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10 THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF WOMEN IN IRAN AND THEIR APPROACH TO THE VACCINE

Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis is a multi-dimensional phenomenon whose effects and consequences can be investigated in various economic, social and cultural fields. The effect of this virus on women and their cultural and religious beliefs and actions is also one of the topics of sociology of religion and sociology of disasters.

The current research has investigated the influence of COVID-19 on the religious beliefs and practices of women in Iran and their approach to the vaccine. This research is a descriptive-analytical qualitative one. The data were collected using in-depth interviews with Iranian women aged 25-60 and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that the Corona crisis is of high importance; the experience of anxiety and death, the feeling of sadness, religious feelings, religious upbringing, and religious rationality have led to the deepening of religious beliefs and the change of religious behavior in Iranian women. The power of religious feelings has played a prominent role in women's adaptation to the crisis. Regarding the attitude toward the COVID-19 vaccine, one can say that Iranian women had doubts and worries about the unknown consequences of receiving the vaccine. Some considered it ineffective and others preferred traditional medicine as more effective. However, others consider the vaccine the only way to deal with the virus and believe that modern science is more accurate and effective.

Keywords: Women in Iran, Corona, disaster, religious beliefs, vaccine

Introduction

The spread of the corona virus is one of the most important crises of the last century in the world due to the speed of its spread and uncontrollability. Although this crisis is only medical in nature and related to the health

system, it is a multidimensional phenomenon the effects and consequences of which can be investigated in various economic, social and cultural fields. In the economic dimension, the severe recession resulting from the suspension of many economic activities and businesses, in the social and cultural dimension, the isolation resulting from the reduction of social relations, face-to-face meetings, due to home quarantine and the suspension of many religious and social rituals, change in people's lifestyle and cultural consumption are among the changes and consequences that have occurred due to the spread of Corona in the world. In other words, it should be accepted that COVID-19 is not a virus that only infects the body, but beyond the medical issue, it has penetrated all the borders of human life and spread to all the systems and institutions of the societies. On the other hand, it is possible that with the introduction of the vaccine, its medical side is considered to be over, but its effects on social life will not disappear at once. Religion and religiosity is one of the important fields that has been significantly affected by the corona virus. The spread of the corona disease has affected the field of religion in many ways. When crises such as disease and famine or natural disasters occur, the society is pushed towards a new understanding of the world; this disease has greatly aggravated the fear of the death of oneself and loved ones and the anxiety caused by it for humans. Therefore, it can be said that it has created serious questions in the philosophical field. Have so many people suddenly thought about death and the end of their own and others' lives, and has our interaction with people and things ever changed so suddenly? All these issues lead people to reflect and rethink their worldviews and question the hypotheses and ways of life before the global disease.

What made this issue prominent in Iran was, firstly, the beginning of this disease "from the city of Qom" as a symbol of religious life in Iran and the reaction and intervention of a number of religious leaders from Qom to Mashhad in the initial weeks of the virus outbreak, and secondly, there was the suspension of religious and pilgrimage centers and the suspension of religious rituals and the reaction of Iran's religious community to these events. Corona in Iran affected religious rituals and closed or changed them. Different religious interpretations of this disease were presented and created challenges in the society. Places of worship were closed for a long time. In order not to distance people from religion, scholars suggested alternative worships. The media played a greater role in holding

religious ceremonies. Also, virtual processions in religious places provided social and health services to the people and helping those in need also increased at this time compared to the past. General it can be said that new conditions came up in religious rituals which were at the lowest possible level before corona. The corona virus as a disease not only affected religious actions and rituals and caused the closure of religious rituals and temples and shrines, but also brought up new theological interpretations and this created challenges for religious scholars and social policy makers in Iran. Is Corona a sign of God's anger against human sin? Is Corona a collective test from God for humans? Is this compatible with divine mercy and cosmic order? Women's exposure to COVID-19 disease and its mental and social effects were also among the new issues that attracted the attention of the authors of the article; because according to the health guidelines during the outbreak of the corona virus, social distance and home quarantine, it has been acknowledged that the burden of women's caring role has also quadrupled during quarantine. (LABEODAN & OLUFEMI, 2021:15) In this research, we are looking for an answer to this question: What effects has the Corona phenomenon had on the religious values, beliefs and behaviors of women in Iranian society? How did Iranian women face this crisis and what challenges did they face and what religious solutions did they have for it? How did they receive the vaccine? And how willing were they to follow health orders to reduce risk and maintain health? In fact, we want to deal with women's understanding of Corona and religion and see, as Corona changed women's lifestyles, if it affected their religious understanding as well. And what are the consequences of these changes in women's religiosity for Iranian society?

An Overview of the Research Background

With the spread of the corona virus in different parts of the world, studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of the corona virus on the economy, politics, culture and religion in various countries, and here we will review some of them.

The Pew Research Center (2021) has investigated the religiosity of the people of 14 countries during the outbreak of Corona and their family relationships.

This analysis focuses on views of religious faith and family relationships around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. It builds on research released in the fall of 2020 about responses in 14 countries to the coronavirus outbreak and U.S. public perceptions of how the pandemic has affected religious beliefs and family situations.

The results of this study show that Americans, more than people in other countries, say that COVID-19 has strengthened their religious faith and made their family ties stronger. (SAHGAL & CONNAUGHTON, 2021:2-3).

