

Perception and Comprehension of Worship Guidelines During the COVID-19 Pandemic among the Muslim Community in the Klang Valley

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, there have been many changes and new norms especially in the aspect of worship. Some laws and practices in the prayer rituals, issued by the mufti and religious departments, initially caused confusion among the Muslim community because such matters had never occurred in Malaysia and there was a lack of explanation by religious experts. Thus, this study is conducted to identify their perceptions and level of understanding regarding the guidelines for prayer rituals during the COVID-19 pandemic. A set of questionnaires is distributed to the Muslim community in the Klang Valley area using the Google Form. A total of 384 respondents participated in this study. The questionnaire consists of six sections based on Islamic concepts and fiqh legal issues arising from COVID-19. The study found that the level of understanding and perception of the Muslim community regarding the guidelines for worship during the COVID-19 pandemic is high. As time goes by, the community has become more understanding and confident in carrying out worship according to the guidelines. Based on the observations, suggestion for future researchers is to explore the role of religious leaders, community organizations and support network in facilitating compliance with the guidelines.

Keywords: Islamic Concept, Guidelines, COVID-19, Muslim Community, Pandemic

Introduction

Infectious diseases have claimed many human lives (Kashim & Husni, 2017). Moreover, there are viruses that still do not have vaccines or cures, such as HIV or AIDS (National Foundation of Infectious Disease (NFID)). The transmission methods of each virus are similar, whether through the air, fluids, or contact. According to studies conducted by the World Health

Organization (WHO), it has been found that the COVID-19 virus is highly contagious compared to the influenza virus. Individuals infected with this virus can easily transmit it to two or three people within a short period of time. In May 2021, WHO, in an update on its website, stated that COVID-19 can spread through the air if a large number of people gather for a long period of time in a confined space without proper air ventilation. This is a new development because initially, during the early stages of the pandemic, health authorities generally stated that the disease spreads through droplets and contact. However, WHO now states that the infectious droplets can remain in the air or travel more than 1 meter.

Therefore, like most other countries, Malaysia has taken proactive measures to address the spread of this pandemic. The government has imposed a lockdown order that began on March 18, 2020. This lockdown order is divided into 3 types: the Movement Control Order (MCO), the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), and the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO). The government will determine the type of MCO based on the needs and number of cases occurring in each state. The Prime Minister of Malaysia has advised that Malaysians must adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), including those related to religious practices, even after the end of the lockdown period, in order to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections in the future.

Research Problem

During the implementation of the lockdown in several countries, including Malaysia, due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 18, 2020, the government issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for various social activities according to the suitability of the infection situation in a particular area. For example, in the sectors of education, tourism, transportation, administration, and even religious matters such as the implementation of prayers in mosques, sacrificial rituals, and funeral management. However, the guidelines issued by the National Security Council (MKN) were concise and condensed. This has raised doubts among some members of the community in implementing them because it involved changes in the religious laws regarding prayers that had not been done before, such as physical distancing between rows and issues related to Friday prayers. The religious authorities have provided explanations on several issues, but they have been general and not detailed.

This has led to differing views among Muslims regarding issues such as the closure of mosques, Friday prayers, congregational prayers, funeral prayers, the management of COVID-19 victims' bodies, prayers for frontline workers, online weddings, and many other worship-related matters. The most debated issue is the suspension of all mosque activities. The difference in opinions has resulted in some Muslims disregarding the lockdown directives.

The differences among scholars in understanding a particular religious text can have an impact on determining the current rulings, especially regarding worship during a pandemic (Kashim et al., 2018). In this situation, weighing the benefits and harms (maslahah and mafsadah) plays a crucial role in issuing fatwas (Al-Buti, 2001). Furthermore, these misunderstandings have also opened up space for followers to advocate for their respective views (Solabi, 2020).

To address the rapid and widespread transmission of the virus, the government has issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for every social activity based on the suitability of the infection situation in a particular place. This includes sectors such as education, tourism, transportation, administration, and also religious matters such as the

implementation of prayers in mosques, sacrificial rituals, and funeral management. However, the guidelines issued by the National Security Council (MKN) are concise and condensed. This has created doubts among some members of the community in implementing them, as it involves changes in the religious laws regarding prayers that have not been previously practiced, such as maintaining physical distance between rows and issues related to Friday prayers. The muftis have also provided explanations on certain issues, but they have been general and not detailed.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows

- To identify the perception of the Muslim community regarding worship guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To determine the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of *masyaqqah* (hardship) in worship.
- To determine the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of *maslahah* (benefit) in worship.
- To determine the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of *darurat* (emergency) in worship.
- To determine the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of *rukhsah* (concession) in worship.

Literature Review

In issuing legal rulings or fatwas, especially in contemporary fiqh issues, scholars and authorities will refer to the relevant fiqh principles. A study conducted by Sahid et al (2020) in an article titled "The Application of Fiqh Principles in Current Issues of the COVID-19 Pandemic" shows that the principles of Islamic teachings gathered in fiqh principles serve as a reference in determining the legal rulings for prevailing issues. This is evidence that the flexibility of Islamic law can address various changing current issues. The principles of *thawabit* (unchanging) and *mutaghayyirat* (changing) are considered as a fundamental reference in Islamic legal rulings (Kashim et al., 2020a). Therefore, all government decisions have taken into account the benefits and harms on society based on Islamic principles.

