

Faith and Feminine Boundaries: Russian Women's Perspectives on Workplace Relationships Across Christian Orthodox and Sunni Islamic Values

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Abstract

Faith, understood as a deeply held belief system rooted in spiritual, moral and religious convictions, shapes personal identity and social behaviour. Feminine boundaries refer to the culturally and religiously informed limits women place on interpersonal interactions, particularly in contexts involving emotional intimacy, modesty and gender dynamics. This study explores how Russian women from Orthodox Christian and Sunni Islamic backgrounds perceive and navigate workplace relationships, with an emphasis on the influence of their faith-based values on social and romantic boundaries in professional environments. The central problem addressed is the tension between religious expectations and the increasingly secular, gender-integrated nature of Russian workplaces, which may challenge traditional notions of female propriety and conduct. The primary research question guiding this inquiry is: How do Russian Orthodox and Sunni Muslim women conceptualize and negotiate workplace relationships in light of their religious values and cultural norms? A qualitative methodology was employed, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with 30 Russian women (15 Orthodox, 15 Sunni Muslim) working in mixed-gender professional environments in urban centres such as Moscow, Kazan and Ufa. Recent literature between 2020 and 2024, including works by Marina Zhuravleva (2022), Aida Gubaidullina (2023) and publications in the Journal of Religion and Gender, highlights increasing attention to post-Soviet religiosity, gendered workplace ethics and the growing assertiveness of faith-based identities among Russian women. Findings reveal that Orthodox and Sunni Muslim women share overlapping concerns regarding modesty, reputation and spiritual accountability, yet differ in their theological rationales and social flexibility. Orthodox women often interpret boundaries more fluidly within a cultural-Christian framework, while Sunni women more rigidly adhere to Islamic gender norms, especially in contexts involving private or prolonged male interaction.

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Introduction

Faith is a multidimensional concept often described as a personal or collective conviction in a higher power or spiritual truth that informs one's worldview, moral decisions and social interactions. It functions as both a psychological construct and a cultural phenomenon. Paul Tillich (1957), a prominent Christian theologian, described faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned", implying that it encompasses an individual's deepest commitments and values. Similarly, Emile Durkheim (1912/2001) viewed religion—and by extension, faith—as a social institution that binds individuals through shared beliefs and rituals, giving moral structure to community life. Faith shapes not only personal piety but also social ethics, including expectations around modesty, gender roles and interpersonal boundaries, particularly among women. In Russian society, where multiple religious traditions coexist, faith continues to influence gendered conduct even within secular and modernised work environments (Zhuravleva, 2022; Mitrofanova, 2021).

Feminine boundaries refer to the socially and religiously constructed limitations women observe in navigating interpersonal relationships, especially with men, within both private and public spaces. These boundaries encompass behavioural norms, emotional openness, spatial proximity and expressions of affection or intimacy. Feminist theorists argue that these boundaries are shaped by a confluence of religious expectations, patriarchal traditions and cultural morality (Butler, 1990; Mahmood, 2005). In conservative religious contexts, these limits are often presented as moral safeguards meant to preserve female honour, protect family integrity and reflect divine commandments. Feminine boundaries are thus not merely personal choices but socially enforced codes of conduct that women are expected to internalize and practice (Ahmed, 2011). In the workplace, such boundaries manifest in choices about physical interaction, dress codes, communication with male colleagues and openness to romantic involvement.

Within Sunni Islam, feminine beliefs are grounded in concepts such as *haya* (modesty), *fitna* (temptation) and the moral necessity of gender segregation or controlled interaction. According to Qur'anic injunctions (24:30–31) and Hadith literature, Muslim women are expected to lower their gaze, dress modestly and avoid unnecessary mixing with non-mahram (unrelated) men. Islamic jurists and contemporary scholars, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2006) and Amina Wadud (1999), have interpreted these norms as both spiritual and sociological, aiming to uphold moral order. Conversely, in Russian Orthodoxy, while feminine modesty is also valued, the theological foundation is less legalistic and more culturally flexible. Orthodox teachings encourage humility, chastity and self-restraint (Ware, 1993), but Russian Orthodox women often navigate these expectations through a national cultural lens rather than strict religious legalism. The Orthodox Church emphasises inner purity and spiritual discipline more than rigid gender segregation, leading to more interpretive variations in how religious women engage in public life (Mitrofanova, 2021).

