



## 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: NDP1

Date: 2/19/2021

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

Year of Birth: 1989

Gender: Female

Country of Origin: U.S.

Year of Immigration: N.A.

Current State in which respondent resides: Virginia

**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:**

The respondent is a Palestinian-American woman, 32 years of age, who grew up in the Midwestern U.S. She now lives in Virginia with her husband and three daughters who are all of school age. In the interview, the respondent shared about her experience with COVID-19 as causing a lot of change, both positive and negative. Some of the less desirable outcomes of the pandemic have included isolation from family and friends especially during Ramadan season, changing from her job as a preschool teacher to an at-home school-teacher for several children, including her own (there were positive aspects to this change, as well, as she is still doing what she loves to do). She describes giving to others in many ways, like by dropping off food for many people on their doorstep, being a “therapist” to so many people on the phone, making worksheets for kids of friends. Positive outcomes from the pandemic have included the

respondent drawing closer to her faith, spending more family time together, her children learning more effectively in their online Islamic studies classes than they did in-person over the last five years, and connecting with geographically-distant family more often. Also, she has been able to teach her kids about being active in social justice initiatives like Black Lives Matter, which she and her family, as well as her mosque and nearby Islamic centers, have been active in supporting both theologically and by showing up.

### **Key Themes:**

COVID-19, pandemic, Muslim, Ramadan, family, mosque, Black Lives Matter, mental health, coping, tutoring, school, virtual, food, quality time, children

### **Edited Transcript**

I: So thanks for agreeing to be interviewed and completing the consent form. Are you ready?

R: Yes! I'm ready.

I: Okay, awesome. So what is your name?

R: [Name]

I: And what is your age?

R: I am 32.

I: Okay. And where were you born?

R: In [a city in the Midwest U.S.]

I: And how do you identify yourself in terms of national background?

R: Palestinian.

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

R: A master's.

I: And your marital status?

R: I'm married.

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

R: Two.

I: Okay, and how many children 18 years or younger live in your household?

R: Three.

I: Okay. So, um, this next set of questions focus on the impact of COVID-19 on personal relationships, uh, financial well-being, and physical or emotional health. I'll give you a few minutes to kind of think about your experiences with changes that have been made to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and how these changes have affected you. So if you just want to reflect for a little bit, and then I'll go into the questions.

R: Okay.

I: How has the outbreak of the COVID virus affected you personally and in terms of your financial, social, or health situations?

R: Um, well (sighs)--because of COVID I actually had to quit my job. So I was a pre-school teacher working at my daughter's school--who doesn't go there anymore, she's now in kindergarten--so I actually had to quit work there, because all three of my kids ended up going virtual and so they weren't in person, so I had to stay home with them. My husband is also working from home, but because of all this, I decided to open up my own mini-preschool pod. So I'm working from home [inaudible] my own teaching, and I have three students, along with helping my own children with their virtual learning.

I: Thank you. And, how would you say the outbreak of the virus has affected maybe the way you conduct yourself with people close to you? Um, this could include, you know, friends and family who *are* near to you geographically, or even people, uh, who are far away geographically?

R: We take COVID very seriously, so we kind of isolate ourselves from everybody, so we hardly see people, and when we do see them, it's kind of like a drive-by hello in the car -- we only see one other person that's not in our household and that's my husband's sister who's by herself and she's also very isolated. We used to--[inaudible] from Virginia--we used to travel to [my home state in the Midwest] at least three times a year, and we haven't been doing that, at all. Um, we cancelled a lot of our family trips, like to visit other families in different states too, because of

COVID, so I'd say we're just kind of isolating from everybody, just so we don't spread the disease.

I: And since kind of--since this whole pandemic has started, you mentioned, you know, drive-by contact, but what are your primary ways of communicating with friends and family who aren't in your household, would you say?

R: Um, probably Facetime.

I: Okay, um, and that kind of answers my next question, but, you know, if you have other answers to this--so if you're using, um--well, actually, this is an extension of that, so if you're using any new ways of connecting with others, can you describe any challenges or unexpected benefits maybe that you've experienced?

R: Yeah, so actually, so--we--so on a daily basis, we'll do Facetime calls, but my sisters and I, my cousins and I, will do like Zoom exercise classes together, which we wouldn't normally have done before COVID. So, that's been different--and I feel like that's an added benefit, 'cause we're seeing more people from out of state that we would have never really kind of seen virtually if that makes sense?

