

Al Huda International Transforming Lives of Urban Women in Pakistan

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Abstract: *This paper is an attempt to understand and discover the factors behind enhancing style of looking for Islamic details by the urban women and the element that Al Huda is suffering from, in exercising these females. The situation of Al Huda is described because it is one of the most well-known spiritual companies offering the needs of the urban women. Examining the situation of Al Huda, the analysis speaks about the effect of Islamic details acquired by these females on their lifestyles. The purpose for doing this analysis is to evaluate the ever enhancing popularity of spiritual academic companies, other than the traditional madrasas, which provides an exciting and awesome group sciences and anthropological subjects. The outcomes from the analysis expose that females are drawn towards getting Islamic details due to broad variety of factors such as the newest globally and nationwide events; lack of Islamic knowledge; individual attention to comprehend Islam more thoroughly; and incident of a way of lifestyle enhancing event. This research was conducted in Al Huda H-11/4 Islamabad, Pakistan. Qualitative anthropological techniques were used to collect empirical data.*

Keywords: Hijab, tolerance, values, attitudes, behaviours,

Introduction:

Ahmed (2009)¹ in her book pointed out that one of the most visible changes that the urban women are going through is the adoption of veil, head covering, Abaya (body covering with a large gown), and deeming music and cultural rituals observed in rituals like weddings and death un-Islamic and *Biddat* (religious innovation not in keeping with the true Islamic principles). These changes are bought about when these women start understanding Islam and seek Islamic education through formal or informal ways. Islam

¹ Ahmad, S. (2009). *Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism among Pakistani Women*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP

is a complete code of life and guides its followers in every aspect of social, cultural, individual, and group life.

Al Huda Globally is one of the well-known religious organizations particularly recognized to attract the elites and the experienced kind of the Pakistani group. The main purpose of this organization is to create awareness among the females of middle and upper class to develop a connection and seek help from Allah is both worldwide and regional activities. Despite the criticisms which spread the concept that becoming a participant of such organizations and Dars activities have become a yet another newest design followed by top stage females, the changes both recognizable and hidden in the way of life of these females validate otherwise. The females becoming a participant of Al Huda display that the enhanced propensity to practice Islamic information by town, experienced, and top stage females is mainly inspired by the point that new kind of educational organizations are now beginning up which do not adhere to the autocratic system that traditional Madrasas are stereotyped with.

The main objective of Al Huda, working under the patronage of Dr. Farhat Hashmi, is to present a precise, practicable and easily comprehensible version of Islam which can motivate Muslim women to incorporate the Islamic practices into their daily lives. The objective of learning Islam is not only to develop the fear of Allah, but also to find a way to connect to Allah, finding peace within oneself, and developing a lifestyle that is in line with the Islamic principles and guidelines. This lifestyle is not only a simpler and better way to spend the life, but is also a more successful pattern of life. Women select Al Huda because of its unique perspective which focuses primarily on linking Muslims to Allah by creating the learners conscious of their ethical responsibilities and the value of Islam for self-growth.

This paper talks about the results of the study associated with the impact of Al Huda in changing the lives of the urban women. This section will cover different factors of lifestyle such as the noticeable ones (for example adopting of Hijab, prohibiting activities like enjoying music, and watching enjoyment shows and movies on TV, and walking

away from un-Islamic traditions and methods frequent in the society), as well as unseen ones (attitude and actions towards life in general, prohibiting habits of relaxing, back biting on, and creating attributes like tolerance, satisfaction etc.).

Locale

The present research was conducted in Al-Huda institution Islamabad, Pakistan. Which is situated in sector H-11/4 on A.K Brohi Street, plot No. 6 and 7 with 33.655549 latitude and 73.014289 longitude. On the very close to Al-Huda institution, FAST University, new campus, is also situated. As it have many other grounds and divisions too. Since there are two divisions in Islamabad, one in sector F-8/4 and the second one is in sector H-11/4. So my location of analysis was H-11/4 school Islamabad.

Research Methodology

Methodology for the collection of empirical data for the current research was based upon qualitative anthropological research methods, which include socio-economic survey, participant observation, and key informant interviews, interviews of the respondents, case studies, and focus group discussions. We choose of two key informants from the institute on the basis of the personal judgment, taking into account their familiarity with most of the inhabitants of the institute as well as the socio-economic conditions of the area. Participant observation was used in order to get first-hand and accurate information about the institute. In-depth interviews were conducted with the working staff of the institute to get detailed information. Structured interviews were used to collect information from students and teachers. Case studies were conducted to secure more detail.

