

## Children choose hijabs against Islamophobia: Muslim leaders

[Sharri Markson](#), The Australian, 12:00AM July 7, 2016



Young girls wearing hijabs at Lakemba Mosque in Western Sydney during yesterday's Eid celebrations. Picture: Renee Nowytarger.

Toddlers have begun wearing the hijab as Australian Muslims follow a global trend of younger children covering their hair.

While traditionally Muslim girls start wearing the hijab when they reach puberty, community leaders said younger children were choosing to follow the dress code of their sisters and mothers as they embraced their religion in the face of what they claim is growing Islamophobia.

Muslim community spokesman Keysar Trad said children were wearing the headscarf at a younger age in reaction to the Muslim community being "persecuted" in Australia.

"What it means is the more you persecute us, the more we will become closer to our religion, as we find faith in being a good Muslim not kowtowing to political bullying out there," he said.

"I think as more and more people are finding their religious identity and taking pride in being a Muslim, they are starting to take the scarf a little more seriously and they are putting it on at a younger age and appreciating it."

One of Mr Trad's daughters chose to wear the hijab at the age of three, and another at four.

But he said it was their choice and, in turn, he supported the decision of another daughter not to wear the hijab at all. "If they reach puberty it becomes a religious obligation. If they haven't reached puberty it's purely optional," Mr Trad told The Australian. "It's an indication that the young woman

is very appreciative of the requirements of her religion. So for me if the young girls are putting it on more often than not at an early age, that's a healthy sign."

At the Eid celebration marking the end of Ramadan began in Sydney's west yesterday, Swestika Swandari's daughters Tsabita, 5, and Jameela, 4, were two of many children under 10 years who wore headscarves for the religious feast days.

Ms Swandari said the family was visiting from Indonesia, where Islam is the dominant religion and where it is common for girls to cover their heads.

Fitya Islamic Centre imam Abdallah Esmail said girls must wear the hijab when they reached puberty, usually between nine and 15 years, but otherwise it was a personal choice.

"From seven and below, we don't ask them to cover their hair at the mosque but those who do we don't discourage them either," Dr Esmail said, adding that girls often liked to follow the clothing habits of their mother and sisters.

"This is an indication that this is more religious awareness by the parents and this is being reflected by the behaviour of their children," he said. "When they want to go to the park to play, the majority of the children will take the hijab off when it comes to playing."

Former president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils publisher Haset Sali, who has written an English translation of the Koran, said, in his view, the burqa and hijab were from Bedouin custom and had nothing to do with Islam.

"They really are not required by the Koran at all. The code of dress is very similar to the Christian code that you shall dress modestly and cover their breasts in public, not their heads," said Mr Sali. "I think it's sad because they (children) need as much vitamin D as they can get unless they live in very hot and oppressive climate. There is a major problem with vitamin D deficiency in the Muslim community and generally."

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