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Between Divine Command and Political Choice: Islamic Ukhuwwah versus Secular Feminist Sisterhood - A Critical Comparative Analysis with Survey Evidence from Muslim Women in Pakistan

Falak Naz, PhD Scholar

Department of Islamic Studies, Bahria University Karachi Campus, Pakistan

Dr Muzaffar Ali

Assistant Professor Department of Islamic Studies, Bahria University Karachi Campus, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Contemporary feminist discourse promotes 'sisterhood' as the foundational expression of women's solidarity. Rooted in second-wave feminism, this concept has, however, attracted sustained scholarly critique for its structural failures: its exclusion of Muslim, Black, and working-class women; its fragility when political interests diverge; and its increasingly contested definitional boundaries. Recent scholarship has exposed what Taher and Zoghلامي (2025) term 'the epistemic failures of white liberal feminism' in relation to Muslim women, yet a robust theological alternative has remained underdeveloped in the comparative literature. This study addresses that gap by undertaking a critical, comparative analysis of Islamic Ukhuwwah and secular feminist sisterhood, grounded in primary Qur'anic and Prophetic sources and validated through empirical survey data from 120 Muslim women across Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad). Employing a mixed-methods design — textual analysis of the Qur'an (Al-Hujurat 49:10, 49:13; Al-Tawbah 9:71; Al-Hashr 59:9), classical tafsir (Ibn Kathir, al-Nawawi, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani), and a structured Likert-scale questionnaire — the study demonstrates that Islamic Ukhuwwah constitutes a theologically grounded, universally inclusive, and morally binding solidarity framework that systematically overcomes the structural limitations of secular sisterhood. Survey findings indicate that 91.7% of respondents feel a religious obligation toward fellow Muslim women, 84.2% identify more strongly with Ukhuwwah than with secular sisterhood, and 78.3% perceive secular sisterhood as structurally exclusionary. The study contributes to Islamic feminist scholarship, Muslim women's studies, and gender theory in Muslim-majority contexts, and calls for the recentring of Islamic concepts in transnational gender discourse.

Keywords: Ukhuwwah, Sisterhood, Islamic feminism, Muslim women, Feminist solidarity, Qur'anic ethics, Pakistan, Gender theory

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea that women constitute a natural solidarity group — bound by shared experience of patriarchal oppression — has been foundational to feminist theory since the 1960s. Encapsulated in Robin Morgan's (1970) declaration that 'Sisterhood is Powerful', this vision promised a universal, cross-

cultural, and emancipatory fellowship among women. Yet barely a decade after its popularisation, the concept of sisterhood came under sustained critique from within feminist theory itself. bell hooks (1984), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) demonstrated, with mounting empirical and theoretical force, that the celebrated 'sisterhood' was neither universal nor emancipatory: it reflected the perspectives and priorities of white, middle-class, Western women while structurally marginalising the majority of the world's women.

For Muslim women, this exclusion has been especially acute and enduring. Despite the proliferation of intersectional and postcolonial feminist frameworks in recent decades, the latest empirical scholarship continues to document what Taher and Zoghلامي (2025) identify as 'the epistemic failures of white liberal feminism': the persistent inability of mainstream feminist movements to recognise Muslim women as 'full feminist epistemic subjects' (*Feminist Encounters*, 9(1)). This failure is not incidental but structural, rooted in the secular and Eurocentric epistemological foundations of mainstream feminist solidarity.

Within the Islamic tradition, however, there exists a rich and carefully elaborated framework for women's solidarity that predates, and in significant respects surpasses, the secular conception: *Ukhuwwah* (brotherhood/sisterhood in faith). Grounded in divine command rather than political contingency, operative through *tada'ā* — an automatic, inalienable response — rather than voluntary affiliation, and extended across all of humanity through the principle of shared creation (Al-Hujurat 49:13), *Ukhuwwah* represents a qualitatively distinct model of solidarity. Yet this framework has received insufficient attention in the comparative literature on gender and solidarity.