Visible Changes in the Lifestyle:

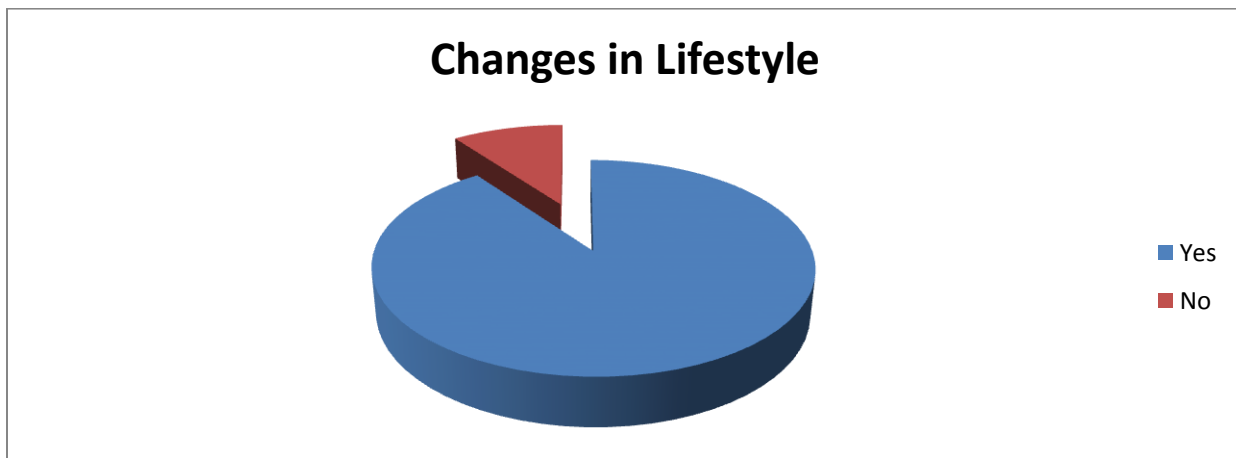
Participants revealed that once they got connected to the God, they found it easier to adopt virtuous traits and practices which are characteristic of Islamic teachings. These transformations include the adoption of veil (Hijab) by many of the women, and giving up many un-Islamic activities like listening to music and watching movies and entertainment shows on the television.

Table 1: Obvious Change after Attaining Islamic Education at Al Huda

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	45	90.0	90.0
No	5	10.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data.

Figure 1: Obvious Change after Attaining Islamic Education at Al Huda



The above table shows the frequency distribution of responses with regard to the obvious changes in life style. Majority of the female students (90%) stated that they felt changes in their lifestyle after they learnt Islam in greater detail at Al Huda. Only 10% of the respondents claimed that they did not feel any obvious or prominent change within themselves as a result of joining Al Huda. These women either had Islamic education from other institutes as well and thus found the education at Al Huda just an extension to their existing Islamic knowledge, or had not experienced any visible change in dressing, attire, social circle, ritual and cultural practices or so forth.

Impact on Observance of Prayers and Other Pillars of Islam:

Prayers (Namaz) forms one of the most important pillars of Islam. It is our belief as Muslims that after death, the first question asked on judgment will be about the Prayers. 80% of the respondents claimed that they had become more particular and efficient in

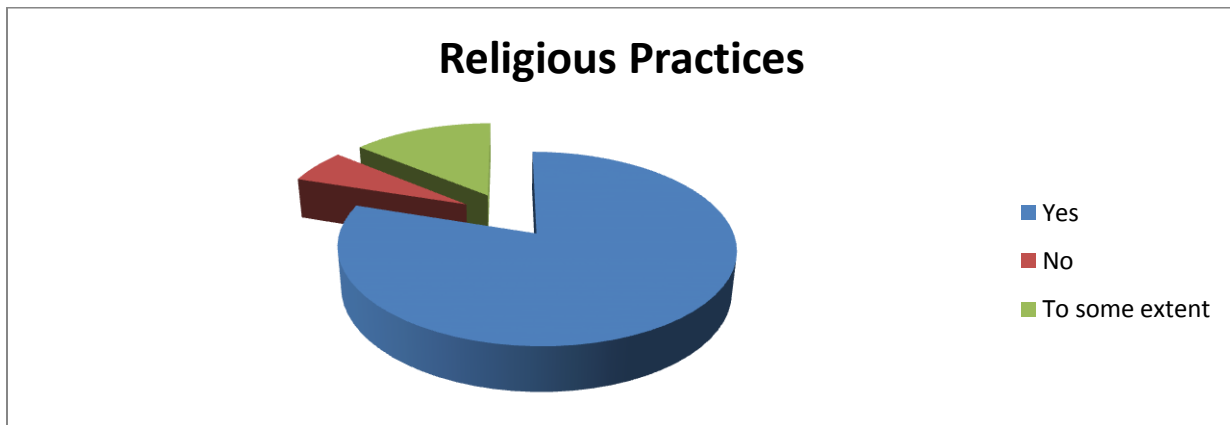
terms of offering prayers five times a day and fulfilling other pillars of Islam as well. 14% of the respondents said that they try to fulfill their religious obligations, but do not fulfill them completely. Only 6% of them said that there had been no change in their observance of the five pillars of the religion.

Table 2: Observance of Prayers and Other Pillars of Islam

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	40	80.0	80.0
No	3	6.0	86.0
To some extent	7	14.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data.