Another article titled the role of religion during the crisis of the corona outbreak was done by M.T. JOSEPH (2021).

This article is an attempt to document the intersectionality of religion with COVID-19. Religion in a general sense is a reservoir of resources to which believers turn, especially in times of crisis. Religion offers explanations as to what is happening and also proposes means of mitigation. This article aims to look for highlights of these two responses from religion in different areas of the world, with a particular focus on India. (JOSEPH, 2021:1-2)

The socio-cultural and religious impact of the spread of Corona in Nigeria (2021) is the title of a research conducted by Nkechi G. ONAH. This research seeks to investigate the impact of the spread of Corona on social-cultural and religious life in Nigeria.

The article draws data from official documents, interviews, and other relevant materials. Using a descriptive narrative approach, the paper reveals that the family life of Nigerians is disrupted, poverty is exacerbated and gender-based violence is aggravated. The religious life of the people is also affected. The communal religious experience and participation which the people see as essential in their daily lives are also interrupted.

The situation leaves the people in a state of despair. Nkechi G. ONAH says:

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted religion in Nigeria. Places of worship are shut down while religious activities that will bring people together such as conventions and congregational meetings have been cancelled. Worship is done live on social media, radio and through online television channels but this does not give room for physical interaction with other members of the church. Religious activities bring people together in love and solidarity. It allows people to reach out to members especially the needy and vulnerable groups. This social support is very important in a poverty-ridden country like Nigeria. Studies have shown that communal religious experience is very important in human life (WEINSTOCK 2019)" (Nkechi G. ONAH, 2021:194).

Another study titled “Coronavirus and the Decline of Africa's Collective Values: Religion and Social Media to Rescue” by LANRE-ABASS (2021) was conducted to investigate the socio-economic and psychological consequences of this Corona disease on the African collective value system, especially two approaches to curbing it. This disease examines social distancing and quarantine. LANRE-ABASS says:

This paper examines the socio-economic and psychological implications of this pandemic on African communal value system particularly social distancing and self-isolation as approaches of containing the pandemic. The paper argues that although these approaches undermine the communal system of living that Africans enjoyed in the past, the need for social distancing and self-isolation becomes imperative when viewed from an Islamic point of view. The paper offers a reconciliation of Islamic social distancing approach with the benefits of the social media as a panacea in handling the gradual decline in African communal system. It recommends that given the spread of the virus, social distancing and self-isolation can both be maintained while at the same time upholding African communal values. (2021: 215)

In Iran, various researches have been conducted regarding the effect of Corona on the educational system of economy and culture. Part of this research is the polls that have been conducted. The results of the latest survey of the Iranian Students’ Opinion Center (ISPA) regarding the spread of the Corona virus at the national level and on 24-27 April 2019, show that in response to the question that “How has the importance of religion and God during this period of spread of Corona changed for you compared to before?” 47% of Iranian people said that religion and God are more important to them than before and 48.4% said that there has been no change in this regard. Only 3.5 percent of people said that the importance of religion and God has become less for them than before. This increase of effect was more among women. (ISPA national survey on the spread of the Corona virus, May 10, 2019).

The results of the survey conducted by the Radio and Television Research Center nationally on April 31 and May 1, 2019 also confirm the importance of religion for people during the outbreak of the Corona virus. In this survey, people were asked how effective each of the items is in reducing their anxiety during the Corona outbreak. The findings of the survey indicate that 73.6 percent of the respondents said that prayer is effective in reducing their anxiety. While referring to doctors with 44.2%

and referring to psychologists and psychiatrists with 22.9% are ranked next. As with all surveys and surveys related to religion, here women are more influenced by religion than men. 65.7% of men and 79.7% of women said that prayer greatly reduces anxiety caused by Corona. The least group affected by prayer during the Corona era is students with 55.6 percent, and the highest group is housewives with 81.6 percent (national radio and television survey on the Corona disease, May 2019).

Theoretical reviews

The relationship between gender and religion has long been the focus of sociologists and anthropologists. For example: James FRAZER, a famous anthropologist, shows that even in primitive religions and nations of the East (India) and West (Ancient Greece), the relationship between religion and gender in the form of naming and assigning roles to goddesses is considered (FRAZER, 1922). In studies conducted in many countries, it has been found that women are more religious than men. In this regard, two psychological and sociological approaches can be mentioned. In the psychological explanations of women's religiosity, Freud's theory, deprivation theory, and guilt theory have provided explanations for the differences in women's religiosity. Considering that our approach in this research is sociological, we will explain sociological theories regarding gender differences in religiosity. Social learning theory can be mentioned in the social and sociological explanations. The followers of this theory explain the gender differences and believe that the development of the gender role is influenced by social factors and these social conditions provide children with examples of male and female models who behave differently (such as different gender behaviors). Socialization of girls teaches them to be caring, emotional, submissive, passive and domineering. Because religion encourages these characteristics, women find religion more attractive than men (FURSETH & REPSTAD, 2006). In support of this theory, Landon SCHNABEL argues that gender differences in religiosity are caused by social processes that operate in gendered societies and expect women to assume roles, identities and values related to caring for others. On the contrary, many men develop into self-sufficient, individualistic, strong-willed, and sometimes even aggressive masculinities that are equated with religious bigotry and general intolerance. Apart from distinct social-

