

Coping Strategies employed by Muslim Academia during Covid-19: A narrative review

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Abstract

The global educational scenario has undergone a major transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to substantial conflict and disturbances in the process of imparting and acquiring knowledge. The scarcity of studies on Muslim academia's coping mechanisms amidst the COVID-19 outbreak highlights the necessity to investigate their distinct encounters. Drawing on existing literature, this narrative review explores the Islamic-based coping strategies they employed. Educators, mental health practitioners, and other stakeholders may acknowledge the significance of these coping strategies and integrate them into mental health and educational programmes to aid the Muslim academia and alike amidst the pandemic and beyond.

Keywords: Coping strategies, Muslim academia, Covid-19, narrative review

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1.0 Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19, also called the novel coronavirus disease, a pandemic. This has resulted in academia who are made up of students and educators, along with various global populations, facing new pressures and difficult situations. Educators and students have faced pressure due to sudden changes, such as closure of educational institutions, and the shift from face-to-face classrooms to fully online learning but with insufficient preparation (Moser et al., 2021). Online learning has become the new standard, and despite the advantages such as flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and promotion of student-centred and lifelong learning (Bourne, Harris & Mayadas, 2005), it has posed challenges for students; the challenges included loss of motivation, disengagement, excessive information load, unstable internet connectivity, unfamiliarity with remote learning and unfavourable home study conditions (Bakar & Tazijan, 2022). For educators, their struggles with online learning during the pandemic included limited preparation time, difficulty with technology, finding effective online delivery practices, student engagement, providing personalized feedback, assessing student learning effectively, and managing workload (Aboo Bakar, 2021b; Divoll & Moore, 2021). These difficult situations have led academia to have negative emotions, such as hopelessness, anger and stress (Taylor et al., 2021). However, educators and students need to have positive emotions which are essential to their positive learning environment and success; this means that they need to embrace coping strategies (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Coping refers to the ability to deal with difficult situations effectively (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Coping strategies are actions taken by individuals, groups or organizations to minimize the effects of stress, which can be categorized as problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused strategies address the root cause of stress by finding solutions, while emotion-focused strategies manage the emotional distress caused by the situation. Examples of coping mechanisms that can reduce anxiety levels include relaxation techniques, meditation, yoga, and imagery. Other effective coping strategies include social support, distraction, self-control, and problem-solving plans. Factors such as religiosity and self-efficacy are important predictors of life satisfaction. Effective coping strategies

can have a positive impact on psychological well-being and emotional reactions, including managing depression and anxiety, maintaining a balance of positive and negative feelings, and reducing the risk of psychiatric disorders.

Koenig (2020) notes that religion is a crucial coping strategy in maintaining health and well-being during the pandemic and emphasizes the importance of faith in providing comfort and support during difficult times and the need for individuals to take responsibility for their actions to prevent the spread of the virus. Islamic teachings urge individuals to submit to Allah in both good and bad times (Abou Bakar, 2021a), behave responsibly towards others, show solidarity, and follow established rules during emergencies, such as refraining from entering or leaving areas affected by an epidemic (Fadel, 2020). However, there is a scarcity of studies on Muslim academia's coping mechanisms amidst the COVID-19 outbreak highlighting the necessity to investigate their distinct encounters. Thus, employing a narrative review, this article aims at exploring the coping strategies the Muslim academia exercised amidst Covid-19.

2.0 Methodology

The study employed a narrative review. The process of writing a narrative review involves four stages (Gregory & Denniss, 2018):

- Define a topic

The study explored the coping strategies employed by Muslim academia during their difficult situations amidst Covid-19.

- Search and re-search the literature

The authors searched Scopus and Google Scholar for peer-reviewed articles published from January 2020 to April 2023 in English. Search terms included Muslim academics, Covid-19, challenges, teaching and learning activities, and coping strategies, with a combination of any and/or all of the previous terms. In doing a narrative review, any basic and well-established search engines can be used to find peer-reviewed articles so long as they can provide the intended articles (Agarwal et al., 2013; Hujoel & Lingström, 2017).