Similarly, a study conducted by Mahaiyadin and Samori (2020) in their article titled "Controlling the Spread of Dangerous Epidemics from the Perspective of Siasah Syar'iyah" found that the epidemic control methods implemented by the Malaysian government, along with the policies and regulations enforced to address the life-threatening pandemic, are in line with the mandatory Shariah commands that must be followed by all parties. Therefore, the community should obediently and open-mindedly adhere to the guidelines set by the government throughout the duration of the pandemic.

Every guideline and standard operating procedure (SOP) related to worship implemented by the Malaysian government is in accordance with the application of the concept of *murunah* (flexibility), even though there may be some implementations that go beyond the normative framework of the Malaysian Muslim society (Kashim et al., 2020b). *Murunah* is part of the fundamental concepts of Islamic understanding in the implementation of the Shariah (Subri, 2021). This proves that Islam is a religion that is easy and places great emphasis on the well-being of its community by providing concessions (*rukhsah*) in cases of difficulty.

Furthermore, there is an article titled "Preventing the Spread of the Corona Virus (COVID-19) from an Islamic Perspective" (Abdul Rahman & Zaluki, 2020). This article discusses the prevention of COVID-19 transmission carried out by the government and the social responsibility from an Islamic perspective, based on the principles of maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law). The article also found that the prevention of COVID-19 transmission falls under the principle of al-Daruriyat, which is the preservation of life. Therefore, all SOPs implemented in mosques or any matters related to worship aim to prevent greater harm.

This is further supported by a study conducted to discuss the method of *takhsis al-nutq* with qiyas (analogical reasoning) and its legal application in preventing the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the study was on selected legal issues during the period of the Movement Control Order (PKP) due to the pandemic. The findings of the study concluded that the government's directive to suspend all religious activities in mosques and surau was in line with the legal application based on the method of *takhsis al-nutq* with qiyas (Hussain et al., 2020). The study presented the discussions of scholars regarding the methods of *ijtihad* in harmonizing conflicting evidence, such as the issue of suspending Friday prayers and congregational prayers in mosques, as well as maintaining physical distancing between worshippers (Kashim et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a study by (NOOR & NOOR, 2021) was conducted to examine the extent to which the method of legal change based on changing times can be applied in the approach of *Siyasah Syariyyah* (Islamic governance) in the present time. The study showed that this method is crucial for the government to implement in the aspect of *Siyasah Syariyyah* when dealing with the people who often question policies that they perceive as contradictory to Islamic law. However, the study concluded that legal changes based on changing times are not contradictory to Shariah at all.

There is a study conducted by (Yusoff & Sarifin, 2021) that examined the reaction of the Malaysian society to the Movement Control Order (PKP) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that the majority of respondents had a positive reaction to the issued PKP directives. In terms of compliance, the majority of respondents also expressed their compliance with the PKP. However, one of the reasons for this compliance was the visibility of the authorities deployed throughout the country, as respondents were more concerned about being apprehended by the authorities if they did not adhere to the directives, rather than a genuine awareness of the need to eliminate the chain of COVID-19 transmission. This study focused on general compliance with the PKP and did not specifically address the aspects of worship.

Furthermore, there is a study conducted in the state of Pahang by (Karim et al., 2020) that examined the level of understanding among the Islamic community regarding the role of Maqasid Shariah in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of the study indicated that the general knowledge level of the Islamic community in Pahang regarding Maqasid Shariah and their understanding of the role of Maqasid Shariah in addressing COVID-19 was high, at 95% and 89.4% respectively, with no significant relationship differences observed.

A study on the public's reaction to restrictions and closures during COVID-19 in Srinagar, outside the country, showed that a significant number of individuals were observed to be careless regarding the announced restrictions aimed at reducing the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with proper explanation and understanding, almost all of them made efforts to comply with the imposed restrictions (Nazir & Rashid, 2020). A study conducted in Jakarta

also indicated that individuals aged 60 and above, as well as female respondents, were more obedient to health protocol measures (Simanjuntak et al., 2020).

Methodology of The Study

To achieve the research objectives, a quantitative research method was employed through data collection via the distribution of questionnaires in the Klang Valley area. The selection of the Klang Valley as the study location was based on the fact that this area has the highest number of Muslim followers compared to other areas (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). The survey questionnaire consists of six (6) sections, namely Section A, Section B, Section C, Section D, Section E, and Section F, as shown in the table below.

Table 1
Questionnaire Instrument

Section	Construct	Item
A	Demografy	11
B	Perceptions regarding the implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) during the pandemic era of worship	8
C	Understanding the concept of masyaqqah in worship	6
D	Understanding the concept of maslahah in worship.	6
E	Understanding the concept of dharurah in worship.	6
F	Understanding the concept of rukhsah in worship.	6
Total		43

Source: Questionnaire 2022

The questionnaire for this study serves as an assessment of the level of understanding and perception of the Muslim community regarding the guidelines for worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the constructed questions are based on Islamic concepts and fiqh legal issues arising from COVID-19. Additionally, experts in the field of Fiqh were involved in providing views and input related to the concepts of Islamic Fiqh while developing the questionnaire instrument.