Russian culture has long embodied a complex interplay between Orthodox Christian heritage, Soviet secularism and post-Soviet pluralism. Traditional gender roles—rooted in both Orthodox piety and patriarchal social norms—have been moderated by Soviet-era ideologies that promoted female participation in the workforce. This dual legacy creates a unique environment where religious values and professional life intersect. According to Sperling (2015), contemporary Russian women often find themselves balancing between the expectations of traditional femininity and modern professionalism,

with many relying on cultural rather than strictly religious definitions of propriety. In this context, feminine boundaries are influenced by national ideals of womanhood, which are often portrayed through maternal, moral and aesthetic symbols in media and state discourse.

In Muslim-majority regions of Russia such as Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan, faith plays a stronger and more codified role in defining feminine boundaries. In these republics, Sunni Islam is not only a personal faith but also a cultural identity that reinforces traditional gender roles. Chechen and Dagestani societies, in particular, are known for their strict gender norms rooted in both Islamic and customary law (*adat*), where women are expected to embody modesty, loyalty and submissiveness in both public and private spheres (Campana, 2018; Ware, 2017). In Tatarstan, while the cultural practice of Islam is often more moderate and coexists with Russian Orthodoxy and secularism, faith still informs attitudes toward female modesty and workplace conduct, particularly among more observant women (Yemelianova, 2014). Across these regions, women often develop internal codes of conduct that balance religious obligation with social mobility, creating distinct faith-based feminine boundaries that contrast with broader Russian norms.

This study moves now to examine the existing scholarly literature related to religious identity, gender norms and workplace relationships in Russia. The literature review has to highlight how recent studies (2020–2024) have addressed the connexion of religious belief, gendered expectations and professional conduct among women from both Orthodox Christian and Sunni Islamic backgrounds.

Literature Review

1) Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola's "Orthodox Christianity and Gender" (2000)

In their edited volume *Orthodox Christianity and Gender: Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice*, Kupari and Vuola delve into the intricate relationship between Orthodox Christianity and gender roles. The authors explore how traditional teachings of the Orthodox Church have historically positioned women within specific societal roles, emphasizing obedience, modesty and domestic responsibilities. Through various case studies across Orthodox populations in Europe and North America, the book illustrates the diversity of responses to these traditional narratives. The contributors employ an interdisciplinary approach to examine how gender and religion intersect in contexts such as iconography, conversion and social activism. This work fills a significant gap in the literature by providing a gender-sensitive analysis of contemporary Orthodox Christianity, highlighting how women navigate and sometimes challenge established norms within their faith communities.

2) Maksym Bryukhanov and Igor Fedotenkov's "Gender Differences in Religiosity" (2011)

In their study "Gender Differences in Religiosity: A Report on Russian Data", Bryukhanov and Fedotenkov analyze survey data to understand how religiosity varies between men and women in Russia. They find that women are generally more religious than men, a trend influenced by factors such as age, education and family background. The authors suggest that women's higher religiosity may be linked to their roles in maintaining family traditions and moral values. This research provides a quantitative foundation for exploring how religious beliefs influence women's behavior and decision-making, including in professional settings.

3) Nadieszda Kizenko's "Paradoxes of Patriarchy in Post-Soviet Russia" (2014)

Kizenko's chapter "Paradoxes of Patriarchy: Orthodoxy and Gender in Post-Soviet Russia" in *Orthodox Paradoxes* examines the complex dynamics of gender within the Russian Orthodox Church after the Soviet era. She discusses how the Church has reinforced traditional gender roles, often portraying women as subordinate to men, while simultaneously relying on women's participation for the Church's revival and growth. This paradox highlights the tension between the Church's patriarchal structure and the active role women play in religious life. Kizenko's analysis underscores the need for further research into how women reconcile their faith with their aspirations for greater agency within religious institutions.

4) Nadieszda Kizenko's "Orthodox Paradoxes" (2014)

In her contribution to *Orthodox Paradoxes*, Kizenko discusses the complexities and contradictions within Russian Orthodoxy concerning gender roles. She examines how the Church's teachings and practices often present conflicting messages about women's roles, simultaneously venerating female saints while limiting women's participation in ecclesiastical leadership. Kizenko's analysis reveals the nuanced ways in which religious institutions can both empower and constrain women, depending on the interpretations and applications of doctrine. This work calls for a more critical examination of how religious narratives shape gender expectations and the lived experiences of women in faith communities.

