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**Conversion to Islam among Women in the USA:  
Reasons and Effects**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to five years of hard work.

To my parents and family, who supported me along the way.

To my friends who believed in me.

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By the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

First and foremost, praise is for Allah, on whom we depend for help and guidance.

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## **Abstract**

The United States is a diverse country that combines variable ethnicities, races, cultures, and religions such as Christianity and Islam, the latter of which is the world's second-largest religious group and the third-dominant religion in the United States. Despite the media portrayal of Islam and the hostility against Muslims following the 9/11 attacks, it managed to spread rapidly among American women, who chose it as their new religion instead of any other widely spread religion in the USA. This study aims to determine the main reasons leading American women to change their faith and convert to Islam, as well as the effects of conversion, in addition to the challenges Muslim women face after conversion. This research adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods to build theoretical knowledge about the main reasons and effects of conversion to Islam among American women. The theory was further supported by a qualitative questionnaire that aimed to test the studied topic's hypotheses. The interpretation and discussion of the results confirmed that the main factors causing American women's conversion to Islam are their dissatisfaction with their previous religion, discovering the purpose of life in Islam, and direct contact with other Muslims. The process of conversion also results in several effects on women's conversion to Islam and their relationships with their families and society, in addition to some social and personal challenges.

**Keywords:** American women, conversion, Islam, effects; reasons.

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

<b>ABC News</b>	American Broadcasting Company News
<b>CAIR</b>	Council on American Islamic Relations
<b>CGTN America</b>	China Global Television Network
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>PBUH</b>	Peace Be Upon Him
<b>SAAWS</b>	Salla Allaho Alieh Wa Salam
<b>SWT</b>	Subhanahu WA Ta'ala
<b>USA</b>	United States of America

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## **General Introduction**

### **1. Background of the Study**

The cultural and religious diversity of the United States is a result of several factors, including slavery, the four major immigration waves, and trade. Immigrants from across the globe arrived in the United States, and propagated their religion. However, Islam has managed to become the third-largest group in the United States and its influence has been so widespread that a remarkable number of Americans have converted to Islam. However, the most recent studies demonstrate that more American women than men convert to Islam every year. Because of several factors, this has the potential to drastically alter women's religious beliefs as well as their outlook on life and social interactions. Furthermore, the common stereotypes concerning Islam and the 9/11 incident, which create a difficult environment for Muslims living in the USA, also make non-Muslim women curious to learn about Islam and explore its essence.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

The post-9/11 incident era in the USA was mainly characterized by a remarkable hostility toward Muslims at the time, in addition to arbitrary arrests and terrorism accusations against Muslim citizens. The media shed light on Islamophobia and disseminated a negative perception of Islam throughout American society. Despite that, the number of American Muslims, mainly women, who have converted is constantly increasing, and according to surveys conducted by the Council of American Islamic Relations, 20,000 people convert to Islam every year in the USA, of whom 80% are women. This number is enormous in comparison with American society, which consists of a Christian majority and has such a negative perspective on Islam and Muslims. American converted women, constituting 80% of the total number of converts in the U.S. in addition to previous data, constitute the primary basis for conducting the following

research to discover and explain the reasons behind the conversion of American women to Islam as well as the different types of effects resulting from this phenomenon.

### **3. Research Questions and Research Hypotheses**

The current study attempts to find adequate answers to the following questions:

**Q1:** What are the different reasons that lead American women to convert to Islam?

**Q2:** What are the effects caused by American women's conversion to Islam, individually and collectively?

In light of the aforementioned questions, we hypothesize that conversion to Islam among women in the United States is caused by several personal, historical, and social factors and results in a set of individual and collective effects.

### **4. Aims of the Study**

This research seeks to investigate the main factors that influence American women to change their faith and convert to Islam. Furthermore, it attempts to discover and explain the psychological, social, and spiritual effects resulting from the process of conversion to Islam. Additionally, this dissertation illuminates the challenges and obstacles faced by women who convert to Islam within their society.

### **5. Significance of the Study**

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it emphasizes the process of conversion to Islam among females, specifically in a non-Muslim society. It sheds light on the significance of Islam and the main features that make it interesting to people who were not born Muslims. In addition, it provides an overview of the expected effects of conversion, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge on the subject. Finally, it raises awareness about the challenges faced by female converts to Islam in American society.

### **6. Research Methodology**

The present study adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods to extract secondary data from previous works in the field. The historical method was followed in the first

chapter to trace the history of Islam's first arrival in the USA in addition to the history of immigration related to the topic. The second chapter adopted the descriptive method to collect secondary data related to the common reasons and effects of conversion to Islam in the USA. The third chapter used an analytical method to interpret data extracted from an online survey that was used to test the hypotheses on a small sample.

## **7. Structure of the Study**

This dissertation consists of two theoretical chapters and a practical one. The first chapter aims to introduce the topic and provide background information about it. It discusses the historical background of the spread of Islam in the United States and attempts to define conversion and explain its process. Additionally, it provides general information regarding the expansion of Islam in the U.S. and demographical information about women converts. The second chapter sheds light on the different internal and external reasons leading women to convert to Islam, in addition to the main effects resulting from this process. Moreover, it narrows down the main issues facing female converts in their non-Muslim environment. The third chapter is an analytical examination of the findings from a small sample of respondents to an online survey. It interprets the results in comparison with the literature review and tries to test the research hypotheses.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Historical Overview**

## **Chapter One: Historical Overview**

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## **Introduction**

The spread of Islam in the United States has remarkably increased throughout the years, particularly among women. Muslims in the U.S. are not mainly born Muslims, but they also consist of a large number of converts; the Council of American Islamic Relations estimates that thousands of people convert to Islam every year. These converts come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. This chapter provides a historical overview of Islam's arrival in the USA as well as the factors that played a crucial role in introducing Islam to the American people, in addition to the four major immigration waves during which immigrants arrived from various Muslim countries and started to introduce and spread Islam through establishing mosques and religious institutions. Furthermore, it sheds light on the process of conversion and its different definitions from several perspectives, with special emphasis on the definition of conversion to Islam as a remarkable phenomenon. It also investigates the main phases Muslim converts encounter during the process of conversion to Islam and attempts to describe their emotional and mental experiences after deciding to change their religion and before officially converting to Islam. Moreover, this chapter provides background information about Islam, which is the third largest religious group in America, in addition to its growth and large spread in American society. Finally, a demographical profile of female converts in the USA is provided, including general information about their age rate, their religious and educational backgrounds, as well as the ethnic groups they belong to.

### **1.1. Overview of the Spread of Islam in the United States**

The history of Islam in the USA goes back to the 18th century; despite the denial of the existence of any mutual past between America and Islam, Muslims have existed in the U.S. since the slave industry era (Curtis, 2009), as well as the four major immigration waves (Haddad, 1986) from the Middle East, as well as the remarkable number of Americans who embraced

Islam. Slaves were captured and brought to the USA from North Africa and other African countries, such as Somalia, and they are believed to be Muslims. According to Haddad (1986),

The Muslim discovery of America is a little-explored topic. Some believe that it predated Columbus' expedition. Records note the arrival as early as 1717 of Arabic-speaking slaves who would not eat pork and believed in Allah and Muhammad P.B.U.H. According to some estimates, as much as a fifth of all the slaves introduced into the Americas, from Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries, may have been Muslims (p.02).

In addition, slavery narratives and their documents are living proof that the main reasons behind the spread of Islam in America are slavery and trade. As cited in Alosman et al. (2019),

As early as the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, Muslims were abducted and enslaved from West Africa, which constituted the first significant Muslim population (Gomez, 1994; Curtis, 2009; Curtis, 2010; Ghana Bassiri, 2010). However, the first documented Muslim presence in America was in the 16th century, by a Moroccan slave (Manseau, 2015, p.03).

History books mention several Muslim African figures that were captured in Africa and brought to the USA to work as slaves. One of these figures is the famous Slmon Job, who was captured and brought to America to work in tobacco fields and was later sent to Britain. Job was one of the most famous Islamic figures in America, for he was able to write a few copies of the Qur'an on his own and played a significant role in spreading Islam there not only among slaves but among those who occupied high positions in the church too (Curtis, 2009). As stated by Curtis (2009), "Various documents by and about American Muslims were published in

English and other languages" (p. 04), and Islam and Muslims are a major part of American history and nation.

As reported by Haddad (1986), immigration is considered one of the main factors contributing to the spread of Islam in the USA. He defines four main phases of the arrival of middle eastern immigrants from Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, starting from the 18th century and during the world wars until the fourth wave, "which began in 1967" (Haddad, 1986, p. 03). As stated in Haddad (1986), Middle Eastern Muslims' arrival in the USA during the first three immigration waves was driven by their eagerness to make a fortune and return to their homeland. Immigrants' flow changed accordingly due to the legal amendments which occurred to the immigration laws during the two world wars. Middle Eastern Muslims who could successfully enter America were uneducated and unable to speak English which resulted in their struggle to occupy high-position jobs. These immigrants introduced a new way of practising a faith that was more suitable to the civil laws and the American social structure (Haddad, 1986). Nevertheless, Muslim immigrants who arrived during the final wave were:

educated, fluid in English, and Westernized. They came from a wide variety of countries, including many beyond the Middle East. These Muslims have not come to make a fortune and return home, but to settle, to participate in American affluence (Haddad, 1986, p.03).

This new generation attained greater power and authority than its predecessors, and they "began gradually to develop the organizations and institutions required to preserve the faith." (Haddad, 1986, p. 02), which significantly assisted in promoting Islam and introducing it to American society, as well as strengthening the Muslim American community.

Nevertheless, the Muslim population in the United States does not only consist of foreigners (former slaves and present-day immigrants), but it also consists of a remarkable

number of converts, with "women outnumbering men approximately four to one" (Haddad et al., 2006, p. 42). According to Haddad et al. (2006), women's conversion to Islam is not a foreign phenomenon in Islamic history, and it is believed that the Prophet's wife was the first woman to believe in the Prophet and Islam and that her support was the main reason behind so many women's conversions. Furthermore, "Various Muslim leaders have estimated that there are between 40,000 and 75,000 converts from among the white population, the majority of them women." (Haddad, 1986, p.6). These women are said to embrace Islam as a new faith as a result of several reasons, including marriage, and the disagreement with Christian beliefs concerning the status of women, which in most cases are viewed as sexist (Haddad, 1986).

## **1.2. The Definition and Process of Conversion to Islam**

Conversion to Islam is among the phenomena that have been widely discussed and investigated by scholars and researchers who have been able to extract several definitions of it as well as create models to explain the process and define its main stages. The following points shed light on the general definition and process of conversion to Islam.

### **1.2.1. The Definition of Conversion to Islam**

Religious conversion is "the process by which a person commits to the beliefs of a new religious tradition and shifts away from their previously held religious beliefs" (Strak and Finke, 2000, p.03, cited in Snook et al.,n.d.).In the same sense, conversion to Islam can be similarly defined as "the process whereby a non-Muslim takes on a new religious identity, adopts new beliefs and practices, learns to live as a Muslim, and gradually becomes accepted as one by others." (Knott, 2017, p.01). Conversion to Islam involves being fully and spiritually committed to its beliefs, rules, and practices as well as being a member of the Islamic community, which explains that Islam is a lifestyle and a system that organizes one's various aspects of life rather than a mere ritual or set of tradition-based practices. Furthermore, Knott (2017) prefers to define a conversion to Islam as "a journey and not a single event" (p.01), given that becoming an actual

Muslim requires undergoing multiple stages, starting from discovering Islam, being fully aware and convinced of its rules and practices, and saying 'Shahada' and being engaged with the Muslim community. In another attempt to define and explain the process of converting to Islam, Knott (2017) explains that conversion is similar to an adult learning process in which those who wish to become Muslims must learn about Islam and its practices. The emphasis here is put on the learning and deep understanding of Islam that occurs before saying Shahada and being considered a part of the Muslim community because practicing prayers and fasting is not enough for one to become Muslim; rather, it is the pure intention and belief in Islam.

### **1.2.2. The Process of Conversion to Islam**

(Knott, 2017) explains that Islam is "...a journey and not a single event" (p.01), given that conversion to Islam is not a mere action by which a person becomes a Muslim, but rather a process consisting of multiple phases and stages encountered by those who wish to convert before and after converting to Islam and publicly saying Shahada. Several researchers and scholars in the field of religious studies distinguish several models for Islam conversion.

One of the most crucial models suggested by Roald (cited in Nieuwkerk, 2006) states that the process of conversion as a whole consists of three main phases. First, "love" or "falling in love", In this stage, converts tend to be impressed by the new religion and are mostly attracted to the parts they have been exposed to in comparison to their previous religion and, in some cases, their previous lifestyle. This phase in particular is characterized by excitement, where potential converts become eager to learn about Islam and its practices in detail. The second phase is "disappointment," where new converts realize they are unable to learn and follow every single Islamic practice in a short time and that the process of conversion requires patience and discipline. The final stage is "maturity." This stage usually comes after new Muslims perceive a

more realistic version of Islam. In this particular stage, new Muslims start to develop a practical view of Islam that is logical and real.

According to Knott (2017), new Muslims with a sincere desire to convert tend to view the conversion process as an educational journey in which they take courses privately and with other Muslims to eventually become Muslims. This view mainly emphasizes the understanding of Islam and the commitment that follows conversion by dividing the learning process into two main parts. The first part is done individually, where new Muslims observe the Qur'an and Islam and try to make sense of them on their own. In this part, Muslims tend to prepare themselves to engage with the Muslim community and to take part in religious practices such as prayers and fasting, as well as holidays. The second part requires the help of teachers and mentors who play a significant role in introducing Islam to non-Muslims in addition to providing them with realistic views on the practices and commitment that come with conversion. This journey is mainly characterized by a set of difficulties mostly related to the learning of the Arabic language to memorize the Qur'an and practice prayer, in addition to the confusion resulting from the differences between new Muslims' previous lifestyle and the one they are introduced to. Converts usually find themselves obliged to change different aspects of their lives, especially in terms of food, clothing, and celebrations.

Rambo (1993, as cited in Kok, 2016, p. 12) suggests a famous model of conversion consisting of seven main stages that comprise the entire conversion process. Rambo further explains that these phases and their organization differ from one person to another and that the model he presents is not universal, yet it provides a general overview of the process. The seven stages are context, crisis, quest, interaction, encounter, commitment, and consequences. In the Islamic context, this model explains that the process of conversion starts in a non-Muslim environment, which leads to a "crisis," which represents dissatisfaction with several aspects of one's life and religious beliefs. This dissatisfaction leads to the search for the truth and better

conditions, as well as spiritual and psychological fulfillment, which eventually lead to discovering a new religion (Islam), its practices, interacting with the Muslim community, and finally conversion to Islam as the new faith.