ization, people also tend to observe and act on gender norms and stereotypes. For example, women are thought to be more sociable and compassionate, and therefore through social interaction reject those who transgress gender norms. Then these gender processes are compatible with women's greater religiosity and their lower levels of religious prejudices (SCHNABEL, 2018:62). Structural position theories are also among the other theories proposed in this field, they believe that women are more religious than men because of their structural position in society, because women tend to have less participation in the workforce and have more responsibility for raising children, so they have more time for religious activities. Some have also said that women's involvement in raising children leads them to be religiously involved because such activities are related to the well-being of the family. Despite numerous researches that show that women are more active than men in organizing worship, religious activities and religious beliefs, Leventhal believes that these differences exist depending on the culture and tradition of each religion and believes that religious traditions in each religion creates a difference between women and men in terms of religious obligations and duties. For example, Islam and Judaism have fewer religious obligations for women than for men in some aspects. Cult believes that these differences actually have a social origin, and in this way it has explained the gender difference in religiosity. Another theory is the role theory, based on which it can be said that women's gender roles, such as having children and bearing children, women's relatively precarious and dependent position in relation to their fathers, women's love and affection, which are expected from women's roles, and most importantly their dependence on the family system can be an effective factor in their higher religiosity than men. And another theory developed by two sociologists, John P. HOFFMAN and Alan S. MILLER's theory of risk taking explains that men have an innate tendency to take risks and therefore are more inclined to gamble than women to avoid being punished in the afterlife. As a result, men are less religious. Since women are generally more risk-averse, this theory believes that they turn to religion to avoid eternal punishment or to secure a place in heaven (MILLER & HOFFMAN, 1995:72-73). Based on these sociologists' theory, Baylor University sociologist Rodney STARK hypothesizes that men's physiology – specifically their higher testosterone levels – accounts for gender differences in religiosity. His argument is based on what he sees

as growing evidence that testosterone is linked to men's greater willingness to take risks, and argues why men are less religious than women. According to inference, women are more religious because they have less dangerous testosterone (STARK & MILLER, 2002:1419).

On the other hand, people's recourse to religion can be different in disasters and crisis situations, and the amount and type of this recourse is also different between men and women according to gender; "Disaster is an event process that requires the combination of potentially destructive factor(s) resulting from the natural environment, the changed environment or the artificial environment and a population that appears in a socially and economically created vulnerable situation and As a result, a kind of discontinuity is felt in the relatively customary fulfillment of individual and social needs related to material survival, social order and meaning (SMITH & HAFFMAN, 2002:4).

Mikael BARKUN believes that individual disasters provide less opportunity to challenge existing explanations, but when disasters and their consequences are multiple, the inadequacy of traditional methods of explanation becomes evident (BARKUN, 1974:79). Challenging existing methods of explanation in low-consequence disasters or isolated disasters is in many cases neutralized by the inertia of cultural systems: "Cultural systems have inertia; All belief systems tend to preserve themselves as much as possible, even when alternative systems offer better understanding" (BARKUN, 1974:79). Hence, under the initial impact of disaster, victims instinctively seek to explain their plight in terms of pre-existing beliefs, just as we all seek to relate to an unfamiliar stimulus by associating it with the most readily available familiar categories (IBID.). The important point that Mikael BARKUN points out is that if the disaster is limited in terms of scope and time period, ineffective explanations will continue to exist in the corners, but if the disaster expands more and more and in terms of time and space, the scope will continue. In fact, the ineffectiveness of such explanations becomes more apparent (BARKUN, 1974:81).

The more a belief receives the attention and favor of the people of the age, the more power and influence it gains. Sometimes the story is the opposite, and all things go in a certain way, and the set of circumstances is matched in such a way that they destroy the validity of a belief and make it seem unimportant or even deviant and false in the eyes of people. Dis-

aster situation and crisis situation are prone to invalidate beliefs or validate them. We can divide religious beliefs into three categories: untestable, testable, and testable. Because untestable religious beliefs do not have any direct relationship with the affairs of this world and do not require judgment about the affairs of this world or do not require direct intervention in the affairs of this world, they usually do not undergo erosion in a catastrophic situation. Testable religious beliefs are usually not challenged because they can be tested in some way. But the religious beliefs that avoid the test, on the one hand, judging about the affairs of this world, indicate some kind of intervention in the affairs of this world, and on the other hand, the believers of these beliefs are not willing to test them. These types of religious beliefs may rise or decline in a catastrophic social situation. For example, millennial beliefs grow in some catastrophic situations and based on them, millennial movements emerge (BARKUN, 1974:164).

Research Method

This research is a descriptive-analytical qualitative research. The data were collected using in-depth interviews with Iranian women and were analyzed and investigated using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an analysis based on analytical induction in which the researcher achieves an analytical genealogy through data classification and pattern finding within and outside data (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2013:121). The participants in this study were selected based on theoretical sampling, and according to the quarantine conditions due to the COVID-19 disease; the interviews were conducted in the form of video calls through the WhatsApp virtual network. Interviews were conducted with Iranian women from different parts of the country in the age range of 25-60 years old, working and housewives, single and married. And it continued until theoretical saturation was reached, and finally 19 interviews were conducted. Each interview was between 30 to 45 minutes, all interviews were recorded and then written in detail. For data analysis, thematic analysis was used as a suitable method to obtain the structure of meaning in a set of data that emphasizes the subjective experience of people. After coding and removing duplicate codes, 54 codes were extracted. In this section, the 54 codes or initial concepts identified could be placed in 21 sub-themes, and finally we placed the sub-themes in the heart of 11 main themes.