The sampling method used is non-probability sampling using a simple sampling technique. The number of respondents included in the study is 384 individuals, based on the Krejcie and Morgan standard, which accounts for the ratio of 100,000 Muslim followers in the Klang Valley. The questionnaire was distributed through the Google Form application by providing QR codes, link URLs, and paper distribution. The data obtained were then analyzed using SPSS version 28 software, employing descriptive frequency analysis such as frequency, percentage, and mean. The questionnaire was also constructed based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 and interpreted into four levels, as shown in the table below

Table 2

Interpretation of Average Scores (Likert Scale 5)

Average Score	Interpretation
1.00 to 2.00	Low (L)
2.01 to 3.00	Low Moderate (LM)
3.01 to 4.00	Moderate High (MH)
4.01 to 5.00	High (H)

Source: Piaw (2006); Munawar (2008)

The study conducted successfully obtained a total of 401 respondents. However, the analysis for this study was based on a sample size of only 384 individuals. All of these respondents are members of the Muslim community residing in the Klang Valley area, namely Selangor, Putrajaya, and Kuala Lumpur. The table below presents the demographic data of the respondents.

Table 3

Demographic Data of Survey Respondents

Respondent Profile		n = 384	Percentage (%)
Age	18-29 years old	110	28.6
	30-39 years old	149	38.8
	40-49 years old	75	19.5
	50-59 years old	34	8.9
	60 years old and above	16	4.2
Gender	Male	100	26.0
	Female	284	74.0
Town	Selangor	332	86.5
	KL	40	10.4
	Putrajaya	12	3.1
Occupation	Government Employee Private Sector Employee Business Owner	81	21.1
	Self-Employed	93	24.2
	Student	15	3.9
	Unemployed	46	12.0
	Retired	80	20.8
	Other	45	11.7
		21	5.5
		3	.8
Current Residential Area	City	229	59.6
	Suburb	68	17.7
	Town	23	6.0
	Planned Housing Area Village	9	2.3
	Other	50	13.0
		5	1.3
The average frequency of congregational prayers in mosques/surau before the	1 prayer time	47	12.2
	2 prayer times	87	22.7
	3 prayer times	35	9.1

implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO)	4 prayer times	18	4.7
	5 prayer times	68	17.7
	None	129	33.6
The average frequency of congregational prayers in mosques/surau on each day after the implementation of the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO)	1 prayer time	48	12.5
	2 prayer times	46	12.0
	3 prayer times	31	8.1
	4 prayer times	9	2.3
	5 prayer times	34	8.9
	None	216	56.3
The average frequency of congregational prayers in mosques/surau on each day after the implementation of the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO)	1 prayer time	44	11.5
	2 prayer times	57	14.8
	3 prayer times	40	10.4
	4 prayer times	20	5.2
	5 prayer times	58	15.1
	None	165	43.0
The distance from home to the mosque/surau regularly visited for congregational prayers.	Less than 1 kilometer	193	50.3
	1km - 3km	127	33.1
	3km - 5km	34	8.9
	5km and above	30	7.8
The usual methods used from home to the mosque/surau to attend congregational prayers	Walking	90	23.4
	Bicycle	2	.5
	Motorcycle	99	25.8
	Car	187	48.7
	Other	6	1.6
I am an/a at the mosque/surau.	Imam	2	.5
	Member of the mosque committee	7	1.8
	Preacher/religious speaker/religious teacher	2	.5
	Member of the congregation.	373	97.1

Source: SPSS Analysis

The total number of respondents consists of 384 individuals, with 100 (26.0%) male respondents and 284 (74.0%) female respondents. The majority of respondents were in the age range of 30 to 39 years, with a total of 149 individuals (38.8%), followed by respondents aged 18 to 29 years with 110 individuals (28.6%). There were 75 individuals (19.5%) in the 40 to 49 age group, 34 individuals (8.9%) in the 50 to 59 age group, and 16 individuals (4.2%) aged 60 years and above. Most of the respondents were from Selangor, with 332 individuals (86.5%), followed by Kuala Lumpur with 40 individuals (10.4%), and Putrajaya with 12 individuals (3.1%). In terms of occupation, 81 individuals (21.1%) were government employees, 93 individuals (24.2%) were private sector employees, 15 individuals (3.9%) were business owners, 46 individuals (12.0%) were self-employed, 80 individuals (20.8%) were students, 45 individuals (11.7%) were unemployed, 21 individuals (5.5%) were retired, and 3 individuals (0.8%) had other occupations. From the total number of respondents interviewed, the majority of respondents resided in urban areas, with 229 individuals (59.6%), followed by suburban areas with 68 individuals (17.7%), rural areas with 50 individuals (13.0%), town