### **1.3. The Growth of Islam in the United States**

Christianity, with its various sects, is regarded as the most prevalent religion in the United States, particularly among white Americans. However, in 2018, the overall proportion of white American Christians dropped significantly and reached its lowest level since 2006 (The 2020 Census of American Religion, 2022). There have been controversial studies and a wide disagreement about the exact number of Muslims in the USA. According to Simmons (2008), different surveys have been conducted throughout the years and different statistics have been extracted. Based on statistics, the number of Muslims is estimated to be between six and seven million; while other studies indicate they could be more or less than this number. Regardless of the number of American Muslims, Islam is indeed growing in the USA both socially and economically in the sense that Islamic institutions are largely spread and are serving to introduce Islam to non-Muslims in the US. (Esposito, 1998) states that "There are more than 200,000 Muslim businesses, 1,200 mosques, 165 Islamic schools, 425 Muslim associations, and 85 Islamic publications in the United States." (cited in Simmons, 2008,p.02) These numbers are considered large and influential due to their pivotal role in disseminating Islam and facilitating conversions to the religion.

Immigration has played a significant role in the expansion of Islam in the US, particularly during the latter phase when young Muslims began to immigrate to the country in search of higher education. Haniff (2003) argues that Islam started to grow larger in the USA after the establishment of the "major mosque in Washington, D.C.," which was inaugurated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954." (p.3). Such a huge event came along with the remarkable influx of Muslim students to the USA from many nations, and it served as one of the

main factors in establishing several other institutions that aimed to ease the cultural difficulties newcomers might face. The activities of mosques and other institutions served to spread and teach Islam, as well as charities and fundraising, and they developed throughout the years to start addressing common issues faced by Muslims in the USA and trying to solve them.

#### **1.4. Demographic Overview: American Women Converted to Islam**

The number of American Muslims is constant state of increase as a result of immigration and high levels of fertility among Muslim citizens of different origins (Nowrasteh, 2016). However, a survey conducted by Pew Research proved that 20% of Muslims in the USA are converted and that women make up the majority of them, in the sense that four out of five converts in America are women (Evans, 2015).

A survey was conducted (Evans, 2015) to create a demographic profile of female converts in the United States. This survey found that the two ethnic groups most likely to convert to Islam are white Caucasians and black African-Americans. The survey that was answered by 257 American women found out that female converts convert to Islam during their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Most of them are highly educated and employed, having spent at least a few years in college. In addition, the previous faith of converted women was mostly Christianity with all of its branches because it is the most common religion in the USA. Moreover, Daily (1994) states that American Muslims, including converts are located in different states in the USA depending on their ethnicity, in the sense that some of them are located in metropolitan centers whereas others are located in rural or urban areas.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, since this chapter aims to introduce the topic of conversion to Islam among American women, it provides crucial background information about the arrival of Islam in the USA and the significant role played by immigration waves and slavery in spreading Islam

in a non-Muslim country. The following chapter introduces the topic, defines key terms such as conversion and conversion to Islam," and provides wider knowledge about the process and phases that converts experience during their conversion to Islam. Furthermore, it sheds light on the growth of Islam in terms of the increase in population as well as the economic and social growth that is a result of American Muslims' efforts to spread Islam and address the common issues encountered by American Muslims. Finally, it explains the demographical information of female converts, including their average age of conversion, religious background, level of education, and ethnicity.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Reasons and Effects of Women's Conversion to Islam**

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## **Introduction**

The United States is an ethnically and culturally diverse nation with numerous religious and cultural backgrounds. Christianity, with all of its factions, is the most common religion in the country, yet a remarkable number of American women choose Islam as their new faith, which is considered an interesting phenomenon in a majority Christian society. Both internal factors relating to women's identity and truth-seeking as well as external factors relating to their social and religious orientations are responsible for this phenomenon. This chapter seeks to identify and explain the main reasons that led American women to discover and learn about Islam, as well as the main factors causing their decision to adopt it as their new religion. It also sheds light on the effects resulting from the process of conversion on various aspects of converts' lives, such as the spiritual, personal, social, and psychological aspects. Besides, this chapter discusses the common challenges encountered by converted women in terms of understanding and practising their new faith, as well as society's perception of them and their ability to adapt to their new lifestyle.

### **2.1. Reasons for American Women's Conversion to Islam**

Although Christianity is the most widespread religion in the United States, a rapid increase in the number of American Muslim converts, mainly women, has been noticed in the past few years. American women are leaving their previous religious beliefs and choosing Islam to be their new religion as a result of a set of factors, including their dissatisfaction with their previous religion, their interest in Islam's views about different matters such as rights and duties, and their direct contact with Muslims in schools and workplaces. This section investigates and discusses the primary causes of American women's conversion to Islam.

### **2.1.1. Dissatisfaction with the Previous Religion and Finding Answers in Islam**

Women have always been viewed as inferior members of society and were deprived of their fundamental rights. Different religions, including Christianity, support discrimination against women, and the Catholic Church holds controversial views regarding women's rights. For example, American women did not have the fundamental right to vote or inherit it from their parents or spouses. According to Nowark (2016), the church played a significant role in accentuating gender inequality and discrimination in the United States. Females were allowed to enter the church but were not allowed to speak up or participate, as mentioned in the Bible: "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak." (Nowark, 2016).

Although Christianity is the religion of greatest popularity in the United States, the majority of American women convert to Islam every year due to their disagreement with its views on women's rights and their dissatisfaction with its teachings. For instance, converts explain that they have always rejected the idea of "confession" in which one is not permitted to speak to God directly but must instead speak to a priest and ask them for forgiveness (UTICA MASJID, 2022). Furthermore, converts' rejection of their religion is a result of the paradox related to the concept of God in the sense that they refuse to believe in the Trinity, which indicates that God is a three-unit body. In addition, the multiple testaments in the Bible and their different interpretations are among the crucial factors leading women to convert to Islam in the sense that these testaments are considered confusing and difficult to understand, in addition to their multiple contradictory interpretations (Michael Chancellor, 2021).

However, Islam has different views on women and their roles in society. According to Khan (1988), Islam abolished all forms of discrimination against women, gave them a high position in society, and considered them equal to men in the sense that they were rewarded and punished equally. Women in Islam are not viewed as servants to men but rather as their

companions, as the Quran states, "He has made for you mates of your own kind" (42:12). It indicates that men and women are made into pairs instead of classes where men are superior to women. Islamic teachings' preservation of women's rights is among the main reasons leading women to be unsatisfied with their previous faith and more interested in Islam. Moreover, among the main reasons leading women to be unsatisfied with their religion is its inability to answer specific questions such as the purpose of life and the destination after death, which leads women to question their beliefs and tend to search for answers in other religions. The rise of such questions leads women to encounter difficulties in their daily lives in the sense that questioning their religion leads to psychological issues.

Islam can provide women with the answers to all of their questions, and their search for a religion that satisfies their needs to know and find answers leads them to find Islam. Other religions believe that the mere purpose of life is based on progress and human intelligence, which is limited. According to Islamic teachings, the main purpose of life is to create a strong connection with Allah and worship Him. Life in Islam is regarded as a temporary stage in which people are being tested. Those who pass the examination gain access to paradise in the realm of eternal life. Islam goes further and views humans as the most important creatures on earth. Human life, rights, and dignity are emphasized in Islam in every aspect. In addition, the Quran answers the common question of the main purpose of creating humans despite their bad deeds in Surah El-Bakara:

'Remember' when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place a successive 'human' authority on earth." They asked 'Allah', "Will You place in it someone who will spread corruption there and shed blood while we glorify Your praises and proclaim Your holiness?" Allah responded, "I know what you do not know ((Khattab et al., 2019, p.22)

Jeffrey Lang argues that the verse above is the best answer to whoever is questioning the reason behind their existence because it explains that Allah has the power of creating humans and providing them with enough intelligence to survive life in addition to a clear guideline, which is the Quran, that would show them the right path (Lets Learn Arabic, 2011). As a result, convert women become interested in Islam because of the strength of its structure and its ability to clarify misconceptions they have about their previous religions.

### **2.1.2. Media Representation of Islam**

The media has been a main tool for introducing and spreading Islam to different people around the world. Despite the false representation of Islam and its association with terrorism, mass media played a significant and crucial role in influencing and encouraging American women to discover and learn about Islam, particularly after the Twin Tower attacks.

#### **2.1.2.1. The Effect of 9/11 on Islam and Muslims**

The media has shed light on Islam and Muslims after the 9/11 incident and provided a negative view to people who also experienced the loss of many family members as a result of these attacks. Following these fraudulent accusations, Muslims across the United States were arbitrarily arrested, which led to an increase in hate crimes against Muslims (CAIR, 2021). Remarkably, these circumstances increased the attention paid to Islam, and more people became eager to discover its practices and learn about it. Many American women became curious to discover the reality of Islam, especially after experiencing the loss of their loved ones after 9/11.

Among women who developed an interest in Islam after the attention it received from the media is the American political activist Cynthia Cox Ubaldo, who states in an interview with CGTN America (2022) that she had Muslim acquaintances before the 9/11 incident and that she only became interested in Islam after that. Cynthia explained that her primary search for Islam aimed to answer her son's potential questions about the Tower attacks and to have a better understanding of the information shared by the media. She states that it was the first time she

heard about Islam and that what she learned from the media was not logical in comparison to the books she read and the relationship she had with her Muslim friends at that time. Cynthia adds that the stereotypical view the media provided about the Muslim community proved to be wrong after Muslims defended her against extremists and non-Muslims who attacked her after her conversion. She concluded that the main reason behind her conversion was the extremist view the media provided about Islam, which led her to discover such a great religion.

Furthermore, Feisal Abdul Rauf, who is an imam, explains in a CNN report the "paradox" of people's interest in Islam despite the false representation of it, saying that "when something tends to become more popular in the news, people want to know about it" (Beginners Guide to Islam, 2013). The extremist views on Islam after 9/11 brought more attention to it, and most people who were curious to learn about it or discover its practices concluded that it is a peaceful religion and that the terrorist attacks were mere propaganda that is not related to real Islam.

#### **2.1.2.2. The Positive Portrayal of Islam in Media**

The wide spread of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube played a major role in facilitating the spread of the true image of Islam among people. American women could learn about Islam through social media from influential female figures such as Dr. Haifaa Younis, who is the chairman and founder of the Jannah Institute and has helped thousands of American women convert to Islam and receive proper education about it. The representation of famous American female figures is among the reasons leading to the conversion of many American women. Using media means, Muslim American female figures could reach and inspire thousands of women all over America to convert to Islam and provide them with free lessons about Islamic teachings and morality, in addition to several other matters such as modesty and morals.

Islamophobic stereotypes have a significant influence on the majority of Hollywood films and television shows that feature Muslim characters. However, famous works such as "The Message," which was translated into English, were considered "a source of instruction for those looking to learn about the rise of Islam"(The Message, n.d.). This work is one of the most famous works that did not only introduce the history of Islam to people but also included some positive, inspiring female Islamic figures such as "Hind (Irene Papas), the wife of Abu Sufyan" ("The Message, n.d.). In addition, there is a certain scene where a certain character explains the role of women and how Islam views them as companions to men rather than inferior creatures, in addition to the obligation of treating them with fairness and respect (Akkad, 1976,...). Such representations in movies deliver a realistic Islamic view of women's position in Islam and introduce them to the history of religion and its great stories.

### **2.1.3. Islamic Social and Family Structure**

There are several differences between the American and Islamic perspectives on the ideal family and society. In Islam, family is a sacred bond between members, and its structure affects the entire society. In addition, Islamic society must be founded on a set of norms and principles that benefit both the individual and the collective. This comparison, along with Islam's perspective on women's roles in families and societies, is one of the primary reasons for American women's choice of Islam as a new religion and their wish to join the Muslim community, adhere to its teachings and rules, and alter their lifestyle accordingly.

#### **2.1.3.1. Social Structure**

In contrast to American society, which emphasizes individualism and the importance of the individual over the group, Islam views society as an "organic whole, where all aspects of life are considered as a part of the body, hence negating sectarianism and racism." (Laluddin,

2014, p. 01). Society members in Islam must work in harmony to achieve peace and growth; consequently, they must always defend and support one another.

Women in the United States tend to favor the Islamic social structure over the American one because Islam considers the individual and the group to be of equal importance and "the affliction of an individual part will equally affect the whole." As a result, (Laluddin, 2014, p.1) women feel supported and assisted by other members of society as opposed to handling the various problems on their own. In addition, Islam granted women their rights and improved their circumstances in various ways. "Islam improved the status of women by instituting the rights of property ownership, inheritance, education, and divorce," wrote William Montgomery Watt (Yazbeck, 1998, p.11 As cited in Bukhari et al, 2014, p.04).

The high position Islam gave women in society is not to be found in any other religion. Women in Islamic society are more than mere housewives with the responsibility of raising children; they are regarded as significant members of society, without whom this latter would not function properly. According to Bukhari et al. (2014), "there has been so much respected women leadership in Muslim society, such as Shajar-ul-Durr in Egypt (13th century), Queen Orpha in Yemen (1090), and Razia Sultana in Delhi (13th century)." (p.04), which illustrates how supportive Islam is of women's right to perform high-position jobs and that Islamic society does not favor men over women.

Furthermore, solidarity is very common among Muslims, for they tend to be supportive and protective of each other, which makes the social structure more appealing for American women who tend to believe that their society lacks such features. Many converted women explain that their encounters with Muslims were positive because they are well-behaved and kind. Monique Salim is one of the young American ladies who converted to Islam because she was impressed by the solidarity of Muslims and their way of managing all of their life

aspects as a group. She explains that she discovered it through her Muslim neighbors, who were a group of students from Saudi Arabia. She states that she was impressed by these students' behaviors and their ability to get along and look after each other even though they do not come from the same family. She adds that she became more interested in Islam because she felt like the Muslim society would help and support her (Dawah, 2020). American women also praise Muslims' care and support of each other and how Muslims are willing to interfere in any situation to help each other. Cynthia Cox Ubaldo, who is an American convert states that she was attacked by non-Muslims after wearing a head scarf publicly by "Muslim young men". She praises this behavior and explains, "That's what Islam is like. We all look out for each other" (CGTN America, 2022,6:06).