I: Yeah, absolutely.

R: Uh, then we've done a few Zoom birthday parties, which has been cool, because, especially if it's an out of state, we probably wouldn't have celebrated with them if it weren't for COVID or like Zoom, if that makes sense.

I: Sure. And then, you mentioned a couple different platforms like Zoom and FaceTime. Are there any other specific apps that you've begun to use, or you know, blogs that you've begun to read or listen to, and if so, do you remember the names of them?

R: Um (pauses) let me think. Um, is it strictly just to communicate with people?

I: No, any apps that you've used.

R: I've started using this app on my phone, it's called COVID-Wise that just [inaudible] in a certain area communication if there's like an outbreak where I am. And actually a new one that I put on my phone is um (pauses) what is it called... Patient First? And it's basically like an online televisit for urgent care.

I: Okay.

R: Pre-COVID, we would have never done like a televist for urgent care, but it's been really convenient to just call up somebody and let them know what our symptoms are.

I: Sure (pauses). Absolutely, okay, thank you. Yeah, and uh, you mentioned your previous employment. Could you tell me how many hours on average per week you worked at--as, uh, a preschool teacher?

R: Yeah, so I was working, um, four hours a day, five days a week.

I: Okay.

R: Um, so super part-time, but now, I'm working full-time, 9-3, full time for me (chuckles), 9-3, five days a week.

I: Okay, great, and then you answered my next question right away, so thank you. And, uh, in what ways, if any, would you say COVID-19 has affected you or your family's financial well-being?

R: Um (pauses, sighs)--well I guess I--I had to switch jobs. Um, and (pauses, sighs)--I'm not a hundred percent sure, I mean, I feel like it hasn't impacted us terribly, because we are all home, and we are all still employed, so that's good. We stopped going out to eat as much, so we're spending a lot more money at the grocery store, and everyone's eating a (chuckles) a lot more, so we spend--we spend a lot more on groceries.

I: Sure.

R: Like, a lot, way a lot more than we usually do. At least 50% more. Um, so that's been, that's been big.

I: Okay. Um, have you received any sort of help? And it doesn't have to be, you know, strictly financial, but any sort of help throughout this pandemic?

R: Uh, no.

I: Okay, and then, would you just kind of reflect on some--what are some current needs you might have, if any, and just kind of tell me what those are?

R: Current needs? Uh, what do you mean?

I: I think probably mostly in terms of, um, you know, financial well-being, mental well-being, um, or, you know, any sort of physical, physical needs as well?

R: Okay, um well I don't know if this, this counts, I don't know (chuckles)--

I: Sure.

R: But one of my, one of my needs, I guess, is, um, I--for my mental well-being--is I need to take like at least a thirty minute walk every day

I: Okay, sure!

R: Um, just to recharge and decompress, 'cause I mean, like I was working part-time before, so I would have a couple hours in between work and the time the kids came home to just decompress, so now I have--I make myself take a walk every day for thirty minutes just--to recharge. And it helps a lot--

I: Oh, good!

R: But yeah, I guess--that's my only real need.

I: Sure, and that kind of brings me to a different strain of questions. You mentioned walking -- what other strategies have you used to cope with, or some challenges that COVID-19 has kind of posed you with?

R: Um, so walking is one, just for mental well-being. Like I said before, starting my own school in the basement has been a challenge because of COVID, but it's also--it also helps a lot, because I am still active and working and still doing what I love. Plus, I'm still there with my kids if they need something. We've done a lot of baking, which we would have done pre-COVID, but not as much as we're doing, now that the kids are into it. They've looked up the recipes, and then it's like a family thing, all of us are into baking now.

I: Sure

R: Uh, so, um, things like that. Yeah.

I: Um, and one question I'd like to just loop back to is um, you know we were talking about just needs and in terms of multiple facets, but what kind of, um, what kind of help have you given to others? It could include immediate family or friends, extended family or acquaintances; so what kind of help might you have given?

R: Um, so (sigh), help for friends that have had COVID, I've dropped off food to their house, just like at the doorstep. Um, for friends that have children around the same age as mine, or younger, I've made them, like their children, like worksheets, or homework, or something that they can do at home to kind of ease their parents. I've done a few virtual, like, tutoring, through Facetime. We did end up driving to [my parents' home in the Midwest] in June; I was there to help my parents and to kind of take care of them, and take care of the house, try to get everything in order before we left. So we were there for about a month. I (chuckles) do feed a lot of people and I do cook for a lot of people, and just drop it off. And I do feel like I am a lot of people's therapist--so they'll call me if they need to vent; so, that's another thing that I've given to other people, just an ear.