areas with 23 individuals (6.0%), planned development areas with 9 individuals (2.3%), and other areas with 5 individuals (1.3%). The frequency of congregational prayers in mosques/musallahs showed changes before the implementation of the Movement Control Order (PKP), during the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), and after the Recovery Movement Control Order (PKPP). Before the PKP phase, 255 individuals (66.4%) attended at least one congregational prayer in a mosque/musallah. The number of attendees decreased during the PKPB phase, with 168 individuals (33.6%), and increased again after the PKPP phase, with 219 individuals (57%). Most respondents lived near a mosque/musallah, with 193 individuals (50.3%) residing within a distance of less than 1 kilometer, 127 individuals (33.1%) within a distance of 1km - 3km, 34 individuals (8.9%) within a distance of 3km - 5km, and only 30 individuals (7.8%) living at a distance of 5km and above from a mosque/musallah. The majority of respondents chose a car as their main mode of transportation to attend a mosque/musallah, with 187 individuals (48.7%), followed by motorcycles with 99 individuals (25.8%), walking with 90 individuals (23.4%), cycling with only 2 individuals (0.5%), and other methods with 6 individuals (1.6%). Most respondents were members of the congregation in a mosque/musallah, with 373 individuals (97.1%), followed by 7 individuals (1.8%) who were mosque committee members (AJK), and an equal number of 2 individuals (0.5%) who were imams and religious speakers/teachers.

The assumption of this study is to prove that a high level of understanding and perception among the Muslim community regarding the implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) during the pandemic is based on Islamic concepts such as masyaqqah (hardship), masalah (public interest), darurat (emergency), and rukhsah (relaxation of rules).

Table 4

SOP for the implementation of worship during the pandemic era

No	Item	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	The standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued by the government in the implementation of religious practices can help prevent the spread of an epidemic.	3 (0.8)	17 (4.4)	37 (9.6)	148 (38.5)	179 (46.6)	4.26	.86	H
2	I am open-minded and accept all the latest fatwa	4 (1.0)	13 (3.4)	35 (9.1)	135 (35.2)	197 (51.3)	4.32	.85	H

	decisions regarding changes in the implementation of prayers during the pandemic era.								
3	The SOPs issued for performing prayers in mosques/surau do not reduce the inclination of the community to attend mosques/surau.	16 (4.2)	46 (12.0)	70 (18.2)	126 (32.8)	126 (32.8)	3.78	1.14	MH
4	SOPs related to the implementation of religious practices can help uphold the image of the Muslim community.	4 (1.0)	22 (5.7)	62 (16.1)	122 (31.8)	174 (45.3)	4.15	.95	H
5	I believe that mosques/surau should be the most strictly regulated in terms of SOP compared to other places.	38 (9.9)	71 (18.5)	75 (19.5)	86 (22.4)	114 (29.7)	3.43	1.34	MH
6	I believe that setting a quota for attending mosques/surau can make people appreciate the opportunity to be present in mosques/surau.	32 (8.3)	50 (13.0)	54 (14.1)	108 (28.1)	140 (36.5)	3.71	1.30	MH
7	I feel that there are more	73 (19.0)	72 (18.8)	86 (22.4)	60 (15.6)	93 (24.2)	3.07	1.44	MH

	benefits than drawbacks when Muslims are prevented from attending mosques/surau during the spread of an epidemic.								
8	I feel that the SOP provided by the government is comprehensive and suitable for the current situation of the epidemic.	7 (1.8)	31 (8.1)	74 (19.3)	144 (37.5)	128 (33.3)	3.92	1.00	MH
Average Mean Score							3.83		MH

Source: SPSS Analysis

Based on the table above, it is found that the Muslim community is open-minded and accepting of the latest fatwa decisions regarding changes in the implementation of prayer during the pandemic, as indicated by the highest mean score (mean = 4.32; SD = 0.85). However, for the item "I feel that there are more benefits than drawbacks when Muslims are prevented from attending the mosque during the outbreak," it received a lower mean score compared to other items (mean = 3.07; SD = 1.44), indicating that some Muslim individuals assume that the barriers to attending the mosque during the pandemic are not entirely justified. Nevertheless, on average, the Muslim community has a positive perception of the SOPs issued by the government for the implementation of religious practices during the pandemic (mean = 3.83).

Table 5

Concept of masyaqqah in worship

No	Item	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Masyaqqah refers to the hardship or difficulty in fulfilling the obligations that have been commanded.	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)	26 (6.8)	70 (18.2)	286 (74.5)	4.66	.63	H
2	In Islam, masyaqqah refers to the	7 (1.8)	6 (1.6)	42 (10.9)	106 (27.6)	223 (58.1)	4.39	.87	H

	difficulty, hardship, and burden in fulfilling the obligations of worship.								
3	Rukhsah (leniency) is applied when there is masyaqqah (hardship) that may lead to harm or difficulty for Muslims.	2 (0.5)	7 (1.8)	16 (4.2)	93 (24.2)	266 (69.3)	4.60	.70	H
4	The spread of an epidemic is one form of masyaqqah (hardship) that hinders Muslims from performing their worship as usual.	16 (4.2)	24 (6.3)	41 (10.7)	114 (29.7)	189 (49.2)	4.14	1.09	H
5	The fatwa issued through the SOP for the implementation of worship has taken into consideration all the factors of masyaqqah outlined by Islamic law.	4 (1.0)	13 (3.4)	49 (12.8)	126 (32.8)	192 (50.0)	4.27	.88	H
6	The use of tayammum (dry ablution) to perform the ritual washing (gusl) of a deceased person who passed away due to COVID-19 is allowed because of the masyaqqah	4 (1.0)	3 (0.8)	53 (13.8)	117 (30.5)	207 (53.9)	4.35	.82	H

