



Interview for Study on Impacts of COVID-19 on U.S. Muslims

Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Interviewer/Number of Interview: AP2

Date: 3/14/2021

Name of Interviewee Assigned by Researcher (to protect identity): Respondent

Year of Birth: 1965

Gender: Male

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: 1991

Note: In the transcript, *I* refers to Interviewer, and *R* refers to Respondent/Interviewee. To protect the identity of the interviewee, some responses to questions are not provided. In such cases, this statement will show in the transcript: Information is not being made available. In other responses, specific details that might identify the family members are omitted or made more general.

Abstract:

This transcription is focused on how the respondent adjusted his life to the COVID-19 pandemic. His job wasn't affected much, which offered him stability in his life and with finances. He was not able to see family outside his household in person but maintained contact through FaceTime. He was able to practice his religion on a personal level, but virtual participation was limited due to lack of access to apps, Facebook, that his Mosque used. He also touched on how his Mosque, religion, and personal beliefs support social justice and its importance.

Key Themes:

COVID-19, family, work, religion, social justice

Transcript:

I: So just for record, I'll let you know that this call will be recorded, but the audio will not be published or shared with the public, but the transcription, the writing, of what we talked about will be made public and covered for confidentiality. Any questions with the consent form?

R: Nope.

I: Awesome, so as you know, this study is about the impact on covid-19 on U.S. Muslims. So, I'll just be asking different sets of questions on all kind of areas and I'll preface each set before I start. So, the first kind of set will just be kind of demographic information. So, if you could just start with sharing your name.

R: [Respondent]

I: And your age.

R: 55.

I: And where were you born?

R: Palestine.

I: Alright, and when did you move to the US?

R: 1991.

I: Alright, and how would you identify yourself in terms of like your national background?

R: Arab American.

I: Okay. And what is the highest level of education that you've completed?

R: Bachelors.

I: And what's your marital status?

R: Marriage.

I: And including yourself, how many adults live in your household?

R: Including myself, 4.

I: And how many children 18 years or younger live in the household?

R: None.

I: Awesome. So those are just kind of those intro questions. So, now will kind of get back into how COVID-19 kind of impacted your personal well-being. Specifically, in relation to like personal relationships, financial well-being, physical and emotional health. So, the first question with that will be how has the outbreak of covid virus affected you personally in terms of your financial, social, and health situation?

R: Um. Financial, you know like everybody else, but you know nothing is like before. Of course, since covid everything changed, and it affect a lot of aspects of life. But in my case to be honest with you, I wasn't one of the people who got hit hard. There are some people who got really hard financially. Um because in our line of work you know it's still, people need it – I'm in sales, I'm in auto sales – people still needed vehicles. No matter what, you know what I mean.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, as far as social. Uh, definitely it affected every single aspect of the social life. To say the least. I mean it's really disconnected people, disconnected families. Especially for those families who are following the, you know the rules of the social distancing and doing it right if you will. So, it's really, really made a lot of negative impacts on the relationship with relatives and family, for the most part for us. Um, what was the other third part?

I: Uh, the health situation.

R: Health to be honest with you it's more – thank God so far, we're healthy. We didn't experience it ourselves. We knew some family members and relatives who experienced it. It really didn't get into our household. Thank God and as far as more of the health situation, I would say more of the psychological aspect. Sometimes people get really depressed in situations like these, which is normal. You don't really have any social activities, not just with people, even so, like we used to go to the gym, you know, frequently. I mean, since covid, we don't. That's definitely affects your health: physical and mental. So, you know just in the indirect way it did affect it, but not directly through the sickness of the virus.

I: Yeah, and how has the outbreak of the virus affected the way you conduct yourself with people close to you? So that includes like friends and family, you know, even inside the US, outside the US.

R: Um to be honest, I mean mostly you know it's the same as when you talked about the social aspect of the influence of covid. Even family members were very, very close. It's not, you know even to the limit that sometimes you want to give a family member hug, you can't. You know what I mean? And then you started really changing your every aspect of the social and family relations you know, I mean. So, it's not really, it's not easy. Definitely changed everything, every daily aspect of our life. Every social gesture you know. Even with people who like, used to be,

you know, I just said like no hugs, no touching. Sometimes it gets really, really challenging and very hard, very difficult.