I: Yeah, well, yeah, thank you for sharing that. Is there anything else, you know, because this is the end of this section of questions, but is there anything else that comes to mind, you know, something to note about your experience with COVID--just, you know, things that were expected, unexpected. It's really just kind of an open-ended question, but is there anything else you'd like me to know?

R: Yeah, there's a few. So, one thing that wasn't expected from COVID is that it is really hard. Um, another thing is Ramadan during COVID, which was like in April, right around when COVID hit. We used to host meals and eat with everybody; we'd go to the mosque and pray every night, and we weren't able to do that at all, so that wasn't fun. You know, we usually see tons of friends and family and have these big celebrations, so that was hard on my kids. Um, so we didn't--I mean, we prayed at home, like through Facebook Live, which our mosque would provide. For Friday, I would actually take my kids, and we would actually go to pray at the mosque before COVID. So that all stopped; we would try to do something at home, again, through Facebook Live, but it wasn't the same.

I: Okay

R: Um--so, I feel like the same thing this year, Ramadan's going to feel a little different

I: Sure

R: When I first think of Ramadan, I think of having good food and family, being with people, so it's just hard for me to get used to that aspect of it all.

I: Yeah, absolutely, and you really did (chuckle) touch on the next strain of questions, which is evaluating the impact on religious practices and beliefs. So you've told me a little bit about how the pandemic affected religious traditions, especially about Ramadan, and you have talked about virtual religious activities, and especially about how these are not the same as previously. Have

religious leaders drawn on scriptural or Muslim historical sources to help community members during this time, to kind of understand and cope with the crisis?

R: Um, I feel like they have. I feel like they have. I don't know if this is related--

I: Sure

R: But side note, um, is my kids were in Sunday school, and obviously that went away once COVID came. But now they do private, one-on-one Islamic studies and Qur'an classes. And, to be honest, that was the one positive thing about COVID -- I would have never thought to put them in one-on-one tutoring, I always had them in a classroom setting, but since they've been in one-on-one tutoring, they've learned way more than they have the five years that they were in Sunday school.

I: Sure!

R: And they're three hours, versus they're a half an hour with their teacher, so, that's something that, once COVID is over, we'll probably continue that one-on-one tutoring, like, virtual tutoring--

I: Absolutely

R: Versus a classroom setting.

I: Sure, okay, awesome!

R: Yeah!

I: And then, um (pause)--yeah, that helps to, that helps to kind of construct an idea of how things have changed, but, um, also--

R: In a positive way!

I: Yeah, exactly! Noticing what works. So this might be a little more personal, but, you know, in what ways, if any, have your own prayers and religious practices played a role in how you have coped with COVID-19, or how you have understood the pandemic?

R: I feel like I've been praying a lot more, and I don't know if manifesting is the right word for it, but I'm like wishing, you know, everybody to be well and healthy. That's the main thing I add in on all my prayers at the end -- just please keep us all safe and healthy. And that's something new, because I, I--like I said, we take COVID very seriously, so anytime we do go out,



we--we're a little paranoid to be honest. Um, anytime we do go out, it's just like, oh I, I hope that we go and we come back safely, and we don't bring anything back into the house.

I: Sure.

R: So, I've been adding that to our nightly prayer, or our daily prayer.

I: Sure. And that's something that you, that you do every day, then?

R: Yes.

I: Okay, okay. Got it.

R: Yep.

I: Is there anything else you'd like to kind of just fill me in on, um, in terms of specifically, you know, your faith during this time?

R: Um, I do feel like I've drawn closer to my faith than before, um--and when we do my Facetime calls with my sister and whatnot, it's more of, like, hi, how are you, but also we talk about things that we've read in the Qur'an and things that we've learned recently, so there's a lot more religious talk among us> Now that my kids are doing the one-on-one tutoring, there's a lot more of that talk at home, too, just to instill it into them, and then reinforce everything that they've learned.

I: Right. Definitely a change, yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: Awesome, so we're getting to the home stretch, [NAME], um, so--

R: (Chuckles) okay.

