



Understanding the Role of Religion in Helping Muslim Women in Managing Family Crisis During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 has had a huge effect on the psychological, social and the mental health of the Muslim women. Their responsibility has tripled from working, to adopting the role of the teacher and care giving and domestic chores. The family in Islam is the basic institution of the society where the woman is at the center stage. The Muslim woman has a prominent status that is in line with her physical, psychological and mental creation of Allah, these traits gives her the capacity to take on the formation and the management of the family affairs. Women as wives and mothers have faced with challenging responsibilities and need the social and spiritual nourishment to sustain their mental health and to give support, care and guidance to their loved ones. This social and spiritual support is provided by the religion of Islam, which teaches the total submission to the will of Allah, who is the creator, controller and the sustainer of the whole universe. The purpose of this article is to understand how the religion of Islam helped the Muslim women in managing the family crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. What support and contribution has religion provided to the Muslim women to achieve their objectives and to carry out their role as leaders? It is hoped that this study will make Muslim women to learn their religion well and to nurture their children with the abilities and give them an intellectual awareness to tackle the challenges and the obstacles that surround them. The mother has the duty to inculcate good values and principles in their children in order to lead a safe future life.



Keywords: COVID-19, Muslim Women, Mother, Psychological, Mental, Social

Introduction

The world had come together to tackle the multidimensional effect of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that began in Wuhan. Zhang and Ma (2020) state that the virus that caused major health pandemic in the global was first reported in in this city in China in December 2019 and spread to the rest of the world within weeks. According to World Health Organization (WHO) coronavirus dashboard there have been 759,408,703 confirmed cases including 6,866,434 deaths of the virus and a total of 13,229,471,213 vaccine doses that have been given as of 7 March 2023. The virus was confirmed to have reached Kenya on the 12TH March 2020 and as at 7th March 2023 there have been 342,932 confirmed cases with 5,688 deaths reported. As of 18th February, 2023 a total of 23,359,310 vaccine doses have been administered this is according to the Kenya World Health Organization (WHO) Coronavirus dashboard.

The pandemic has affected the social, religious and economic lives of all in one way or the other; it affected the lives of the people in discriminatively in every dimensions. Women are among the severely affected ones in the society due to their roles in the family either as mothers, wives, daughters, aunts or even grandmothers. Women were more exposed to this pandemic due to their roles inside and outside the house. This was because women worked at home as primary caregivers, taking care of the children, sick and the elderly while again working outside the house giving informal labor. Therefore, these women are likely to suffer from physical and mental tiredness.

The family in Islam functions as an institution that encourages tranquility and mercy between the husband and the wife. It also creates an environment where children are educated and nurtured according to the Islamic values and principles that are stipulated in the Islamic laws. The mother has a remarkable place in the family setup not only as the caregiver but also ensuring the family needs are meet. Women have the dual role of providing for the family depending on the socio-economic and cultural situations. In the fast changing times where modern Muslim women are struggling between keeping their career and taking care of their household responsibilities (Ibrahim & Halkano 2022) state that Muslim women understand their position in the family setting such that even those professional women acknowledge and prioritize their family and children over their careers.

The religion has been giving the Muslim women the energy and the zeal to perform their responsibilities both outside and inside the house. The



Quran advises the Muslims to have patience during calamities and pray to Allah to ease the calamity and also to be grateful and thankful to Allah in the good times. Muslim women can play an important role in enhancing the welfare of the family by increasing the family income and act as a breadwinner to back up the income of the father, (Jailani, 2022). He further states that the productivity rate of the women increases by 175% having more homemakers going out to work in order to support the family needs.

Literature Review

In view of Islam, the wife's task is to accompany and serve her husband and takes the role of a nurturer, caregiver, educator and friend to the children according to Quran (4:34). The mother's role in Islam is highly regarded and is called "school of Nation". Umm which is an Arabic word-meaning mother is a root word of Ummah, which means the Muslim community. Thus, the Muslim woman is the mother of the Muslim communities and Allah has bestowed upon the Muslim mother the responsibility of care giving, guiding, nurturing, safeguarding and teaching the next generation of the Muslim Ummah, (Rahman, 2015). Thus, the prophet said in his Hadith "woman is the care-taker of all the members of her husband's family and his children. And for this she will be questioned on the Day of Judgment", (Bukhari, 2009).