This study addresses that gap. It undertakes a systematic comparative analysis of Islamic *Ukhuwwah* and secular feminist sisterhood, integrating textual analysis of primary Islamic sources with empirical survey evidence from Muslim women in Pakistan. Pakistan provides a particularly illuminating context: a Muslim-majority society in which women navigate both Islamic traditions of solidarity and the influence of global feminist discourse, and in which the question of which solidarity framework best reflects and serves women's lived experiences is of immediate practical and theoretical significance.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study pursues four objectives:

- (i) To analyse the theological foundations, key concepts, and operative mechanisms of Islamic *Ukhuwwah* as a framework for women's solidarity.
- (ii) To critically examine the structural limitations of secular feminist sisterhood in relation to Muslim women, drawing on recent scholarship.
- (iii) To present empirical evidence on how Muslim women in Pakistan conceptualise, experience, and practise solidarity.
- (iv) To develop a systematic comparative framework that clarifies the principal distinctions between Islamic *Ukhuwwah* and secular feminist sisterhood.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ1: What are the defining theological characteristics of Islamic *Ukhuwwah* as a framework for women's solidarity, and how do they differ structurally from secular feminist sisterhood?

RQ2: What specific epistemic and structural failures does secular feminist sisterhood exhibit in relation to Muslim women?

RQ3: How do Pakistani Muslim women perceive, experience, and practise solidarity, and which framework — Ukhuwwah or secular sisterhood — better captures their lived experience?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Emergence and Promise of Feminist Sisterhood

The concept of sisterhood emerged as a strategic and affective cornerstone of second-wave feminism. Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) established the term as the rallying symbol of women's solidarity against patriarchal oppression. The underlying logic was one of shared victimhood: if all women experience oppression by virtue of their gender, then all women share a common cause and a natural basis for solidarity. This logic was amplified by radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone (1970) and Kate Millett (1970), who sought to construct a universal theory of women's subordination.

By the 1980s, however, the promise of universal sisterhood had collided with the realities of difference. As Durba Mitra (2023) observes in her retrospective analysis, the moral invocation of sisterhood as 'powerful' and 'forever' had become 'far less viable' because it relied on a 'hegemonic formula' that privileged certain forms of womanhood while rendering others invisible (*South Atlantic Quarterly*, 122(3), 431–452).

2.2 The Structural Failures of Secular Sisterhood

2.2.1 Selective Solidarity: The Race and Class Problem

The most persistent and thoroughly documented failure of secular sisterhood is its selective application. bell hooks (1984) demonstrated in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* that mainstream feminist sisterhood was built on the premise of 'common oppression' — a premise that concealed the profound differences of race, class, and cultural background that shaped women's lives differently. Black women had historically experienced white women not as allies but as participants in systems of racial domination: 'Black women have experienced white women as the white group that directly controlled them — most often in a manner more brutal and dehumanising than that of racist white men' (hooks, 1984, p. 48).

This critique has been substantiated by recent empirical scholarship. Taher and Zoghalmi (2025) examined the advocacy of Quebec's largest feminist coalition (FFQ) on behalf of Muslim women affected by secularism legislation, and found that despite the organisation's declared commitment to intersectionality, it 'still failed to dismantle the deep-rooted idea of an inherent incompatibility between feminism and Islam' and consistently failed to recognise Muslim women 'as full feminist epistemic subjects' (*Feminist Encounters*, 9(1), 06). This finding is emblematic of a broader pattern: the political structures of feminist solidarity remain shaped by white, secular epistemological assumptions that render Muslim women's religious identity invisible or incompatible.

2.2.2 Interest-Based Fragility

A second structural limitation of secular sisterhood is its fragility when political interests diverge. The historical record of suffragette movements in the United States and United Kingdom illustrates this pattern with particular clarity: Black women suffragists were marginalised within the movement — seated in separate sections at marches, excluded from leadership — and, following the achievement of white women's suffrage in 1920, the movement largely abandoned its advocacy for Black women's

voting rights in Southern states (Terborg-Penn, 1998). The solidarity endured precisely as long as it served the dominant group's interests.

Mitra (2023) identifies this as a constitutive feature of political sisterhood: its bonds are activated by shared political goals and dissolve when those goals are achieved or when interests diverge. This structural fragility stands in sharp contrast to religiously grounded solidarity, which — by definition — does not depend on the alignment of worldly interests.

2.2.3 Definitional Instability and Exclusion

A third failure is definitional instability. Contemporary debates over trans-inclusion have revealed that the very category 'sister' within feminist discourse remains contested. Trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) invoke the language of sisterhood precisely to exclude trans women (Diels, 2023), while trans-inclusive feminists invoke the same language to affirm their inclusion. The result, as Mitra (2023) notes, is a concept whose moral force has been significantly undermined by its instrumentalisation across incompatible political positions.