(difficulty) that exists.								
	Average Mean Score						4.40	H

Source: SPSS Analysis

The table above shows each item in the construct to measure the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of masyaqqah in worship. Generally, the Muslim community has a very good understanding that masyaqqah refers to the difficulties in fulfilling the commanded obligations, as indicated by the highest minimum value (mean = 4.66; SD = 0.63). On the other hand, the lowest minimum value is for the item "the spread of the pandemic is one form of masyaqqah (hardship) that hinders Muslims from performing worship as usual" (mean = 4.14; SD = 1.09). The interpretation of the overall average score indicates that the Muslim community has a very good level of understanding of the concept of masyaqqah in the implementation of worship (mean = 4.40).

Table 6

Concept of maslahah in worship

No	Item	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Maslahah is something that is beneficial for the interests of the Muslim community in upholding the objectives of Shariah.	-	-	14 (3.6)	67 (17.4)	303 (78.9)	4.75	.51	H
2	The concept of maslahah also includes matters that can prevent and avoid harm to the Muslim community.	1 (0.3)	-	22 (5.7)	97 (25.3)	264 (68.8)	4.62	.61	H
3	Maslahah is a concept that is given primary consideration by scholars in addressing issues related to the legal aspects of worship during the spread of an epidemic.	-	-	31 (8.1)	102 (26.6)	251 (65.4)	4.57	.63	H

4	The standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued for the implementation of worship have taken into account factors that bring benefit to the Muslim community.	4 (1.0)	4 (1.0)	46 (12.0)	120 (31.3)	210 (54.7)	4.38	.81	H
5	The SOPs issued are aimed at preserving maslahah, which includes preventing the spread of the virus in mosques/surau.	1 (0.3)	7 (1.8)	40 (10.4)	117 (30.5)	219 (57.0)	4.42	.77	H
6	The use of face masks during prayer is allowed to preserve the well-being of the Muslim community from being infected by the pandemic.	7 (1.8)	12 (3.1)	35 (9.1)	114 (29.7)	216 (56.3)	4.35	.90	H
Average Mean Score							4.51		H

Source: SPSS Analysis

The table above shows each item in the construct to measure the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of maslahah in worship. Based on the minimum score values, the Muslim community has a very good understanding that maslahah refers to something beneficial for the interests of Muslims in preserving the objectives of Shariah (mean = 4.75; SD = 0.51), and there were no respondents who chose disagree for this item. On the other hand, the item with the lowest minimum value is "the use of face coverings during prayer is permissible to safeguard the welfare of Muslims from being infected by the pandemic" (mean = 4.35; SD = 0.90). This may be because this matter is a new norm for Muslims when performing prayers. On average, the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of maslahah in worship is very good (mean = 4.51).

Table 7

Concept of dharurah in worship

No	Item	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Dharurah is a dangerous or distressing situation that befalls a person, causing them to fear the occurrence of harm or adversity to themselves.	-	1 (0.3)	12 (3.1)	83 (21.6)	288 (75.0)	4.71	.53	H
2	Rejecting harm takes precedence over pursuing benefit.	-	3 (0.8)	40 (10.4)	102 (26.6)	239 (62.2)	4.50	.71	H
3	Islam provides flexibility to implement the easiest way of fulfilling religious obligations in the presence of difficulties and harm.	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)	26 (6.8)	116 (30.2)	240 (62.5)	4.54	.65	H
4	The fatwa issued regarding the SOP for the implementation of religious practices is aimed at preventing greater harm, which is the transmission of the virus.	1 (0.3)	4 (1.0)	34 (8.9)	111 (28.9)	234 (60.9)	4.49	.72	H
5	The ruling regarding the implementation of religious practices will return to its original state	-	1 (0.3)	21 (5.5)	93 (24.2)	269 (70.1)	4.64	.59	H

	once the difficulty has been alleviated.								
6	Social distancing during congregational prayers is permissible in times of emergency, such as the spread of a pandemic.	6 (1.6)	12 (3.1)	40 (10.4)	109 (28.4)	217 (56.5)	4.35	.90	H
Average Mean Score							4.54		H

Source: SPSS Analysis

The table above shows each item in the construct to measure the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of emergency in worship. The item with the highest minimum score is "emergency refers to a dangerous situation or hardship that befalls a person and causes them to fear harm to themselves" (mean = 4.71; SD = 0.53), indicating that the Muslim community strongly agrees with this definition. On the other hand, for the item "social distancing during congregational prayer is permissible in cases of emergency, such as the spread of a pandemic" received the lowest minimum score (mean = 4.35; SD = 0.90). The interpretation of the overall average score also indicates that the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of emergency in worship is high (mean = 4.54).