When a Muslim woman is carrying out her role as a mother, she understands that this is a responsibility from her creator and she will be rewarded. "And help you in doing virtue and piety and do not help in sinning and transgression", (Quran 5:2).

The Socio-Economic and Religious Impact of COVID-19 on the Muslim Women

When the virus spread to the whole world and different countries adopted different measures to stop the further spreading of the disease, among them was wearing of masks, social distancing and washing hands. The Muslim women were able to easily get used to the wearing of the mask because of the nature of their dressing in *hijab* (a head covering of the Muslim women) and *niqab* (is a face covering for Muslim women except the eyes), which substituted the wearing of the facemask in public places.

The face veil was used instead of the face mask which was considered to be the best form of protection as it allows people to do their daily activities while keeping a relatively safe, (Khamis, 2022). These are Muslim women dress codes that were associated with Islamic fundamentalism and were banned in some parts of Europe and Africa especially the face veil. It eventually gained currency and dominance in the wake of COVID-19 because it was in high



demand even for those Muslim women who never used to wear it before were using it as a facemask.

It is compulsory for all adult Muslim women to pray five times in a day and there are other forms of prayers in between and whenever they are getting ready for the prayer they need ensure the cleanliness of their body, clothing and the place of prayer, (Katz, 2013). In addition, they are required to take ablution, which entails washing of some parts of the body that is the hands, face and the feet in order to get ready for the prayer. This to some extent has made it easy for the Muslim women to protect themselves and others from the disease by washing themselves the right way.

The physical interactions and visits were limited or were never there at times and this created a great impact in the social cohesion. People were given strict measures of not attending any gathering, any interactions and literary staying at home, this has affected the solidarity and the connection of the family members and the society at large, (Dayrit and Mendoza, 2020). The social distancing was a major issue that alienated the Muslim women from gatherings in the Mosque, Quranic recitations, marriage ceremonies, school activities, outreaches and cultural programs, (Thomas and Barbato, 2020). The mental health problems experienced by women during the Covid 19 pandemic are reported by a number of researchers from various countries. Venugopal, Mohan, Chennabasappa (2020) found that the female population in India had a higher popularity of mental disorders than their male counterpart. Furthermore, reported that women in China who worked as medical workers, such as nurses, doctors, and officers who were at the forefront of caring for patients experienced very critical signs of mental instability (Lai et al. 2020). They were experiencing higher level of anxiety, stress, depression and insomnia. In Argentina women were feeling psychological fatigue and discomfort during the period quarantine and the total lockdown, (Steinmetz et al. 2020).

The school closure has brought an added responsibility on the mothers who are supposed to take the role of the teacher, educator, care giver and adviser to the children. Although it has given the parents an opportunity to bond with their children but too much time together with them can lead to mental stress as result of bricking or fighting among family members, (Evan et al., 2020). They are required to handle the psychological trauma of the children, explaining to them of the situation and ways of protecting themselves and others around them when they are at home and outside. In addition to the household chore mothers have the responsibility of helping the children in their online classes and homework.

The Muslim women have felt the economic brunt of COVID-19 more severely than the male counterparts due to them making up a large number of workers in the most affected economic sectors such as hospitality,



international travel and non-essential retail stores. The married and working women, during the Covid-19 pandemic, play multiple roles in both inside the house and in the public domains. These tasks put them at a greater risk of having psychological and mental fatigue. The number of women that are in education sector are twice that of the men, so even when there was no physical going they were required to finish their work at home while taking care of the household chores and the children, (Eva et al., 2021). In the health sector women take up to 70% of the workforce exposing them to greater risk of infection, as they are at the forefront in handling the COVID-19 patients thus increase their physical and mental fatigue. Women do far more care work than men- up to ten times, with closure of schools, day care centers, home quarantines, elderly care women will feel the pinch more than the men, (OECD, 2020).

The impact of the pandemic on women is not only on the number of deaths, but also on other dimensions, especially the psychological dimension. The psychological condition of women is affected by the social and economic conditions that are less beneficial for them. The World Economic Forum stated that although the number of deaths for men is higher than for women in the cases of Covid 19, the social and economic vulnerability of women is higher than men (The World Economic Forum, 2020). This is because women's jobs, businesses, income, health insurance and living standards may be more exposed than that of the men hence the economic insecurity.

Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day and for men they must offer these prayers in congregation in the mosque with other Muslims. There is also the Friday rituals and prayer that is mandatory to be prayed in the mosque, which was not possible due to the closure of the mosques, (Thomas and Barbato, 2020). Muslims were forced to pray at home with their family members, where the father calls the *adhan* (call to prayer) and ask another male member of the family to call the *iqama* (second call to prayer) before leading the prayer.

In Kenya, the effects of the pandemic were coupled with a prolonged drought crises that affected all sectors of economy. The poverty line before the coming of the pandemic was going at 44% and just two months into lockdown this number almost doubled reaching 83%, this is according to a report of Hand in Hand on the poverty level in Kenya during the pandemic, (Barasa et al, 2022). Women and girls have experienced the socio-economic burden of both the coronavirus pandemic and the climate change that has been witnessed for a long time in the country. The northern parts of the country sore the brunt of the harsh climatic conditions and high level of poverty where in the rural place parents have resorted to marrying off their young daughters in exchange for cattle for their livelihood, (Mwabe, 2021). On the other hand, the closure of schools due to the total lockdown resulted



in early pregnancies, child marriages, sexual and gender-based violence especially from close family members, (Ibrahim & Wario, 2022).

Women at the Core of Managing the Pandemic

In the Islamic perspective, during pandemics Muslims were advised to value their lives and use all means possible to protect themselves and others from the disease. The prophet taught the Muslim on how to handle such diseases and talked about quarantine and lock down, (Andreas, Adinugraha & Surur, 2022) where Muslims were not allowed to leave or enter the affected areas. The coronavirus resembles the plague (Da'un), which at one time happened during the prophet's time and the Muslims were advised not to leave or enter the affected area; there was no shaking of hands and hugging.

Women played a great role in coordinating and sensitizing the community on COVID-19 government policies through community initiatives. The civil society empowered women as agents for creating awareness and implementing public policies on fight against COVID-19, (Andreas, Adinugraha & Surur, 2022). Women were additional breadwinners at family to supplement the income of the father or as a sole breadwinner in case the father was unable to do any work due to death, layoff work, illness or retired, (Jailani, 2022). Women played an important role in the family economy by supporting the family income and managing the household budget. Women were the main decision makers and cut on the expenses in order to get only what is needed and necessary. Mothers who are working were in a better position to understand the family finances since they worked both outside and inside the house.

In the Muslim family setting, the responsibility of taking care of the expenses of the family members is upon to the father even when the mother is working and earning. Hence the savings and the investments made by the mothers have immensely helped to tackle the economic crises within the family, (Muhammad & Musarat, 2020). The covid-19 control measures were mostly anti-social therefore mothers were given psychological and emotional security to the family members. The mother's unconditional love, care and mercy enabled the easy adaptation of the family members to the harsh measures of lockdown or stay at home policy, (Andreas, Adinugraha & Surur, 2022). Even though women are the most affected by this pandemic, they have brought about economic resilience in the family especially the working mothers who struggling to balance between their domestic and public roles, (Ibrahim & Wario, 2022). Mothers worry about neglecting their responsibilities of taking care of the family in the process of working outside the home.



Methodology

This was qualitative research that aimed at describing a phenomenon, which is COVID-19 that had a huge impact in the different dimensions of the human life in the globe. The pandemic affected men and women in different measures although women are among the hard hit in the society. The study utilized both the primary and the secondary sources; the later was obtained from scientific published journals, previous studies, government and World health organization dashboards reports on coronavirus.

The primary sources were retrieved from the data collected from the field; this information was collected by the use of open-ended questionnaires and key informant interviews. These data were used to describe the socio-economic and religious effects of the pandemic on the Muslim women and how they have used their strategic positions and responsibilities in the family to manage the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The open-ended questionnaires were administered to the Muslim women who were working outside the home. The researcher presented some of the questionnaires personally to the participants and collected them later while others were sent through email and received through email. These data were used to give a vivid description of the psychological, mental and the economic impact of COVID-19 on Muslim women in Kenya. It was also used to explain how the Islamic religion has helped the Muslim women in their different capacities and roles in mitigating the challenges of the pandemic in the family setting.

The Key Informant interviews were given to the Muslim scholars both men and women to ascertain the position of the Muslim women in the family setting, to also understand the role of religion in helping Muslim women handle the family crises.