Findings

The research findings were categorized and analyzed in 11 main themes. In terms of demographic characteristics, women are in the wide age range of 25-60. Married and unmarried women from different cities are included in this survey, and they were employed in various administrative and educational occupations or they were housewives.

The interviewees introduced themselves as believers. Religious beliefs include beliefs related to fundamental ontological issues and the ultimate issues of life that the followers of a religion and ritual believe in those content and concepts. In this research, one of the main themes is "religious beliefs" which has 4 sub-concepts; Belief in monotheism (the oneness of God), resurrection (life after death), prophet-hood (the prophet-hood of Muhammad (pbuh)) and imamate (twelve infallible imams). They described God as all-powerful, merciful, and considered the Prophet and Imams to be perfect human beings whose behavior is a model for Muslims. They also considered three elements more effective in their "religious education": family, educational institutions and religious studies. The studied women who had a more serious and acute encounter with the corona virus had experienced "anxiety and worry" facing with the disease this disease. The experience of anxiety is the feeling of discomfort, worry or tension that a person presents in response to threatening or stressful situations. Although anxiety is a natural human response to threats, anxiety about COVID-19 seems to be mostly due to the unknown and creating cognitive ambiguity in people about this virus. Fear of this disease, fear of death, spread of false news and rumors, interference in daily plans, regulations, curfew and travel restrictions, reduction of social relations and dozens of other consequences of these conditions threatens the mental health of people in society. The experience of anxiety caused by COVID-19 was not only for the person infected with Corona, but during the spread of this virus, the fear of getting sick, the fear of death, along with the confusion of daily activities, makes healthy people also get involved with the anxiety of this disease (RUBIN & WESSELY, 2020). These factors can cause a series of symptoms and also serious clinical disorders (SHIGEMURA, ET AL., 2020), which range from symptoms of feeling fear and worry to clinical stress and anxiety; mental and practical obsessions related to the disease and even signs of post-traumatic stress have been seen in similar conditions (SHULTZ, BAINGANA & NERI, 2015). Preliminary data showed

that women accepted more psychological effects of the corona epidemic conditions compared to men, therefore women are at greater risk (PIEH, BUDIMIR & PROBST, 2020). According to several studies conducted in Iran, women in Iran felt significantly more anxious when dealing with COVID-19, compared to men. This is also the case in our research. One of the interviewed women clearly expressed her fear of this disease and the fear of the hospital being contaminated:

It was at the beginning of the New Year 1399 that we got involved as a family. At first it was a minor cold. We were afraid of catching this disease, and they kept telling us not to go to the hospital, because if your illness is not Corona, you will definitely get Corona if you go to the hospital.

Another interviewee (code 18, female, 37 years old, married) also stated in response to the same question:

In the beginning, at the beginning of the virus outbreak, we were so afraid of catching it that we rarely went out for shopping, and I kept washing everything and anything we bought that could be washed..., it was really a strange fear. We could not go to my mother's house for almost several months, because I was afraid of being a carrier and transferring it to my parents who are very old.

The experience of death and the intensification of grief were among the other issues of the interviewed women, at the same time as the spread of the Corona virus in Iran, the daily deaths caused by it began. The suspension of social rituals related to death caused many survivors to be deprived of holding funerals and burial rituals for their family members and loved ones. In the situation of the spread of Corona, funeral and burial ceremonies were held with the presence of a small number of family members and relatives, and in the case of funeral and memorial ceremonies, which are usually held on the third, seventh, and twentieth days, the physical and public gathering of relatives and acquaintances have been impossible. The situation mentioned about the deaths caused by the corona virus has been worse. The survivors of those who died due to Corona have often been deprived of visiting their loved ones in the hospital, hugging them and saying goodbye to them. Many families do not know how the bodies of their loved ones were washed or bathed. Funeral ceremonies are often not held and burial ceremonies are held in compliance with health protocols and with the presence of a handful of the closest family members. In many cases, religious customs such as the funeral prayer and the last exhortation for these deceased have not been implemented and the holding

of funeral and memorial ceremonies in a physical and collective manner has been completely suspended. In such cases, even close relatives or family members are prohibited from gathering in one place and honoring the memory of the deceased. The situation becomes worse when the survivors of the Corona virus are infected with the virus themselves and go through a period of illness. This is where even wives, children, sisters and brothers cannot hug each other and hold each other's hands. As an example, one of the interviewees (code 3, female, 35 years old, single), in response to the question of whether you lost someone close to you due to corona disease and how you managed it, said:

I lost my father due to Corona; my illness was also very severe; 20% of my lungs were involved... I was quarantined at home alone for 40 days. I had lost my father and I hadn't seen anyone and only some relatives called me and expressed their condolences. I was so broken down that I couldn't sleep and I cried until morning.