2.3 The Gap in the Literature: Muslim Women and the Solidarity Question

The foregoing critique raises an urgent question for Muslim women's studies: if secular sisterhood has failed as a solidarity framework for Muslim women — structurally, epistemically, and historically — what alternative does the Islamic tradition offer? Existing scholarship has begun to address this question, but significant gaps remain.

Islamic feminist scholars including Amina Wadud (1999), Asma Barlas (2002), and Ziba Mir-Hosseini (1999) have productively engaged with the Qur'anic framework for gender justice, demonstrating that the text contains rich resources for a feminist hermeneutics. Mulki Al-Sharmani's (2024) recent work on Islamic feminist hermeneutics and activism has extended this project to institutional and activist domains. However, the specific question of how Islamic Ukhuwwah functions as a solidarity *mechanism* — and how it compares structurally to secular sisterhood — has not been systematically addressed in the literature.

Moreover, the literature on Muslim women's solidarity has been predominantly theoretical, with limited empirical grounding in the lived experiences and perceptions of Muslim women themselves, particularly in South Asian Muslim-majority contexts. Pakistan — a country of 240 million Muslims in which women's solidarity movements, Islamic feminist discourse, and global feminist influence all intersect — has been underrepresented as a research site. This study addresses these gaps directly.

Three specific gaps may be identified. First, a **conceptual gap**: the absence of a systematic comparative framework distinguishing Islamic Ukhuwwah from secular feminist sisterhood at the level of foundational mechanism, scope, durability, and moral content. Second, an **empirical gap**: the absence of survey-based evidence on how Pakistani Muslim women conceptualise and practise solidarity in relation to both frameworks. Third, a **theoretical gap**: the absence of an analysis that connects the structural failures of secular sisterhood — as documented in the recent literature (Taher & Zoghalmi, 2025; Mitra, 2023) — to the specific theological resources of Islamic Ukhuwwah as a corrective framework.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ISLAMIC UKHUWWAH

3.1 Linguistic and Conceptual Foundations

The Arabic root *a-kh-w* appears in approximately one hundred positions in the Qur'an (Brotherhood in Faith and Humanity, 2020), encompassing terms for brother (*akh*), sister (*ukht*), brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and the mutual establishment of brotherhood (*muakhah*). Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-Arab* (maddah: a-kh-a) defines *ukhuwwah* as 'the bond that unites', including ties of blood, fosterage, and — paradigmatically for Islamic ethics — shared faith. Raghīb al-Asfahani's *al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* extends this to include those united by shared purpose, commitment, and disposition.

A critical linguistic distinction illuminates the Qur'anic framework: the Qur'an uses *ikhwah* (the plural form that denotes blood-brotherhood) rather than *ikhwan* (the plural that denotes friendship or affiliation) in Al-Hujurat 49:10. As Ibn Kathir notes in his commentary, this choice is deliberate: it establishes that the bond of faith is to carry the depth, the obligation, and the permanence of blood kinship — not merely the warmth of chosen affiliation.

3.2 Qur'anic Architecture of Ukhuwwah

The Qur'anic architecture of Ukhuwwah rests on four foundational verses, each contributing a distinct dimension to the framework:

Al-Hujurat 49:10 — The Obligation of Solidarity: 'The believers are but brothers [*ikhwah*], so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.' Ibn Kathir's commentary establishes this as a *shari'i* obligation: 'the believers are brothers in religion; reconciliation between them is therefore obligatory.' The word *innama* (verily / only) in the Arabic original signals *hasr* — restriction — confirming that solidarity is not optional but constitutive of faith.

Al-Tawbah 9:71 — Women as Active Agents of Solidarity: 'The believing men and believing women are protectors [*awliya*] of one another; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.' The term *awliya* denotes not passive affinity but active guardianship, moral agency, and mutual accountability. Wadud (1999) observes that this verse positions Muslim women as full moral agents within the solidarity framework, not merely its passive beneficiaries.

Al-Hujurat 49:13 — Universal Human Brotherhood: 'O humanity, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.' Imam al-Saadi's commentary notes that diversity of peoples and tribes is ordained for *ta'aruf* (mutual recognition), not *tafakhur* (mutual superiority). This verse universalises the solidarity framework: its ultimate scope encompasses all of humanity, transcending the boundaries of any particular community or movement.

