

## RAMADAN CELEBRATION DURING COVID-19 IN MALAYSIA

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### Abstract

*This year's entrance to the month of Ramadan was distinctive from previous years. Whether fasting may present an elevated risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus due to dehydration while the coronavirus pandemic spreads its way through the world is a reasonable issue. During this COVID-19 era, the misery fuels the thought about the public implications that emerged. Therefore, this study is undertaken in order to assess the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in the holy month of Ramadan among Muslims in Malaysia in terms of religious practices (fasting, prayers, charity) by using data collection via questionnaires. Online sampling of residents from Malaysia has been actively recruited via the authors' networks of residents and social media in Malaysia. To sum up, during this year's Ramadan in Malaysia, the COVID-19 pandemic does impose differences in religious practices (fasting, prayers, charity) compared to previous years.*

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Malaysia, Ramadan, Fasting.

## INTRODUCTION

Mass worship at mosques, temples, and churches in many parts of the world have been put on hold as a measure against the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 500,000 people (increasing). The coronavirus caused by COVID-19 has infected over 1.7 million population. Many countries have imposed strict and drastic measures to contain deadly viruses, including citywide lockdowns and extensive travel curbs. The Malaysian government has issued a curfew and a movement control order (MCO) to flatten the pandemic curve. The action taken by the authority is in line with the Prophet Muhammad's advice on quarantine: "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it. If the plague outbreaks in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place" (Sahih al-Bukhari, v. 7, h. 624). However, with Ramadan's holy month, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a damper on new social norms and religious practices

among Muslims due to large-scale gatherings and close contact are banned to prevent the spread of the disease.

To Muslims around the world, Ramadan is a month of piety and religious obligation, as well as a time of family gathering and charity. Muslims usually break the fast at sunset together with their family, pray at the mosque, and spend more time on religious activities. However, with health experts recommending social distancing measures during the global coronavirus crisis, most Muslim countries ban any gatherings and public iftaars, or Ramadan bazaars, as well as collective social activities to prevent the spreading of COVID-19. Similarly, in Malaysia, iftaar, Taraweeh prayers congregation, religious classes, Quran recital, and the Qiamullail programs have all been cancelled, as there is no sign that the COVID-19 pandemic would subside by the end of Ramadan. For Muslims who traditionally spend hours during Ramadan at mosques to perform the congregational Taraweeh prayers or to study the Quran, the closure of mosques by the government is a painful decision. However, practicing Ramadan traditions at home would not reduce worship value, as the country was in a state of emergency. Besides that, it is a golden opportunity to worship more peacefully and pray with family at all times. Closure of the mosques provides an opportunity for the father, as head of the family, to lead the Taraweeh prayers at home and perform *tadarus* (Quran recital) (Razak Chik, 2020).

Since no previous researches on the COVID-19 pandemic were conducted concentrating on the impact towards Ramadan, this study focused on revealing attributes related to the effects of this pandemic on Muslims during Ramadan in terms of religious practice.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This cross-sectional survey was performed during the second and third weeks of Ramadan from 1st May 2020 to 14th May 2020. It is also MCO's sixth and seventh week as the Malaysian Government has reported. The survey group includes Muslim Malaysians who had embraced the month of fasting. A sample size of 385 is required to satisfy the confidence level of 95 percent and the margin error of 5 percent of the total Muslim population of Malaysia. A one-page summary and a Google form link were posted/reposted to groups and pages on WhatsApp and Facebook, receiving a total of 554 respondents, depending on the authors' network of locals living in Malaysia. However, only 500 respondents were chosen for the study after data clean-up. The following data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions: demographic information (age, gender, profession, monthly gross income, marital status, level of education, state) and religious activities (fasting, prayers, charity) during the holy month of Ramadan. This description includes a brief introduction to the online questionnaire's context, purpose, processes, voluntary essence of participation, confidentiality, notes to fill in the questionnaire, as

well as the online questionnaire's relation and quick response code (QR). The collected data was then put into an online archive, and a detailed analysis was carried out. The 95 percent confidence interval was measured in accordance with Ramadan for the occurrence of adverse reactions. The techniques used were analyses of the Likert scale. SPSS was utilized to create the database for the research and the study.

## DATA COLLECTION

As shown in Table 1, the questionnaire items were initially designed in English after a thorough search for relevant recent literature on religious activities, which was then translated to the Malay Language to allow everyone to participate despite the language barrier. The questionnaire was designed to contain two parts, including socio-demographic information (age, gender, employment status, education level, marital status, household size, state, and monthly gross income), as well as nine questions on the participants' religious activities during COVID-19. A Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree) was used in the statements to measure this variables. Some open questions were also included to give space for the respondents to provide their feedback.