#### **2.1.3.2. Family Structure**

American society is known for its support of freedom and liberty in addition to its neglect of the traditional family structure that consists of a mother, a father, and their children. This support of individualism and liberty resulted in many problems related to families, divorce, and raising children. According to DeFrain (2018), divorce and unsuccessful marriages are among the main issues within American society given that "23.2 million Americans - about 9.1% of the U.S. population - are currently divorced" (p. 74). Within this high divorce rate, the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau declared that "4 out of about 11 million single-parent families with children under the age of 18, nearly 80 percent were headed by single mothers." (Single Mother Statistics, n.d.), which indicates that a remarkable number of American women are obliged to raise their children alone due to the absence of the father. The unstable family structure is very common in the USA, which in most cases leads women to serve in different capacities, including providing a decent income while raising children individually in light of the absence of a father figure. (DeFrain, 2018) declares that "unmarried childbearing is highly related to child poverty" (p. 74), which also results in different types of problems concerning healthcare and education.

Having experienced such difficult circumstances, women tend to find comfort and support in the Islamic ideal family structure, which is supposed to be close-knit. Islam views the family as the base stone of society and the source of every other discipline because "religion, education, economics, and health, which have different functions in societies, have emerged from the individuals raised by families and their interactions" (Bahaüddin, 2020, p.01), given that the family's high position in Islam is a result of its crucial contribution to the development of society. The Islamic family is based on a lawful marriage that combines a man and a woman within a sacred bond that allows them to have children and create a home. In this highly respected bond, both Quran and Sunna clarify a set of rights and duties for both men and women that serve to create a healthy environment where all family members feel safe. The Islamic principles concerning relationships, marriage, and family are mostly preferable for American women, for they guarantee their rights and assign them duties where they find themselves as useful and important as men without bearing responsibilities they cannot handle. Islam distinguishes a strong type of relationship between spouses where both are comfortable and safe. It is mentioned in the Quran that "It is He who created you from one soul and created from it its mate that he might dwell in security with her..." (As cited in Bahaüddin, 2020, p. 06), which provides women with all the related support they require and reminds them that they share responsibilities and privileges with their partners.

Furthermore, American women whether mothers, daughters, or sisters, are most impressed and inspired by Islam's emphasis on respect, love, and several other feelings between parents and their children. Islam provides guidelines about the ideal relationship between parents and children, the proper way of raising children, and the proper treatment parents must receive from their sons and daughters. According to Saddique et al. (2020), "good parenting matters for the betterment of the society, and it cannot be left aside." (p.04). Families are the base of society, and the development of this latter depends on how families are constructed and how children are

brought up. This is the main reason behind the focus on proper parenting, which must be based on Islamic teachings. In addition, single mothers (divorced or widowed) in Islamic families enjoy the privilege of raising their children with an extended family that is willing to provide the help and support necessary for both mothers and children.

#### **2.1.4. African Americans: Islam's View on Slavery**

Slavery has been an American issue since the discovery of the New Land. Slaves were brought to the USA from Africa and were forced to work in fields and houses. However, the issue of slavery can be discussed from a religious perspective, for it has been supported by the church and Christianity, as stated in Abdallah (1987). The New Testament does not prohibit enslavement, so it orders slaves to obey their masters. "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." (ABC News, 2013). Nevertheless, the Islamic mission has aimed at all categories of society since its beginning, and it first addressed minorities and vulnerable people before spreading among all types of people around the world. Islam is one of the main religions embraced by minorities in the USA, mainly African Americans, who suffer racism and discrimination. Simmons (2006) cites, "There is some consensus, reports Jane Smith, that there are at least 6 million Muslims now living permanently in the United States and that at least 40 percent of them are African American converts" (1999, xii–xiii). Islam gained popularity among the African American community as a result of its views on slavery and rejection of white supremacy.

As a result of their history and slavery, African Americans proved to be more religious because religion was their escape from the hard lives they lived as slaves. Religious institutions in America (churches, temples, and especially mosques) were the places where

African Americans felt safe and belonging. The relationship between African Americans and Islam was mainly spiritual and political, in the sense that the collective memory and psychological struggle of slaves could only be expressed and stated through religious commitment. "Blacks found a voice" (Simmons, 2006, p. 173), and that voice was Islam, for it spoke for the rights of vulnerable people and granted equality to all races. As cited in (Simmon, 2006, p.173) "Baer and Singer further note, another role that African American religion has played is as a "form of self-expression and [individual] resistance to white-dominated society." the rejection of race-based discrimination along with several other political and social circumstances African Americans rebelled against their situation and formed an Islamic community that started to grow and fight for equal rights for all races (Simmons, 2006).

African American women are among the American population that has embraced Islam as their new faith as a result of Islam's support of black people's fight for freedom and equality. Islam's stand concerning the issue of slavery is considered one of the most significant reasons behind women's conversion to Islam in the USA, for it defends everyone's right to freedom and denies any race-based discrimination, as the Prophet (SAAWS) said, "There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither is the white superior over the black, nor is the black superior over the white—except by piety." (Afsaruddin, 2022, para.02). This explains that equality between people is their birthright and nobody ought to take it away from them and that the only thing that makes people better than each other is their good deeds and pure belief in Allah. African American women are inspired by Islam's supportive stand on their case and its understanding of their struggle, and that is among the reasons behind their choice to embrace a faith that does not look at their skin colour but rather only considers their faith and beliefs.

Abdallah (1987) explains that the emphasis placed on the emancipation of subjugated women and the strategies employed by Islam to eradicate slavery as a system are

among the causes of American women's (and particularly African American women's) conversion to Islam. First of all, Islam views slaves' emancipation as a good deed that makes people closer to Allah, and it encourages treating slaves fairly and gently and spending money for the sake of setting them free. Furthermore, Islam approaches the issue from several economic, practical, and psychological aspects. Multiple verses in the Quran mention slavery and emancipation and suggest solutions to solve this issue effectively. The following verse, for instance, explains that slaves have the right to establish a written contract with their masters that seeks their freedom. Based on this contract, slaves gain the right to work for other people while working for their original masters to be able to collect money and pay for their emancipation.

And let those who find not the wherewithal for marriage keep chaste till Allah gives them independence by His grace. And such of your slaves as seek a writing [of emancipation], write it for them if ye are aware of aught of good in them, and bestow upon them of the wealth of Allah which He hath bestowed upon you (p.29).

The act of writing a contract and paying for freedom serves to prepare slaves economically and psychologically for their life after freedom, as well as making them understand the value of this freedom they work hard for.

Enslaved women have their share in the Islamic approach to abolishing slavery since certain verses in the Quran emphasize freeing women through different means, such as marriage. Unlike Christianity, Islam encourages masters to marry and have children with their slaves for several reasons. However, children who are born into such marriages are free, and therefore their mothers gain freedom as well. Not only do these marriages result in the emancipation of women, but they also play a significant role in ending the caste system and classicism.

And whose is not able to afford to marry free, believing women let them marry from the believing maids whom your right hands possess. AUah knoweth best [concerning] your faith. Ye [proceed] one from another so wed them by permission of their folk, and give unto them their portions in kindness, they being honest, not debauched nor of loose conduct. And if they are honourably married, and they commit lewdness, they shall incur the half of the punishment [prescribed] for women [in that case] ...<sup>34</sup>

Abdallah (1987) states that this verse in the Quran explains that Islam does not only encourage free men to marry enslaved women to give them freedom but also to change their social status. In this verse, specific slave women receive the same status as free ones, yet they receive half of their punishment for any wrong deed. Islam's support for such vulnerable groups within American society is considered one of the main reasons women embrace Islam as their new religion.

#### **2.1.5. Contact with Other Muslims**

As a result of living in a diverse society, American women are most likely to have a direct connection with other Muslims in their environment in the sense that they might have several types of relationships with other American Muslims, such as friends, neighbours, classmates, co-workers, and especially being married to a Muslim. Social relationships with Muslims are regarded as one of the crucial factors leading women to convert to Islam.

Several American women confirmed that their conversion was a result of the friendly relationships they had with other Muslims. Many women explain that their first encounter with Islam was through Muslim friends who either gave them the Quran, explained Islam to them, or were simply impressed by their ideal mannerisms, discipline, and morals. According to the testimonies of several female converts, their interest in Islam grew after joining a university where they met Muslims and were impressed by their respectful behaviours. For instance, a

female convert who comes from a Christian family explains that she was impressed by her female Muslim classmates in college because they were different. Her relationship with these girls changed her orientation and made her realize that Islam must be her new faith (Doan and Abdullah, 2023). Furthermore, the mindset and behaviour of Muslims in the USA are considered influential in American society in the sense that they not only represent themselves but also present Islam positively. An American convert female states that her first encounter with Islam was a result of her relationship with her Muslim neighbours. She explains that they showed a great deal of solidarity, which is not common in American society, which supports individualism. Her neighbours taught her about Islam, gave her a copy of the Quran, and helped her convert to Islam (Ramadan Dawah, 2020).

Additionally, marriage is considered a crucial reason for women to convert to Islam. (Esseissah, 2011) argue that marriage is a primary reason leading American women to convert to Islam given that Islamic marriages last longer and are the most successful, and this is because they are ruled by strict rules that grant both parties their rights. Furthermore, Muslim (2008) argues that women are most likely to convert to get married, but there are also several cases where the decision to convert is made before marriage and is further supported by spouses who create a suitable environment for women to learn about Islam and engage with it. Marriage to Muslims results in motivating women to learn about Islam to have a better understanding of their spouses and be able to engage with their in-laws. Whether converting to get married or discovering Islam after marriage, women are still deeply affected by their spouses, and they change their faith as a result of that.

All in all, among the factors leading American women to Islam, is their dissatisfaction with their religion, which might not answer all of their questions, unlike Islam, which goes beyond religious practices and provides clear guidelines for family relations and social structures. Furthermore, the direct connection with Muslims in the workplace leads

women to discover Islam and learn about it through the positive representation of it by Muslims and Muslim figures in the media. Moreover, American women's conversion to Islam results in multiple social and psychological effects on converts' lives in general. Besides their religious beliefs, they also witness remarkable changes in their relationships with their families and society, as well as in their spiritual and psychological states. Convert women tend to face a set of challenges in announcing their conversion to their families and social environment, which tend to perceive them differently. Furthermore, the process of conversion results in several effects and challenges that occur in converted women's personal and professional lives, given that their conversion has effects on their marriages and their productivity at work. The social perception of converted women in the USA affects their roles in labour, where they might face prejudice and discrimination as well as some difficulties concerning legal matters.

## **2.2. Effects of American Women's Conversion to Islam**

Conversion to Islam is a long spiritual process that consists of different phases. After the decision of conversion is taken and converted women have taken their Shahada they tend to experience a set of changes in their psychological and spiritual states in addition to their social relationships with their families, friends, and in their schools and workplace. In addition, convert women face a set of challenges after their conversion, especially with their families and societies that would react differently to their change of faith.

### **2.2.1. The Psychological Effects**

Conversion to Islam goes beyond the entitlement of the religion and the mere commitment to religious practices and consists of a radical change in spirituality and beliefs. American women who convert to Islam undergo a set of changes in different aspects of their lives, such as their psychological state, especially after they begin to believe in the higher power of Allah and the concept of the afterlife. In addition, their conversion results in spiritual

fulfillment, where women no longer feel emptiness and become able to deal with their mental health issues differently.

#### **2.2.1.1. The View on the Afterlife and Higher Power of God**

As a result of the diversity in the USA, women tend to have different religious backgrounds before their conversion to Islam, which indicates that their beliefs change after the official process of conversion. Conversion to Islam mainly changes their view of the afterlife and the destination after death. Among the fundamental requirements of Islam is the belief in the oneness of Allah and the afterlife, which includes reward and punishment, represented in the ideas of "heaven" and "hell," and one's conversion is not complete unless one believes in these concepts. American women who convert to Islam tend to face certain effects as a result of their belief in such a concept, especially in terms of their mental health and death anxiety.

To begin with, American women who convert to Islam start to view death as an inevitable event that must happen to everyone as a result of the Quran's mention of death and the afterlife in different verses. For instance, "Every soul shall taste of death." (Qur'an, Surah Ale Imran, 3:185, as cited in Jafri, 2021). Which emphasizes the mortality of everything in life except for Allah. "The present, worldly life is nothing but a pastime and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is truly alive. If they but knew." (Qur'an, Surah al-Ankabut, 29:64, as cited in Jafri, 2021). This constant reminder that life is a temporary test of one's patience and ability to do good deeds plays a crucial role in changing American women's behaviours and views of life and death, which results in their constant attempts to become better Muslims and have a stronger connection with Allah.

El-Issa et al. (2021) claim that "afterlife beliefs could be associated with psychosocial benefits" (p. 02), given that people tend to worry less about temporary matters in life when they believe that it all reaches an end eventually, in addition to the belief that they will

be rewarded for their good deeds in Heaven. Moreover, believing in the afterlife has a positive effect on American women who embrace Islam because it is said to be "positively correlated with death acceptance." (Al-Issa et al., 2021, p. 03), which also leads to decreasing death anxiety that many non-religious people are believed to suffer from. Converts benefit from building an immune system against mental unrest as a result of embracing Islam and understanding its views on the afterlife and death, which could be the cause of constant anxiety and stress for non-Muslims. In this matter, Dr. Jonathan Jong suggests that "religious people are less afraid of death than nonreligious people." (As cited in Study into who is least afraid of death, 2017), which is mainly a result of their knowledge of their destination after death and their strong relationship with God.

Furthermore, the absolute belief in Allah's oneness and higher power results in the creation of a strong relationship between converts and Allah, which Bonab et al. (2013) argue is a type of "positive attachment" that creates a feeling of "security" that reduces mental issues and helps Muslims survive life challenges in addition to increasing the feelings of "self-worth and sense of meaning" given that converts tend to experience a high level of enlightenment concerning their purpose in life as a result of their positive relationship with Allah, which positively reflects on their psychological state.

#### **2.2.1.2. Spiritual Fulfillment**

The journey to Islam starts with a "crisis" that causes a person to question plenty of their original beliefs and the thoughts they have inherited from their environment about religion and life in general. This long journey led the majority of American women to discover Islam and embrace it because it answered all of their questions and made them certain about their previous doubts. Among the remarkable outcomes of Islam for these women is their ability to achieve spiritual fulfillment after suffering feelings of confusion and uncertainty.

“Spiritual fulfillment means the realization of your true self — of who you are.” (Morton, 2019), which justifies converts' search for the truth within which they believe they would find themselves after their previous religions failed to make them achieve that feeling of rest. Most of the American women who converted to Islam agree that their journey started with a set of questions that their previous religion was unable to answer. Despite the difficulties they faced trying to find the answers, they could finally discover Islam. After embracing Islam, women tend to experience a high level of spiritual comfort as a result of engaging in multiple religious practices.

