspects of the lives of the different people who share the workplace. Giving a more pluralistic and decisive response to diversity in the workplace constitutes a necessary step towards more inclusive societies that are able to ensure adequate transitions between training and access to employment for all citizens and, ultimately, to promote social inclusion for all.

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