**Table 1** Questionnaire items of religious activities during COVID-19

Items	
R1. Fasting can pose an increased risk of catching the COVID-19 virus due to dehydration.	5-point Likert scale
R2. There are differences fasting in previous years compared to this year, due to the pandemic COVID-19.	5-point Likert scale
R3. If I suddenly feel ill with COVID-19 symptoms in the day, I am allowed to break my fast.	5-point Likert scale
R4. I am affected by the closure of the mosque in my region due to MCO during the COVID-19 pandemic.	5-point Likert scale
R5. I miss the feeling of performing Taraweeh and <i>moreh</i> at the mosque like the previous years.	5-point Likert scale
R6. Performing congregation Taraweeh prayers at home with my family is different than performing it at the mosque.	5-point Likert scale
R7. It is challenging to do charity during this year's Ramadan compared to previous years due to Movement Control Order (MCO).	5-point Likert scale
R8. I prefer to pay my Zakat Fitrah using an online platform such as e-Zakat during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to paying at the counter like the previous years.	5-point Likert scale
R9. Due to an unstable source of income during this pandemic situation, I am affected to do charity.	5-point Likert scale

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data entry and statistical analysis were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software program for Windows (Version 20.0). Descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated. Statistical significance was considered at a *p*-value of less than 0.05 for all analyses. Before the full analysis was carried out on the whole sample, a pilot study consisting of random *N*=30 respondents was conducted to ensure the data and items in the questionnaire are reliable and valid by referring to the value of Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.717.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Socio-demographic Characteristics**

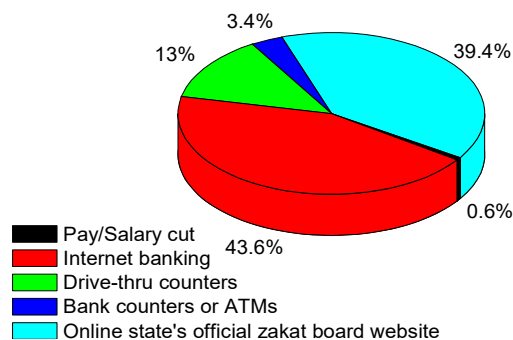
The final number of respondents used for this analysis is 500 after eliminating incomplete answers. Table 1 details the socio-demographic profiles of the 500 respondents. There were 122 males (24.4 percent), and 378 females (75.6 percent). The majority of respondents were aged between 21 and 30 years (36.0 percent) and 28.0 percent (31 to 40 years). In terms of employment, the majority were students at 33.0 percent, led by academicians at 25.8 percent, and more than half of the participants had a bachelor's degree (65.6 percent). The majority of respondents have 4-5 persons in their household (36.2 percent), followed by 6-7 individuals (25.6 percent). The proportion of married (51.2 percent) and single respondents (46.7 percent) is nearly identical. Moreover, most respondents live in Selangor (23.6 percent), led by Perak (10.6 percent) and Johor (10.2 percent), respectively. The majority of respondents receive under RM2,000 (26.0 percent) in terms of monthly salary, followed by RM4,001 to RM6,000 (23.0 percent). Besides that, 90.8 percent of respondents said they lived with their families, while just 9.2 percent lived away from their families. For more demographic statistics, please refer to Table 1.

**Table 1** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents celebrating Ramadan during Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia.

		Frequency, N	Percentage (%)
Age	less than 20 years old	44	8.8
	21 to 30 years old	180	36.0
	31 to 40 years old	140	28.0
	41 to 50 years old	100	20.0
	above 50 years old	36	7.2
Gender	Male	122	24.4
	Female	378	75.6
Occupation	Professional	104	20.8
	Academician	129	25.8
	Executive	33	6.6
	Merchant/Businessman	17	3.4
	Small business	2	.4
	Student	165	33.0
	Government employee	11	2.2
	Private sector employee	14	2.8
	Retired	2	.4
	Unemployed	23	4.6
Education level	Primary school	4	.8
	Secondary school	20	4.0
	Diploma/A-Level/STPM/Foundation	55	11.0
	Bachelor	328	65.6
	Master	72	14.4
	PhD	21	4.2
Marital status	Married	256	51.2
	Single	234	46.8
	Widow	10	2.0
Household size	2-3	107	21.4
	4-5	181	36.2
	6-7	128	25.6
	more than 7	84	16.8
State	Selangor	118	23.6
	Kuala Lumpur	36	7.2
	Perak	53	10.6
	Negeri Sembilan	41	8.2
	Melaka	19	3.8
	Pulau Pinang	35	7.0

	Terengganu	31	6.2
	Johor	51	10.2
	Kelantan	31	6.2
	Sabah	10	2.0
	Kedah	34	6.8
	Perlis	7	1.4
	Pahang	31	6.2
	Sarawak	3	.6
Monthly income	below RM2000	130	26.0
	RM2001-RM4000	90	18.0
	RM4001-RM6000	115	23.0
	RM6001-RM8000	89	17.8
	RM8001-RM10000	46	9.2
	above RM10000	30	6.0
Stay with family	Yes	454	90.8
	No	46	9.2