In this research, one of the main themes known to be effective among Iranian women in adapting to the critical conditions of COVID-19 is "religious feelings", which includes two sub-themes of hopefulness and peace and assurance. Emotions are an important aspect of individual and social life and play a significant role in people's lives. According to Vanderle Fran, religious feelings are different from non-religious feelings: First, they have a composite structure and include more than one feeling at the same time. Mixed feelings can be of different nature. They may have the same capacity (both may be pleasant or unpleasant), but equally their capacities may conflict. His description of religious emotions as a mixture of fear and wonder constitutes an example of mixed religious emotions. Second, for our purposes, it is more promising and has more depth of value. So there is a balance between emotional responses and the values that respond to them. (Some values are higher than others and require deeper involvement). Considering that all examples of religious emotions are related to religious values, they are emotions that affect us in a much deeper way. Fear of eternal damnation, religious despair, happiness and hope, the religious joy of feeling loved by God – all are types of general emotions that involve us more than other emotions in connection with religious values (FERRAN, 2019:79). A peculiarity about religious feelings is that, unlike our general emotions, they have more depth and stability. We abandon ourselves to them. We surrender to them. Religious joy is always a deep joy. Religious feelings are emotions with weight. And

one is completely influenced by them. It should also be said that religious feelings intensify, especially in times of crisis, and for this reason, some sociologists consider the changes in societies in the process of modernity, which have increased financial and social security, to reduce the need for religious assurance, and the occurrence of crisis. In the societies, they consider it a setback in the religious orientation of the societies (HOLLINGER & MUCKENHUBER, 2019). So it can be acknowledged that religious feelings and beliefs when faced with threatening situations such as illness, war, death of relatives, etc., is an effective way for people to deal with such situations by creating psychological and social support (IMMERZEEL & VAN TUBERGEN, 2011). Analyzing religious feelings according to the dual human need for positive feelings caused by religion in the conditions of suffering and help to overcome the crisis seems necessary (KRYNSKA, ANDRIESEN & CORVELEYN, 2014:352). From the texts of the interviews conducted, we extracted the propositions and concepts that indicated religious feelings. For example, one of the interviewees stated in response to the question of how you evaluate yourself from a religious point of view:

For me, the peace I get in religion is very good, and maybe I can't find this peace in anything else but God. I have to say that this is my personal feeling, those who do not believe in the oneness and power of God live harder.

In response to the same question, another interviewee said:

I feel God in every moment of my life, and I believe that God will solve every problem. Sometimes when I think about my sister or..., I can see exactly some time later that person contacts me. I believe that this is a non-material action that is going on and the cause of all this is the loving presence of God and God is everywhere.

“Deepening of religious beliefs” is the most important concept that we found in the interviews with Iranian women in the face of the Corona challenge, which has two sub-themes of belief in monotheism and God's power and belief in Ahl al-Bayt (imamate). After conceptualizing the interviews that were conducted with women, we found that the women who had a more serious conflict with it during the outbreak of the Corona virus, their religious beliefs have deepened in terms of belief in monotheism and the power of God and belief in Imamate and Ahl al-Bayt. Women whose belief in God has deepened are those who experienced severe anxiety and sadness during the outbreak of Corona due to acute infection of

themselves or their family members. This feeling or belief made the patient hope for a miracle and healing. The interviewee (code 10, 34 years old, single) answered the question of whether your religious beliefs and beliefs have changed due to the spread of Corona virus or not.

Well, I really saw a miracle when my brother was hospitalized due to the corona virus, and God gave us a miracle that he came back. It was a really difficult time and God brought him back to us again. This incident made my faith in God and his power stronger and stronger than before.

Also, another interviewee expressed the power of religion in enduring adversities and creating hope in disappointments (code 12, 54 years old, married) in response to the same question:

I feel that I have become closer to God with this incident, because I had no recourse other than God and the imams in that situation... We asked God for your health, and my infection with Corona made it more tangible for me that a human being with all abilities gets into a state where he can't even blink and I felt how small and weak I was and only God could bring me back to life.

“Religious rationality” is also one of the important concepts extracted in this research. The interviewed women did not see a serious conflict in terms of the ratio of religion and reason. On one hand, they prayed to God for healing and health, and on the other hand, they believed in taking care of medical orders and recipes related to the care of Corona. One of the interviewed women says:

I believe in the healing power of Imams. The same is true for Corona, but the story of Corona is a little different due to its contagious nature. It is true that Imams have healing power, God himself says that the greatest thing I have given you is reason, and you should use it. When a disease like Corona is highly contagious, then common sense dictates to stay away from the place where there is a gathering, now wherever it is. Whether it is a party hall or a shrine of Ahl al-Bayt.

Also, another interviewee tries to justify the corona bans regarding religious places. She considers answering a prayer to be more of a matter of the heart than a ritual by attending a special place. She said in response to the same question:

I fully believe in the healing power of imams and for me it is not like I am bound to be present in that place. That is, I appeal to the imam in my heart, and then the place is not important to me, which means it's not the case

that now that the shrine of Imam Reza or Imam Hossein is closed I can't as for anything from them, or there was no contradiction for me to say that Imam Reza, who was said to heal, is now closed because of Corona.