(Sister Rachel) explains that she suffered from uncertainty concerning her previous religion, with which she disagreed on different matters such as her relationship with God and racism. She describes her feeling after conversion: "After I took my Shahada, I felt like I had found the secrets to the universe" (UTICA MASJID, 2022, 3:59). For her and other converted women, the emphasis on discovering Islam and creating a strong relationship with Allah played a major role in helping them find their purpose and organize all aspects of their lives. The spiritual enlightenment women reach after converting to Islam plays a crucial role in teaching them the proper way to understand and deal with overwhelming emotions such as grief and anger through the determined belief that it is all a part of Allah's plan (UTICA MASJID, 2022).

Converted women do not only find the answers to their religious questions in Islam, but they are also able to achieve what is known as "universal unity in Islam." (Bowen, 2009, p. 23), which makes them feel that they are part of a bigger whole than the one they used to belong to before their conversion. This type of unity abolishes the feelings of loss and confusion they previously felt as a result of the lack of spiritual connection between them and their previous religions (if they had any).

### **2.2.2. The Effect of Conversion on Families**

The transformation in American women's lives after embracing Islam is mostly shown through their behaviours as well as their social relationships, especially with their family members. Whether they are wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters, their views on their roles within their families change, and the way they treat their family members also changes according to Islamic teachings. In addition, emphasis must be put on the development of the relationship between newly converted women and their Muslim spouses, as well as the reactions of families after their daughters change their faith.

Islam provides newly converted women with clear guidelines concerning their relationships with their families as well as their extended families. This guideline is based on both the Quran and Hadith, and it clarifies rights and duties towards parents, spouses, and even extended families. Converted women start to view their relationship with their parents as the most crucial bond in their lives in the sense that Islam directly relates it to heaven and good deeds. Women's relationships with their parents become characterized by respect, mercy, and honour after their conversion to Islam as a result of the Quran's emphasis on the importance of obeying them and treating them with kindness, even if they're following another religion. Allah said:

Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but him, and be good to your parents. Whether one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of annoyance and do not repel them, but rather speak to them a noble word. Lower to them the wing of humility for them, out of mercy, and say: My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up when I was small.

Surat al-Isra 17:23-24 (Ahmerd, 2019)

This verse in particular explains the importance of establishing a strong relationship with parents and being kind to them, as well as taking care of them when they grow old, demonstrating children's duties towards their parents. Regardless of American views on the concept of family, converted women tend to establish a stronger bond with their extended families (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) as a result of Islam's emphasis on the significance of strengthening the relationship with one's relatives. Such bonds are significant in Islam, which also makes them significant for converted women because their extended family is as important as their close family. Omar Suleiman (2018) explains that maintaining a close relationship with uncles and aunts is named "Sila," which means "maintaining a strong bond," and that it is considered crucial for all Muslims because aunts and uncles are as precious as parents.

Furthermore, women's relationships with their spouses become stronger and better after their conversion because, according to Islamic teachings, marriage is the most sacred bond in life. Conversion to Islam provides women with a better understanding of the concept of marriage and characterizes their relationships with cooperation, understanding, mercy, and help in practicing the faith, therefore reaching psychological comfort and spiritual fulfilment (Dogarwa, 2009). According to a survey (Muslim,2008), the majority of American women who converted to Islam and were married to Muslims believe that their relationships with their spouses became stronger after their conversion because their Muslim husbands introduced them to the religion, supported their spiritual journey, and helped them learn more about Islam and how it's practiced. The same questionnaire showed that some difficulties are faced by couples after the wife's conversion in the sense that some husbands and in-laws start to have some cultural-religious expectations from women immediately after their conversion. Such difficulties are usually overcome after women have a better education about Islam and become more familiar with it.

The process of conversion has a remarkable effect on women as well as their families and relatives. The announcement of a change in religion elicits both positive and negative responses from family members, which can range from acceptance to rejection. Living in a religiously diverse society with a Christian majority as well as the media's representation of Islam after the 9/11 incident are among the factors causing the issues between converted women and their families' reactions toward their daughters' new faith.

American women who converted to Islam explain that they faced some difficulties concerning revealing their conversion to their families, especially when they belong to a religious family. (Alhmmmd, 2022) explains that she was concerned about revealing her conversion to her Jewish family, whom she describes as "religious" especially her mother, who had a negative view of Islam and Muslims. The mother's reaction was expected, and she considered her daughter's conversion a result of her failure as a parent. However, the mother became more understanding after noticing the positive change that occurred in her daughter's life and is now more supportive of her beliefs. Despite several cases in which parents and family members refuse their daughter's decision to change faith, many other families are welcoming and supportive. Some family members became interested in Islam after women in their families converted. For instance, (Brooklyn) explains that Islam has a major effect on her life and her mother's because her conversion was the reason behind her mother's conversion to Islam and healing from addiction (The 3 Muslims, 2022).

### **2.2.3. Receiving Hate from the Non-Muslim Community**

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 resulted in the rise of hostility towards American Muslims, who suffered discrimination, racism, and violence because of the negative perspective average Americans have about Islam in addition to the media representation of Muslims. The negative attitude towards Islam does not only include Muslim immigrants and those **who were**

born Muslims; it also became a challenge for American converts, especially women who can be easily identified as Muslims after wearing hijab.

Evans (2015) argues that American converted women face plenty of obstacles concerning the announcement of their conversion to their society. She explains that Americans tend to reject the fact that converts are both Americans and Muslims at the same time, and that is a result of their rejection of Islam, which they associate with violence and terrorism. She adds that converted women are viewed by American society as "passive-aggressive victims," which is incorrect and a result of stereotypes. Additionally, hijab is viewed as a symbol of oppression and lack of freedom; therefore, American converts tend to be attacked by the public, who often try to unveil them, arguing that the USA is a free country and they are not obliged to dress modestly, assuming that converts' free choice of wearing hijab is a result of violence and oppression (El-Wazni, 2015).

Based on the testimonies of converted women, a great majority of Americans do not show friendly attitudes towards American women who wear hijab, and that is a result of the media representation of Muslims as well as other factors such as the war in Iraq, where most people believe that this war aims to abolish terrorism and that wearing hijab is a form of supporting the enemy (CGTN America, 2022). Raising hate towards Muslims and discrimination against women lead converts to avoid wearing hijab and just dress modestly to avoid violence and clashes with non-Muslims.

#### **2.2.4. Employment**

Conversion to Islam transcends changing religious beliefs and covers a wide range of radical changes concerning multiple aspects of life. These changes are observed through embracing new behaviors, modest clothing, and, in some rare cases, new Islamic names, which make it clear to society that these women belong to Islam. In a mostly liberal country like the

USA, the effects of these changes are not merely psychological and personal, but they can also be professionally given that women's performance at work changes as a result of their conversion, whereas some others either lose their jobs or find difficulties in finding employment as a result of stereotypes.

Islam is more than a set of religious practices; its teachings work on organizing every aspect of human life rather than merely being concerned with the spiritual aspect. (Nuriman and Fauzan, 2017) argue that "moral values in Islam aim to determine human activity in a Muslim society, and to promote and control their behavior to the benefit of the whole society and its individuals" (p.4) explaining that women's conversion to Islam has a direct effect on their behaviors and the way they act within their society and workplaces. The high level of spirituality women experience after their conversion is proven to affect their performance at work. According to Krishnakumar and Neck (2002), spiritual employees are the best in terms of productivity and professionalism in the sense that their spiritual beliefs cause "honesty, creativity, dedication, and personal fulfillment." (As cited in Bahti et al., 2016, p. 4). Women tend to show a high level of professionalism and integrity in their jobs after conversion as a result of Islam's emphasis on the responsibilities that come with every single position one occupies. The Prophet PBUH also said:

Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you will be questioned about those under his rule: the ruler is a shepherd, and he will be questioned about his subjects; the man is a shepherd in his family, and he will be questioned about those under his care, and the woman is a shepherd in the house of her husband, and she will be questioned about those under her care [...] Thus, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for those under his care (SahihBukhari Al-Hadith, 252 As cited in Bahti,2016,p.5).

In the sense that all Muslims will be questioned by Allah about everything they do and that they must take full responsibility for their roles in life. All works are devoted to Allah, which encourages women to assume full responsibility for their jobs and to provide the best performance possible, as being honest in their jobs is equal to being honest with Allah.

Furthermore, Islamic teachings do not only affect women's sense of responsibility and productivity, but they also enhance their time management skills as a result of Islam's stress on managing time and the proper way to spend it. Razi (2016) argues that Islam emphasizes the importance of managing one's time when they are committed to job responsibilities, in addition to "prioritizing duties" and making sure to perform a high quality of work within the pre-set time. "Al-Jeraisy (2008) maintains that every Muslim has certain duties and responsibilities towards the Almighty Allah (swt) and for society." (As cited in Islam et al., 2020, p. 2), among these responsibilities is the performance of five prayers a day, which is an important matter for Muslims in the sense that they cannot delay these prayers and must perform them on time. This sense of responsibility makes women more aware of the importance of time and the proper way to organize their social and spiritual lives with their professional ones.

Despite the peace Islam brings to women, they still face a set of difficulties related to social stereotypes and prejudice that are a result of their conversion, which becomes obvious to their surroundings after they wear the hijab (headscarf) or change their names to Muslim ones. Finding labor or keeping a current job position is among the common obstacles American women face after their conversion.

As a result of living in a society where freedom is pretty common, there are no particular dress codes promoted in the USA. The American people are known for enjoying a high level of freedom concerning the way they dress, which grants converted women the right to dress according to the Islamic dress code that is characterized by modesty (Women in Islam and

Muslim Realms: Dress Code, 2023). This type of dressing is considered strange in American society, and it is among the factors leading women to face stereotypes in their workplaces. Hyder (2015) argues that non-Muslim Americans assume that the hijab is a symbol of oppression and that the reason behind women's struggle to find labor after their conversion despite their competence is the prejudice related to their appearance. Ahmed and Gorey (2021) state that a large number of Muslim women in the USA either "got denied employment or faced discrimination" in their workplaces as a result of their religious background and their appearance (wearing a head scarf), which is a result of the stereotype related to 9/11.

According to (Meksem,2012), Muslim organizations in the United States have been working to eliminate acts of discrimination against Muslim women in the workplace by protesting and putting pressure on the government to enact effective laws to combat bigotry and discrimination against Muslims in the workplace.

### **2.2.5. Legal Matters**

Among the common challenges faced by American women after embracing Islam are the differences between the American legal system and Islamic teachings concerning legal matters such as heirlooms, divorce, and child custody. American women find they are concerned and confused whenever they have to solve a matter legally because the law in their country does not go along with their new faith's teachings. As new Muslims, their legal sources are both Sahria and Fiqeh, which (Budiharjo, n.d.) defines as "the laws, commandments, and way of life prescribed by Allah to mankind."For the former and "the knowledge of the legal rules (Al Ahkam Al Shariyyah), pertaining to conduct that has been derived from their specific evidence" for the latter. Both Shariah and Fiqeh make up the Islamic law that American women are supposed to follow instead of the American one after their official conversion to Islam.

Moreover, American women tend to face the most problems concerning heirlooms in countries whose Islamic law is completely different from the American one in the sense that married Muslim women do not inherit from their family members after marriage but inherit from their husbands and children instead. In addition, shifting ownership of the property to someone outside the bloodline takes the form of a gift and follows certain Islamic rules in the sense that a certain percentage can be gifted, whereas the rest of the property must be divided according to Shariah's rules (Shatzmiller, 1996). Such laws are considered crucial in Islam, which makes women obliged to follow them after their conversion, even though they are not tolerated by the American system or by non-Muslim family members.

Volokh (2013) argues that American law allows some religious contracts that serve Muslim citizens, such as days off on Islamic holidays, despite the constant concerns about the implementation of such Islamic laws in American courts. However, the law in the USA does not allow the application of the majority of Islamic laws or the establishment of laws related to punishments or contracts related to child custody and divorce where "courts don't allow for arbitration of child custody" (p. 07). In the sense that Muslim women in the USA are obliged to follow American law in case they get divorced, their child custody decisions can only be made by American courts, and no contract between them and their spouses is allowed concerning this matter. American women can make agreements with their potential spouses on receiving "Meher," which is allowed in American courts, yet Hutler (2018) and other scholars argue that the implementation of such Islamic and religious laws must be forbidden and neglected because it provides religious institutions with more power and control over the government. Such stands threaten Muslims' ability to follow Islamic laws and are the source of conflict for women who converted to Islam.

The pressure concerning legal matters is constantly increasing in the USA, which makes it difficult for converts to be Muslims and Americans at the same time. The Islamic

Shariah is regarded as a "foreign law" in the sense that it does not originally belong to the American legal system. As a result, several states in the U.S. forbid the application of laws from different states; these laws are driven by Shariah (Pedrioli, 2012). Furthermore, some states in the USA have passed laws that forbid any legal contracts related to Muslim marriages even if both spouses are Muslims, claiming that imposing such acts aims to decrease the spread of terrorism (Choudhury, 2013). According to Sonne (2015), Islamic laws should not be considered foreign because they are not driven from another country and they concern a religious community that does not only consist of immigrants but also includes a remarkable number of American citizens who converted to Islam. This "hostility" towards Shariah is a result of the "anti-Muslim" movements that are active in the USA.

## **Conclusion**

American women are exposed to multiple cultures and religions that coexist in their society, allowing them to discover and learn about them. Nonetheless, the majority of them conclude that Islam is the most suitable religion for them, for a number of reasons. Women's conversion could be caused by their dissatisfaction with their religion, which is unable to answer their questions about life and the purpose of existence. It could also be driven by curiosity to learn about the religion after being exposed to it in the media. Moreover, women decide to convert to Islam as a result of their interest in its different aspects, such as its views on controversial matters such as slavery and human and women's rights, in addition to its views on family and society's ideal structure. Furthermore, direct contact with other Muslims in the social structure leads women to discover Islam and choose it as their new faith, especially after marriage to Muslims, which affects American women's views on religion. Regardless of the factors causing American women's conversion to Islam, this latter affects women in several aspects. For instance, they undergo radical changes spiritually in the sense that their views on life and their existence change completely, and they start to experience spiritual fulfilment. In

addition, conversion affects their relationships with their families, friends, and society, where reactions towards their change of faith are either positive or negative. Finally, convert American women tend to face a set of difficulties in their society as a result of prejudice and being unaccepted by their environment. Furthermore, the main differences between the Islamic and American systems could be confusing and difficult to understand.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Questionnaire Analysis and Hypotheses Testing**

## Chapter Three : Questionnaire Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

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## **Introduction**

This research is based on hypotheses that aim to discover the main reasons causing American women's conversion to Islam as well as the effects resulting from this process. The first hypothesis assumes that the process of conversion is caused by a set of both external and internal factors, such as the previous religion of new Muslims and their desire to seek the truth and find their real identity, as well as their interest in different aspects of Islam, such as its teachings about society and family, in addition to the Quran and Hadith, which represent a guideline for all aspects of life. Additionally, the second hypothesis assumes that women experience several effects after their conversion to Islam as well as some challenges as a result of the radical change in their behaviours and beliefs. These effects concern learning about Islam and the correct way of practicing it, as well as their psychological and physical states. Women who have recently converted may also face challenges in terms of correctly observing religious practices and announcing their conversion to their families and non-Muslim society, as well as how this impacts their faith. The data collected from this questionnaire represents a small sample of converted American women, and it is insufficient to generalize in the meantime. However, this chapter is dedicated to analyzing the questionnaire's results and trying to test the above-mentioned hypothesis concerning the small data sample that has been collected through the questionnaire.