Figure 1 indicates that most respondents have opted for Internet banking (43.60 percent), followed by the official website of the electronic state's zakat board (39.4 percent) to pay their zakat fitrah this year. This is the most efficient way to use the system because people are now under MCO and are reluctant to physically go out from their homes to pay their zakat. In comparison, bank counters or ATMs (3.4 percent) are the least favored choice, presumably because of MCO, given the constraint that prohibits them from leaving their homes. However, this alternative may also have been preferred by those who were not so apt in technology, particularly elderly residents who do not have internet access. In comparison, the most convenient choices in paying zakat fitrah this year were internet banking and the official website of the electronic state zakat commission.



**Figure 1** Zakat Fitrah payment preferences during COVID-19 pandemic

The mean score for religious activities for each socio-demographic background is more or less around 27, which indicates that from the Likert scale of 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), respondents were not so inclined to answer 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree). In this case, it means that the respondents were not significantly affected through religious activities, and most of them were neutral towards each statement under this component. Firstly, religious activities that differ by age show that the difference is apparent in those below 20 compared to the 41-50 age groups where the below 20 group has a mean of 28.50, SD: 3.434 compared to the 41-50 age group (26.12, SD: 4.808). The specific difference among gender in this component shows that females (26.68, SD: 4.462) on average have lower mean compared to males (28.12, SD: 4.325), while for occupation, the differences are seen among the students (28.15, SD: 3.883), which is higher than professionals (26.13, SD: 4.584) and academicians (26.47, SD: 4.765). Apart from that, there is a significant difference among single respondents (27.59, SD: 4.005), which is higher than those who are married (26.53, SD: 4.715) with a small size effect.

**Table 2:** Religious activities mean score based on socio-demographic backgrounds

	N	Mean	SD
Age			
less than 20 years old	44	28.50	3.434
21 to 30 years old	180	27.62	4.013
31 to 40 years old	140	26.57	4.450
41 to 50 years old	100	26.12	4.808
above 50 years old	36	26.64	5.991
Gender			
Male	122	28.12	4.325
Female	378	26.68	4.462
Occupation			
Professional	104	26.13	4.584
Academician	129	26.47	4.765
Executive	33	27.58	4.596
Merchant/Businessman	17	26.59	5.466
Small business	2	30.50	.707
Student	165	28.15	3.883
Government employee	11	27.09	3.833
Private sector employee	14	27.29	3.474
Retired	2	26.50	12.021
Unemployed	23	25.35	4.174
Education level			
Primary school	4	28.25	1.708
Secondary school	20	26.25	6.357

Diploma/A-Level/STPM/Foundation	55	27.96	3.981
Bachelor	328	26.98	4.442
Master	72	27.19	4.261
PhD	21	25.29	4.776
Marital status			
Married	256	26.53	4.715
Single	234	27.59	4.005
Widow	10	26.80	6.812
Household size			
2-3	107	27.16	4.098
4-5	181	26.64	4.722
6-7	128	27.38	4.430
more than 7	84	27.19	4.430
State			
Selangor	118	27.58	4.127
Kuala Lumpur	36	25.47	4.712
Perak	53	26.26	4.494
Negeri Sembilan	41	27.17	4.674
Melaka	19	28.79	4.158
Pulau Pinang	35	27.74	4.168
Terengganu	31	27.13	4.801
Johor	51	26.29	4.941
Kelantan	31	27.74	4.472
Sabah	10	24.10	3.107
Kedah	34	27.62	3.908
Perlis	7	27.14	4.259
Pahang	31	26.94	4.258
Sarawak	3	24.67	10.504
Monthly income			
below RM2000	130	27.65	4.306
RM2001-RM4000	90	27.37	3.976
RM4001-RM6000	115	26.64	4.589
RM6001-RM8000	89	26.40	4.859
RM8001-RM10000	46	27.43	4.708
above RM10000	30	26.07	4.315
Stay with family			
Yes	454	27.04	4.508
No	46	26.91	4.098

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic does impose differences in terms of religious activities component during Ramadan in Malaysia. There are significant differences in means for this component across socio-demographic variables, specifically within



the marital status. Alas, despite the government not allowing Ramadan bazaars to be held, sporadic stalls selling iftar dishes emerged throughout the month of Ramadan in Malaysia. Amid the current pandemic, Ramadan's core practices have not changed, as it still requires one to fast and increase their Islamic duties, such as praying, reading the Quran, and performing charity. For many celebrating Ramadan this year, COVID-19 is truly a blessing as we have learned to live a modest lifestyle as emphasized in Islam and in line with Maqasid Al-Shariah. Nevertheless, let's celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr this year by being in touch with our current world, expressing appreciation for what we have, and empathizing with those who are unfortunate. Of that, we have a lot to be grateful for.

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