Table 8

Concept of rukhsah in worship

No	Item	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Rukhsah refers to the legal concession granted to individuals facing difficulties in carrying out the obligations of Islamic law.	-	-	17 (4.4)	104 (27.1)	263 (68.5)	4.64	.56	H
2	Rukhsah serves as evidence that Islam is a religion that facilitates its followers in the performance of	-	-	22 (5.7)	100 (26.0)	262 (68.2)	4.62	.59	H

	religious duties.								
3	Rukhsah is practiced when there is masyaqqah (hardship or difficulty) in fulfilling religious obligations.	-	-	18 (4.7)	95 (24.7)	271 (70.6)	4.66	.56	H
4	Rukhsah aims to alleviate the difficulties faced by Muslims so that they are able to fulfill their religious obligations.	4 (1.0)	4 (1.0)	32 (8.3)	108 (28.1)	236 (61.5)	4.48	.77	H
5	The selection of rukhsah is determined by fatwa in forming standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the implementation of worship during a pandemic.	2 (0.5)	5 (1.3)	43 (11.2)	117 (30.5)	217 (56.5)	4.41	.78	H
6	The allowance to forgo Friday congregational prayer is one form of rukhsah (dispensation) granted due to the presence of difficulties, such as the transmission of a pandemic.	12 (3.4)	26 (6.8)	50 (13.0)	101 (26.3)	194 (50.5)	4.14	1.09	H
		Average Mean Score					4.49		H

Source: SPSS Analysis

The table above shows each item in the construct to measure the level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of rukhsah (dispensation) in worship. The item that received the highest minimum score is "dispensation is practiced when there is hardship in performing the obligations of worship" (mean = 4.66; SD = 0.56). The data shows that there were no respondents who disagreed with this item. On the other hand, the item

"waiving the obligation to attend Friday prayers is a form of dispensation given the presence of hardship, such as the spread of a pandemic" received the lowest minimum score (mean = 4.14; SD = 1.09). The overall minimum score is very good (mean = 4.49), indicating that the Muslim community understands the concept of rukhsah in the implementation of worship.

Level of Understanding of Islamic Concepts in Worship Implementation

The research data also uses calculated values to determine the level of perception and understanding of the Muslim community. The determination of these levels varies depending on the section in the questionnaire instrument, depending on the number of items in each construct. These levels are divided into low, moderate, and high levels as shown in the charts below.

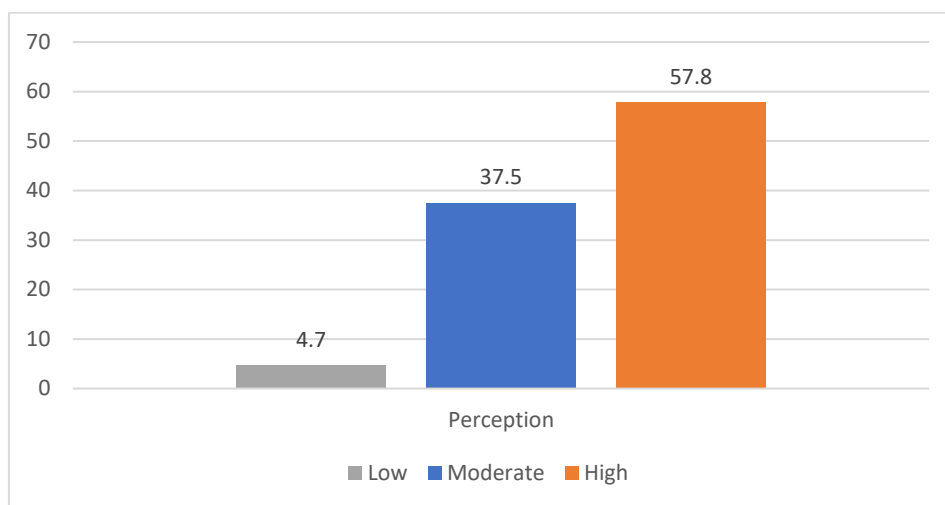


Figure 1 Perception of the Muslim community regarding worship guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: SPSS Analysis

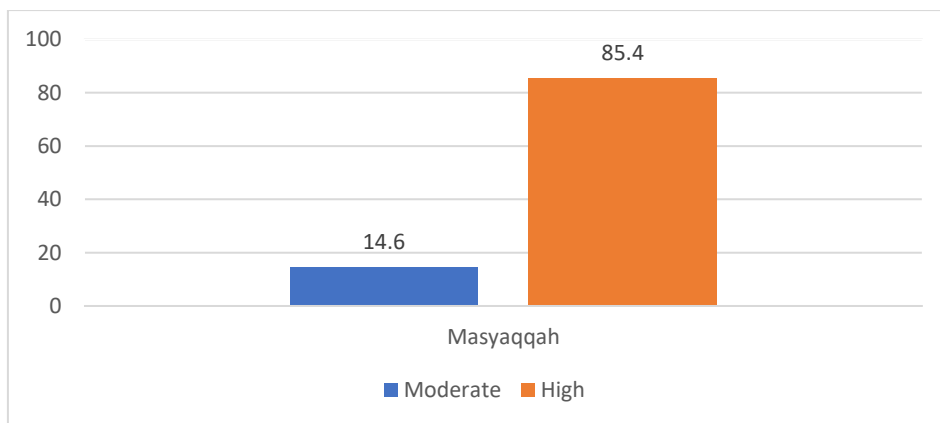


Figure 2 Level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of masyaqqah in worship

