

A Fiqh-Based Solution to Worship Practices During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Natural Disasters

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the fiqh-based solutions for the implementation of Islamic worship during the Covid-19 pandemic and natural disasters. It examines how Islamic jurisprudence provides flexibility and prioritizes public safety without compromising religious obligations in emergency contexts. Using a qualitative normative approach, this research analyzes primary sources of Islamic law, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical fiqh literature, supplemented by contemporary fatwas and scholarly opinions. The study also applies maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (objectives of Islamic law) principles to interpret worship practices amid health crises and natural disasters. Findings indicate that contemporary ulama universally emphasize the obligation to preserve life (ḥifẓ al-nafs) while maintaining religious duties. Fiqh accommodates emergency circumstances by permitting modifications or delays in worship, such as congregational prayers and fasting, without nullifying their spiritual value. The research highlights consensus on using protective health measures and endorsing vaccination during fasting, emphasizing that safeguarding health takes precedence. This research contributes to the growing body of Islamic jurisprudential discourse by offering a comprehensive fiqh framework tailored to unprecedented global health emergencies and environmental catastrophes. It bridges classical legal principles with modern public health concerns, providing practical religious guidance in times of crisis. The study serves as a reference for policymakers, religious authorities, and Muslim communities to develop informed, flexible worship protocols during emergencies. It also encourages further research into fiqh responses to socio-religious challenges beyond health crises, such as in economic and family law during pandemics or disasters.



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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the entire world, including Indonesia, and has had a significant impact on various aspects of society, including religious practices (Lubis, 2022). Muslims have faced the challenge of fulfilling their religious obligations while adhering to health and safety protocols (Supena, 2021). *Fiqh al-'ibādah* (jurisprudence of worship) is a branch of Islamic knowledge that studies the legal rulings and regulations surrounding acts of

worship (Muthalib et al., 2021). In the context of the pandemic, *fiqh al-'ibādah* becomes highly relevant, as it helps Muslims understand how to perform their religious duties while prioritizing health and safety.

Contemporary scholars have paid considerable attention to jurisprudential issues arising during the pandemic (Fauzi, 2020). They have issued fatwas and legal opinions on how Muslims can fulfill their religious obligations while observing necessary health and safety measures (Ridwan, 2020). The views of contemporary scholars vary widely, reflecting a range of interpretations in addressing religious matters related to the pandemic. Several expert opinions may serve as important references. First, according to Achmad Zuhdi, a prominent scholar and Chair of the *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* of Muhammadiyah's East Java Regional Board, *fiqh al-'ibādah* during the pandemic must consider the principles of Islamic law alongside the socio-religious context. Second, Shaykh Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, a renowned contemporary scholar and expert in *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, emphasized that *fiqh al-'ibādah* during a pandemic must incorporate the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) and respond to the socio-religious realities. He highlighted the importance of understanding these objectives when addressing religious issues during such crises (Az-Zuhaili, 2011). Third, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) issued Fatwa No. 14 of 2020 on the Organization of Worship During the Covid-19 Outbreak (Mun'im, 2022). This fatwa recommends the suspension of congregational worship in mosques and advises Muslims to perform their religious duties individually at home.

Previous studies have examined various dimensions of Islamic jurisprudence in relation to the pandemic. For instance, *Fiqh Pandemi: Studi tentang Fatwa Ulama tentang Covid-19* by Ahmad Fauzi (Fauzi, 2020) explores fatwas issued by scholars during the Covid-19 crisis and how *fiqh* provided guidance in addressing the pandemic. Siti Nurhaliza's (2021) research, *The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Implementation of Islamic Worship*, discusses how communal prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage practices were affected. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ridwan (2020), in *Principles of Fiqh in Facing the Pandemic*, analyzes fundamental *fiqh* principles such as the protection of life and the pursuit of public welfare (*maṣlahah*) in times of crisis.