Figure 2: Observance of Prayers and Other Pillars of Islam



Changes in Attire:

Dress is the most prominent part of a person’s exterior personality. The women studied in Al Huda, as mentioned time and again, hail from educated and wealthy class of Islamabad. The women of Islamabad are not only fashion conscious, but also very liberal with regards to their dressing and clothing. Interestingly, the most prominent and the quickest change observed amongst the females joining Al Huda for education was the changes in their attires. Nearly half the respondents (46%) were found to have added Scarf and Abaya in their attire. 14% started covering their head and hair with

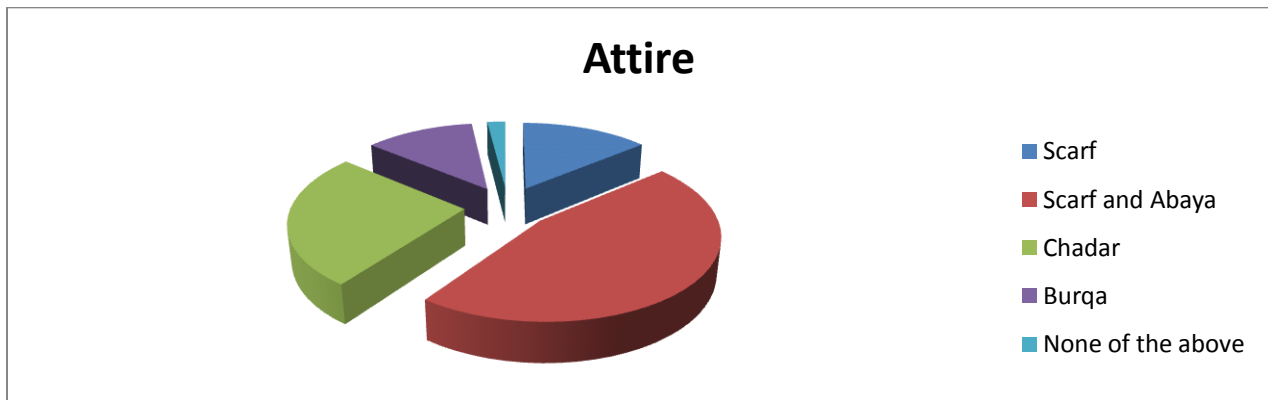
scarf; 26% added chadar (veil or shawl) to their dressing; while 12% started observing Hijab through wearing *burqa* (large gown to cover the body like Abaya). Only 1 respondent claimed that she did not change anything in her attire after joining the institute. The figures show that 98% of the females did experience a positive change in their attires and dressing since joining the institute.

Table 3: Changes in Attire

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Scarf	7	14.0	14.0
Scarf and Abaya	23	46.0	60.0
Chadar	13	26.0	86.0
Burqa	6	12.0	98.0
None of the above	1	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 3: Changes in Attire



Abandonment of Music/ Films/TV:

Approximately half of the respondents claimed that they had quit listening to music, watching entertainment shows on TV, and movies. 48% of the respondents had quit all of these completely, while 44% claimed that they had given up these practices to some extent, but not fully. Only 8% of the respondents told that they had not quit any of these

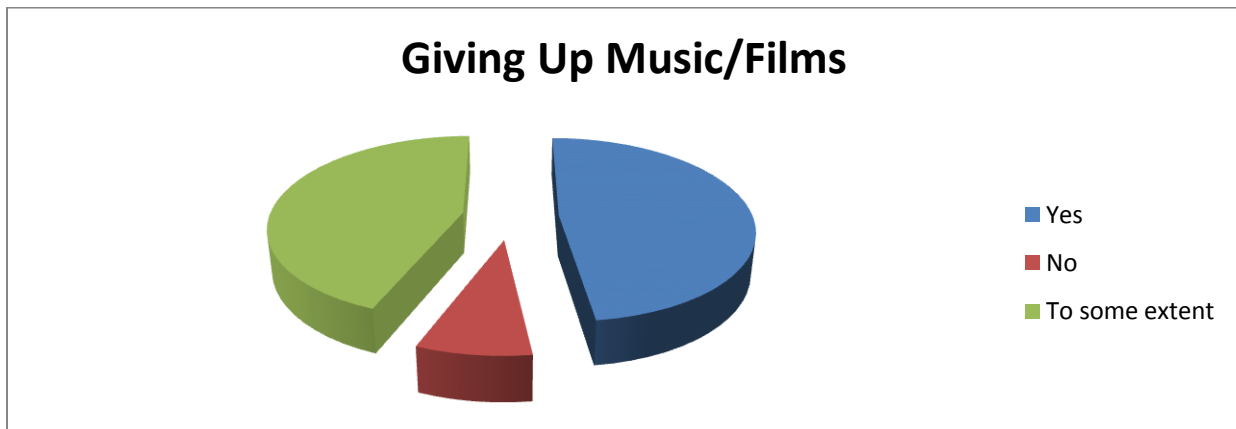
three activities from their daily lives. This depicts that music and television are majorly affected by the Islamic knowledge as they take humans away from the remembrance of Allah.

Table 3: Giving Up Music/ Films/TV

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	24	48.0	48.0
No	4	8.0	56.0
To some extent	22	44.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 3: Giving Up Music/Films/TV



Change in Social Circle:

Social circle constitutes of group of socially interacting people. In a social circle, a person is in contact with all the members of that circle due to a common theme shared by these people. This can be a common ideology, educational background, socio cultural norms and values, interests or traditions etc. It is an old adage that a man is known by the company he keeps. Thus, a person becomes a part of a certain social circle or group because he or she identifies himself or herself with that group. It is important to note that while there do exist many differences amongst the people