Source: SPSS Analysis

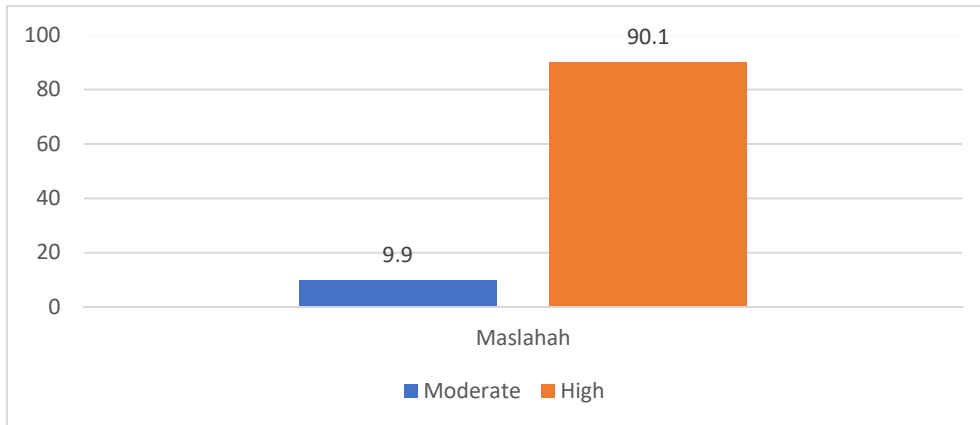


Figure 3 Level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of maslahah in worship

Source: SPSS Analysis

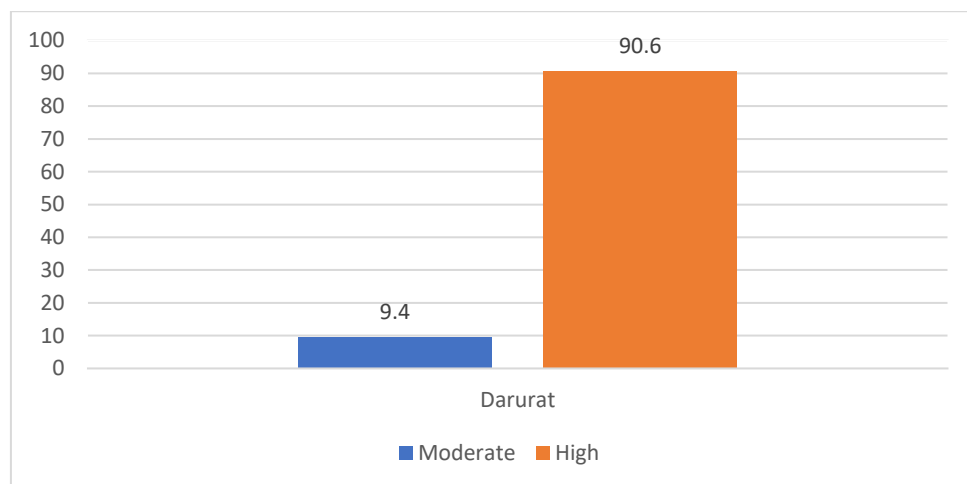


Figure 4 Level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of dharurah in worship

Source: SPSS Analysis

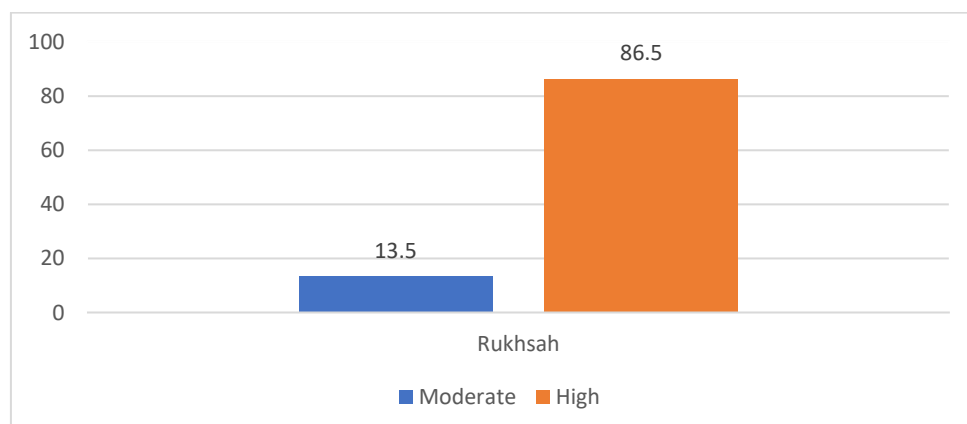


Figure 5 Level of understanding among the Muslim community regarding the concept of rukhsah in worship

Source: SPSS Analysis

Based on the above charts, the level of understanding of the Islamic concept in worship among the Muslim community is high. This indicates that the majority of Muslims are able to understand very well all the fatwa decisions and changes in the laws implemented by the mufti and the Islamic religious department. However, the chart regarding the level of perception of the Muslim community towards the SOP issued by the government shows a high percentage for the moderate level as well (37.5%). This is because the enforcement of SOPs varies depending on the area, current conditions, and management, causing some individuals to feel a bit confused. However, overall, the percentage of the level of understanding and perception of the Muslim community regarding the guidelines for worship during the COVID-19 pandemic is high, amounting to 82.08%.