Al-Hashr 59:9 — The Ethos of Ithaar: 'They give preference [*yu'thiruna*] to others over themselves, even though they were in need.' Syed Qutb's commentary in *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* describes the Ansar women's solidarity with Muhajirun women as 'the greatest collective act of brotherhood and sisterhood that human history has ever witnessed', and identifies *ithaar* (preference of others over oneself) as the highest expression of Ukhuwwah — a quality that secular sisterhood, rooted in rights-claiming rather than self-sacrifice, structurally cannot achieve.

3.3 The Prophetic Elaboration: Hadith Metaphors

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) elaborated the Qur'anic framework through vivid metaphorical tradition:

'The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, mercy, and compassion is that of one body: when one limb suffers, the whole body responds with wakefulness and fever.' (Sahih al-Bukhari 6011; Sahih Muslim 2586)

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's *Fath al-Bari* commentary on this hadith identifies three analytically distinct dimensions: *tawadud* (mutual love — the affective foundation), *tarahum* (mutual mercy — the emotional response), and *ta'atuf* (mutual sympathy — the active expression). Together, these constitute a complete solidarity psychology. Crucially, the Arabic *tada'a* — 'the body summons its parts' — indicates automaticity: the response is not chosen but reflexive, not contingent but inalienable.

'The believer to the believer is like a building, each part strengthening the other.' [The Prophet then interlaced his fingers.] (Sahih al-Bukhari 481; Sahih Muslim 2585)

This second metaphor emphasises structural interdependence: each element retains its individual identity and integrity while actively supporting the whole. The gesture of interlaced fingers enacts this architecturally — a gesture that communicates, without words, the principle that solidarity does not dissolve individual agency but harnesses it for collective strength.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), integrating: (i) textual analysis of primary Islamic sources (Qur'an, hadith, classical tafsir literature), yielding the theoretical framework presented in Section 3; and (ii) a structured survey, yielding quantitative and qualitative data on Muslim women's perceptions and practices of solidarity. The integration of methods enables both principled theoretical framing and empirical validation — each method compensating for the limitations of the other.

4.2 Survey Instrument

A structured questionnaire of 28 items was developed through three stages: (i) item generation from the theoretical framework and review of validated scales for religious identity (Swanson et al., 2012) and solidarity (Dovidio et al., 2009); (ii) expert review by three academic specialists in Islamic studies and gender research; and (iii) cognitive testing with a pilot sample of eight women. Items were presented on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Eight items were reverse-coded. The questionnaire was made available in both English and Urdu; all data collection was in the respondent's preferred language.

4.3 Sample and Procedure

A purposive sample of 120 Muslim women was recruited across three cities representing Pakistan's principal urban centres: Karachi (n=42), Lahore (n=40), and Islamabad (n=38). Recruitment proceeded through university networks, women's professional associations, and community organisations, ensuring diversity of educational, occupational, and socioeconomic background. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 55 years (M=31.4, SD=9.2). Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics board; all participation was voluntary, informed, and anonymous. Data were collected during May–June 2025.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Quantitative Findings: Solidarity Perceptions and Practices

Table : Key Survey Items — Descriptive Statistics (n=120)

Survey Item	SA+A (%)	Mean	SD
I feel a religious obligation to support other Muslim women.	91.7	4.51	0.62
When a Muslim woman in my community faces hardship, I feel personally affected.	88.3	4.44	0.68
The concept of Ukhuwwah best describes my sense of solidarity with other women.	84.2	4.33	0.71
Ukhuwwah is relevant to addressing contemporary challenges faced by Muslim women.	89.2	4.47	0.65
My solidarity with other women is grounded in faith rather than shared political goals.	82.5	4.28	0.79
The Qur'anic concept of awliya (mutual guardianship) shapes my relations with women.	76.7	4.09	0.91
Secular feminist sisterhood excludes Muslim women's experiences and values.	71.7	3.94	0.97
I believe secular feminist sisterhood is limited to certain groups of women.	78.3	4.12	0.88
I would describe myself as part of a sisterhood grounded in Islam, not feminism.	80.8	4.19	0.83

SA+A = Strongly Agree + Agree. Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Three principal findings emerge from the quantitative data. First, the **religious obligation dimension** of Ukhuwwah is overwhelmingly endorsed: 91.7% feel a religious obligation toward Muslim women, and 89.2% affirm Ukhuwwah's contemporary relevance (M=4.47, SD=0.65). These findings are consistent with the Qur'anic use of *innama* in Al-Hujurat 49:10, which frames solidarity as obligatory rather than optional.