I: Yeah, and since the outbreak, what would be like your primary ways of communicating with friends and family who are in the household?

R: You mean the immediate family in the household?

I: People who aren't in the household. So like people that you don't live with, like, how would you communicate with them since the outbreak?

R: I'm sorry, I'm just trying to clarify not living in the house?

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, well, the main thing honestly is of course phones and FaceTime. You know that's especially – for example, like my daughter and her family. You know there has been a new grandson, we didn't see him since covid, you know. I mean, we just do it by phone and FaceTime, you know, since it's been a year. They live in California, but you know, no visits. We didn't visit them. They didn't visit us just because of Covid. The same thing with the rest of the like this family, whether it's relatives or friends or you know, well just by phone, mainly.

I: Yes, and any challenges with this new way of communicating?

R: Oh, if I'm understanding your question as far as technology wise?

I: Yeah.

R: Everything was smooth.

I: Any unexpected benefits from kind of communicating this way now?

R: No. To me honestly, no. I don't see any benefit for it. The only benefit for having this technology is because of the situation of covid, then yes, it is a benefit to have a technology like that to be better than the alternative is it but using FaceTime and you know, would it replace the physical part of it, like this to actually really see your family and relatives and sons and daughters, and you know? I mean no, it does not.

I: Yeah. Yeah so during the pandemic have you used any new apps or like listen to any blogs or podcasts since the pandemic started?

R: Um, elaborate on that please.

I: Yeah, so any new apps like more for like communicating? Or is there been any I guess just

new things that you've reached out to in terms of information. You know, blogs, podcasts, anything like that.

R: Yeah, no. Nothing that I wasn't using before. For example, before I used to use a couple of communication apps. Before Covid, maybe we came to use it a little bit more during covid, you know. Even FaceTime you know you used to use it before covid, but we use it a lot more during Covid you know, so I didn't really use anything different or anything new.

I: Yes, it's not really anything new, just how much you use it. Your using a bit more now.

R: You got it, yeah.

I: Yeah, that makes sense. So, before the COVID-19 outbreak, were you employed?

R: Yes.

I: And you said that you do sales for cars.

R: Yes.

I: And so, before covid on average, how many hours a week would you say that you worked?

R: Um before covid I would say about 50.

I: Okay, and in the last month like on average, how many hours would you say that you've worked?

R: Last month?

I: Yeah, so I per week. Pretty much I guess since covid started.

R: Yeah no. I mean like when you say like this last month here, we just sort of comparison?

I: Yeah.

R: Um, to be honest with you, I mean still about the same as right now. When the first couple of months when covid hit, yeah, we did work less the first couple of months, but we never like a closed completely. But a few months after I mean we became a little bit more used to about 40-50 a week.

I: Okay. And did that affect your family's financial well-being at all?

R: Uh a little but like I said, nothing like before you know what I mean. But I'm sure there are a lot of people who are really in a lot worse situation than us. I mean we didn't really – I can't say, “hey, we suffering”, so no we didn't suffer.

I: Okay yeah, and did you receive any kind of like financial help or any other kind of help during covid so far?

R: You know when they did the stimulus check for everybody. I mean we received the check; you know just like everybody else. But sincerely, I mean, as I just said, I mean, a lot of people are in need for that money more than us.

I: Mhmm. Yeah, and any current needs that you or your family have at this time?

R: I'm sorry?

I: Current needs like I know you've mentioned a lot of how other people might need a bit more, but does your family have any at this moment? Are you guys doing alright?

R: No, we're doing we're doing okay. Thank God.

I: If you've given any help to others, including friends and family in or outside the US, have you given any help out?

R: Yeah, whenever we can. We definitely, yeah, we definitely do.

I: Yeah, would you like to share what that might maybe looks like?

R: Unfortunately, no.

I: OK, that's fine. The next question will be, well I guess we already touched on how covid affected your physical and emotional health a bit, but would you like to maybe elaborate a little bit more on some of that challenges that you faced? I know you said how it affected more of your emotional well-being.