However, prior studies tend to lack a focused analysis of *fiqh al-'ibādah* during pandemics and disasters from the perspective of contemporary scholars. Their discussions are often limited to the general impact of the pandemic on the Muslim community and religious practices. This study, in contrast, specifically focuses on how *fiqh* can offer solutions in emergency situations, emphasizing the flexibility of worship and the prioritization of life and well-being, all through the lens of contemporary scholarly perspectives.

Therefore, research on *fiqh al-'ibādah* in the context of pandemics and disasters from the viewpoint of contemporary scholars is both crucial and timely. This study aims to assist Muslims in understanding how to perform religious obligations during crises while upholding safety, health, and the overarching values of public welfare. Additionally, it seeks to

contribute to the development of a more contextual and socially responsive Islamic jurisprudence that aligns with the needs of modern society.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method using a library research approach. The data sources include classical fiqh texts and other relevant literature related to fiqh al-‘ibādah and the pandemic, fatwas issued by contemporary scholars concerning religious worship during the pandemic—such as those from the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2020)—as well as academic articles and journals related to the subject, including publications such as *Jurnal Fikih* and *Jurnal Studi Islam*. The collected data and information are analyzed using qualitative analysis methods by identifying key themes related to fiqh al-‘ibādah and the pandemic, based on established fiqh principles and relevant theoretical frameworks. The findings are then interpreted through the lens of contemporary Islamic scholars to provide a contextual understanding of worship practices during times of crisis.

Results and Discussion

Implementation of Worship Practices During Emergency Situations such as the COVID-19 Pandemic

The technical aspects of conducting religious rituals during times of hardship or emergency—such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters—require detailed discussion and clarification. The following elaborates on the implementation of worship during the pandemic:

1. Worship Practices During the Pandemic
 - a. Congregational Prayer and Friday Prayer

The performance of congregational prayers during the COVID-19 pandemic became a major topic of discussion among contemporary scholars (Wijaya, 2022). Several scholarly perspectives on this matter include:

- 1) Suspension of Congregational Prayers in Mosques

The Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) issued Fatwa No. 14 of 2020, recommending the suspension of congregational prayers in mosques to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This is grounded in a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from Abū Hurayrah (Al-Bukhārī, 2012), which states:

“Do not mix the sick with the healthy.”

- 2) Praying at Home as an Alternative

Scholars agree that congregational prayer is a *sunnah mu’akkadah* (highly recommended), but in cases of valid excuses such as illness or a pandemic, praying at home becomes a permissible alternative. In fact, such practice may carry additional merit by

contributing to the prevention of harm to others (Muslim). This is supported by a ḥadīth from Abū Dāwūd:

“Whoever hears the call to prayer but is prevented from attending it due to an excuse— what is the excuse? Fear or illness.”(Al-Sajistani, n.d.)

3) Prioritizing Collective Safety

Scholars also emphasize the importance of prioritizing public health and safety in worship practices. The legal maxim *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār* (no harm shall be inflicted or reciprocated) serves as a foundation for decisions regarding congregational prayer during the pandemic (Afif & Sohrah, 2021).

4) The Flexibility of Fiqh in Responding to Pandemics

Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) accommodates flexibility during emergencies. Scholars formulated guidelines for worship appropriate to the prevailing situation, such as the use of face masks, maintaining physical distance, and frequent hand washing (Shemer, 2017). This aligns with the *fiqh* maxim: *al-ḥukmu yadūru ma‘a ‘illatihi wujūdan wa ‘adaman* (legal rulings revolve around the presence or absence of their effective cause).

5) Wearing a Mask During Prayer

Under normal conditions, wearing a mask during prayer is deemed *makrūh* (discouraged). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, wearing a mask became permissible. Al-Azhar’s Majma’ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah stated that the ruling of *makrūh* may be waived in cases of necessity (*ḥājah*). This is based on the legal maxim: *al-ḥājah tanzilu manzilat al-ḍarūrah* (necessity can take the ruling of dire need) (A. Latief, 2022).