The study was conducted in Nairobi County the city of Kenya; this is because it represents the women populations working Muslim women in all sectors of the economy and also the hardest hit County by the pandemic. The target populations are the Working Muslim women in all sectors of the economy and also in business sector, Imams, Muslim scholars of both genders who are based in Nairobi County.

Findings

The findings are discussed in terms of the psychological, mental and the economic crisis of COVID-19 pandemic on the Muslim women and how the religion has helped them to handle the situation. It also explains the position of Muslim mothers in the family setting and their role in mitigating the impact of the pandemic despite the fact that they are the most affected population in the globe.



Psychological, Mental and Economic Impact of the Pandemic and Muslim Women at the Forefront in Mitigating the Situation

The Muslim women had a critical role in and outside the house. They were doing most of the unpaid domestic work at home, which was coupled with the constant monitoring and guidance to the school going children who are now home schooling. The position of the mothers in the family setting has given them the required energy and zeal to carry out their daily responsibilities. The Muslim mothers are the first teacher of their children and it is their responsibility to take care, nurture and protect all their loved ones. The mothers feel proud of doing their work and therefore they expect reward from Allah for fulfilling his commands. These was confirmed by respondents

“My name is Aaliyah, I am a home maker, I stay at home, I do not work outside my house but I enjoy doing my responsibilities of taking care of my husband and the children. I feel so proud of doing my job and I will not feel I a lot of guilt if don't do. With the coming of COVID-19 my work has tripled and I sometimes feel very tired and overwhelmed, but I pushed through by the grace of Allah. I sometimes wake up just to pray to him to give me strength and stamina in order to overcome my physical and mental fatigue.”

“My name is Hafsa, I do not work I just stay at home. Because my responsibility at home is too much and I do not have time to do any work outside my home. COVID- 19 increased my task and I had to juggle between household chores, helping the children with their homework and giving special care to the sick (those who contacted the virus). My responsibility at home is more important and I feel good when I do them although I feel so tired sometimes praying to Allah feels like a total relief, and because Allah is pleased with me and will give me the strength and the required energy to deal with any situation at home.”

“My name is Fatuma and I am a teacher, I felt so much pressure during the COVID-19 period because I had a lot of work to do at home. I was required to finish my work at home at the same time help my home schooling children with their school work and also do the household chores. It was really a very stressful work and I always turned to Allah for help. It is really not an easy task, it require a lot of prayers, sacrifice and hard work and I was glad Allah was by my side anytime I needed him, whenever I felt burnt out I call upon Allah to give me the strength and the patience to move forward.”



There was a unique experience noted especially among the working Muslim mothers who felt that the measures that were put forward due to the pandemic resulted in some form of gender stereotypes. This is in terms of the household chores that women have always been fighting and wanted to bring equal responsibilities in the house. Some women felt that they are stuck in a situation that they had always been fighting against that is staying at home and doing the unpaid task of cleaning and cooking. This has psychologically affected some of them, as most of the husbands were not helpful and supportive although they were also at home and the mother was left with no option but to do everything at home while also attending to her office task. The lock down and the staying at home measures have resulted in domestic and sexual based violence especially from marriage partners. Husbands have become crankier and more dominative over their spouses, which lead to frequent quarrels and arguments even when the children are present. Working outside the house was a safe haven for Muslim women who could find their peace of mind and an environment where they are among people that empower them and appreciate their efforts and hardwork.

“ My name is Zeinab I am a human resource manager. I have experienced the worst physical fatigue at home doing both the household chores and my outside work from home. My husband does not want to help me in cleaning the dishes, cooking and or even doing the laundry. I always thought that being a professional woman will give the power to negotiate domestic responsibilities and empower me to a level that I have always dreamt of, but not any more I am back home doing what a home staying wife will do. I am really struggling to come to terms with these measures of staying at home and the lockdowns of working from home that is exposing me to more psychological and mental stress.”

“ My name is Filsan, I am a business woman, and every time I come home and find my husband at home, he always finds a reason to start a fight, if not this it is the other which will culminate to a heated argument that will earn me a physical assault.”

“ My husband gets irritated so easily, because he is under a lot of stress, he lost his job, his mother and sister-in law to the pandemic and all he does is vent out his frustration on me. He beats me up and when I state that am no ready for him at night, he forces himself on me and this has been going on for sometime now and there is nothing I can do.”