I: So two more topics. The first topic is about social justice, and the questions focus on, at large, the Muslim community's engagement with social justice, um, specifically as a result of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, so--how has, um, uh, if at all and to what extent, has your mosque and/or the Islamic center responded to the calls for social justice raised by Black Lives Matter movement?

R: Uh, um, many mosques set up protests that we could all go to, uh, 'cause we're in D.C.  
(chuckle)

I: Oh, sure, sure!

R: So, um, just kind of like urging people, if they can get out, put your mask on, and can go--um, and I do feel like the dynamic is very different in D.C. versus anywhere else, 'cause, like...everybody is very supportive over Black Lives Matter, especially, I felt like, our Muslim community. Um, and so it's--I--so they wrote up a statement and [inaudible] and all these things to make sure that we know they're with the Black Lives Matter, which I appreciate, and yeah!

I: And--and when you say, do you mean, the Muslim community especially around D.C. or at large, you're feeling this?

R: I mean, I'm, I'm meaning at large, but I--because I'm here, I feel like it was, just not just the Muslim community but Virginia and D.C. in general, it looked like.

I: Right (clears throat).

R: Um, it was very big for us.

I: Sure. And you mentioned, um, like statements, um, you know--were these by, were these by religious elders, or kind of--who were, who were these kind of by?

R: Um, so they--it was by the mosque itself, so--

I: Okay, sure

R: So, it was--so they signed it like a mosque [inaudible] so they signed it [inaudible - big space?]. But, but they're all, like everybody was on the same page.

I: Sure, sure. Um, and how, you know, in what other modes have you kind of found out, or like--you know, listened to this, um, this conversation in the, in the Muslim community, like through other (chuckles) like through what means, I guess?

R: Um, usually like social media.

I: Sure.

R: Facebook, Instagram.

I: Sure. Um, and then, in what ways, if any, have you or any--I mean, you kind of touched on the Muslim community around you, but maybe like you and your family--how have you guy showed solidarity, if at all, with Black Lives Matter?

R: Um, so we actually, um, we went to the/a protest (chuckles)

I: Okay! (chuckles)

R: Um, I know--it was safe enough for us, at least, COVID-wise. We double-masked when we went. And then once the protest kind of winded down, we did take our kids to Black Lives Matter Plaza, and we just showed them what is was and explained everything to them, which, I mean, the oldest one kind of knew what was going on--but at least the younger ones. Um, and, and yeah, so--we just kind of stayed around D.C. and taught them exactly what happened.

I: Sure. Um, and then what do you think--this question says what do you think Muslim communities in the U.S. should be doing with regard to social justice? Now this can expand beyond Black Lives Matter to include, you know, issues of racism, the problem of Islamophobia, violence against Muslims, against LGBTQ community, um, and beyond, so, uh, so, what do you think ought to be the actions or conversations going on in the Muslim community?

R: Um, at least for our, like pre-COVID, when we would go to Friday prayer--so usually there's like a, like a lecture that happens. And they would always preface equality for all and regardless of who your neighbor is or what the person next to you is doing, you treat everybody with the same amount of respect that you would want to be treated. And then they would talk about how Prophet Muhammad would get trash thrown at him by a neighbor who was of a different religion and faith who didn't appreciate Prophet Muhammad's religion and faith -- so the neighbor would constantly throw trash at him, throw trash on his yard. And then one day the Prophet woke up to no trash in his yard, and the first thing he did was visit his neighbor and ask him if he was okay, and to make sure he wasn't sick, because there wasn't trash on his yard.

I: Mm-hmm.

R: And so then, so basically our mosque is telling us to model that behavior, like, don't get mad at a person who's throwing trash in your yard, because you're Muslim or Palestinian or Black, or whatever--just be okay with it and still respect that person for the way they believe and then teach them the proper way and the right way--and, and try to get rid of their stigmas and their stereotypes against you, personally. And that's how I raise my kids too. I don't care what that person's doing; I don't care if we don't agree with the way that they're living; we still respect them -- we love them, and we take care of them.

I: Sure, absolutely. Thank you for that.

R: Yeah, no problem

I: Um, any other thoughts on the intersection of Muslim community and social justice?

R: Um (pauses, sighs), I mean, there's so much injustice (chuckles, sighs), that it's hard to just complain. The only thing I can say is that I think/feel our religion has taught us to treat everybody like human beings, and treat everybody equally in the way that you would want to be treated. And just to be kind, because...you know, *salaam* means peace, so just--be peaceful, and loving.