Among the other main categories extracted in this research, “the change of religious behavior” is under the influence of the spread of the Corona virus, which has a sub-theme of individualization of religious practices and worship among women. Corona has affected religious rituals in Iran. Under the influence of the spread of COVID-19 in Iran, religious gatherings have been cancelled and changed for a long time, congregational prayers and Friday prayers have been suspended, and many mourning rituals of Shia special days in the months of Muharram, Safar and Ramadan were also closed in general. Due to the home quarantine during the outbreak of the Corona virus, the people of Iran did not participate in the traditional religious ceremonies. Scholars proposed alternative forms of worship in order not to distance the people from religion. Also, the media played a greater role in holding religious ceremonies. In this situation, the majority of Iranians performed their religious acts and prayers individually at home. Many religious groups and people who were distributing food offerings in the street spent their offerings to provide health care products for the people in order to prevent the spread of the corona virus and in many mosques and religious groups, they made masks. According to the conducted interviews, we extracted propositions and concepts that indicated the change of religious behavior. For example, one of the interviewees, in response to the question of whether your religious practices changed due to the spread of Corona, said:

Not only religious ceremonies and pilgrimages, but also parties and everything else were closed. We would go shopping with my husband by car and return early. I used to go to all the ceremonies, especially Ashura and Tasua'a, and I believed in them very much. But during these two years I couldn't go there. We lived in Zanjan for a while, and there was a big celebration in Zanjan Square, which I went in person. But in these two years I watched its live broadcast on TV.

Another interviewee also stated in response to the same question:

Before Corona, I regularly went to the mosque for noon and evening prayers, I used to offer Iftar to others during Ramadan, but during Corona, I didn't go to mosques and shrines at all, and now I go very rarely. When the Ramadan Quran sessions were canceled, I also read the Quran while watching it on TV.

In addition to the individualization and personalization of religious practices, we also witnessed its medialization. A significant part of the television programs consisted of preaching and religious programs, and by broadcasting limited ceremonies or ceremonies from previous years, it helped people perform religious ceremonies.

Perhaps one of the important themes in this research can be considered as the increase of "attention to human rights". This is the seventh theme that was observed in the findings. By studying the interviews, we extracted concepts that confirm the increasing attention to human rights among Iranian women in the period of the Corona epidemic. This theme includes the sub-concept of public benefit and charity. In a part of the interviews in which women were asked about their religious beliefs and behaviors during the Corona period, they mentioned the increase in helping the needy, respecting the rights of others, and helping charities. An interviewee stated:

Generally, after the crisis that happened to the family, I changed my mind and come to the conclusion that one's actions are much more important. One's actions, thoughts, and beliefs must be the same; I think that one should try to be kind and help others; that is more effective than, for example, praying 100 raka'ats.

Another interviewee considers serving the people and caring for the needy as religion and states:

I see God and religion in serving the people. We have many poor people. Especially in this Corona situation, many workers became unemployed and became poor, and they are hungry. I think the cost of these religious places should be spent on these needy people.

Some others even stated that instead of spending money on religious ceremonies, it is more necessary to help the needy and providing the children in school with their needs or medical matters. Here, a kind of secularization of religion can be found. In other words, they did not see religion only in certain customs in a certain place, but consider every human issues and social service to the needy as religion.

"Women's attitude towards the corona virus" is the eighth theme that was investigated. This theme has three sub-categories that express the attitude of women towards the corona virus, some women considered the corona virus to be man-made, some had a natural origin, and some had a

divine attitude towards the emergence of the corona virus. In the following, we have arranged a number of narrations related to each of these concepts. One of the interviewees stated:

I think the mutations that this virus has are suspicious, and the fact that nature has not been able to eliminate it yet make me think that it has been manipulated. I think these mutations are unnatural, that sometimes it becomes weak and sometimes it becomes strong.

This conspiratorial approach to the corona virus, which considers it to be a product of the laboratories of some major governments in the world, was common for a while, especially at the beginning of the spread of this virus in Iran. The second approach is the natural approach to the virus, which considers it similar to other viruses that have existed in the history of the world with differences. One of the women said:

These epidemics have always been seen throughout history, and I don't think it's anything strange. And I don't accept many things that have been said.

According to the third approach, Corona is the result of a sin committed by humans, and now, in a way, nature has rebelled against humans and is punishing them. Some religious scholars in Iran also mentioned this concept in their speeches. Some women accepted this approach:

In my opinion, in the world, there are so many wars, so many sins, so much extravagance in weddings and ceremonies, people who borrowed money for a wedding, how much do they have to spend to make the ceremony elaborate. This is the recompense we have to pay for our being ungrateful.

The ninth theme is that of "women facing the corona vaccine". With the creation of the first vaccines to deal with the corona virus, there were reactions among the people facing the vaccine, which was accompanied by concern and doubt about its injection. In this research, according to the interviews that were conducted with Iranian women, it was found that they had different opinions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. Propositions and concepts related to how to face the corona vaccine were extracted, which had two different themes and concepts.

The sub-theme of "doubt and concern about the vaccine and its consequences" is the theme that was extracted according to the conducted interviews. Many women have doubts and worries about the corona vaccine injection. On the one hand, this doubt in Iran was due to the doubt about

the origin of the corona virus, because they saw it as fake, so they considered the vaccine as fake as well. On the other hand, due to the pessimism that exists in Iranian society towards the West, and that the Iranian society was promised the production of a vaccine, people hesitated to use it.