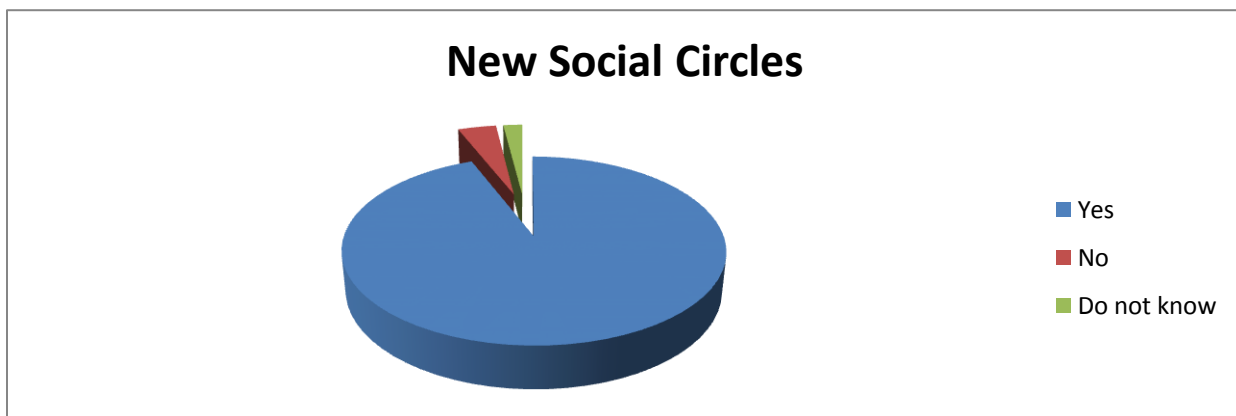
belonging to a certain social circle, they do share mutual values and thoughts which binds them together. A common element, also identified by Ahmad (2009)², during her research on Al Huda, and other researchers studying Islamic institutions is the change in social circle by many people once they acquire religious education. 94% of the respondents were found to have experienced a change in social circle which they belong to. These changes were in terms of addition of new social circles in their life.

Table 4: Changes in Social Circle

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	47	94.0	94.0
No	2	4.0	98.0
Do not know	1	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 4: Changes in Social Circle



When asked by the respondents, if they quit being part of the social circles in which they moved prior to joining Al Huda and found new groups, or retained the old ones, 50% of them agreed that they did experience a change in social circle by quitting many of the old ones. A further investigation revealed that this change was largely driven by the transformed lifestyle and ideology of these women. 50% of the respondents, however,

² ibid

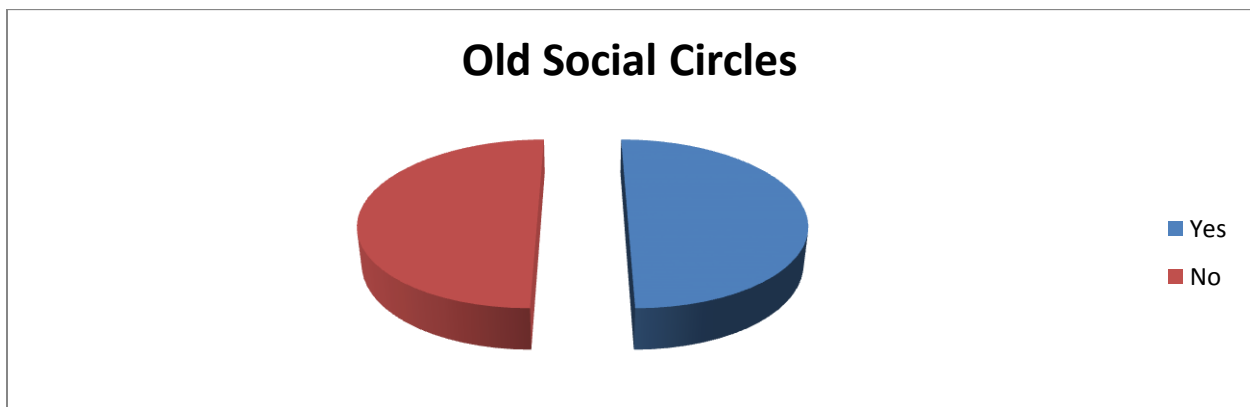
claimed that they did not experience any changes in social circle but added new groups to their social circles which share their Islamic practices and ideology.

Table 5: Retaining Old Social Circles

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	25	50.0	50.0
No	25	50.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 5: Retaining Old Social Circles



During the survey, it was also found that these women had transformed preferences with regards to making friends and adding people to their social circles, after acquiring religious education. All the respondents were of the view that they now preferred friends and people in their social circles who understood the importance of Islam in their lives. 38% of the respondents said they now preferred friends who are at least moderately religious; 32% preferred extremely religious friends; while 30% believed that they are content with their friends who at least practice 5 pillars of Islam. The respondents in favor of highly religious friends and people believed that friends are a great influence in a person's life and thus moving in the company of highly religious people will make them practice Islam in a better way. On the other hand, the women who were fine with the people who pray 5 times a day and perform other basic pillars of Islam claimed that