I: Awesome, well thank you!

R: Mm-hmm

I: Final section--so this last section of the interview is going to take a turn, because many of these questions have been about difficulties and hard times associated with COVID. And you did touch on (despite these difficult times) positive changes and good things that have happened, so this is to kind of expand on that aspect of the experience.

R: Okay

I: So I guess, if you could pinpoint it, or if you have multiple stories, that's fine too--what would you say was the most uplifting experience since the outbreak of COVID-19, something that inspired hope or happiness?

R: So, before COVID, we were a super, super busy family, and we would kind of use our house like a hotel--we'd eat, sleep, and leave, eat, sleep, and leave, so like--the kids would wake up, we'd go to school, and then they would have their soccer, tae kwondo, dance, gymnastics, swimming, like, music lessons, all of that after school. And then we'd come home at like 8:30, have dinner, homework, and bed, and then we'd start it up the next day. Saturday and Sunday it was the same thing. But once COVID hit, everything stopped. So we all had to slow down, and I appreciated that need to slow down, because you don't realize how fast you're going or how life is moving so quickly when you're moving so quickly. So, like, just when everything stopped and there were no more sports or music or dance or anything, it was just us, and we could actually hang out together and play games and do things that I always wish we could have done but we couldn't have done because we were always so busy.

I: Right

R: So that has been a positive for me -- just that we get to spend more quality time with each other and just always kind of be together. Like, I always wished for more time together, because I felt like we all lived together, but we never saw each other.

I: Sure

R: So, that's been the main thing. I feel like we're a closer family now, and we have more hobbies together instead of separate. We all bake together now, we all cook together as a family, which (chuckle), which, it sounds awful, but sometimes we wouldn't eat together as a family, we would just eat when we got a chance, and--we'd eat separately. So, so yeah--we've been a little closer together.

I: Oh, good

R: My main thing is that the one-on-one tutoring for Islamic studies has been huge for us. I didn't realize how much they're learning now in that short period of time versus the five years that they were actually in a classroom setting.

I: Sure

R: I feel like I've become closer to people that are far away because everyone's home, everyone has ability to talk to each other, because I wouldn't call one of my cousins because I would have thought she would have been busy, but now that I know everyone's home, I'm more inclined to pick up the phone and call people. So certain things like that have changed. I feel like a lot of things have--I mean, COVID's been hard, but certain things have made life easier, like, this sounds so stupid, but like grocery pick-up?

I: Mm-hmm.

R: Or just like never having to get out of your car; you can just go to any store and do pick-up. I hope that doesn't go away (chuckles), because that's been really helpful. But yeah, those kinds of things.

I: Awesome. Yeah, great, thank you! Yeah, uh, and what is, uh, what is it that you're looking most forward to doing once COVID-19 abates or maybe once every gets a vaccination?

R: Yeah, so I actually got my first dose last week.

I: Oh, cool!

R: So I'll be getting second dose soon. What I keep saying is, if I get my second dose before spring break, I want to go visit my parents. So, that's my biggest thing. My parents also got vaccinated. And they got vaccinated around the second time, so we'll receive our second dose around the same time.

I: Okay.

R: So once we're both fully vaccinated, I will pay them a visit and just hang out with my parents. Um, but, but other than that, just traveling again, together as a family.

I: Sure, absolutely.

R: Yeah

I: Yeah. The final question -- is there anything else at all that you want to tell me, that we haven't covered so far?

R: Um, I feel like we've covered a lot of it, unless you can think of something else.

I: I can't, yeah, I can't personally think of something--

R: Okay. Yeah, I hope this was helpful!

I: Yeah, it was very, very much so, thank you. And just as a closing, we're of course always seeking additional people to interview, so if you know of any American Muslims who are over 18 years old, and you think they would like to participate in this project, you have my email now and my phone number, so you could either contact me or you could give my name and contact to them as well.

R: Okay!

I: And then, as part of the project, we created an anonymous survey-- so I'll email that to you, and if you have a chance and are willing to take it, that would be super appreciated.

R: Awesome

I: And I'll also--in that email, I'll give you the AMWRRRI website that we're working on, so you can kind of take a look at what the project is focused on.

R: Sounds great!

I: Yeah, so thank you again so, so, much, [NAME] for your cooperation!

R: No problem!

I: Yeah, stay healthy, much peace to all of you!

R: Thank you. Take care!

I: Bye-bye

R: Okay, bye.