6) Permissibility of Not Performing Friday Prayer

The MUI also issued guidance via Fatwa No. 14 of 2020 regarding the suspension of Friday prayers in areas affected by the pandemic to prevent transmission through public gatherings. As explained by Asrorun Ni’am (MUI Secretary-General), there are two types of legal excuses (*‘udhr sharī*): first, when illness prevents one from attending Friday prayer for three consecutive weeks; and second, when there is a strong likelihood of disease transmission due to crowding, which justifies not attending (Amrin & Amirullah, 2022).

7) Maintaining Physical Distance During Congregational Prayer

While Islamic tradition stresses the importance of aligning and closing ranks in prayer, in emergency situations such as a pandemic, flexibility is allowed. Despite the prophetic guidance to straighten and close rows in prayer, social distancing measures were permitted under the principle that necessity allows exceptions. This is supported by Qur’anic verses, such as:

“But whoever is forced by necessity without willful disobedience or transgressing due limits, there is no sin upon him.” (Qur’an 2:173). This aligns with the legal maxim: *al-ḍarūrah tubīḥ al-maḥzūrāt* (necessity permits the prohibited) (Amin et al., 2024).

In summary, the performance of congregational and Friday prayers in Islamic jurisprudence can be adjusted based on prevailing circumstances. When individuals are

confronted with obstacles that hinder the performance of obligatory or recommended acts of worship, Islamic *fiqh* offers facilitation and leniency. The practice of Islamic worship adheres to the principle of *taysir* (ease), avoiding excessive hardship or burden.

b. The Implementation of Ramadan Fasting During the Pandemic

The implementation of Ramadan fasting during the Covid-19 pandemic has become a particular concern among contemporary Islamic scholars (Usman, 2019). Generally, scholars agree that the pandemic cannot be considered a valid excuse (*'udzr*) to exempt adult Muslims (*mukallaf*) from the obligation of fasting. In other words, every adult Muslim is still required to observe the fast of Ramadan, except those who suffer from health conditions that medically prevent them from doing so.

Moreover, fasting during the pandemic requires special attention to health-related matters. Scholars emphasize the importance of maintaining physical stamina and ensuring adequate nutritional intake during *suhour* and *iftar*, as well as avoiding strenuous activities that may weaken the body. In addition, health protocols such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distance should continue to be observed, particularly during social interactions throughout Ramadan.

Regarding vaccination during the fasting period, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) issued Fatwa No. 13 of 2021, which states that Covid-19 vaccination administered via intramuscular injection does not invalidate the fast. Therefore, receiving a vaccine while fasting is permissible for Muslims, as long as it does not cause harm or pose health risks. This ruling is also supported by the Bahtsul Masail Council of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (LBM PBNU), which, in a discussion held on April 9, 2022, declared that receiving a vaccine injection does not invalidate the fast.

In conclusion, the pandemic does not nullify the obligation to fast during Ramadan. Concessions (*rukhsah*) are only granted to individuals who become ill due to the virus or have medical conditions that significantly hinder their ability to fast. In such cases, Islamic law permits them to abstain from fasting and mandates that they make up the missed days after recovery, as stated in Qur'an Surah al-Baqarah [2]:184. Preventive measures such as vaccination are encouraged to maintain immunity and, according to Islamic legal rulings, do not invalidate one's fast.

c. Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha Prayers, and Qurban During the Pandemic

The performance of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha prayers, as well as the qurban ritual, during the Covid-19 pandemic requires special attention to health and public safety. The following are several guidelines that can be followed:

1. Guidelines for Performing Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha Prayers During the Pandemic

Eid prayers may be conducted at home or in other suitable locations to avoid large gatherings and minimize the risk of Covid-19 transmission (Sakka & Marahamid, 2019). If the prayers are performed in mosques or open fields, it is important to wear

masks and maintain physical distancing between congregants. Limiting the number of attendees is also recommended to help curb the spread of the virus.

2. Guidelines for Performing Qurban During the Pandemic

The *qurban* ritual can be carried out by utilizing technology, such as purchasing sacrificial animals online and using authorized machinery for the slaughter process (Syatar et al., 2020). Community involvement remains important in the distribution of meat to those in need. The entire process should be conducted in a manner that prioritizes safety and health.