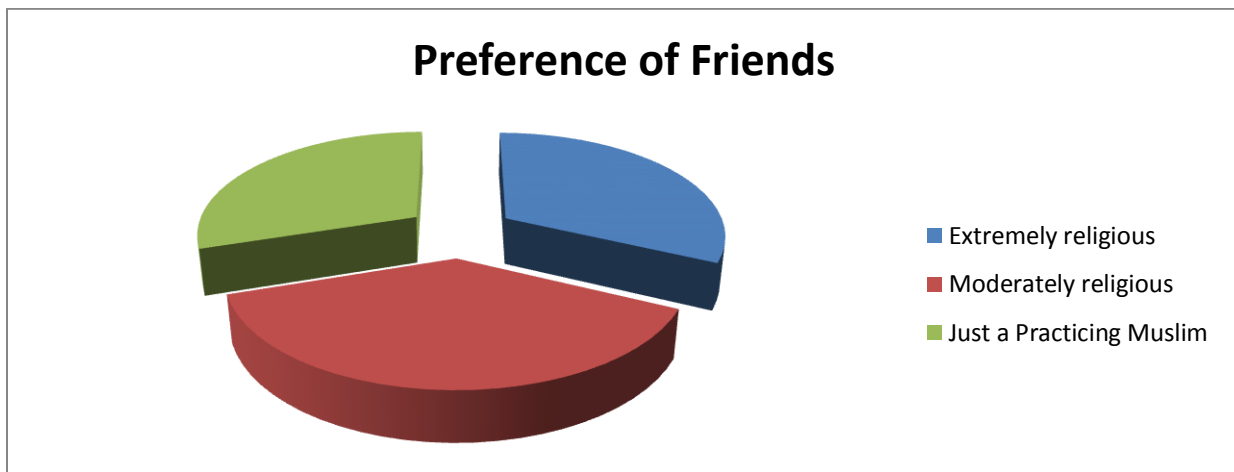
Islam teaches tolerance and flexibility. Therefore, humans cannot judge a person on his or her piety or proximity to Allah. Therefore, they are satisfied as long as their friends fulfill basic requirements of Islam.

Table 6: Preference of Friends after Acquiring Islamic Education

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely religious	16	32.0	32.0
Moderately religious	19	38.0	70.0
Just a Practicing Muslim	15	30.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Table 6: Preference of Friends after Acquiring Islamic Education



Attitude and Behavior Transformation

Apart from these transformations, the respondents testified that they observed changes in their attitude towards life, and their behavior towards interacting with others. It was cited by many of the women that they feel difference in even very small things pertaining to their lives. Mushtaq (2010) in her study on Al Huda also observed that this transformation extended from the individual to the collective experience, and thus acted

as a binding force for the students of Al Huda. Ahmad (2009) states in her book that Al Huda's motivated discourse which is seen in the interpretation of the Quran is designed in a way that makes the students think and ponder, and make them aware of their moral obligations, influence their behavior, and encourage them to exercise control over themselves and engage in self- forming and self- exploring activities to attain piety and virtuousness characteristic of a true Muslim.

Changes Observed in Dealing with Others

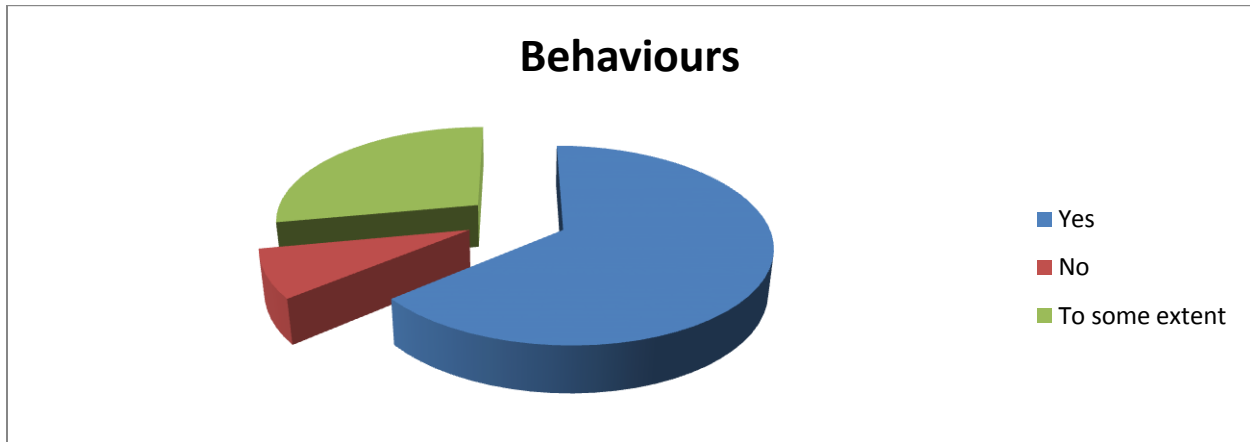
Islam emphasizes much more on the obligations humans have towards fellow human beings, as compared to the obligations towards Allah. This is why *Huqooq ul Ibad* are important to fulfill in order to please Allah. One of the facets of Islamic education delivered at Al Huda is its emphasis towards understanding ones responsibilities and obligations towards others. This is also developed through motivating students to organize social welfare events and participating in welfare activities. By translating the teachings of Islam in to an easily practicable tool, Al Huda tries to shape up the behavior of its students. 64% of the respondents reported that they felt a change in the way they dealt with others. These dealings not only include the communication and the ways of interaction with each other, but also include developing the sense of responsibility towards fulfilling *Huqooq ul Ibaad*. 28% of the respondents claimed that the change they felt was limited to a certain extent and did not affect all their dealings with others. Only 8% believed that they did not feel any change in their behavior towards others.