Discussion

During the distribution of this questionnaire, the COVID-19 infection has been decreasing, especially as the majority of the population has received the vaccine. The government has implemented more lenient measures regarding the MCO. For example, gatherings are allowed, congregational prayers in mosques can be conducted, and people can stand closer during prayers as long as they have received the vaccine and wear face masks. Therefore, there have been various reactions from respondents regarding the PKP implemented so far.

The implementation guidelines for religious practices provided by the government have taken into account fatwa decisions and are in line with Islamic principles based on the methods of *usuliyah* and *fihiyyah*. The Islamic concepts used include *masyaqqah* (hardship), *maslahah* (benefit), *darurat* (emergency), and *rukhsah* (relief). Every change in the laws established during the COVID-19 pandemic aims to preserve the *maslahah* (benefit) of the Muslim community and prevent greater harm. This aligns with the principles of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, which emphasize the protection of five essentials: religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage. At the beginning of the PKP implementation, there were a few individuals who criticized the government regarding the closure of mosques and *surau*, criticized issued fatwas, and accused them of being a *fitnah* (trial) from *Dajjal* (Harian, 2020). However, this study proves that over time, the Malaysian people have become more aware of the importance of the restrictions and regulations issued by the authorities due to the decreasing infection rates. Table 4 shows that the Muslim community can accept the latest fatwa decisions with an open mind, and they have a positive perception of the issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

There are a few individuals who insist on adhering to the principle of sticking to the original ruling of a particular act of worship. However, the majority of others opt for the dispensation (*rukhsah*) in the implementation of worship in accordance with the prevailing circumstances and constraints. Looking at Table 8, item 6 received the lowest score, indicating that "omission to perform Friday prayers is considered a form of dispensation due to the existence of harm, namely the spread of the epidemic." Nevertheless, during this pandemic, the determination of adhering to the original ruling or granting dispensation in religious practices is based on the extent of benefit (*maslahah*) and harm (*mafsadah*) to individuals, and it is also in accordance with the decisions of the government and regional muftis in determining the legal implementation. Dr. Zulkifli al-Bakri also believes that the question of prioritization depends on the situation and circumstances of the individual (Federal Territory Mufti's Office, 2019). Thus, once agreed upon by the muftis and scholars, the implementation

of Friday prayers, Tarawih prayers, and Eid prayers at home represent a change in the implementation of the ruling from adherence to dispensation.

When the situation improves and the infection rate decreases, the government must ensure that Muslims return to performing prayers according to the original ruling, as the necessity of refraining from prohibited matters has been fulfilled based on the current conditions. This is based on the legal principle in fiqh "ما جاز لعذر بطل بزواله" which means what is permissible due to necessity becomes null when the necessity ceases. This implies that the obligation to leave what is obligatory is contingent on the circumstances and not absolute. According to this principle, the use of dispensation in religious law must be commensurate with the degree of harm experienced by the individual. Additionally, the actions taken must remain within the defined scope or limits (Abdul Karim, 2020).

In the Special Discussion of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs (MKI), the issue of standard operating procedures (SOP) regarding mosque and surau activities, as well as the proposal to close the gaps between rows during congregational prayers following the announcement of the Prime Minister regarding the transition phase and relaxation of SOP under the National Recovery Plan (PPN), were discussed. Saudi Arabia also announced that congregational prayers with full capacity were allowed at Masjid al-Haram in Mecca and Masjid al-Nabawi in Medina (Harian, 2021). In early 2022, the government began to relax the SOP to allow for closer alignment of rows, but many people still had confusion about its implementation. Most mosque-goers only brought their prayer mats closer together and did not observe the proper spacing between rows as stated in the hadith of the Prophet: "From Ibn Umar, the Prophet SAW said, 'Align your rows, draw them close together, and make your shoulders level.'" (Narrated by Abu Daud and An-Nasai). Therefore, the government and mosque authorities must continuously remind congregants to perform prayers correctly.

Conclusion

Overall, the Muslim community has a very good understanding of the Islamic concepts in prayer, such as masyaqqah, maslahah, dharurah, and rukhsah in the implementation of prayer, especially in terms of definitions. However, in terms of application, there are still some Muslims who have a lack of understanding and disagreement with the SOPs set by the government and the implementation of laws issued by the mufti during the pandemic, even though these measures are aimed at upholding the objectives of Shariah, such as the use of face coverings during prayer, social distancing during congregational prayer, and the exemption for Friday prayer. Therefore, the muftis and experts in the field of religion play a crucial role in providing clear explanations to the community so that they can perform their prayers with confidence and avoid conflicts among Muslims.

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