R: Yeah, definitely. A situation like covid I mean, the impact of it on any person I think, because it doesn't just affect only you as a person. Because when the with a break, you know, over pandemic like this, that affects almost every aspect of life. And you all you see and hear about sickness and disease and deaths and people who are really in a very high level of stress situations for one reason or the other, financial or whatever it is. Living in a situation like this, it can be very, very challenging mentally and emotionally. So, being part of the fabric of this society, I mean it's definitely is going to affect you too. Uh, as I said, I mean you sometimes honestly you get you get really like a little bit more depressed and other times you know I mean. But just like everybody else and everything else, you know. And some people, maybe they take it harder than others, but so far thank God, it is not affecting us as with no permanent damage you know.

I: Yeah. Do you have any idea of maybe like some strategies that you've been using to kind of help you kind of cope with these like every day you know stressors that you know everyone is dealing with? Anything that you've been doing in particular that you think might be helping.

R: Sincerely, you know thank God we're we have work. Definitely work. Work can really keep your mind off things a lot of times. You know, of course, praying is definitely part of our daily life. That's also has to do with it and with your strength and how you deal with the emotional stress and the mental stress. Um, and you know, trying to work with mental block was what you what you can control. I mean, if mental you know it gives you always try to remind yourself that this is in your control, this is not in your control; I think you'll do and deal with it a whole lot better.

I: Yeah. So, these next group couple questions are going to explore more about how COVID-19 has affected your religious practice and beliefs. So how have you been able to continue religious traditions during the pandemic?

R: Um, on a personal level, nothing changed to be honest with you because what I was doing daily before covid, I'm still doing daily. You know, now and after covid you know that's on a personal level. Now if you are describing, for example, one of our things, you know in our religion and our belief is like, really, a good prayer is in is in the mosque. You know the group prayer, which of course since covid, me personally, I didn't do the mosque – they were closed for a long time. So, you don't do that practice, even though you pray at home, but you can't pray in the mosque, which is preferable in in our religion and in our believe too. Now the other part of it also is going to the mosque, you know it definitely has to do with the social part of it in your community. You know with people who are, you know your background, your religion, you speak the same language, the same culture. So, it's also by not practicing that as you wish, you know it does – it did affect, I think the cultural daily life you know of the whole community at that level, not just me of course. That's just that's my opinion.

I: Yeah. Since the outbreak, have you participated in any virtual religious activities?

R: Oh yeah, a couple on the computer. I'm one of the people who do not have – maybe I would have like participated in more if I have Facebook as everybody said. I don't have a Facebook. I don't use Facebook. And I did participate in things that whenever they don't use Facebook and it's available when they can. Yeah, I did a couple of virtual things but not a lot. Most of the times they use Facebook for it because almost everybody has Facebook, but I don't participate in those. You know, that's probably something that we never did before. You know, that's definitely a new trend because of covid. Yeah just the virtual activities.

I: Yeah, and what are your thoughts and feelings about practicing religion virtually?

R: I honestly, as I said earlier, that does not replace doing the in person thing. I think that the in person is more rewarding and richer, you know for such experience. So, I don't really personally, care too much for virtual practices. But, when you have to use it as an alternative, when you have no other choice, that's fine. You use it. But for example, one thing that is coming soon since talking about that subject, like we have the month of Ramadan coming next month. I don't know about it but it's one of the biggest and holiest months of the year for the Muslim faith. And you know everybody, every practicing Muslim, I mean they get together every night for prayers in that month you know in the mosque, which were normally talking usually like hundreds and thousands of people you know each night. Now it is going to be limited to 300 people a night. You see the difference.

I: Yeah. Yeah, so how do you feel about Ramadan being different this year?

R: I mean, you know it's unfortunate, you know. But you know, again, to deal with this pandemic and try to get to the end of it, you have to do it that way. And you know by following the regulations and recommendations of the CDC and the health experts and you know, hopefully, within a few months, hopefully will go back to normal.

I: Yeah. Okay, and how your Imams or religious leaders drawn on scriptural or Muslim history sources to kind of help community members understand and cope with the COVID-19 crisis?

R: Sorry I didn't understand the first part of the question.

I: I'm just asking how Imams or religious leaders you know people that you can listen to you at the Mosque. Have you know, if you've noticed any of them drawing on scriptural or Muslim history sources to kind of help everyone understand covid bit more.