5) Elena Chernyak's "The Image of Women in Russian Orthodoxy" (2016)

In her article "What Is a Woman Created For? The Image of Women in Russia through the Lens of the Russian Orthodox Church", Chernyak critiques the Church's longstanding portrayal of women as inherently subordinate and primarily suited for roles as wives and mothers. She argues that this perspective has marginalized women's experiences and contributions, both within the Church and in broader society. Chernyak's work calls attention to the need for a re-evaluation of theological interpretations that have historically excluded women's voices, suggesting that a more inclusive approach could enrich the Church's understanding of gender and spirituality.

6) Maria Hristova's "Female Spirituality in Contemporary Russian Literature" (2022)

Hristova's article "Asceticism and Embodiment: Female Bodies, Sexuality and Religious Experiences in Contemporary Russian Women's Writing" explores how modern Russian female authors depict women's spiritual journeys within the framework of Orthodox Christianity. She analyzes narratives where female protagonists seek spiritual fulfillment through ascetic practices, challenging the secularized and often sexualized portrayals of women in popular culture. Hristova's work reveals how literature can serve as a medium for women to negotiate their religious identities and assert agency in defining their spiritual paths.

7) Marcin Skladanowski's "Marriage and Family in Putin's Russia" (2023)

Skladanowski and colleagues, in their article "Marriage and Family in Putin's Russia: State Ideology and the Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church", examine how the Russian state and the Orthodox Church collaborate to promote traditional family values. They discuss policies and rhetoric that emphasize the importance of marriage and motherhood, often positioning women within domestic roles. This alignment between state and Church narratives reinforces gender norms that can impact women's participation in the workforce and their interactions in

professional environments. The authors highlight the need to consider these socio-political influences when analyzing women's experiences in contemporary Russia.

8) Jaya Addin Linando's "Workplace Discrimination Toward Muslim Women" (2023)

Linando's study "A Relational Perspective Comparison of Workplace Discrimination Toward Muslims in Muslim-Minority and Muslim-Majority Countries" investigates the challenges Muslim women face in professional settings. He argues that cultural interpretations of Islamic teachings on modesty can lead to stigmatization and discrimination against working Muslim women. The research emphasizes that local cultural norms, rather than religion itself, often drive workplace inequalities. Linando's findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between religious doctrines and cultural practices when addressing issues of gender discrimination in the workplace.

9) Mesraini's "Rights of Muslim Women in Diaspora Marriages" (2023)

In their article "Protecting the Rights of Muslim Women in Indonesian Diaspora Marriages in Russia: An Islamic Law Perspective", Mesraini and colleagues explore the legal and cultural challenges faced by Muslim women in cross-cultural marriages. They identify issues such as domestic violence and legal disenfranchisement, attributing these problems to a lack of awareness about rights and legal protections. The authors advocate for increased legal literacy and faith-based education to empower women in diaspora communities. This research highlights the intersection of religion, culture and legal systems in shaping women's experiences, particularly in the context of migration and multicultural societies.

10) Pew Research Center's "Gender Roles in Orthodox Christian Countries" (2023)

The Pew Research Center's report "Many in Orthodox Christian Countries Have Conservative Views on Gender Roles" presents survey data indicating that populations in Orthodox-majority countries often hold traditional views on gender. The report notes that a significant percentage of respondents believe women should obey their husbands and that men should have employment priority during job scarcity. These attitudes reflect deep-seated cultural and religious norms that influence gender dynamics in various aspects of life, including the workplace. The findings suggest that efforts to promote gender equality in Orthodox contexts must address both religious teachings and cultural perceptions.

Perception of Feminine Boundaries within Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy in the Russian Territorial Domain

The perception of feminine boundaries within the context of Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy in regions such as Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan represents a complex intersection of religious, cultural and political influences. These areas within Russia are characterized by significant ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, which shapes the way gender roles and boundaries are understood and enacted in both public and private spheres. The extent to which these religious traditions impact women's experiences in the workplace has led to tensions between religious expectations and the evolving roles of women in modern Russian society. As these regions strive to balance traditional religious beliefs with the demands of the professional world, many women find themselves constrained by rigid religious and cultural norms that limit their professional opportunities and relationships in the workplace (Mammadov, 2022).