### **3.1. Questionnaire Analysis**

#### **3.1.1. Questionnaire Description**

The questionnaire was conducted online using social media platforms such as Facebook, and it was meant to address converting women from the USA. The questionnaire aimed to test the research hypotheses based on the data collected from a small sample of female converts in American society. The questionnaire participants were eighteen American women

from different ethnicities and religious backgrounds to test the research hypotheses and investigate the main reasons causing conversion to Islam among women as well as the main effects resulting from that.

The questionnaire consisted of four main sections. The first was dedicated to collecting general demographic information about the participants. First, they were asked to state their age to detect the age range of converting women. Next, they were asked to state their origins to discover the ethnicities that are mostly attracted to Islam. After that, participants stated their professional status, which helps in detecting the categories of society that are attracted to Islam. The second section of the questionnaire was dedicated to discovering the main reasons behind women's conversion to Islam as well as the motifs leading them to change their original faith. In this section, women were given a wide range of options related to the main factors affecting their decision to convert and were also given a free space to express their own opinions and reflect on their personal experiences. The third section sheds light on women's experiences post-conversion and the challenges they faced after changing their religion. This section also offered participants a wide range of options concerning the difficulties they might have faced after they converted and also offered them the option of choosing something outside the list and expressing their thoughts and experiences. The final section was dedicated to examining the effect of conversion on the participants' social relationships with several social groups and contexts. This section was further divided into seven sections according to the social groups and contexts included in the questionnaire. Unlike the previous sections, participants were not asked to choose among options, but they were asked to comment or describe the strength of their relationships with seven social groups and contexts using a scale that included options such as "very strong/strong, "moderate, "weak/very weak, and "not applicable.

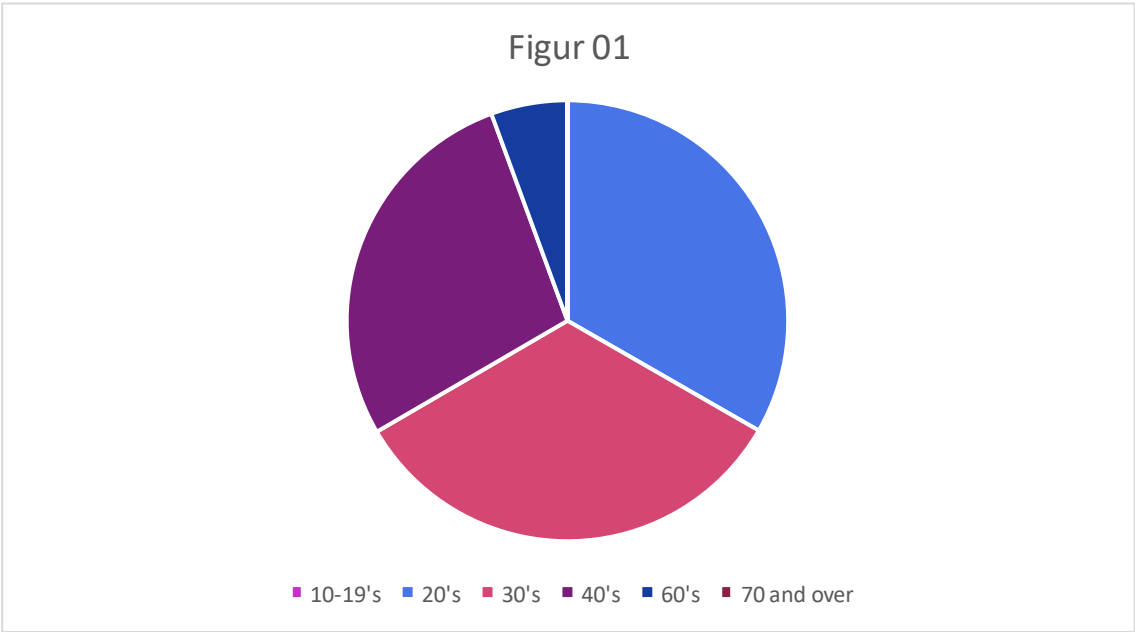
**3.2. Discussion of the Results**

**3.2.1. First Section: Demographic Information**

Discovering the demographic information of participants is crucial to put the issue in its realistic context, providing further information such as the common age range of female converts, the major ethnicities that convert to Islam, and the categories of society that are more exposed to Islamic teachings, and connecting such information with the main reasons leading American women to convert to Islam.

**3.2.1.1. Participants' Age**

The results below show that participants came from several age categories in the sense that the majority of them were young converts in their twenties, whereas others were aged between thirty and forty. Remarkably, a small number of participants declared that they were in their sixties.



**Figure 3.1:** *Convert Women's Age*

### **3.2.1.1.1. Young Participants (20s)**

The majority of the participants were young converts in their 20s. Despite the liberal lifestyle American youth adopt in the USA, these results show that Islam attracts a majority of young women in their 20s, which is caused by several factors. First, women of that age are most likely college students, indicating that they reside in larger cities where they interact with individuals of various cultural and religious backgrounds. Young American women have the opportunity to be exposed to Islam through other Muslims who introduce them to Islam and set a positive example of the ideal behaviours of Muslims (See chapter two, p.30). Being in contact with other Muslims helps women reflect on their attitudes and religious choices, which eventually leads them to conversion to Islam.

Second, the extreme freedom and irresponsible lifestyle that are associated with young people in the USA, where they consume alcohol and drugs, lead to personal and social issues to which women tend to react in several ways. This irresponsible lifestyle and the hardships it causes lead women to search for solutions that they tend to find in Islamic teachings. Furthermore, young women at this age tend to worry about the future and suffer from mental issues caused by their concerns about life. Islam offers these women comfort, knowing that Allah is the one taking care of their lives.

Finally, mass media play a major role in spreading Islam and introducing it to young women. The wide spread of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook introduced Islam to the younger generation through content creation and the ability to contact other people from Muslim countries. In addition, the younger generation enjoys freedom, which helps them search for information about Islam and learn about its reality from other sources than the media, which provides a stereotypical view of Islam and associates it with terrorism.

### **3.2.1.1.2. Middle-Aged Participants (30's and 40's)**

The number of participants that were in their 30s is equal to those in their 20s, which is a high number within the small sample. Middle-aged women are equally exposed to Islam as younger generations. This supports the fact that Islam attracts a wide range of people regardless of their interests and ages. Women at that age have different concerns than younger women in the sense that they do not only worry about their futures, but they are most likely to worry about their children's future as well. Islam offers these women full guidelines on the appropriate way to raise children and take good care of them. Female converts at that age are mostly interested in Islam as a result of its views on the ideal family, where women enjoy their rights and occupy a high position in the family system (See chapter 2, p. 26). Moreover, women in their 30s can be married to Muslims. Such relationships can either result in their conversion to get married or their conversion after marriage, which offers a realistic view of true Islam. Finally, psychological conflicts at this age are pretty common as women start to question their life decisions and lack the motivation to achieve their goals. Being loyal to religion minimizes the mental harm resulting from negative thoughts and helps women psychologically and spiritually through prayers and creating a strong bond with Allah.

A slight difference in percentage was noticed between participants who are either 20 or 30 and participants who declared being in their 40s. Physical and psychological changes occur in women at this age, which results in an identity crisis and a lack of motivation because women start to be viewed as useless and are supposed to have fulfilled their desires and accomplished their goals. The way women are viewed at this stage of life weakens and affects them negatively. Women at that age tend to search for a source of strength that they find in Islam. Being religiously disciplined changes women's views on life and helps them find their identities and their true purpose.

### **3.2.1.1.3. Old Participants (60's)**

Results showed that a very small number of female converts are in their 60s, which indicates that Islam attracts a wide range of people and that it is not only interesting for the younger generation. At the age of 60, women have already experienced health problems and sickness, as well as the deaths of several loved ones. Furthermore, women at this age are already suffering from fear of death and possible regrets over past actions and decisions. Moreover, the majority of seniors in the USA live in nursing homes away from their families. These factors play a major role in women's discovery of Islam and their conversion at this old age, for it provides them with comfort and minimizes their feelings of loneliness. Erikson's developmental stage model suggests that elderly women at the age of sixty reach a stage of despair in the sense that they feel like death is near, which results in "existential identity" formation. The wisdom reached by old women leads them to discover Islam, which changes their views on death, life, and the afterlife (as cited in Evans, 2015).

### **3.2.1.2. Participant's Ethnic Groups**

The data of this questionnaire was randomly collected and targeted convert American women in general which explains the ethnic diversity of the participants. As the table below shows the participants belonged to diverse ethnic groups such as African American, Latin, and white. The majority of participants were white American women who made up (55.8 %) of the total number of participants. In addition, a remarkable number of participants were African American. These results indicate that Islam is widespread among diverse ethnic groups in the USA and is not only related to middle eastern immigrants who are said to be the first ones to spread Islam in the USA as previously stated in chapter one (p.05).

*Table 3.2: The Ethnic Groups of Convert American Women*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Participant's Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>White</b>	10	55.5%
<b>African American/ Black</b>	6	33.3%
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	1	5.6%
<b>Asian</b>	1	5.6%

### **3.2.1.2.1. White (Caucasian)**

Participants who identified as white Caucasians made up 55.5% of the total number of participants, which was an unexpectedly high number. African-Americans were expected to be the majority due to reasons that will be discussed in the next point. However, the high number of white female converts within the questionnaire's small sample is similar to the results obtained from the Evans (2015) large sample questionnaire, which indicates that 53% of American female converts are white Caucasians (p. 93).

This result was unexpected in light of the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, after which Muslims of other races faced a rise in hostility toward them as a result of associating them with the twin tower attacks. In addition, the support Donald Trump received from the white race during the elections, in which he emphasized racial and religious discrimination against Muslims, However, the propaganda created by the hatred of Muslims resulted in contrasting effects where white women became curious to discover Islam and learn about it, aside from the views provided by the media. The extensive fear of Islam and Muslims resulted in introducing Islam to women who decided to embrace it after discovering its true nature (Chapter 2, p. 23).

Moreover, as a result of the class system in American society, the white race is known for being privileged and enjoying extreme freedom, which led to the abolishment of most rules in society. This social chaos led American women to start searching for a virtue that was strict and

emphasized organization and discipline. This search for stability and comfort results in finding Islam, which is related to human instinct.

### **3.2.1.2.2. African-American (Black)**

The number of African-American women was expected to be larger than that of white women as a result of the history of racism in the USA, which has been largely supported by the church. Similarly, the large sample survey conducted by Evans (2015) found that African-Americans are the second largest group in the USA in terms of female converts to Islam. Their survey found that African-American female converts made up 20% of the total number of participants, whereas the results of this survey showed that African-Americans made up 33.3 percent of the total number of participants within a small sample.

The number of African-American female converts is less than that of white converts; however, it is still considered high in comparison to other ethnicities. This result could be best explained in relation to the history of African-Americans and slavery. In reference to chapter two (p. 27), the main reason behind the conversion of African-American women to Islam is its views on social issues such as racism and slavery. African-Americans are among the most vulnerable categories in American society in the sense that they have suffered from slavery and oppression since their first arrival in the country. Their ancestors were tortured and oppressed in the past, and they are facing another type of oppression in the present day that comes in the form of discrimination and racism. Women find fairness and inequality in Islam, which views them as human beings regardless of their skin colour. In addition, Islam abolished slavery, gave people equal rights, and emphasized that the main criteria to judge people are their good deeds, which encouraged African-American women to choose Islam as their new faith

Furthermore, the church played a major role in emphasizing racial discrimination by interpreting verses from the Bible in a way that encouraged slavery and classicism, which made

African-Americans feel outcasts. This resulted in black women's rejection of the church's teachings and dissatisfaction with their religion, in addition to their search for another religion that is supportive of their freedom and right to equal treatment. African-American women find comfort and support in Islam, which grants them all of their rights and treats them equally. Moreover, Quran verses emphasize treating humans with dignity and respect and forbid racial discrimination and racism, which explains women's choice of Islam as a new faith (p. 29).

### **3.2.1.2.3. Minorities**

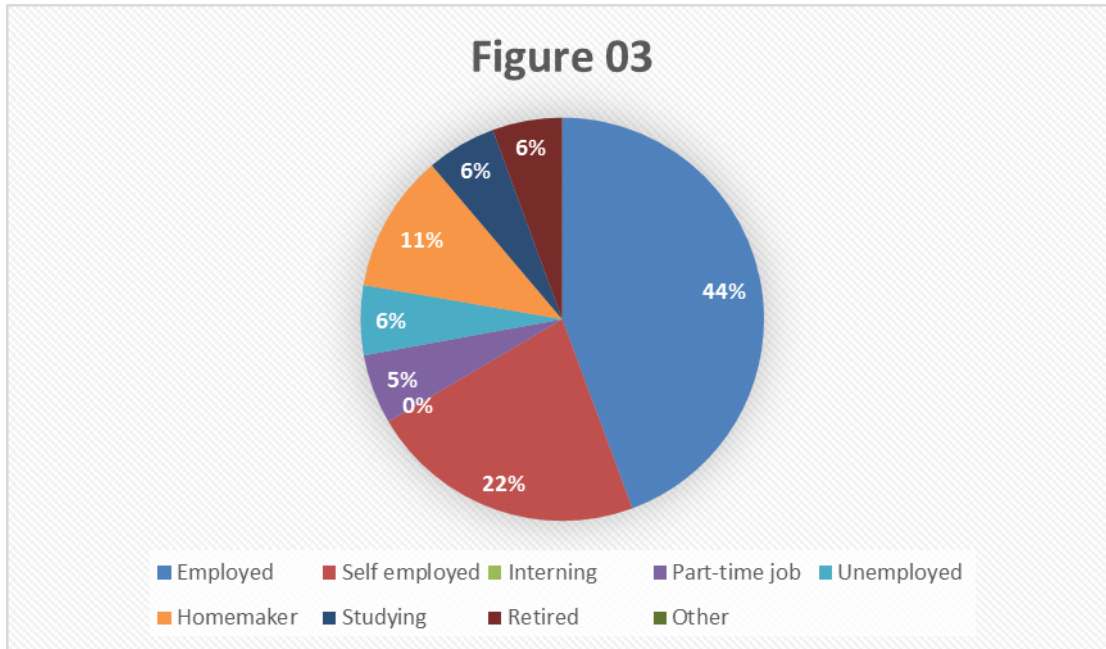
Despite the small number of Latino and Asian participants, this result provides views on the diversity of Muslim converts in the USA. Islam attracts women from several cultural backgrounds in the sense that it does not emphasize discrimination against races and people and only considers one's good deeds and intentions. Additionally, the main reason behind the small number of converts from Latino or Asian backgrounds is that they already represent a minority in American society. Most of them are either religious Christians or atheists.