Muslim women were among the most affected population economically by the pandemic. There are those who lost their jobs completely, others became the sole breadwinners in the family while others had to use their little savings to supplement the income of the father in order to meet the needs of the family members. The Muslim women were able to do a rational budget at home so as to curb excessive and in appropriate expenses at home. Muslim women were making decisions in terms of expenditure at home because they understand the outside and the inside work better than their men counterparts, hence helping in reduced expenses at home.

“ My name is Nasra, I am a teacher, and unfortunately I lost my husband to COVID-19 and Alhamdulillah it is Allah that wills and we have to be contented and put a lot patience during calamities. The responsibility of taking care of the needs of my family falls on me. My eldest daughter was very helpful as she was helping me with taking care of the needs of the children and the household chores.”

“My name is Husseina, I am an accountant, I was helping my husband with the needs of the family since his income was no longer enough. I had to cut the household budget and we were only putting more effort on the basic needs of the family especially when my first-born son fell sick (COVID-19 positive). We could not manage him at home so he was in ICU for a week and Alhamdulillah all feeling well all over again.”

“My name is Halima I am a business woman dealing with clothes and hand bags and with the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic, our business has gone down very badly. My husband is a taxi driver and we had to struggle to put ends together because the income and the household expenses were not adding up together and I had to cut on the expenses and only focus on what we needed.”

The religion of Islam has given the women the courage and the determination to live a positive life despite the challenges that were put forward by the pandemic. In the Quran Allah says “ Be patient and steadfast: God does not let the rewards of those who do good go to waste.” Q (11:115). In the Muslim life there are experiences of happiness, excitement, uncertainty, fear and sadness and only those who turn to Allah for help will attain stability, patience and peace. Patience is the one of the greatest forms of worship and makes a Muslim to live having a complete trust and faith in Allah by accepting his will. Allah says “. Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in good and lives and the fruits of your toil. But give glad



tidings to those who patiently persevere. Those who say when afflicted with calamities "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return." They are those on whom descend blessings from their Lord and mercy. They are the ones who receive guidance." Q (2:155-157).

"My name Imam shukri, I am the Imam of Masjid Alkhualfaa, Ushirika, Nairobi. The Muslim women are supposed to observe patience at all times because everything happen with the will of Allah who is the controller and the sustainer of the universe. The position of mothers in the family setting is such a way that she is the pillar that holds other members of the family together. She has been given the responsibility of taking care of her family members, to show love and compassionate, to guide and to protect to nurture and to preserve the dignity and respect of the family hence she is in a better placed to help her loved ones to cope with the challenges of the pandemic."

"My name is ustadh Adam, I am the Imam of masjid Jamia. All Muslims are required to be grateful for the blessings that Allah has given them and observe patience during calamities therefore the Muslim women were patient, contented and accepted whatever Allah has willed and all the only thing they could do was to pray to Allah to give them the patience and the strength to deal with the pandemic. Although they were also affected in one way or the other, Allah has positioned them in order to understand and manage the family crises caused by the pandemic."

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Islamic faith has played a vital role in giving hope, trust and positive energy to the Muslim women during and after the pandemic. Allah has ordered the Muslim to observe patience during turbulence and be grateful to the blessing that he bestowed upon them and therefore the pandemic was a test from Allah. The Muslim women showed an exemplary resilience and helped the family members cope with the challenges that was posed by the pandemic. Through their constant prayer and patience, they helped their loved ones to go through the psychological, mental, social and the economic impacts of COVID-19.

The position of the Muslim mothers in a family set up is critical, Allah has given them the responsibility of safeguarding, nurturing, guiding, caregiving and teaching the next generation of the Muslim society. Although they have suffered psychologically, mentally and financially due to the pandemic, they were able to remain resilient and manage the family crisis. They made the home a dwelling place for the members of her family and



devised a way of entertaining, engaging and educating the children in order to divert their attention from their surrounding, which was characterized by panic, fear and uncertainty.

The Muslim women felt that they were doing their responsibility as commanded by Allah thus awaiting reward and abundant blessing from their creator. This has given them the required energy and zeal to tackle their daily challenges of working inside and outside the house, even when their role tripled due to the pandemic. They felt that they were doing their role and always turned to Allah for guidance, patience and strength, without any faith and trust in Allah these mothers could not have been effective in their roles.

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