For example, in response to the question of what is your opinion about the corona vaccine and whether you are willing to inject it or not, an interviewee stated:

It is not known at all what these vaccines are and what effect they are going to have on people's bodies later. However, I took two doses of the Sinopharm vaccine and I am really sorry because after two doses of the vaccine, I got corona again.

Some other women like the rest of Iranian society prefer to use medicinal plants and traditional medicine. Another interviewee stated in response to the same question:

I generally get along better with herbal medicines. If you ask me for pills now, I don't have any pills at home. I couldn't trust the vaccine either, but finally they told me to receive it and I did. Anyway, this was also a way I tried and the result is not clear yet.

The sub-theme of trust in science is another theme extracted from interviews with Iranian women in the face of the corona vaccine. In response to the question of what do you think about the corona vaccine and are you willing to inject it, some women declared that science has been serving a better life for mankind from the beginning to this day, so they trusted it and were willing to take it easily and so they were vaccinated. The approval of the WHO and the use of many countries also increased the trust among the people, despite this, a part of the society, especially women, could not trust. Proponents of traditional medicine as well as religious healing prescriptions recommended by some religious people, especially in the villages, developed mistrust.

The findings of this research show that the corona crisis, due to its components and extractive effects (experience of anxiety, experience of death and feeling of sadness, religious feelings, religious education, and religious rationality) ultimately leads to the deepening of religious beliefs and changes in religious behavior in Iranian women. It should also be said that the experience of anxiety, the experience of death, and the feeling of sadness have been among the most important factors affecting religious beliefs. In other words, our findings show that women who have

had a more serious encounter with the corona virus, i.e. they themselves or their loved ones had a serious conflict with it, experienced more severe anxiety in interactions with others, and this experience of anxiety and the experience of death and the sadness caused by that crisis has affected their religious beliefs. Our findings show that women who did not experience severe anxiety and sadness did not find a connection between Corona and their religious beliefs, that is, there was no change in their religious beliefs. It should also be added that the theme of religious feelings has played a prominent role in women's adaptation to the experience of anxiety and sadness caused by the corona virus crisis, in other words, women who experienced more anxiety through religious feelings have been able to overcome anxiety. The studied Iranian women, while criticizing the irrational religious prejudices and unconventional behavior of some religious people in response to the closure of religious ceremonies and places, have considered the change in religious behavior as an inevitable necessity in the conditions of the Corona crisis. In other words, under the influence of these conditions, women performed their religious practices individually, away from the crowd and at home. Also, one of the significant points in this field is the increased attention to human rights in women's religious behaviors and practices during the Corona outbreak. Our findings show that during this era, Iranian women were more willing to do charitable and humanitarian acts.

Another finding of this research is the attitudes of Iranian women towards the corona virus, among Iranian women there are three different attitudes towards the origin of the corona virus, some consider it man-made and others consider it natural and like other diseases on earth. But another group has a different attitude towards the origin of the virus and consider it divine and the result of the bad deeds of humans and their ingratitude.

Regarding the exposure of Iranian women to the corona vaccine, it can be said that they had doubts and concerns about receiving the vaccine and its unknown consequences, some considered it ineffective and others were influenced by anti-vaccine advertisements. Traditional medicine has been considered more effective in preventing the corona virus, but some others consider the vaccine to be the only way to deal with the corona virus and believe that modern science is much more accurate and committed

to human health and to stay with their family and loved ones, they have trusted science and are willing to accept the corona vaccine.

Figure No. 1 - The final thematic map shows the relationship between themes and the impact of the Corona crisis on values, religious beliefs and behaviors of Iranian women.

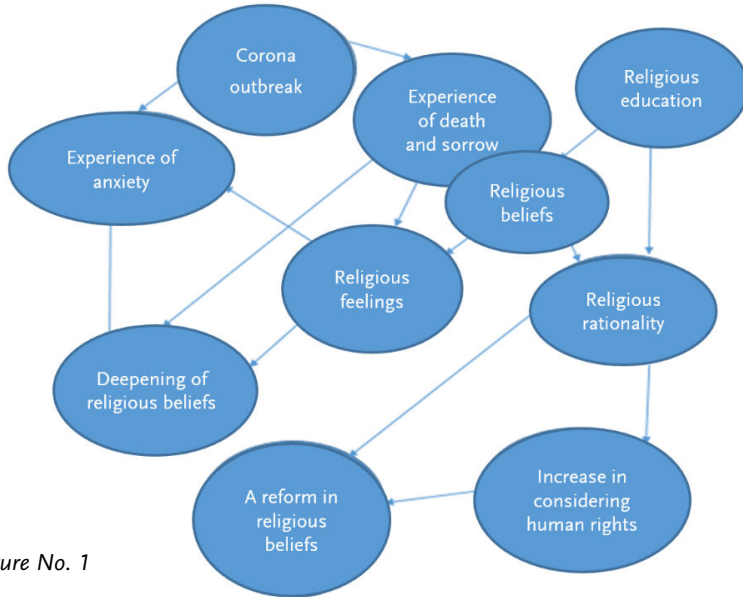


Figure No. 1

In the description of this map, it can be said that the spread of Corona in Iran has had two direct consequences: the experience of anxiety and the experience of death, the feeling of sadness for Iranian women, which, through the components of religious feelings, religious beliefs and religious education, lead to a deepening of beliefs and religious values in women who have been studied in this research. It should also be said that the theme of religious feelings directly played an effective role in controlling women's anxiety during the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, the theme of religious rationality, which is influenced by the theme of religious education and religious beliefs, has played an effective role in changing the religious behavior of Iranian women. Also, the theme of increasing attention to human rights as a result of religious education