As noticed in the table above, none of the participants identified as Arab, and that is because the most common religion among Americans of Arab origins is already Islam in the sense that they are classified as born Muslims rather than new Muslims. In addition, the results showed that there were no Native American participants because they make up an extreme minority in American society and are most likely to embrace their religion.

### **3.2.1.3. Participants' Work Status**

Despite the small number of participants who responded to this questionnaire, the data extracted from this question showed that the participants occupy a wide range of professions and are mostly educated to a certain extent. The results below depict that the great majority of participants are employed. (44.4%) stated that they were employed, whereas (22.2%) declared

they were self-employed, in addition to those who had part-time jobs or were interns at different institutions.



**Figure 3.3:** *Converted Women's Work Status*

### 3.2.1.3.1. The Educational Level of Participants

As the results show, the majority of female converts who answered the questionnaire are employed, which indicates they have received a certain level of education that could include university level. The educational level of women plays a crucial role in their conversion because it helps them realize and criticize their social and spiritual situations and search for religious commitment. On the one hand, education helps women perceive Islam in an objective, critical sense so that they do not merely believe what they see in the media and follow the stereotype. They become aware of the propaganda and more curious to learn about Islam, which eventually leads to their conversion. On the other hand, educated women are most likely to be logical in the sense that they refuse the irrational practices of their previous faith and tend to think about the reality of the creation of life and their true purpose in it. This mindset leads women to discover Islam, which has the answer to their questions.

### **3.2.1.3.2. Employed Participants**

As the results show, the majority of converted women are employed and occupy a wide range of jobs. Some of them are employed, whereas others identify as self-employed individuals. Another category is those who are either retired or had part-time jobs at the time they answered the questionnaire. These results provide insights into the spread of Islam among the working class in American society. Working women are exposed to Islam in their workplaces, where they have the opportunity to meet other Muslims who would explain Islam. Being outside helps in having realistic views on different aspects of Islam from Muslims and comparing what is being promoted in the media with reality.

Moreover, the mental issues resulting from the busy lives working women lead tend to cause a wide range of psychological issues, creating a feeling of loneliness, despair, and emptiness in the sense that these women's value is associated with their productivity. However, Islam is a source of comfort to women, knowing that their faith is controlled by Allah. The negative feelings caused by this busy lifestyle lead women to search for ease and comfort, which are found in Islam. This latter encourages productivity and all types of legal and fair labor, especially for women. In addition, it emphasizes not putting more pressure on oneself than one can handle. Women are encouraged to work and be productive without causing harm to them.

### **3.2.1.3.3. Unemployed and Homemakers**

Islam is meant for all people and all social categories; therefore, it attracts all types of people regardless of their educational level and work status. The diagram above shows that a slight number of participants are either homemakers or unemployed, which confirms that Islam is related to one's instinct and search for stability rather than social class and educational level. Concerning Islamic history, Islam was first spread among vulnerable categories of society, and it emphasized equality, which makes it preferable for such social categories.

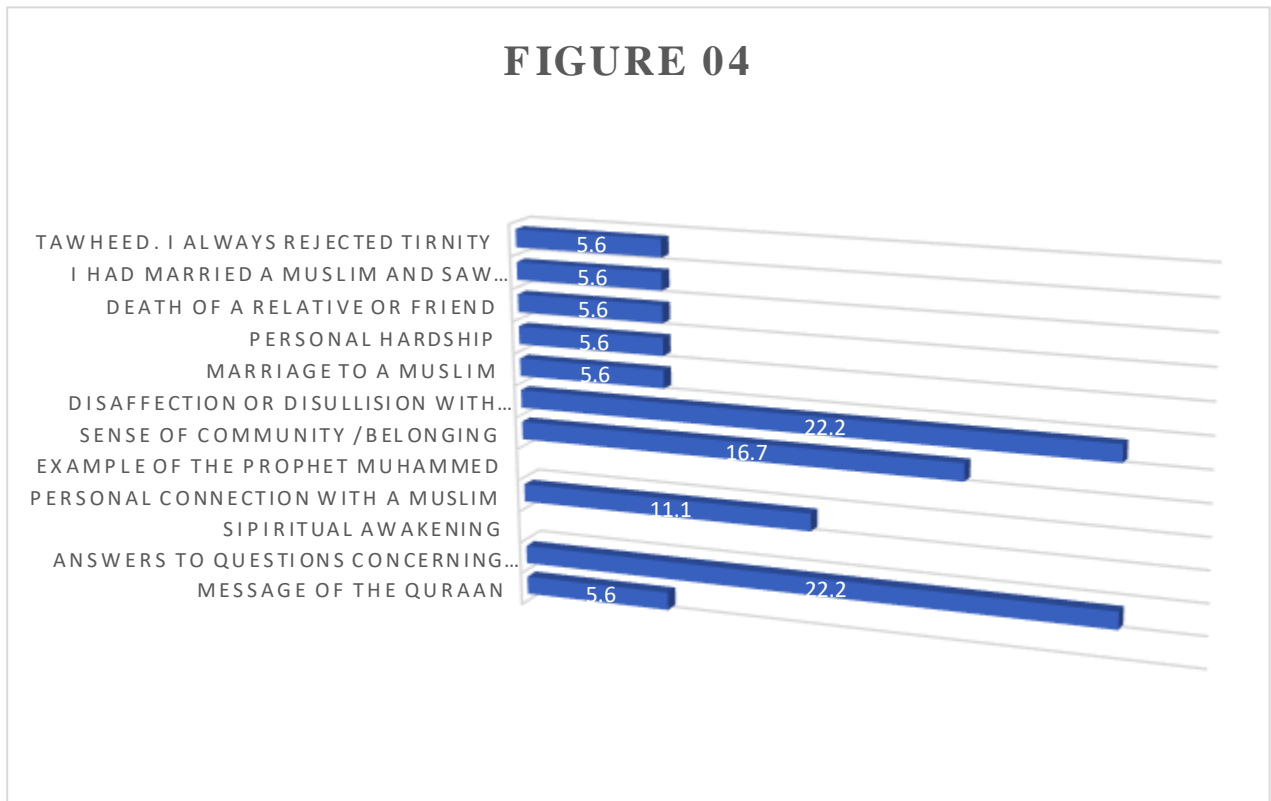
Women who identify as homemakers would be interested in Islam primarily because it does not consider their professional and educational levels but only their deeds. Furthermore, most housewives discover Islam after attempting to answer their children's questions about it, whereas unemployed converts would find comfort and consolation in Islam and its practices.

### **3.2.2. Second Section: Reasons for Conversion**

This section was dedicated to exploring the main factors leading to conversion to Islam among women. Participants were invited to reflect on their personal experiences with conversion and express the reasons affecting their decision to embrace Islam. In this section, they were provided with a set of options representing some of the expected common reasons for conversion and were asked to choose the most relevant ones. However, participants were also provided with a free space to express their personal reasons for conversion in case they did not find their most accurate option within the list. The results of this question are shown in the diagram below.

#### **3.2.2.1. The Most Important Factors in Life, or Aspects of Islam Leading to Conversion**

The process of conversion is a major phenomenon that requires the presence of a set of factors that can be either internal, such as the search for truth crisis within finding one's identity and dissatisfaction with the previous religion or common spiritual beliefs, or external, such as interest in Islam and its teachings and practices, as well as the effect of direct contact with Muslims through different types of relationships such as friendship, marriage, or contact in workplaces.



**Figure 3.4:** *The Most Important Factors Leading to Conversion to Islam*

### 3.2.2.1.1. Religious Factors

As shown in the figure above, the great majority of participants stated that the main factors leading to their conversion to Islam were spiritual and religion-related. (22.2%) of converted women stated that they converted as a result of their disillusionment and dissatisfaction with their previous religion. Whereas 5.6 percent of them declared that they were interested in the messages of the Quran. In addition, another (5.6%) states that the main reason behind their conversion was their rejection of the Trinity.

Dissatisfaction with the previous religion is among the major factors causing women’s conversion to Islam. In reference to the second chapter of this dissertation, where Christianity is used as an illustration of women’s disillusionment with their previous religion as it is the most common religion in the USA, American women tend to be unsatisfied with the Church’s teachings, which they believe lack discipline and are confusing (p. 21). On the one

hand, the history of the church is full of controversial opinions concerning important matters such as women's duties and rights, both outside and inside the church. The church emphasized men's supremacy and regarded women as inferior creatures that must not express their opinions. As a result of that, American women started to be driven away from Christianity and search for a religion that would grant them equal rights and emphasize treating them with honor and respect. Women embrace Islam, for it does not consider gender and only regards one's deeds, whether a man or a woman. Furthermore, participants' previous faith is confusing and complicated as a result of the several testaments and several interpretations of the holy book, as well as rituals and diverse religious practices.

On the other hand, women convert to Islam because they refuse to believe in the Trinity, where God consists of three units that are considered illogical. Additionally, their dissatisfaction with the religion increases as a result of complicated practices such as (confession) where people cannot contact God directly and must speak to a priest (see chapter Two, p. 21). Islam attracts women because it is a simple faith that consists of simple practices where they can create a personal connection with Allah without the need for the interference of a third party.

Finally, as the results depict, 5.6% of the participants declared that their interest in Islam was caused by the messages of the Quran. Converts could obtain English copies of the Quran in addition to its explanation either online or from other Muslims they encounter. Unlike other books, it only consists of one version that has never been modified, and it does not include several testaments. The Quran includes several miraculous stories and fascinating life lessons. After reading and understanding the Quran, women tend to reflect on their previous religion and feel more comfortable and satisfied with Islam.

### **3.2.2.1.2. Spiritual Factors**

Spirituality plays a crucial role in conversion because it encourages the search for the appropriate religion. As previously mentioned in the first chapter of this research, converts tend to experience a certain period known as "the crisis," which is one of the pre-conversion stages where converts start to question several aspects of their lives, such as their religion and the purpose of their existence (p. 15). The results above prove that 22% of the participants experienced a stage of crisis before their conversion, which led to their discovering Islam.

American society is known for its emphasis on individualism and materialism, which makes most people focus on productivity and labour. This mindset eventually leads to the neglect of human values and widespread psychological issues such as depression and suicide. Furthermore, the widespread myths about life after death make people live purposeless life where they do not have a certain goal. However, women find the answers to all of their questions in Islamic teachings. For instance, Islam views life as a temporary stage where people are meant to live and worship Allah. In addition, the belief in reward and punishment and the reality of the afterlife help women realize that they were created for a reason and that the main reason behind humans' existence is to create a strong bond with Allah and worship him.

### **3.2.2.1.3. Personal Factors**

It is believed that domestic difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, prompt women to convert to Islam. The results above illustrate that (5.6%) of the participants converted to Islam due to personal hardships, whereas (5.6%) specified that their hardships were the death of a family member or a friend.

Personal hardships are closely related to conversion in the sense that despair creates the need for virtue. Women who experience personal hardships, especially the loss of dear people tend to search for a source of strength, which they find in faith. As previously discussed

within the first chapter, converts experience a period known as "the crisis" which is most of the time a difficult period where a tragic event happens to a person and causes their loss of faith in everything. This experience is usually the main factor causing women to search for a comforting religion such as Islam. This latter consists of several solutions to overcome sadness and despair that can be found in several verses in the Quran explaining that the best way to overcome hardships is to depend on Allah and strengthen one's faith.

#### **3.2.2.1.4. Social Factors**

As previously discussed in the second chapter (p. 29), interaction with other Muslims is among the most common factors leading to women's conversion to Islam in the USA. Being introduced to or related to Muslims sets a realistic example of the ideal Islamic attitudes that make women interested in the religion. Furthermore, social relationships and especially marriage encourage women to embrace Islam, given that they become interested in the religion as a result of their spouses' ideal attitudes or because they have a better understanding of their spouses. Moreover, the welcoming nature of the Muslim community encourages women to discover Islam, which eventually leads to their conversion.

##### **3.2.2.1.4.1. Marriage and Direct Contact with Muslims**

The aforementioned diagram demonstrates that (5.6%) of survey respondents stated that they converted to Islam as a result of their marriage to a Muslim, and (5.6%) further explained that their conversion took place after marrying a Muslim and becoming impressed with their behaviours. Marriage provides women with a realistic view of Islam and its teachings. Muslims set a positive example of appropriate attitudes in terms of religion, social connections, and life in general. Women tend to be impressed by Islam's views on marriage and the ideal relationship between spouses, where both enjoy rights and are assigned duties. As referred to in the second chapter, Islamic marriages are proven to last longer because they are based on love,

mercy, and respect, which creates a safe environment where women are inspired to follow Islamic teachings.

Moreover, marriage is not the only social connection leading women to embrace Islam. Connection with other Muslims in the workplace, academic institutions, and neighbourhoods plays a crucial role in introducing Islam to non-Muslim women. Being related to Muslims and creating any type of relationship with them provides women with space to learn about Islam and reflect on the information spread in the media, especially after 9/11. They become able to compare the view of Islam that is provided by the media with the reality of it, which is completely different. As a result of that, they become eager to learn about Islam and eventually embrace it.

