

COVID-19: How Does Religion Interact with Pandemic?

Ahmed M. Abbas^{*1,2}, Ebrahim Yousof^{2,3}, Shima Selim^{2,3}, Safaa Ahmed^{2,3}, Yasmin Ismail^{2,3}

¹Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, Faculty of Medicine, Assiut University, Egypt.

²COvid-19 Research of Assiut UNiversity Association (CORAUNA) group.

³House-officer, Faculty of Medicine, Assiut University, Egypt.

***Corresponding Author:** *Dr. Ahmed M. Abbas, MD, Professor at Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Assiut University, Egypt, Women Health Hospital, 71511, Assiut Egypt.*

Introduction

At the end of 2019, Corona's outbreak appeared in Wuhan in China then rapidly the World Health Organization (WHO) stated Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a pandemic infection. This infection can transmit by aerosol, direct contact, fomite, oral or a vector. So, as a matter of course, we expect mass gathering will over spread this infection as large numbers of people attending in close contact in certain location for extending time like Hajj, major sporting or other religious and culture events.¹

In situation of Hajj, an estimated two million pilgrims attend from 184 countries, present in crowded condition & performed religious rites in close contact and exposing themselves. An increase prevalence of infectious disease has been described also other than the Hajj as the annual celebration of day of Ashura in Karbala in Iraq which involved about 2-3 million of Muslim from and outside Iraq.

Evidence of outbreaks is not limited to Muslims gathering, they also occur at Christian ones. Also respiratory tract infection outbreak was recorded during world youth day 2008 in Australia. So we should take precautions about these meetings and avoid spreading of infection.

Rule of Clerics

There is global increasing desire to face and deal with COVID's pandemic not to escape from it; starting from financial load that forces people to let down quarantine

measures, till religious rituals that have been stopped since COVID's pandemic started (like pilgrimage, Umrah or Ramadan activities). So world should find how to achieve safe life with COVID-19.

Religion has a majestic effect on COVID-19 spread; appears clearly in area like Iran that ignores medical safety advices and allow religious ceremony that leads to horrible increase in infected citizens, also "CASE 31" in South Korea is a good evidence; So religious rule shouldn't be limited to teachings of prophylactic sanitation (Ablution 5 times a day, hand washing before eating, etc.) then relating them to holiness, but also they should take part in preparing and organizing the whole society to collaborate against this crisis. Religious charity have the largest distribution among all social levels that form a huge network that can be used to increase awareness about disease and how to reduce risk of infection during daily life outside. Religious rule should also share in establishing a peaceful psychological environment and cooperation values for facing destroying global panic that affect basic needs especially food security.² So we will take two examples to realize religious rule without exaggeration or underestimation.

Iran

Iran -at one time- had the world's third worst COVID-19 outbreak after China and Italy. This occurs at a critical moments, they didn't take crucial decisions or any protective procedures. On 26th of March, Iran's government made crucial decisions

COVID-19: How Does Religion Interact with Pandemic?

by imposing curfew, closing schools and universities, limiting movement between provinces, encouraging citizens to stay at home, some mosques became factories for facemask and other protective tools, also field hospitals were set up in parking lots, stadiums and wedding halls to handle the overflow of patients.³

Saudi Arabia

KSA consider one of the biggest and important Islamic countries in the world as KSA host most special and important Islamic ceremonies whole the year (Hajj and Umrah). These two Islamic rituals are obligatory for all adult Muslims worldwide and consider one of the largest people gathering in the world. Saudi Arabia was one of the 1st countries which take extra specific precautionary measures to prevent spreading of COVID-19 to the country. On February 6th, KSA government takes 1st decision stopping all direct flights between KSA and China. On February 27th, KSA government suspended entry of all international Umrah pilgrims and tourists and started to monitor all entry points to Makkah and Madinah.

Despite these restrictive measures, on March 2nd, KSA reported its first COVID-19 confirmed case in a traveler returning from Iran through Bahrain without declaring travel history to Iran. But Saudi Arabia continues its efforts to minimize catastrophic expected effects of COVID-19 and to obstruct the spread of this pandemic. On March 4th KSA government suspended completely Umrah. On March 8th the government shifted schools and universities to remote learning and virtual classrooms instead of in person-classes. Subsequently, all international and domestic air travels, sports events, workplaces (except security and health sectors) were suspended.

Also the five daily prayers in all hundreds of thousands of mosques across the country were banned and all Muslims in Saudi Arabia were asked by religious authorities to pray at homes for the very first time in the history of the Kingdom. It is remarkable that all of these restrictive measures were taken while the number of confirmed cases in KSA was still less than 300 in a country.⁴

There are other ceremonies in each religion worldwide which time is came or will come soon as Tarawih prayers of Ramadan in Muslims countries, Easter in Egypt, Karbala Day in Iran, festival of Anokyere in Ghana, Diwali in India, Obon in Japan and La Posada in Mexico there are other many examples for these ceremonies which gather a lot of people from different places and countries in the same place. During this pandemic, all these ceremonies could make people liable to get infection of COVID-19, help in spread of infection and could help in exportation of infection to other countries. We think that no religion in the world said that religious ceremonies are more important than human safety.

References

- [1] Gautret P, Steffen R. Communicable diseases as health risks at mass gatherings other than Hajj: what is the evidence? *Int J Infect Dis.* 2016;47:46-52.
- [2] Gautret P, Al-Tawfiq JA, Hoang VT. Covid 19: will the 2020 Hajj pilgrimage and tokyo olympic games be cancelled? *Trav Med Infect Dis.* 2020:101622.
- [3] Raoofi A, Takian A, Akbari Sari A, Olyaeemanesh A, Haghghi H, Aarabi M. COVID-19 Pandemic and Comparative Health Policy Learning in Iran. *Arch Iran Med.* 2020;23(4):220-234.
- [4] Algaissi A, Alharbi N, Hassanain M, Hashem A. Preparedness and Response to COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia: Lessons Learned from MERS-CoV. *Preprints.* 2020, 2020040018

Citation: Ahmed M.Abbas et.al, (2020), "COVID-19: How Does Religion Interact with Pandemic?", *Arch Health Sci*; 4(1): 1-2.

DOI: 10.31829/2641-7456/ahs2020-4(1)-132

Copyright: © 2020 Ahmed M.Abbas et.al, This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.