Table 7: Change in the Behaviour with Others

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	32	64.0	64.0
No	4	8.0	72.0
To some extent	14	28.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 7: Change in the Behaviour with Others



Development of Traits like Humility and Patience

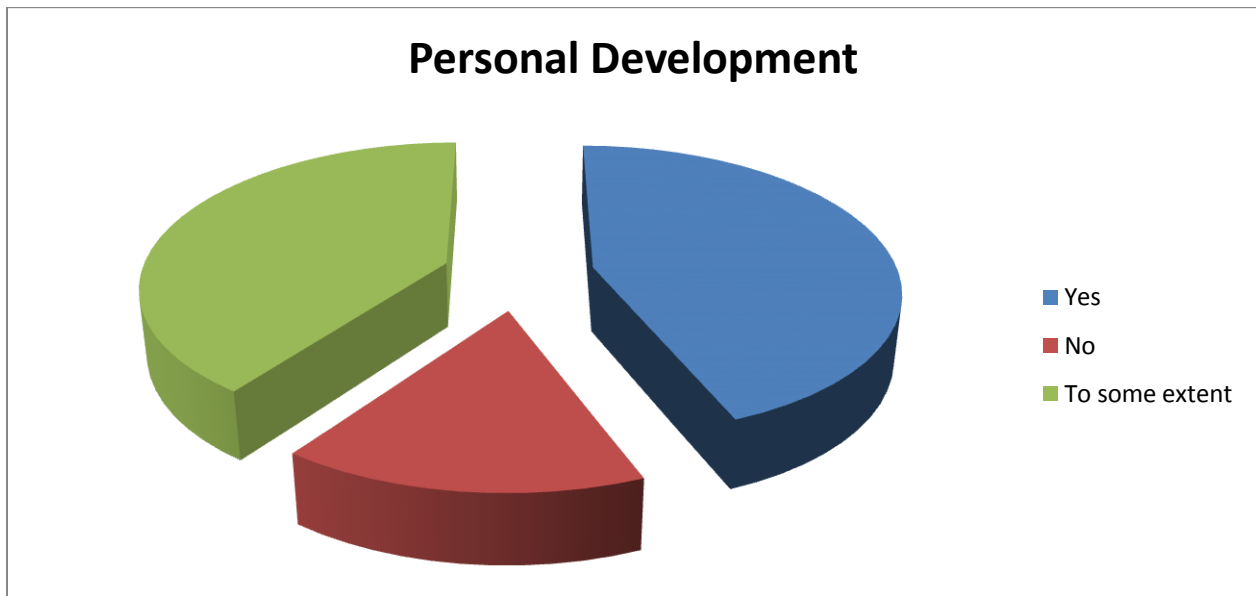
Humility, patience, contentment, honesty, and tolerance, are just a few of the important traits that Islam propagates through its teachings. The concept of Islamic institute is incomplete without its emphasis towards personal development of a human being. The teachers and the owner of Al Huda give huge importance towards development of these traits which are essential for personal growth and development, and to achieve piety and virtuousness. 44% of the respondents claimed that they had observed that the teachings at Al Huda had helped them develop these traits which are characteristic of a true Muslim. 40% believed that they had accomplished this task to a certain extent and are still striving to become better Muslims. 16% claimed that the teaching style at Al Huda did not influence or helped them in development of the traits like humility and patience.

Table 8: Personal Development Traits

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	22	44.0	44.0
No	8	16.0	60.0
To some extent	20	40.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 8: Personal Development Traits



Tolerance for Others' Mistakes and Weaknesses

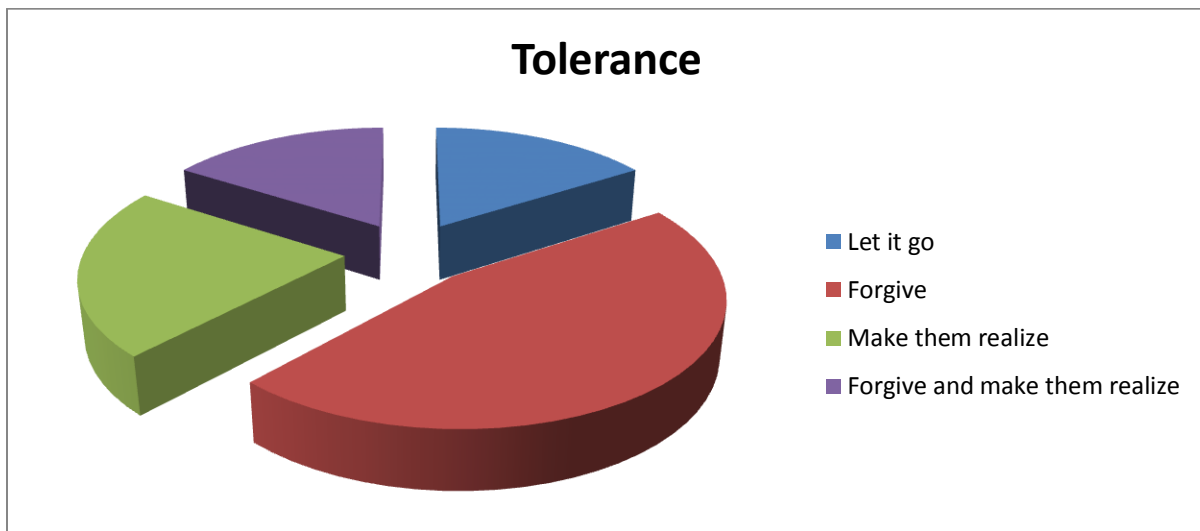
The religion of peace, and the religion of tolerance- this is Islam. As discussed in one of the previous chapters, Al Huda's pedagogy follows a tolerant, flexible regime in which people from all different schools of thoughts are welcomed. Teachers are specially trained to make sure there do not arise any disputes with regards to differences amongst the students. Forgiving others for their mistakes and weaknesses is a trait of Allah Almighty. Therefore, great importance is given at Al Huda to teach its students to be tolerant and forgiving. More than half of the students showed that they had developed the habit of forgiving others for their mistakes because they believed that it is Allah who is the ultimate judge. 62% of the respondents claimed that they either let go of the people's mistakes or forgive them. 22% claimed that they find it more appropriate to make the other person realize his/ her mistake and thus avoid making it in future. 16% claimed that although they do believe in forgiving, they make others realize of their mistakes for their benefit.