#### **3.2.2.1.4.2. Sense of Belonging to the Muslim Community**

As has been discussed previously in the second chapter, the Islamic social structure plays a crucial role in women's conversion to Islam in the sense that it represents the ideal social structure in comparison with the American one. This explains why 16.7% of the participants stated that a sense of belonging was the main reason behind their conversion. Unlike American society, which encourages independence and individualism, the Muslim community is based on solidarity and a sense of community. In Islam, "community" is regarded as a whole unit that functions accordingly. Members of society are obliged to help and support one another. Convert women tend to feel more welcome in the Muslim community since it does not consider the cultural background of women and only views them as new Muslims. Moreover, the multiple social events held by the Muslim community in the USA play a major role in introducing Islam as well as engaging convert women in the Muslim community. For instance, women are encouraged to visit religious institutions such as local mosques and other organizations to meet

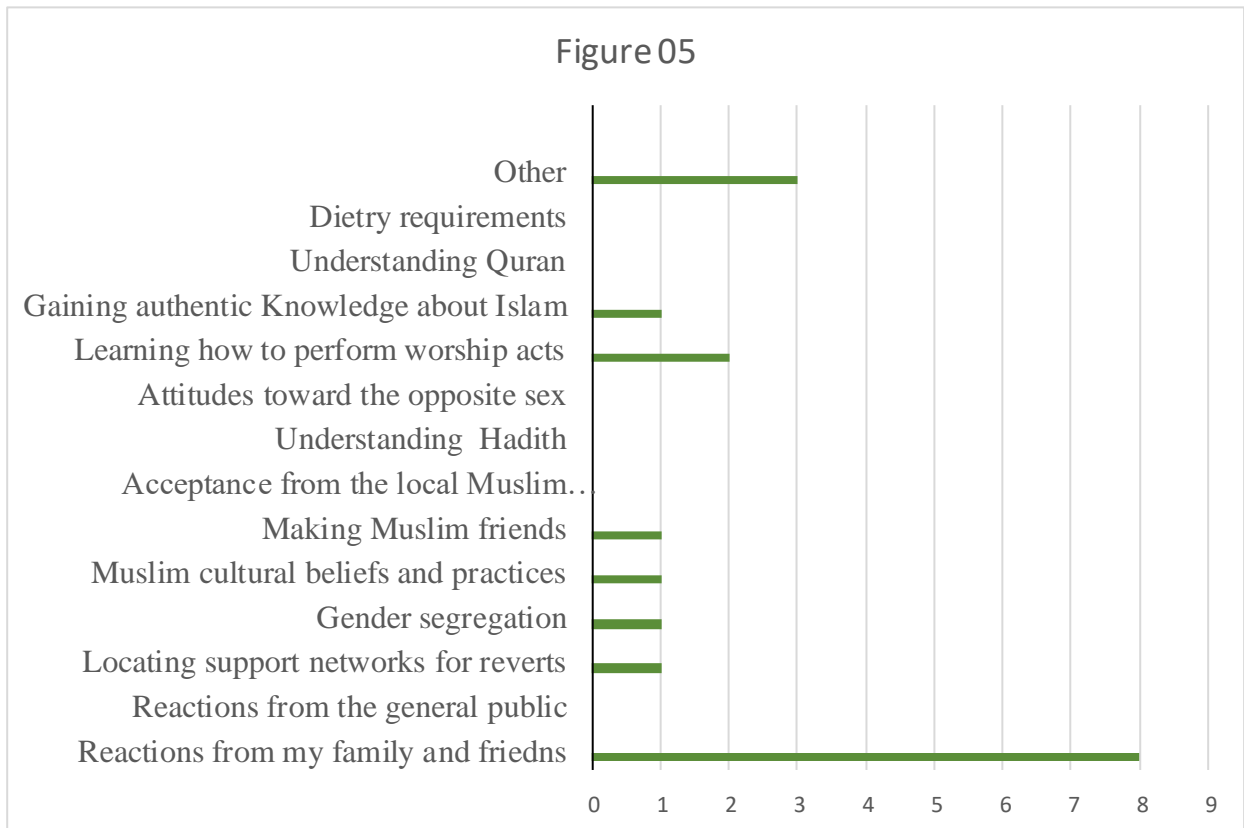
other Muslims before conversion, which emphasizes the positive attitudes of Muslims towards them and encourages them to convert.

### **3.2.3. Third Section: Challenges Facing Convert Women**

This section was dedicated to shed light on the post-conversion period and the main difficulties facing new Muslims. Participants were required to reflect on their personal experiences with several aspects of conversion, such as religious practices, relationships with family and friends, and a general understanding of the new religion. Following the same style of questions in previous sections, participants were provided a set of options related to the most common difficulties facing convert women after conversion, in addition to the freedom to state and explain their difficulties aside from the provided options.

#### **3.2.3.1. Difficulties Facing Convert Women after Conversion**

The process of conversion consists of several radical changes in terms of religious beliefs, behaviours, and social life. American women who embrace Islam tend to face a set of challenges as a result of undergoing such changes, especially after announcing their conversion to their families and social connections, in addition to confusion concerning religious practices, especially at the beginning.



**Figure 3.5:** *Challenges Facing Convert American Women after Conversion*

### 3.2.3.1.1. Social Obstacles

Conversion to Islam among women consists of a set of radical changes concerning their religious beliefs, attitudes, and sometimes their appearance, especially in terms of modest clothing. These changes could either be detected through converts' announcement of the change in their faith or through dressing in an Islamic way. However, converts receive a wide range of reactions about their conversion from family, friends, and the non-Muslim community.

#### 3.2.3.1.1.1. Reactions from Family and Friends

Eight out of eighteen participants declared that they faced a major difficulty in announcing their conversion to their families and friends, who lack knowledge about Islam. American families react negatively to their daughter's embrace of Islam for two main reasons. First, most Americans are affected by the media, which presents a stereotypical view of Islam

and associates it with violence and terrorism. Families develop a fear of the consequences of their daughter's conversion to Islam and assume their attitudes will change negatively, which they discover to be incorrect after a certain period. In addition, as referred to in the second chapter of this dissertation, a remarkable number of families deny their daughters after announcing their conversion to Islam and explain this phenomenon as their failure as parents, especially when they come from religious families. Second, the lack of authentic knowledge about the reality of Islam and its association with terror and violence would expose converts and their families to criticism by the rest of society. Convert families fear that they will be criticized by their religious community after being associated with converted Muslims. Furthermore, American society believes that American soldiers were sent to Iraq to free it from terrorists, which makes people question converts' loyalty to their country in the sense that they assume they support violence and terror by embracing Islam. Moreover, converts' friends are most likely not to understand their conversion to Islam as a result of the major changes in converts' clothing and behaviours, given that they become unable to engage in some of the activities, such as consuming alcohol.

#### **3.2.3.1.1.2. Making Muslim Friends and Locating Support Groups for Converts**

A small number of participants declared that the main challenges they faced after their conversion were related to their new community; some of them were unable to create friendly relationships with other Muslims, whereas others stated they could not contact support groups near where they live. However, a great minority of the participants stated that they were challenged by gender segregation.

Converts inability to create friendly relationships with other Muslims as well as locate support networks for Muslims after conversion is expected to be caused by two factors. On one hand, the demographic statistics show that Muslims are distributed in several American

states and are not based in a specific area (Chapter One, p. 17), which explains converts inability to reach out to other Muslims in mosques and religious institutions. On the other hand, the majority of Muslims are immigrants who suffered from discrimination and hostility after the 9/11 incident, which created a certain stereotype about Americans. For this reason, Muslims tend to find it difficult to accept American converts because they consider them typical Americans who cannot understand Islam.

Furthermore, gender segregation is among the difficulties faced by the minority of participants. Gender differences and the issue of equality are among the most controversial matters in contemporary American society, especially with the rise of feminist movements. However, female converts stated that they struggled with gender inequality after their conversion, which is a culture-related issue. The Muslim community in the USA consists of diverse cultural backgrounds, which results in confusing religious teachings with traditions and culture-related matters. Convert women experience gender-based discrimination after joining the Muslim community because they connect with immigrants and people from different cultures that emphasize such actions.

#### **3.2.3.1.2. Religious Obstacles**

Conversion to Islam requires learning about all aspects of the religion, especially religious practices such as prayers and fasting. Convert women tend to learn about Islam pre-conversion to gain general knowledge about it, which affects their decision to change their faith. Yet, they still face some difficulties in practicing their new religion and gaining full knowledge about it.

American women's conversion to Islam obliges them to learn a set of religious practices that are practiced daily, such as the five main prayers, in addition to the correct way of partaking in extra prayers such as Nafila. Women tend to struggle with learning the difference

between prayers and their appropriate time, but the major obstacle they face is related to learning the Arabic language. The Quran's explanation is provided in English; however, the English version of it cannot be used to pray, which obliges women to learn the language to perform prayers. This process requires a great deal of patience and dedication, in addition to the assistance of teachers and other Muslims.

Moreover, fasting during Ramadan is among the most crucial religious practices in Islam. New Muslims tend to face slight difficulty fasting for thirty days from sunrise to sunset, especially at the beginning of their conversion. However, converts who are connected to other Muslims are constantly encouraged to learn about religious practice and are supported through such challenges.

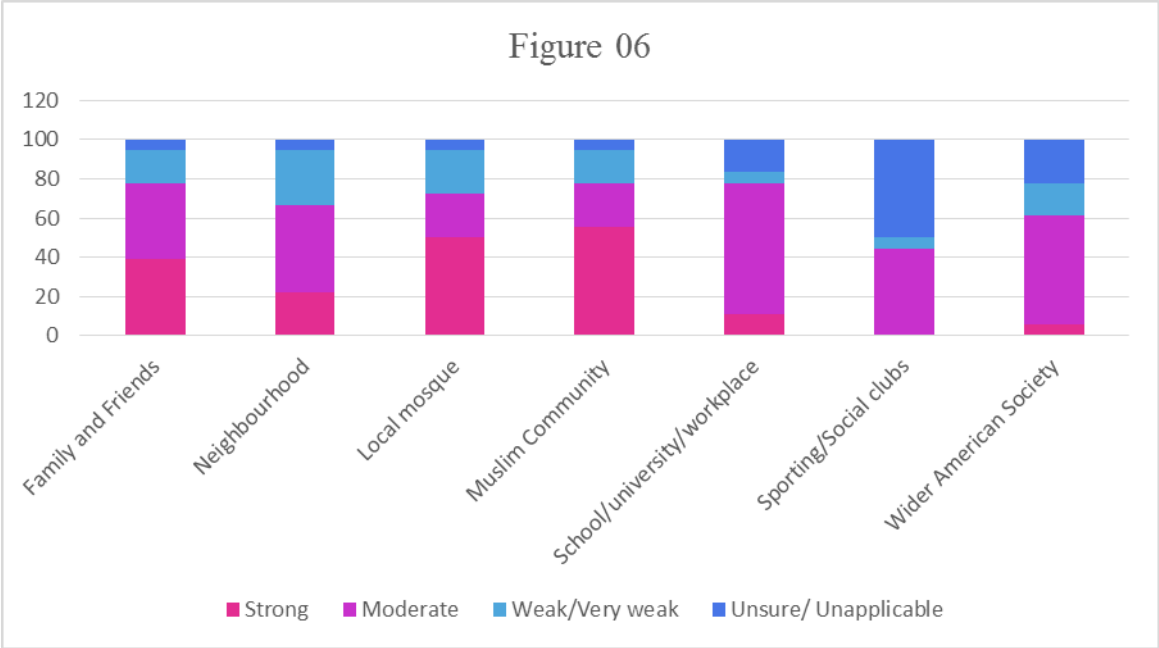
Since Islam is more than a mere religion and covers a wide range of life aspects, converts tend to be challenged to learn everything about Islam. Confusion happens throughout this process as a result of the diversity of sources, the effect of the media, and common misconceptions about Islam. Converts tend to be confused at the beginning of their conversion, for they try to gain real knowledge about Islam in comparison to the stereotypical view provided by the media. Moreover, the cultural diversity of the Muslim community in the USA results in some cultural practices of different ethnicities being confused with religious practices of Islam; converts are therefore required to be attentive to such details to avoid misunderstanding.

#### **3.2.4. Forth Section: Social Belonging after Conversion**

The final section of the questionnaire was dedicated to emphasizing the effect of conversion on the social relationships of the participants with their previous community as well as their new one. It aims to discover the strength of the bond between participants and several social groups and contexts after their conversion and whether it was affected by their belonging to a new religious group. Participants were required to describe their relationship with social

groups using a scale representing the strength of such connections after announcing their embrace of Islam.

**3.2.4.1. Sense of Belonging to Social Groups/Contexts after Conversion to Islam**



**Figure 3.6:** *Convert Women's Relationship with Different Social Groups/ Contexts*

**3.2.4.1.1. Muslims Community and Local Mosque**

As the chart above displays, the great majority of participants experienced a strong relationship with their local mosque as well as the Muslim community after their official conversion. These results indicate that new Muslims are welcome in the Muslim community and that cultural diversity is most likely not to have major negative effects on converts' relations with their new community. As the results of the second section of the questionnaire indicate, a remarkable number of participants converted to Islam as a result of their strong feeling of belonging to the Muslim community, which confirms that converts are provided with a healthy environment within their new community. However, a slight number of participants preferred to describe their relationship with their new community as weak or moderate, which is expected to

be due to cultural differences between Muslims and converts who come from different cultural backgrounds.

Local mosques serve to create a bond between all Muslims, whether born Muslims or newly converted, which helps convert women learn more about Islam from reliable sources as well as engage with other Muslims. Engaging with local mosques helps participants gain authentic knowledge about Islam as well as the appropriate way to perform acts of worship. However, other participants declared that they had a weak or moderate with the Muslim community and the local Mosque. Such a weak relationship is most likely caused by the demographic distribution of Muslims in the USA, as referred to previously in the first chapter (p. 17). Several American states include Muslim minorities, which decreases the possibility of establishing mosques in several neighbourhoods as well as complicating the process of contacting other Muslims. Other explanations for the lack of connection with the local mosque could be prejudice and intimidation by the new community, where converts tend to fear being unwelcome in the mosque, especially at the beginning of their conversion.

#### **3.2.4.1.2. Family and friends**

An equal number of participants declared that their relationship with their family and friends was either strong or moderate. As previously mentioned in the second chapter (p. 34), the convert's relationship with their families gets affected by their conversion, and their families' reactions vary accordingly. Some families are welcoming and supportive of their daughter's choice to change their faith, especially after observing the positive change in their attitudes. Converts views on the importance of family and the ideal relationship with parents in Islam positively affect their relationship with their families, who become more understanding and accepting.

Other participants declared that they had a weak relationship with their parents as a result of their conversion. Parents' denial and rejection of their daughter's conversion to Islam is a result of several reasons that have been discussed in the previous section. For instance, participants who come from religious families are most likely not to be accepted as a result of their conversion, which is considered a betrayal of their previous religion. Most American families would stop communicating with converted daughters due to a lack of knowledge about Islam, which they associate with extremism and terror.