and religious rationality has also been effective in changing the shape of religious behaviors.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current research was conducted with the aim of investigating the impact of the spread of the disease of COVID-19 on the religious beliefs and practices of women in Iran and their approach to the vaccine. In general, the research results show that the COVID-19 disease has led to the change of women's religious practices and the deepening of their religious beliefs. According to studies in Iran, women felt significantly more anxious compared to COVID-19 (PIEH, BADIMIR & PROBST, 2020). According to the health guidelines during the outbreak of the corona virus; Social distance and home quarantine, it has been acknowledged that the burden of women's caring role has also quadrupled during quarantine (LABEODAN & OLUFEMI, 2021:15). Therefore, it seems that this crisis has resulted in a stronger commitment and moral responsibility for women to fulfill the family, relational, religious and educational needs of their families and take care of them. The findings of our research also show that the experience of anxiety, the experience of death, and the feeling of sadness were among the direct consequences of the spread of Corona on women in Iran. Religious feelings that help women adapt to the problems and anxieties and worries caused by the COVID-19 crisis. In fact, the lived experience of religious feelings such as divine faith and divine help and refuge creates positive emotions and spirits in women. And it reduces the feeling of fear of the death of family members and loved ones and makes family life easier in the high-risk society caused by the spread of the corona virus. From this point of view, religiosity among Iranian women shows more damage than men. The research findings of LOKTI ET AL. (2020) and CHEN ET AL. (2020) confirm the role of religious feelings in increasing life expectancy and reducing anxiety and fear. The findings of M.T. JOSEPH's research (2021) also show that in India during the Corona outbreak, resorting to religion has relieved their sufferings and pains caused by the Corona calamities. It should also be said that the religious behavior of Iranian women has undergone changes due to the quarantine conditions caused by the spread of Corona. At first, women performed most of their religious practices individually, away from the crowd and at home. This

research is also similar to the findings of other researches mentioned earlier. First, turning to religion was common among Iranian women, as shown in M.T. JOSEPH's research. Second, communal religious experience was a method used by Nkechi G. ONAH's research among Iranian women to face Corona. Thirdly, although social distancing was against Islamic recommendations, this relationship continued by resorting to social media, as LANRE-ABASS's research in Africa also shows, and with the production of religious programs on Iranian television, it is possible to pray and participate virtually in the religious programs.

As BARKUN's research showed, not all religious propositions are affected. In this research, it was found that unassailable beliefs and basic beliefs have not changed, but things have happened in some areas. One of the significant points in this field is the statement of women to increase attention to philanthropy and human rights in their religious behaviors and practices during the Corona outbreak. It seems that this concept is one of the most controversial findings of this research, which can be discussed with the concept of civil or human religion, which was first proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). In general, it can be said that civil religion consists of a set of symbols and rituals that are often connected with religion and cause facilitation and even a kind of awe in the social system. In fact, the main concern of civil religion is to link religious-theological teachings with political-social affairs (ARON, 2007:116). In other words, in this concept, religion is manifested in a civilized form and compatible with the requirements of the new era in the socio-political era. This manifestation is completely in line with the teachings of the new age and in other words, it serves the needs of this age. According to the findings of this research, it seems that under the influence of the spread of Corona, the religious behavior of Iranian women has tended towards humanization or civilization, the consequences and developments of which are debatable for the Iranian society.

One of the characteristics of civil religion is the sanctification of social laws and regulations in order to guarantee their better implementation, so it can be said that unity, harmony and cohesion among social groups is the most important strength of civil religion, whose achievements are the strengthening of organizations and civil and voluntary groups in society. Strengthening groups and organizations in society also leads to strengthening civil society. The strengthening of civil society in the society

has many consequences. The first consequence is that civil society can be assumed to be the gateway to social development. If the civil society is empowered in a society, that society can reach social development sooner and better.

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Appendix

Table 1 - The interviewees' specifications

*	Age	Gender	Marital status	Religion	Educa-tion	Profession	Place of living
1	26	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	MA	Housewife	Tehran
2	25	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	BA	Unemployed	Bijar-Kordestan
3	35	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	MA	Teacher	Doodoor-lorestan
4	31	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	Ph.D.	PhD student	Qom
5	30	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	MA	QC Engineer	Boushehr
6	46	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	Diploma	Housewife	Zanjan
7	60	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	MA	Teacher	Tehran
8	28	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	MA	Medicine	Mashhad
9	32	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	MA	Student	Tehran
10	34	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	MA	Teacher	Boroojerd-Lorestan
11	32	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	BA	Teacher	Fouman
12	54	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	BA	Retired teacher	Karaj
13	34	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	MA	Teacher	Khorramabad
14	26	Female	Single	Islam-Shia	MA	Corrective movement coach	Karaj
15	51	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	BA	Housewife	Mashhad
16	41	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	Associate degree	Housewife	Kerman
17	38	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	Diploma	Housewife	Kerman
18	37	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	BA	Housewife	Gorgan
19	57	Female	Married	Islam-Shia	BA	Retired clerk	Gorgan

* The interviewee's code