Table 9: Tolerance for Others' Mistakes

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Let it go	8	16.0	16.0
Forgive	23	46.0	62.0
Make them realize	11	22.0	84.0
Forgive and make them realize	8	16.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Table 9: Tolerance for Others' Mistakes



Curtailment of Bad Habits

Bad habits like back biting, lying, deceiving, and jealousy are more common amongst women as compared to men. It was, therefore, asked by the respondents if they were successful in curtailing their bad habits which are a very common part of our social lives now. By studying Hadith and Sunnah, in addition to Quran, one can quit many bad habits. Al Huda's drive to educate urban women also focuses on these aspects of their personalities. Almost half of the respondents (46%) claimed that they are working on abandoning bad habits like lying, hypocrisy, jealousy, back biting etc. which eat up a person's Iman and Aamal. 40% of the respondents believed that they had been

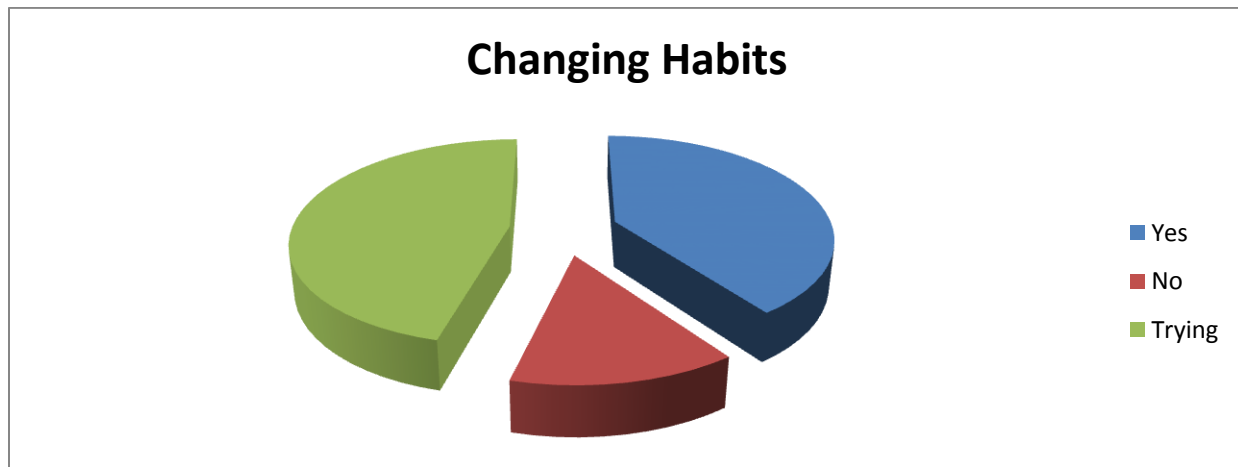
successful in curtailing these habits, while 14% believed that up till now they had not succeeded in doing so.

Table 10: Curtailing Bad Habits

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	20	40.0	40.0
No	7	14.0	54.0
Trying	23	46.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 10: Curtailing Bad Habits



Fulfillment of Obligations as Mother/ Wife/ Daughter/ Sister

Islam holds women in high regard. Their place in the Islamic society in the form of mother, daughter, sister, or wife has great significance and moral dignity. Opposite to the general belief that women are subjugated in Islam by men, Allah has given women special roles to perform. By fulfilling their duties towards their family, women do not become men’s servant, rather earn rewards by Allah. The recent trend of modernization which has led to the evolution of many feminist movements has dismantled the right concept of women in Islam. Al Huda has therefore took it in its hands to teach women how to become better Muslims, and better human beings by fulfilling their duties