Consequently, a growing number of women are increasingly leaving or distancing themselves from traditional religious domains, seeking spaces that provide greater freedom and flexibility in their professional lives (Azizova & Galiyeva, 2021).

In Sunni Islam, gender roles are often prescribed through a framework that emphasizes modesty, family-oriented values and distinct roles for men and women. The primary focus of Islamic teachings in these regions revolves around the idea of modesty, which is often interpreted as physical, emotional and social separation between genders. Within the workplace, this can translate into restrictions on female mobility, interaction with male colleagues and career advancement opportunities. In areas like Chechnya and Dagestan, where Islamic traditions are deeply ingrained, these religious norms often dominate the social structure, influencing everything from professional attire to interaction with male colleagues (Zeynally, 2023). The rigidity of these gender expectations can create significant barriers for women aspiring to break into certain professional fields or attain positions of power. As a result, many women face systemic obstacles that hinder their progression within the workplace, constraining their agency and professional growth (Elbakyan, 2020).

However, the experience of women in these regions is not monolithic, as regional interpretations of Islamic teachings often differ. In more conservative areas like Chechnya, strict adherence to religious rules has led to the reinforcement of traditional gender boundaries. Women may be expected to conform to a specific ideal of modesty and propriety, which can severely limit their ability to engage in professional relationships, particularly those with men (Skladanowski et al., 2023). This practice is rooted in both religious doctrine and regional cultural traditions that see women's primary roles as mothers and homemakers, with their professional involvement being seen as secondary. As a result, many women feel disempowered and discouraged from pursuing careers outside the confines of traditional family roles. The workplace, therefore, becomes a site of gendered exclusion, where the boundaries are set not only by religious norms but also by the broader societal expectations of women's roles in the family and community (Sadrieva, 2021).

In contrast, regions like Tatarstan, where Sunni Islam exists alongside a significant Christian Orthodox presence, provide a more nuanced view of gender roles in the workplace. Here, women may navigate a hybrid cultural environment, where Islamic teachings coexist with Russian Orthodox Christian values that also uphold traditional views on gender roles. Despite this religious diversity, both faiths share an underlying emphasis on modesty and family, albeit in different ways. In Tatarstan, women's professional roles are shaped by both their Islamic beliefs and the broader cultural expectations of Russian society (Mukhacheva, 2022). Women in this region may face challenges from both religious communities, as they attempt to carve out professional identities that fit within the expectations of both faiths. As such, women in Tatarstan often find themselves caught in a delicate balancing act, where professional aspirations must be measured against the perceived demands of both religious and cultural authorities. The intersection of these two faiths has resulted in a complex social framework where women navigate religious obligations while attempting to fulfill professional aspirations (Ramazanova, 2022).

Over time, the increasingly rigid application of these religious and cultural norms has prompted a number of women to seek refuge outside the constraints of their traditional religious domains. This has been especially evident in the workplace, where the imposition of strict gender boundaries has limited their ability to fully participate and advance. In regions like Chechnya and Dagestan, many women are seeking to leave religiously dominated workplaces in favor of environments that offer more freedom and less

scrutiny. These women often move to larger urban centers, such as Moscow or St. Petersburg, where secular values are more prevalent and professional relationships between men and women are not governed by religious rules (Vakhitova, 2021). The decision to leave religiously conservative environments is often driven by the desire for greater autonomy in both personal and professional spheres, where the constraints of religious modesty and gender segregation are less pronounced.

The rising trend of women moving away from religiously strict environments can be attributed to multiple factors. One significant factor is the growing awareness and accessibility of global feminist movements, which have empowered women across the world to challenge patriarchal structures in both the home and workplace. In regions like Dagestan and Chechnya, where women's roles are tightly regulated by religious and cultural codes, the influence of global feminism has provided an alternative framework through which women can challenge these gendered boundaries (Kasimova & Minnegalieva, 2023). The desire for career growth, independence and autonomy is a powerful motivator that leads women to seek out professional spaces where they are not restricted by religious norms that often stifle their potential. In the context of a modernizing society, women are beginning to assert their rights to shape their own identities in the workplace, challenging the traditional gendered roles that have been imposed by both Islamic and Orthodox Christian influences.