#### **3.2.4.1.3. Wider American Society**

Based on what has been discussed in the second chapter (p. 37) concerning hostility towards new Muslims in the USA and receiving hate from the non-Muslim community, the majority of participants were expected to describe their relationship with the wider American society as weak or very weak. However, the results did not meet expectations, and the majority of participants declared that their relationship with their society was moderate, which indicates that no major changes occurred in this relationship after conversion. Unlike what has been discussed in previous works and referred to in the second chapter, female converts do not necessarily suffer from discrimination from the non-Muslim community after their conversion. However, non-Muslims may not recognize these female converts because they do not necessarily appear like typical Muslims, allowing them to maintain a neutral relationship with the larger American society.

Moreover, a small number of participants stated that their relationship with American society was weak, which could be explained in comparison with their relationship with their new community. Participants are expected to be more related to the Muslim community and less related to American society as a result of the religious inconvenience. New Muslims would

rather be in their new environment, where they can freely practice religion, than in their previous environment, with which they have fewer things in common.

#### **3.2.4.1.4. Workplace, School, and University:**

In describing the type of relationship they had with their workplace and school, as well as sporting and social clubs, most participants chose (moderate) or were unsure what the best option was. However, a great minority chose weakness, which indicates that the majority of the rest enjoyed peaceful relationships with their environment and did not suffer from hate after their conversion, and they were accepted as they are by their community. Workplaces and academic institutions could be a safe environment for convert women, for they consist of people from multiple religious and cultural backgrounds, in the sense that convert women's presence in such environments is not considered unusual because people in these institutions are Muslims.

#### **3.2.4.1.5. Neighbourhood:**

The majority of participants described their relationship with their neighbourhoods as moderate, which indicates that their conversion did not have a remarkable effect on their social life in their environment. Some of them described it as weak or very weak, which is likely to be a result of the stereotypes and prejudices related to Muslims and Islam in general. The relationship between participants and their neighbourhood depends on the area they live in. Converts who live in neighbourhoods where Islam is widely spread or consists of other Muslims are most likely to enjoy a peaceful relationship with their neighbours who are used to being around Muslims. However, converts who happen to live in neighbourhoods with a majority of non-Muslims are expected to face some difficulties concerning their stay in such neighbourhoods because they are unable to create friendly relationships with their neighbours.

#### **3.2.4.1.6. Sporting and Social Groups:**

As the results above depict, the majority of participants were either unsure about the appropriate description of their relationship with sporting and social groups or preferred to describe it as moderate. Such results indicate that women's conversion does not cause specific changes in their relationship with such social groups because they do not specifically face discrimination or receive support. However, it can be said that converts maintain a stable, peaceful relationship with sporting and social groups after their conversion, which also indicates that such groups are also neutral toward Islam and do not support discrimination against Muslims.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter examined the causes and effects of conversion to Islam among American women, assuming that this phenomenon is a result of several factors, including the converts' internal crisis, struggle to find a faith that answers their questions, and dissatisfaction with their previous faith, in addition to the various types of conversion effects. As the questionnaire's results showed above, the sample data that has been studied proved that the main causes of conversion among the participants were mainly disillusionment with their previous faith and their interest in Islamic teachings, as well as Islam's ability to solve their problems. It is also shown that the common challenges facing converts in the USA are related to their environment's understanding of their new faith as well as their ability to contact and engage with the Muslim community in their areas. Finally, Islam is proven to effect these women's relationships with several social groups in the sense that convert women enjoyed a strong and peaceful relationship with the wider American society as well as their new religious groups.

## **General Conclusion**

This research idea was built on the observation of the exceedingly large number of Muslim converts and previous research that proved that the majority of these converts are women. These facts led to an investigation of the main factors leading non-Muslim women who live in a non-Muslim environment to change their faith and choose Islam as their new religion. In addition, this research emphasizes the most common effects resulting from American women's conversion to Islam. Providing background information was necessary to provide a better understanding of the topic from several aspects; therefore, its introductory section describes the historical background of Islam's arrival to the USA, where it was first introduced through slaves who came from Muslim countries in addition to middle-eastern tradesmen and finally through four immigration waves. Moreover, it defines the process of religious conversion and conversion to Islam and states the main stages converts undergo during their conversion. It also provides quantitative data related to Islam's growth in the USA and the growing number of female converts there. More emphasis is put on the two main aspects of the topic, which are the reasons and effects of conversion among women in the USA. Therefore, the literature reviewed in this study focuses on the most common factors leading American women to convert to Islam, such as their disillusionment with their previous religion and some personal hardships. Furthermore, it explores the most influential effects and challenges faced by female American converts after their official conversion in terms of their psychological, spiritual, and social status.

To carry out this investigation and discover the main reasons behind American women's conversion to Islam and the effects resulting from this phenomenon, a set of questions must be asked. First, what are the different reasons that lead American women to convert to Islam? And second, what are the effects caused by American women's conversion to Islam, individually and collectively? These questions lead to the formation of two main hypotheses. The first one assumes that historical, social, personal, and spiritual factors influence women's

conversion decisions. Whereas the second hypothesis assumes that conversion to Islam among American women has affected them individually, their families, and the societies they are living in.

18 American converted women answered an online questionnaire to test the veracity of these hypotheses. Participants were asked to share their personal experiences with conversion and state the main factors that led them to convert, in addition to expressing the effect their conversion had on them and their environment.

The research questions could be answered through the data collected from both the literature review of previous works in the field as well as the small sample questionnaire results that were not sufficient to generalize but were sufficient enough to confirm the hypotheses within a small sample. First, it is concluded that the main factors leading American women to convert to Islam are their dissatisfaction with their previous religion, Islam's ability to answer their questions about the purpose of life, and the aid Islam provides in dealing with personal hardships. Moreover, converted women experience a set of effects after their conversion. For instance, it affects their views on the concepts of life and death as well as their relationships with their families and neighbourhoods. Finally, the main challenge faced by female American converts is related to their family's reactions to their conversion and society's views on them.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Questionnaire**

##### **Part One : General Questions**

##### **1. What is your age?**

- 1.1. 10-19 years old
- 1.2. 20's
- 1.3. 30's
- 1.4. 40's
- 1.5. 60's
- 1.6. 70 and over

##### **2. What is your race or ethnicity?**

- 2.1. White/ Caucasian
- 2.2. Hispanic or Latino
- 2.3. Black or African American
- 2.4. Asian
- 2.5. American Indian or Alaska Native
- 2.6. Middle Eastern or North African
- 2.7. Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

##### **3. What is your work status?**

- 3.1. Employed
- 3.2. Self-employed
- 3.3. Interning
- 3.4. Part-time
- 3.5. Unemployed
- 3.6. Homemaker
- 3.7. Retired
- 3.8. Not able to work
- 3.9. Other

## **Part Two: Research Related Questions**

### **1. What were the factors in your life or aspects of Islam that lead you to convert to Islam?**

- 1.1. Message of Quran
- 1.2. Answers to questions about the purpose of life
- 1.3. Spiritual awakening
- 1.4. Personal connection with Muslims
- 1.5. The example of the Prophet
- 1.6. Sense of belonging to community
- 1.7. Disaffection/ Disillusionment with the previous religion
- 1.8. Marriage to a Muslim
- 1.9. Personal hardships
- 1.10. Death of a relative or a friend
- 1.11. Other

### **2. Since converting to Islam, to what extent did you face difficulties with the following?**

- 2.1. Reactions or attitudes from family and friends
- 2.2. Reactions from the public
- 2.3. Locating support networks for Converts
- 2.4. Gender segregation
- 2.5. Muslim cultural beliefs or practices
- 2.6. Finding Muslim friends
- 2.7. Acceptance from the Muslim community
- 2.8. Understanding Hadith
- 2.9. Attitudes towards the opposite sex
- 2.10. Gaining and authentic knowledge about the religion
- 2.11. Understanding Quran
- 2.12. Dietary requirements
- 2.13. Other

**3. In relation to the following social groups/ contexts, how long do you feel connected, involved, and belonging after converting to Islam?**

**3.1. Family and friends**

- 3.1.1. Very strong/ Strong
- 3.1.2. Moderate
- 3.1.3. Very weak/ Weak
- 3.1.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

**3.2. Neighborhood**

- 3.2.1. Very strong/ Strong
- 3.2.2. Moderate
- 3.2.3. Very weak/ Weak
- 3.2.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

**3.3. Local Mosque**

- 3.3.1. Very strong/ Strong
- 3.3.2. Moderate
- 3.3.3. Very weak/ Weak
- 3.3.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

**3.4. Muslim community**

- 3.4.1. Very strong/ Strong
- 3.4.2. Moderate
- 3.4.3. Very weak/ Weak
- 3.4.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

**3.5. School/ University/ Workplace**

- 3.5.1. Very strong/ Strong
- 3.5.2. Moderate
- 3.5.3. Very weak/ Weak
- 3.5.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

**3.6. Sporting/Social clubs**

- 3.6.1. Very strong/ Strong
- 3.6.2. Moderate

3.6.3. Very weak/ Weak

3.6.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

**3.7. Wider American Society**

3.7.1. Very strong/ Strong

3.7.2. Moderate

3.7.3. Very weak/ Weak

3.7.4. Unsure/ Not applicable

## **Appendix B**

### **Respondent 01**

#### **1. What is your age?**

1.1. 20's

#### **2. What is your ethnicity?**

2.1. African-American/Black

#### **3. What is your work status?**

3.1. Employed

#### **4. What are the most important factors in your life, or aspects of Islam that lead you to convert?**

4.1. Sense of community/belonging

#### **5. Since converting to Islam to what extent did you experience difficulties with the following?**

5.1. Muslim cultural beliefs

#### **6. In relation to the following social groups/contexts, how strongly do you feel involved, connected and a sense of belonging after converting to Islam?**

##### **6.1. Family and friends**

6.1.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **6.2. Neighbourhood**

6.2.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **6.3. Local Mosque**

6.3.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **6.4. Muslim Community**

6.4.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **6.5. School/University/ Workplace**

6.5.1. Moderate

##### **6.6. Sporting/Social clubs**

6.6.1. Unsure/ U applicable

##### **6.7. Wider American society**

6.7.1. Moderate

**Appendix C**  
**Respondent 02**

**1. What is your age?**

1.2. 40's

**2. What is your ethnicity?**

2.1. White

**3. What is your work status?**

3.1. Self-employed

**4. What are the most important factors in your life, or aspects of Islam that lead you to convert?**

4.1. Disillusionment with the previous religion

**5. Since converting to Islam to what extent did you experience difficulties with the following?**

5.1. Other

**6. In relation to the following social groups/contexts, how strongly do you feel involved, connected and a sense of belonging after converting to Islam?**

**6.1. Family and friends**

6.1.1. Moderate

**6.2. Neighbourhood**

6.2.1. Moderate

**6.3. Local Mosque**

6.3.1. Very weak/Weak

**6.4. Muslim Community**

6.4.1. Very weak/Weak

**6.5. School/University/ Workplace**

6.5.1. Moderate

**6.6. Sporting/Social clubs**

6.6.1. Moderate

**6.7. Wider American society**

6.7.1. Moderate

## **Appendix D**

### **Respondent 03**

#### **1. What is your age?**

1.1. 40's

#### **1. What is your ethnicity?**

1.1.Asian

#### **2. What is your work status?**

2.1.Employed

#### **3. What are the most important factors in your life, or aspects of Islam that lead you to convert?**

3.1.Other

#### **4. Since converting to Islam to what extent did you experience difficulties with the following?**

4.1.Reactions from family and friends

#### **5. In relation to the following social groups/contexts, how strongly do you feel involved, connected and a sense of belonging after converting to Islam?**

##### **5.1.Family and friends**

5.1.1.Moderate

##### **5.2.Neighbourhood**

5.2.1. Very weak/Weak

##### **5.3.Local Mosque**

5.3.1. Very weak/Weak

##### **5.4.Muslim Community**

5.4.1. Very weak/Weak

##### **5.5. School/University/ Workplace**

5.5.1. Very strong/ Strong

##### **5.6. Sporting/Social clubs**

5.6.1. Moderate

##### **5.7. Wider American society**

5.7.1. Very weak/Weak

## **Appendix E**

### **Respondent 04**

#### **1. What is your age?**

1.1. 30's

#### **2. What is your ethnicity?**

2.1. African-American/Black

#### **3. What is your work status?**

3.1. Employed

#### **4. What are the most important factors in your life, or aspects of Islam that lead you to convert?**

4.1. Answers to questions concerning purpose of life

#### **5. Since converting to Islam to what extent did you experience difficulties with the following?**

5.1. Gaining authentic knowledge about Islam

#### **2. In relation to the following social groups/contexts, how strongly do you feel involved, connected and a sense of belonging after converting to Islam?**

##### **2.1. Family and friends**

2.1.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **2.2. Neighbourhood**

2.2.1. Moderate

##### **2.3. Local Mosque**

2.3.1. Moderate

##### **2.4. Muslim Community**

2.4.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **2.5. School/University/ Workplace**

2.5.1. Very strong/Strong

##### **2.6. Sporting/Social clubs**

2.6.1. Moderate

##### **2.7. Wider American society**

2.7.1. Moderate

## ملخص

تعدّ الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية بلدا متنوعا يضم أعراقا وثقافات وديانات متباينة على غرار المسيحية والإسلام، حيث يعتبر هذا الأخير ثاني أكبر مجموعة دينية في العالم وثالث أكثر الأديان انتشارا في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. وبالرغم من الهجوم الإعلامي الذي تعرض له الإسلام والمسلمين في الولايات المتحدة بعد هجمات 11 سبتمبر إلا انه انتشر على نطاق واسع بين النساء الأمريكيات اللاتي اخترن التخلي عن دياناتهم السابقة واعتناق الإسلام. لذا، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الأسباب الرئيسية لاعتناق النساء الأمريكيات للإسلام ومختلف الآثار الناجمة عن ذلك، بالإضافة إلى التحديات التي تواجهها النساء المسلمات بعد اعتناق الإسلام. وتتبنى هذه الدراسة المنهجين الكيفي والكمي من أجل تكوين معرفة نظرية حول أهم أسباب ونتائج اعتناق النساء الأمريكيات للإسلام. كما تدعم البحث باستبيان كفي من أجل اختبار صحة الفرضيات. وأثبت تحليل النتائج ومناقشتها بأن الدوافع الرئيسية لاعتناق النساء الأمريكيات للإسلام هي عدم رضاهن عن دياناتهم السابقة، بالإضافة إلى قدرة الإسلام على الإجابة عن جميع أسئلتهم المتعلقة بالهدف الحقيقي من الخلق والاحتكاك المباشر مع المسلمين. كما اثبت البحث أن اعتناق الإسلام يؤثر بطريقة مباشرة على علاقة النساء بعائلاتهم وأصدقائهم ومجتمعهم، زيادة على التحديات الاجتماعية والشخصية.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** النساء الأمريكيات، اعتناق، الإسلام، أسباب، آثار.