

Headscarf debate is nonexistent in Turkish social life, survey finds

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The headscarf problem is purely political and has no real foundation in society, according to a recent survey that found covered and non-covered women are at ease with each other.

The survey, carried out by the Metropoll Strategic and Social Research Center for the Turkish Businesswomen Association, or TIKAD, aims to stop Turkey “wasting its time and energy on the headscarf debate,” according to TIKAD head Nilüfer Bulut.

“The deadlock is all political” as parties manipulate the headscarf issue either to strengthen their power or as “ideological ammunition,” Bulut said. Her comments laid blame on both sides of the political debate, without naming them, though TIKAD is known to be close to the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP. Professor Özer Sancar, general director of Metropoll, told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review that 10 percent on each side of the debate had a discriminating stance toward each other while the middle 80 percent were at ease with being covered or not.

The 3,052 survey respondents from 26 provinces were randomly selected by computer according to a quota determined by official voter numbers for that province. Equal numbers of women who wear headscarves, women who don't wear headscarves, and husbands of each were spoken to, but only one person from a household. All respondents were interviewed over the phone.

To the question, “Would it be a problem if your son or brother married a woman who wore a headscarf?” 84 percent of non-covered women and 81 percent of non-covered women's husbands answered, “No.” The reverse question was asked to covered women and their husbands: 90 percent of the women and 80.1 percent of the men answered, “No.” When asked about friends or neighbors, the answers from both sides showed 89 percent to 97 percent of people were indifferent about whether their neighbors or friends wore headscarves.

The percentage of non-covered women who would not be bothered by having a covered colleague was 89.1 percent while 75.9 percent said they felt sorry about covered women being unable to get a collage education. When it came to covered women, 94.3 percent stated they would not force others to cover their heads. Further, 77.2 said covering themselves was their own decision, while 9.6 percent said their families demanded it, and 9.1 said they covered because it is tradition. When asked, almost half of the husbands of covered women said they would allow their wives to uncover their heads in order to be able to work or go to school, but 74.6 percent of covered women said they would not take off their headscarves just to get a job.

Collective answers from all four groups showed 84 percent of people believed women cover their heads “because of faith.” To the question, “Should women

cover their heads outside of the home?"77.8 percent of people answered,"Those who want should, while those who don't shouldn't." The question was answered, "Yes, they should," by 15.4 percent and, "No, they should not," by 5.9 percent. Fully 74.7 percent supported public workers' right to cover while 70.3 said repealing the ban on headscarves at university would not cause pressure on uncovered students.

Sources

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