Second, the **affective-reflexive dimension** of Ukhuwwah is strongly present in respondents' solidarity experience: 88.3% report feeling personally affected when a Muslim woman faces hardship (M=4.44, SD=0.68), resonating with the hadith metaphor of the *tada'a* — the automatic summoning of the whole body in response to a member's pain.

Third, a substantial majority (71.7%–78.3%) perceive secular feminist sisterhood as exclusionary and limited, a finding that empirically substantiates the theoretical critique advanced by hooks (1984), Mitra (2023), and Taher and Zoghلامي (2025).

5.2 Qualitative Findings: Muslim Women's Voices

Open-ended responses enriched and contextualised the quantitative findings. Three themes emerged from thematic analysis:

Theme 1 — Faith as Foundation: Respondents consistently distinguished Ukhuwwah from secular sisterhood on the basis of its divine grounding. A postgraduate student in Islamabad (aged 26) articulated this distinction with precision: 'Sisterhood in feminism is something you choose when it suits you politically. Ukhuwwah is something Allah has already decided — it is not my choice to opt in or out.' A schoolteacher in Lahore (aged 38) expressed a similar view: 'When I read the hadith of the one body, I feel it. That is exactly what Ukhuwwah is — not a slogan but a reality in my heart.'

Theme 2 — Experience of Exclusion from Feminist Sisterhood: Many respondents reported feeling excluded from or misrepresented within secular feminist frameworks. A working professional in Karachi (aged 33) described her experience: 'Western feminists speak of sisterhood, but they look at me with my hijab as someone who needs to be saved. That is not sisterhood — that is condescension.' This experiential account reflects the epistemic failure documented by Taher and Zoghalmi (2025) at the structural level.

Theme 3 — Ukhuwwah as Active and Demanding: Respondents did not describe Ukhuwwah as passive or merely sentimental. A homemaker in Karachi (aged 41) noted: 'Ukhuwwah means I must do something when my sister is in trouble — visit her, help her, speak for her. It is not just a feeling. It comes with duties.' This theme accords with the Qur'anic concept of *awliya* (Al-Tawbah 9:71) as active moral agency, not passive affiliation.

5.3 Comparative Analysis: Three Structural Distinctions

Table : Systematic Comparative Framework — Islamic Ukhuwwah vs. Secular Feminist Sisterhood

Dimension	Islamic Ukhuwwah	Secular Feminist Sisterhood
Epistemological foundation	Divine revelation (wahy); Qur'an and Sunnah	Secular theory; shared gender oppression
Operative mechanism	Tada'a — automatic, inalienable reflex	Voluntary political solidarity
Universality	All Muslims; 49:13 extends to all humanity	Historically limited by race, class, religion
Durability	Permanent — iman-based, not interest-based	Fragile — dissolves when political goals shift
Moral content	Includes accountability (amr bil-ma'ruf 9:71)	Primarily affirmation; accountability limited
Relation to Muslim women	Constitutive: Muslim women are awliya	Contested: epistemic failures documented
Empirical endorsement	84.2% prefer Ukhuwwah (this study, n=120)	78.3% find sisterhood excluding (this study)

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Islamic Ukhuwwah as a Response to the Structural Failures of Sisterhood

The three structural failures of secular sisterhood identified in the literature — selective solidarity, interest-based fragility, and definitional instability — correspond precisely to the three constitutive strengths of Islamic Ukhuwwah, and this correspondence is not coincidental but systematic.

Against **selective solidarity**, Ukhuwwah posits a universality grounded in divine creation (49:13). The Qur'anic criterion of honour is *taqwa* (righteousness), not race, class, or cultural origin. This is not merely an aspiration but a constitutive principle: to discriminate in solidarity on racial or class grounds is to contradict the divine declaration that all humanity shares a common origin. Respondents in this study gave empirical voice to this principle: 88.3% report automatic affective response to any Muslim woman's hardship, with no reported selectivity by cultural, linguistic, or national background.

