

Aligning Research with Islamic Ethics: Navigating the Challenges of LGBT and Sexual Education Research in Academic Inquiry

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Dear Editor,

As a Muslim and a researcher, it is crucial to ensure that our research ethics framework aligns with religious principles and cultural norms. It is our responsibility not only to pursue knowledge and publication but also to ensure that our research does not deviate from the values we hold dear. Ethical research is fundamental to academic credibility and integrity. For a Muslim, this means conducting research that is consistent with Islamic teachings and respects our cultural norms. This is important because it upholds dignity and morality, which are core tenets of Islam (1).

Therefore, research involving sensitive issues such as LGBTQ or sexual education must be approached with caution to avoid conflicting with our religious principles. Without a clear ethical framework, research findings can be misinterpreted and used to defame or misrepresent Islam. For example, using Western-developed research instruments without adapting them to local contexts can perpetuate the stereotype that Muslims are homophobic, which is an unfair generalization. We must remember that our research findings form the narrative that portrays our nation and religion.

There is a substantial body of empirical findings based on research deliberately produced to foster sympathy towards the LGBT community using themes of oppression, discrimination, injustice, rights violations, and many other terminologies (2-9) These are employed to demonstrate that this group receives unjust treatment from society and

needs to be empowered in terms of their rights and social achievements.

Young researchers, particularly undergraduates, often fall into the trap of using research instruments developed by Western researchers. This can lead to several issues, including bias in the research instruments. Many Western-developed instruments may contain biases that are incompatible with our societal norms and values. For instance, instruments that normalize LGBTQ lifestyles may not be appropriate in a society that views such lifestyles as contrary to religious teachings. Utilizing these instruments without modification can lead to conclusions that support lifestyles opposed to Islamic teachings, undermining the researcher's beliefs and misrepresenting the stance of the Muslim community as a whole.

In a world based on the principle of academic freedom, it is not surprising to see various research efforts supporting the strengthening of social interaction for the LGBT community, such as studies on the effects of simulation conducted by McCave, Aptaker [(10). This empowerment-based research extends not only to the capacity of the individuals themselves but also encompasses the empowerment of families, workplaces, and even educational and healthcare institutions. The misuse of academic ethics is so specific that it has led to the development of instruments that can be utilized within these particular spaces (2,3,9,11,12).

Supervisors and academics play a crucial role in guiding students and maintaining research

integrity. They must ensure that students understand and follow a clear ethical framework grounded in religious principles. This includes selecting appropriate research instruments and adapting them to the local context. When research findings do not align with religious values, supervisors should assist students in reinterpreting the data from the correct perspective. This not only helps students comprehend the ethical implications of their research but also ensures that their findings are not misinterpreted.

As academics, we are entrusted with safeguarding the gateway to knowledge, ensuring that religious principles and good values are not infiltrated by excessive liberalism. The faculty, especially the ethical committee, must play a crucial role in advising and approving research by anticipating its trajectories and probable implications for the community. Attention must be given to the popular research areas, including traditional issues such as HIV/AIDS, as well as contemporary topics in the field of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medication and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). We need to be more astute in evaluating and anticipating the direction of such research, assessing whether it benefits Islam or strengthens liberal arguments in advancing their agenda.

Therefore, in addition to evaluating the direction of the research from the perspective of Islamic epistemology, empirical evidence and rational arguments related to the object of study are also needed. This demonstrates the enrichment of perspectives in Islamic research epistemologically. Clearly, the assessment is conducted to ensure that the research undertaken by Muslim researchers does not conflict with Islamic law.

By following Islamic guidelines, researchers can help protect adolescents from exposure to ideas and behaviours that are considered harmful within the Islamic framework. This contributes to the moral and spiritual development of young people, promoting a society that values modesty, family, and ethical behaviour.

Research findings that respect Islamic principles are more likely to be accepted and implemented by policymakers, educators, and

the broader Muslim community. This increases the likelihood that the research will have a positive impact and lead to meaningful changes in sexual education practices.

Research that adheres to religious ethics and cultural norms is essential for contributing to knowledge while respecting and protecting our cherished values. As Muslim researchers and academics, this responsibility is a trust we must uphold with awareness and sincerity.

And ultimately, when conducting research, we should aim to seek the pleasure of Allah, ensuring that our research is accepted as an act of worship. This can only be achieved if our worship aligns with Islamic principles and is carried out with utmost sincerity.

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