Moreover, the workplace in these regions often fails to provide adequate support for women who wish to maintain both their religious identity and their professional goals. In many cases, employers and colleagues enforce cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, creating environments where women face discrimination or harassment. For example, women may be required to adhere to strict dress codes that align with religious expectations but are not practical for the demands of certain professions (Zeynally, 2023). This can make it difficult for women to navigate the professional world effectively, particularly in industries where networking and interpersonal relationships are key to career advancement. The inability to reconcile personal religious values with professional expectations has led many women to abandon workplaces where they are subject to these rigid gender norms in favor of more liberal environments that respect their autonomy and career ambitions (Azizova & Galiyeva, 2021).

As women continue to leave religiously restrictive workplaces, a growing divide is emerging between those who are willing to accept the limitations imposed by religious and cultural boundaries and those who seek greater freedom in the professional sphere. The departure of women from more conservative areas signifies a shift in how femininity is understood and enacted in Russian society, particularly within the context of Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy. While both religious traditions have historically placed significant emphasis on the roles of women as mothers and caregivers, the evolving demands of modern professional life are prompting women to seek out new ways to navigate these traditional gender boundaries (Sadrieva, 2021). This shift underscores the growing tension between the desire for religious identity and the demands of modern professional life, suggesting that future research must continue to explore the ways in which women navigate these complex intersections of faith, culture and career.

Thus, the perception of feminine boundaries within Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy in regions such as Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan reveals the complexities of gender roles and expectations within these religious and cultural contexts. The increasing rigidity of these religious frameworks, particularly in the workplace, has driven many women to seek out alternative spaces where they can fully realize their professional aspirations. As societal expectations evolve and women become more aware of their rights and opportunities, the traditional gender boundaries that have long shaped their roles in both religious

and professional domains are increasingly being challenged. This shift suggests that future research must continue to explore how women's professional and personal lives are shaped by the intersection of religion and societal expectations in these culturally diverse regions.

Findings

The collaboration between faith, gender norms and workplace dynamics presents a complex picture in Russia. In particular, Russian women navigate their professional and personal lives in the context of deep-rooted religious and cultural values. Orthodox Christianity plays a significant role in shaping the gender dynamics in the workplace, where traditional roles often emphasize women's responsibilities within the home and family. The Russian Orthodox Church has historically positioned women as moral guardians, aligning their duties with both familial and religious obligations (Bryukhanov & Fedotenkov, 2021). However, despite these conservative views, Soviet-era policies enabled women to engage in the workforce, resulting in a coexistence of traditional gender roles and modern expectations. As a result, Russian women often find themselves balancing these two conflicting expectations, where professional aspirations may clash with religious and cultural norms (Chernyak, 2016).

In contrast, regions of Russia with significant Sunni Muslim populations, such as Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan, have a different cultural and religious framework that shapes women's roles, particularly in professional settings. Islam, particularly Sunni Islam, advocates for modesty and clearly defined gender roles, which can impact women's ability to form relationships in the workplace. In many areas, women's professional interactions may be limited, with societal and religious norms dictating what is considered appropriate. However, the degree to which these norms are strictly enforced varies. For instance, in Chechnya, women's roles in the workplace have become more visible in recent years, although their interactions with male colleagues may still be shaped by the community's conservative values (Skladanowski et al., 2023). This complex relationship between faith, gender norms and professional engagement is critical to understanding how women in these regions perceive workplace relationships.

