

The Islamic Dress Code (part 2 of 3): Awrah & Mahrams

Description: A continuation of the rules of *awrah* that dictate the overall Islamic dress code and a simple explanation of the *mahram*.

By Aisha Stacey (© 2012 IslamReligion.com)

Published on 14 May 2012 - Last modified on 20 Oct 2016

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Lesson Objectives:

- To understand what women should cover in front of different groups of people.
- To understand the *mahram* relationships.

Arabic terms:

- *Awrah* " the parts of the body that should be kept covered.
- *Mahram* " a person, man or woman related to a particular individual by blood, marriage or breastfeeding. One he or she is not permitted to marry, such as the father, nephew, uncle, etc.
- *Haya* " natural or inherent shyness and a sense of modesty.
- *Hijab* " The word *hijab* holds several different meanings, including conceal, hide and screen. It commonly refers to a woman's headscarf and in broader terms to modest clothing and behaviour.

Awrah

The definition of *awrah* is the parts of the body that should be covered and this does vary in different situations among different groups of people. In lesson 1 we covered the conditions of the dress code for both men and women and thus understood the *awrah* or, what should be covered in public places. However, to fully implement the Islamic dress code it is important to understand a number of other situations in which *awrah* becomes important.

The *awrah* of a woman in front of her husband:

There is no *awrah* between a husband and wife. When a woman is alone with her husband she is permitted to wear any clothing that pleases them both.

And among His Signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. (Quran 30:21)

The *awrah* of a woman in front of her *mahrams*:

Who is my mahram? For ease of writing and understanding we outline *mahrams* for a woman; however the *mahram* relationships are the same whether the person in question is female or male. (Father/mother; son/daughter etc)

A *mahram* is a person one is never permitted to marry, because of a close blood relationship, breastfeeding or marriage. One's spouse is also one's *mahram*. A *mahram* is a person one is allowed to be alone with.

- A close blood relationship: For a female, her father, grandfather, son, grandson, brother, both paternal and maternal uncles and nephews. Likewise for a male, his mother, daughter, granddaughter, sister, both paternal and maternal aunties and nieces.
- Breastfeeding: This includes anyone, male or female breastfed by the same mother or wet nurse. (and includes the brother or husband of the one who breast fed the person in question)
- Marriage: People who become your relations by marriage for example father-in-law, mother-in-law, stepfather, step-grandfather, stepson.

When a woman is amongst her *mahrams*, the scholars of Islam agree that a woman does not have to observe strict rules of covering but rather that she is able to uncover her hair, face, arms, hands, legs from below the knee, and feet. However, a Muslim woman must always remember that she is known for her modesty and *haya*, therefore she must never make a wanton display of herself.

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent and to draw their veils and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women... (Quran 24:31)

The *awrah* of a woman in front of other (Muslim) women:

A woman should dress decently in front of other Muslim women; she can uncover what she would usually uncover, her hair, arms, feet. As for other parts of her body, such as her

thighs, and breast area, they should not be uncovered

Although she is allowed to wear beautiful and flattering clothes and make up, she must take great care to behave and dress in a manner that befits her station and does not offend the *haya* of other women.

If a Muslim woman finds herself in a situation where there are other women who are known to be morally bad, then she must dress accordingly and must follow the same rules of *awrah* that apply when in public. (The rules we learned as the conditions of *hijab*.)

The *awrah* of a woman in front of non-Muslim women:

This is a matter of some disagreement between scholars. Some say that the same rules apply as for Muslim women, however others say that a woman must observe stricter rules for covering amongst non-Muslim women.

At the time of the Prophet, Jewish women and those who worshipped idols used to enter upon the wives of the Prophet for various reasons. It is not narrated that the Prophet's wives, the best and most pious of women, covered themselves in that situation.[\[1\]](#)

When a woman is deciding on what level of covering to observe in front of non Muslim women she must remember that non-Muslim women may be unaware that she should not describe a Muslim woman's beauty to any man.

Thus it is important that she makes her decisions based on each different situation. Muslim women should always dress in clothes that above all else express her modesty and dignity. If there are unknown women in a gathering perhaps it would be better to have a higher degree of covering.

The *awrah* of a woman in front of her children:

If the child is an infant or unable to understand the meaning of *awrah* and sexuality then it is permissible for her to uncover herself to the same degree as with other Muslim women. If however the child is a male and comes to an age where he understands the meaning of *awrah* and the difference between men and women then the women's *awrah* is the same as it is for other male *mahrms*.

All Muslims, male or female, should maintain a sense of *haya* (modesty) at all times because *haya* is part of faith. A person's clothing is usually one of the indicators of their modesty.

The Prophet said, "Faith consists of more than sixty branches (i.e. parts). And *haya* is a part of faith."[\[2\]](#)

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Sheikh Ibn Baaz, in *al-Fataawa al-Jaami'ah li'l-Mar'ah al-Muslimah*

[2] Saheeh Al-Bukhari

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