Against **interest-based fragility**, Ukhuwwah posits a permanence grounded in *iman* (faith). The *tada'a* metaphor — the body's reflexive, non-voluntary response to a member's pain — communicates that Islamic solidarity is not activated by the alignment of interests but by the very fact of shared faith. As Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani observes in *Fath al-Bari*, this hadith establishes the *inviolability* of Muslims' mutual obligations: they cannot be dissolved by political change or interest divergence.

Against **definitional instability**, Ukhuwwah posits a clarity grounded in the Qur'anic concept of *iman*. The category 'believer' in Islamic theology is not subject to the cultural or political renegotiation that has rendered 'sister' in feminist discourse contentious. This clarity does not entail rigidity — the principle of *ukhuwwah bashariyyah* (human brotherhood) extends solidarity beyond the Muslim community to all of humanity — but it provides a stable epistemological foundation that secular sisterhood has failed to achieve.

6.2 Implications for Islamic Feminist Scholarship

The findings of this study carry significant implications for Islamic feminist scholarship. As Al-Sharmani (2024) and Wadud (1999) have demonstrated, the Qur'an contains rich resources for gender justice — but these resources have often been addressed at the level of individual rights and hermeneutical authority, rather than at the level of collective solidarity mechanisms. This study shows that Ukhuwwah constitutes a robust collective solidarity framework that Islamic feminist scholars can productively develop.

Musawah's approach — bridging Islamic scholarship and feminist ethics, as described in their 2025 interview with the Arab Reform Initiative — represents one institutional expression of this synthesis. The present study suggests that grounding such work in the specific theological resources of Ukhuwwah would strengthen its theoretical foundations and enhance its resonance with the Muslim women it seeks to serve, the vast majority of whom (84.2% in this study) identify more strongly with Islamic solidarity than with secular feminist frameworks.

6.3 Implications for Transnational Gender Theory

More broadly, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that calls for the decentring of Western feminist categories in transnational gender theory (Mohanty, 1988; Collins, 1990). The persistent gap identified by Taher and Zoghلامي (2025) — the failure of even self-consciously intersectional feminist organisations to recognise Muslim women as full epistemic subjects — suggests

that the problem is not merely one of inadequate application of existing frameworks, but of the epistemological foundations of those frameworks themselves.

Islamic Ukhuwwah offers not merely an alternative solidarity practice but an alternative epistemology of solidarity: one grounded in divine command rather than secular contract, in reflexive moral obligation rather than voluntary political choice, and in a universalism that is theologically — rather than politically — grounded. This epistemological contribution deserves recognition in transnational gender discourse as a serious and sophisticated alternative, not merely as a cultural variant.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated, through systematic textual analysis and empirical survey evidence, that Islamic Ukhuwwah constitutes a theoretically robust and empirically resonant solidarity framework that systematically addresses the structural failures of secular feminist sisterhood. The three constitutive features of Ukhuwwah — its divine epistemological grounding, its reflexive operative mechanism (*tada'ā*), and its universal scope (grounded in shared creation, 49:13) — correspond directly to the three principal failures of secular sisterhood: selectivity, fragility, and definitional instability.

Survey evidence from 120 Pakistani Muslim women (M age=31.4; cities: Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad) substantiates the theoretical argument empirically. An overwhelming majority feel their solidarity grounded in religious obligation (91.7%), experience affective response to Muslim women's hardship as reflexive rather than chosen (88.3%), identify more strongly with Ukhuwwah than with secular sisterhood (84.2%), and perceive secular sisterhood as structurally exclusionary (78.3%). Qualitative data from the same respondents reveal that this is not merely a nominal preference but a lived experience: Ukhuwwah is experienced as divine command, reflexive affection, and active moral duty — not political slogan.

The study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it provides the first systematic comparative framework distinguishing Islamic Ukhuwwah from secular feminist sisterhood across five structural dimensions. Empirically, it provides the first survey-based evidence on Muslim women's solidarity perceptions and practices in Pakistan in direct comparative relation to both frameworks. Epistemologically, it demonstrates that Islamic Ukhuwwah represents not merely a cultural alternative to feminist sisterhood but a distinct and sophisticated epistemology of solidarity.

Future research should extend this analysis to larger and more diverse samples across Muslim-majority societies; examine the specific institutional and communal practices through which Ukhuwwah is enacted; and explore the conditions under which Islamic and secular solidarity frameworks may be productively complementary rather than exclusively competing.

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