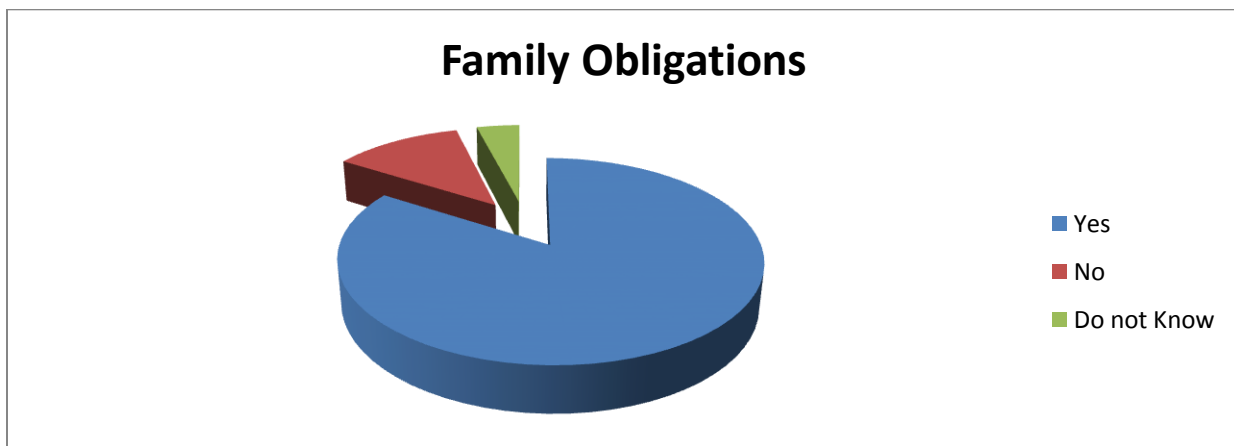
towards their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. 84% of the respondents reported that they felt they have better realized their roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. The respondents pointed out that by understanding the rewards Allah offers them as a result of serving their families; they feel more motivated to take care of their families. Moreover, Islamic education had helped them understand how to deal with their husbands, and raise their children in a better and Islamic manner. 12% respondents did not feel any change in their dealings with their family members, while 4% were unsure of any influence Al Huda had on their dealings with their husbands, sons, fathers, or brothers.

Table 11: Obligations towards Family

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	42	84.0	84.0
No	6	12.0	96.0
Do not Know	2	4.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 11: Obligations towards Family



Perceived Quality Of Life As A Result Of Joining Al Huda

Quality of life refers to the general wellbeing of individuals or societies. In this context, quality of life refers to the sociological and psychological aspect of the wellbeing. Since

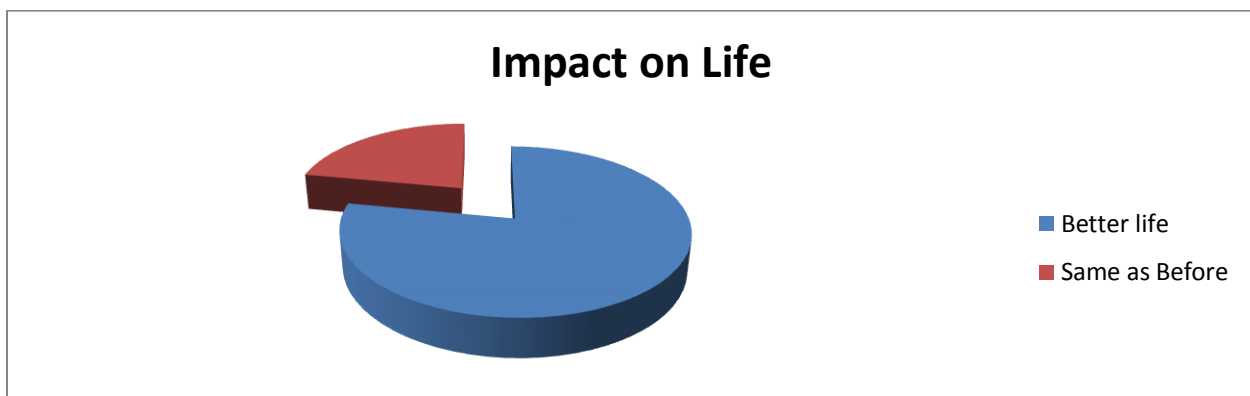
it is the belief of Muslims that Islam is the complete code of life, thus the quality of life can be improved by following the teachings of Islam. By incorporating Islamic teachings in the daily and routine tasks, and dealings, one can become more pious and righteous. When asked, 78% of the respondents claimed that they had experienced an improvement in the perceived quality of their life as a result of joining Al Huda and learning more about Islam. On the other hand, 22% said that they did not find any considerable difference. One of the focus group participants, Hina, reported that she believed that her life had improved because she felt more contented and happy about the blessings of Allah than she did ever before. She added that life is a transient journey for us Muslims, and therefore it is our responsibility to spend it according to the will of Allah. Thus, she believed that by following the path of Allah, she felt that she had added quality to her life. Samina, another respondent was of the view that she perceived her life to be same because it is a gift of Allah which she had always treasured.

Table 12: Perceived Impact on Life as a Result of Joining Al-Huda

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Better life	39	78.0	78.0
Same as Before	11	22.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Source: Field Data

Figure 12: Perceived Impact on Life as a Result of Joining Al-Huda



Conclusion

Al Huda has created ongoing effects on the lifestyle of many females by offering them a platform to comprehend Islam, and work it out. Practicing Islam way of life taught by Al Huda is not a fad that may disappear eventually, but is a purpose behind the difference in the lifestyle of many females who have experienced changes both identifiable and not-so-visible such as changes in outfits (adoption of Hijab), changes in group, desertion of Un-Islamic traditions and celebrations (quitting TV, Music, Films, Mehndi, Basant etc.), and attitudinal changes like curtailment of bad exercises like returning biting on, relaxing, and misleading, as well as growth of excellent functions like humbleness, tolerance, tolerance, and absolution. Thus, Al Huda is suffering from a critical facet in changing and creating the lifestyle of the urban women successfully.