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**University of the Witwatersrand**
**School of Human and Community Development**
**Discipline of Psychology**

# MASTERS RESEARCH DISSERTATION

## MUSLIM WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER DYNAMICS IN ISLAM

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**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Community Based-Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand.**

# DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work, and that it has not been submitted for any degree at another university.

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2009

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## ABSTRACT

This study posits that although the religion of Islam encourages the equality between men and women, it appears that men are still given the level of superiority in the religion. Whether this right is given to men through the *Shariah* (Islamic law), or whether they simply assume the role of superiority is not clear. Therefore this study serves to focus on the Muslim women's perceptions of the gender dynamics with in the religion of Islam. The study is located in the qualitative research tradition which allows for in-depth description and interpretation. Individual interviews with eight Muslim women were conducted. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic content analysis. A main finding or observation is that Islam is not always practiced as it was intended due to the patriarchal society therefore resulting in women being oppressed. It was clear that most of the participants felt that Islamically Muslim women are not oppressed, but culturally and considering patriarchy women in general are not considered on an equal standing to men. From the analysis one can infer that many Muslim women acknowledge that they are given choice and freedom within their religion. Decisions around the wearing of *hijab,* becoming a working woman and allowing one's husband to take on another wife are all rooted in the freedom of choice. This study highlights the gender dynamics in Islam as well as the Muslim women's struggle for gender equality.

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