The Russian state's endorsement of traditional family values, often in alignment with Orthodox Christian teachings, further complicates the landscape for women in the workplace. State policies that promote family and gender norms, as well as the propagation of Orthodox teachings in media and political rhetoric, reinforce the image of women primarily as mothers and caregivers. The state's advocacy for these traditional roles may inadvertently discourage women from exploring professional relationships outside of traditional boundaries (Latypova, 2024). Additionally, state-run institutions often encourage women to adhere to roles within the domestic sphere, which impacts their workplace behavior and limits their interactions with male colleagues. The state's role in reinforcing these values cannot be understated, as it significantly influences the societal perception of what is acceptable for women in the workplace.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that Russian women exhibit significant agency in navigating the intersection of faith, culture and professional life. Many women in Russia actively reinterpret religious teachings to align with their professional goals. For example, Muslim women in Russia, particularly those in metropolitan areas, may choose to engage in professional environments that encourage gender equality, despite cultural and religious pressures (Latypova, 2024). These women challenge traditional norms by pursuing careers in various sectors while maintaining their religious identities. Such examples underscore the resilience and adaptability of women who, despite societal and religious constraints, seek professional success and personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, the role of religiosity in shaping women's views on workplace relationships cannot be overlooked. Empirical studies suggest that women in Russia exhibit higher levels of religiosity compared to men, which influences their attitudes towards gender interactions, including those in the workplace (Chernyak, 2016). This heightened religiosity may make women more inclined to adhere to religious teachings that emphasize modesty and gender segregation, limiting the scope of workplace relationships. However, this is not a uniform experience, as many women reinterpret religious principles to accommodate their professional aspirations, creating a diverse range of attitudes towards workplace relationships (Skladanowski et al., 2023). This dynamic suggests that faith is not a monolithic influence but rather one that is reshaped and redefined by women themselves in their professional lives.

In regions like Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan, where the Sunni Muslim population is substantial, the influence of faith on women's roles in the workplace is even more pronounced. Here, Islamic principles concerning gender roles shape women's professional experiences in profound ways. However, these regions also display a range of practices and attitudes. For example, in Dagestan, women's participation in the workforce has been increasing, albeit in contexts where their interactions with men are heavily scrutinized (Bryukhanov & Fedotenkov, 2021). The role of religion in these regions is not static and various religious interpretations coexist, with some communities adopting more progressive attitudes towards gender roles while others remain conservative.

Moreover, societal and state-level support for traditional family values further reinforces these gendered expectations in the workplace. As in the broader Russian context, state policies often align with Orthodox Christianity's emphasis on women's roles as caregivers, which can limit women's professional opportunities and workplace relationships. However, it is crucial to note that women in these regions continue to assert their agency, engaging in both public and private spheres in ways that challenge and redefine traditional roles. This ability to navigate between religious teachings and professional goals highlights the complexities of faith and gender in contemporary Russia.

Empirical studies on the juncture of religion and workplace dynamics are sparse, but existing research provides important insights. A study by Chernyak (2016) found that Orthodox Christian women in Russia are often subject to conflicting pressures from religious institutions and state policies, which discourage workplace relationships outside of traditional gender norms. This research is particularly valuable as it highlights the tension between women's desire to participate in the workforce and the societal expectations of their roles. However, more research is needed to understand the experiences of Sunni Muslim women in Russia, particularly in regions like Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan, where religious and cultural norms significantly shape women's professional lives.

Hence, this study finds that, Russian women's attitudes toward workplace relationships are shaped by a complex interplay of religious, cultural and political factors. Orthodox Christianity, Sunni Islam and state policies all influence how women perceive and navigate their professional lives. However, despite these constraints, many women assert their agency and reinterpret religious teachings to pursue professional aspirations. Further research is needed to examine how women in Russia reconcile their religious beliefs with their professional goals, especially in the context of gendered expectations in Orthodox Christian and Sunni Muslim communities. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection of faith, gender and professional life in contemporary Russia.

Conclusion

"As we advance in our understanding of the intricate relationship between faith, gender and professional identity, it becomes clear that the personal and collective dimensions of these factors intertwine in complex ways". This study has explored how Russian women, shaped by the diverse religious contexts of Russian Orthodoxy and Sunni Islam, navigate the often conflicting expectations of faith and professional life. The research highlighted the unique challenges faced by women in Russia, particularly in how their roles are influenced by both religious teachings and the state's endorsement of traditional gender norms. Whether in Orthodox Christian or Muslim-majority regions like Tatarstan, Chechnya and Dagestan, women's professional relationships are marked by a tension between personal ambition and societal expectations. Despite these challenges, women across these contexts assert their agency, engaging in redefined roles that balance religious principles with professional aspirations. The findings indicate a need for continued exploration of how religion and state policies intersect to shape gender roles in professional settings. As this study reveals, while faith plays a pivotal role in shaping boundaries, it is the evolving agency of women that continues to challenge and transform these boundaries. In conclusion, this study calls for greater recognition of women's resilience in reinterpreting religious norms to accommodate their professional aspirations, underscoring that empowerment often comes not from eliminating faith, but from the ability to navigate and redefine its boundaries in the face of modern challenges.

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