The performance of Eid prayers, animal sacrifice, and meat distribution during a pandemic must consider the principles of safety, health, and collective benefit (*maslahah*) (Noercholis Rafid. A et al., 2023). Although these acts are strongly recommended (*sunnah*), when circumstances pose a threat to health or human life, such rituals should either be suspended or adjusted accordingly. In Islamic legal maxims, it is stated that "preventing harm takes precedence over obtaining benefit" (*dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*) (Kasdi, 2014).

3. Religious Observances in Emergency or Disaster Situations

In times of disaster or crisis, the primary concern is the protection of life and health (Saryani et al., 2021). The fundamental principles in performing religious duties under emergency conditions include: *al-taysīr* (ease in religious practice), *maṣlaḥah* (prioritization of public welfare and protection of life), and *sadd al-dharā'ī'* (preventing greater harm) (Nisa' & Ulinnuha, 2021). Thus, under such circumstances, religious practices may be performed more flexibly—for example, praying in safe locations or modifying the manner of fasting.

If performing prayer in a mosque or place of worship is not feasible, prayer may be offered in any safe location. Allah (SWT) affirms in Surah al-Baqarah (2:286): "*Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity.*" Imam al-Mawardi stated that when a person is unable to perform prayer in its complete form due to illness or other constraints, they may do so in a lighter or adjusted manner.

Similarly, if fasting cannot be observed in the normal manner, it may be modified—such as fasting for a partial day, adjusting fasting hours, or breaking the fast with the obligation to pay *fidyah* or make up the fast (*qaḍā'*) at a later time, as explained by Ibn Qudamah in *al-Mughnī* (Qudāmah, 2011).

Islamic jurisprudence consistently prioritizes the preservation of human life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*). In cases of natural disasters, individuals are first obligated to evacuate and protect themselves and others. If religious practices cannot be observed immediately, they may be postponed or adjusted to fit the circumstances. Islamic law offers flexibility in its implementation, emphasizing ease and individual capacity. Islam does not intend to impose undue hardship, as stated in Surah al-Ḥajj (22:78), which has led scholars to affirm the legal

maxim: “When matters become constrained, they are relaxed” (*al-ashyā’ idhā dāqat ittasa’at*).

Conclusion

The implementation of religious worship during the Covid-19 pandemic requires flexibility and prioritization of collective safety. Contemporary Islamic scholars unanimously agree on the obligation to safeguard human life and to avoid potential harm. Acts of worship such as congregational prayers and Friday prayers may be adjusted and performed in alternative locations other than mosques when there is a legitimate excuse, obstacle, or threat. Islamic jurisprudence also emphasizes the importance of considering health, safety, and security when performing acts of worship—for oneself, one's family, and others.

Natural disasters are categorized as emergency situations, thus Islamic law provides leniency and ease in religious observance during such times. Actions that are typically prohibited (*ḥarām*) may become permissible (*ḥalāl*) under emergency conditions or when life is at risk. Therefore, the implementation of religious duties in such circumstances must be adapted to the individual's capacity and the prevailing situation. If worship cannot be performed during a disaster, it may be postponed or rescheduled. Islamic jurisprudence upholds the legal maxim that preventing harm takes precedence over obtaining benefit (*dar’ al-mafāsīd muqaddam ‘alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*).

The contribution of this study lies in enriching the discourse on *fiqh al-‘ibādah* (jurisprudence of worship), while offering practical solutions that assist and facilitate Muslims in fulfilling their religious obligations during emergency situations such as pandemics or natural disasters. For policymakers and stakeholders involved in disaster and pandemic management, this research may serve as a reference for developing regulations related to the performance of religious worship, aiming to mitigate risk, impact, and loss. As a recommendation for future research, scholars are encouraged to explore *fiqh al-mu‘āmalah* (jurisprudence of social transactions) or *fiqh al-nikāḥ* (jurisprudence of marriage) in the context of pandemics and disasters.

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