R: Uh, they definitely yeah, they absolutely use – again you know, the technology they use to promote the dealing the right way with covid. And sometimes you know, given some virtual lessons and you know reading materials online to help people deal with it and understand it and you know, try to help people also see the light at the end of the tunnel. So, they definitely try to do what they can. They also always promoting the CDC recommendations and health experts who are trying to promote in the community and to follow it and go through with it.

I: Yeah, and in what ways, if any, have your prayer and religious practices come played a role in how you understand and cope with COVID-19?

R: Um, as far as understanding as a person, you know, as a person, honestly, it's very difficult to deal with accepting something like this in, you know, just happening overnight. Which is exactly what's happened in the whole world. Um, as far as the religious part of it, you know, definitely, your faith makes you stronger. Dealing in situations like this and understanding more. So, I would say the religious aspect of my life, is definitely, it helped me go through these times and

deal with the covid pandemic and the way things are going on daily life.

I: So, these next set of questions are going to focus more on the Muslim community's engagement with social justice issues. Focusing a bit more on the Black Lives Matter protesters, so like back in 2020. So how has your mosque or the Islamic Center responded to calls for social justice raised by the Black Lives Matter movement?

R: How did they respond to calls like Black Lives Matter and stuff like that?

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah honestly, our community and our mosque are usually the first people to respond for issues that have to do with the social injustice and stuff like that and events like these. They always participate whenever there's something to do, to say. Even like demonstrations with the social distancing and stuff like that, they would promote it and like, send flyers for the community and for poor people. A lot of times they send or publish to the press like some statements about all these and they always clear and take very strong stand for injustice, social injustice issues. Um, they do use nowadays more, even though, like in the past they always participate physically in it. Now these days, as you know, it's more limited, but they do promote it a lot through the social media whenever there are any statements or any stand to take or any announcement about events like that.

I: In any way that you kind of also respond or interact with these kinds of calls for social justice movement?

R: Well, with the – so me personally with social injustice you mean?

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, absolutely I am. I'm definitely part of the of the society and I'm also part of the community. And in in my faith, you know, my faith does not accept any social injustice. No matter who is the victim, it doesn't matter who the victim is. But social injustice is never accepted in my faith. So, me personally, I was definitely for these issues, I support any cases that called for social justice and you know, taking action and correction of any unjust situation or event.

I: Awesome, so we're actually on the last section of the interview now, which is going to focus a bit more on inspiration and hope. We talked about a lot of difficult and hard times. So even during these hard times, you know good things can happen in life. So, what would you say has been the most uplifting experience since COVID-19? Or you know something that inspired hope or happiness in you?

R: Honestly, I mean definitely one of the biggest things is your family. And my family, I mean definitely is one of the biggest things, with God, thank God of course. Always helps us, to lift each other and see each other up and be there for each other you know. But the biggest thing, sincerely, it's definitely, family. My wife, my kids. Just that's the biggest thing for me. Of course, recently seeing the tunnel, the light at the end of the tunnel, everybody is talking about vaccines and they're starting to vaccinate people, that's definitely a good thing. Good news for everybody. Hopefully it's going to be the beginning of the end for this pandemic. You know, but the sincerely mainly it's I would say my wife and my kids.

I: Yeah, that's nice. Anything that you're looking forward to doing most once you know COVID-19 is gone?

R: Yeah, travel. (laughter) I want to go see my daughter and her family and my grandchild. Also see my family, my brothers, my sisters, you know. So definitely like a freedom of movement a little bit. Yeah, you know without being worried about getting something or giving somebody something.

I: Yeah. Yes, well that day will hopefully come very soon like you said there is definitely that tunnel.

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, awesome. Anything else you'd like to add? It could be about something that we may be touched on that you want to talk a bit more about, or if there's something I didn't touch on that you'd like to add.

R: No, I appreciate your work. I think it's a very good study and I appreciate you guys – you and your whole group for the effort that you are doing.

I: I appreciate your time. You know for being here with me answer these questions. Yeah, so that's everything I have, so I hope you have a great day. I appreciate you taking your time out to talk with me.

R: Sure, no problem.

I: Awesome, alright then goodbye.

R: Thank you, appreciate it.

I: Bye.

R: Bye, bye.