The author reviewed all potential articles for inclusion. In doing so, only six peer-reviewed articles were found related and suitable to be included. The articles included are irrespective of study design and are from different countries, such as Algeria (this study has also included samples from Malaysia, Indonesia, Qatar, Nigeria, Jordan, Yemen, Morocco, Libya, Mauritania, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Bangladesh), Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Turkey.

- Be critical

The study summarized, analysed, and provided a critical discussion of the relevant literature by identifying knowledge gaps in the literature reviewed.

- Find a logical structure

The study needed to be written clearly with the introduction, methodology, discussion and conclusion parts. Each article was read, re-read and whose topic and discussion were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Each Article

Author	Coping strategy	Summary of study	Source
Abdurrahman et al. (2021)	Students coped with stress by undergoing Islamic counselling containing spiritual guidance guided by Al-Quran and Hadith containing, not trying to change the situation, striving to achieve a better future.	Undergoing Islamic counselling	Google Scholar
Achour et al. (2021)	Lecturers coped with anxiety by praying, attending religious activities, meditating, spending time with family and friends, and adapting to reality.	Engaging in religious practices, and adjusting to reality to maintain well-being	Scopus & Google Scholar
Awaad et al. (2021)	Educated Muslims primarily relied on religious coping behaviours like seeking forgiveness from Allah, performing daily prayers, making du'a, and reading Qur'an; these behaviours were associated with better mental health outcomes.	Exercising Islamic principles	Scopus & Google Scholar
Daulay et al. (2022)	Exercising gratitude and believing Allah to be a helper in all problems and adversity in life.	Exercising gratitude	Google Scholar
Yunus & Eid (2022)	Students coped with difficulties learning online by controlling the learning environment, communicating with others, asking for help, writing a diary, and taking short breaks.	Exercising control, communication, reflection, and relaxation techniques.	Google Scholar
Zin (2022)	Exercising belief in Qada & Qadar, performing five-time prayers, reciting Quran and zikir	Exercising religious spirituality coping mechanisms	Google Scholar

3.0 Findings

From the reviewed literature, the coping strategies taken by Muslim academia amidst Covid-19 are summarized as themes in Table 3.

Table 3. Coping strategies of Muslim academia amidst Covid-19

Theme of Coping Strategy	Conscious Effort	Author
Undergoing Islamic counselling	Students coped with stress by undergoing Islamic counselling containing spiritual	Abdurrahman et al. (2021)

	guidance guided by Al-Quran and Hadith containing, not trying to change the situation, striving to achieve a better future.	
Performing five-time daily prayers	Students and lecturers coped with anxiety by praying.	Achour et al. (2021); Awaad et al. (2021); Zin (2022)
Reciting the Quran	Reciting Quran for mental health outcomes	Awaad et al. (2021); Zin (2022)
Exercising belief in Qada & Qadar'	Accepting and adapting to reality	Achour et al. (2021); Zin (2022)
Attending religious activities	Performing zikir and making du'a seeking forgiveness from Allah	Achour et al. (2021); Awaad et al. (2021)
Spending time with family and friends	Communicating with others and asking for help	Yunus & Eid (2022)
Exercising gratitude	Exercising gratitude and believing Allah to be a helper in all problems and adversity in life; Writing gratitude in a diary	Daulay et al. (2022); Yunus & Eid (2022)
Controlling the learning environment	Taking short breaks, exercising, talking to others, writing in a diary	Yunus & Eid (2022)

4.0 Discussion

From the reviewed literature, the study presents the coping strategies Muslim academia have employed amidst Covid-19 pandemic. They are as follows:

4.1 Undergoing Islamic Counselling

Islamic counselling had been a valuable resource for Muslim academia during the pandemic to maintain their well-being (Abdurrahman et al., 2021). Islamic counselling is a type of therapy that incorporates Islamic principles and values into the counselling process. Islamic counselling offers a unique perspective on mental health that integrates Islamic beliefs and practices. It could help Muslim academia to connect their faith with their mental health and well-being. Islamic counsellors would use Quranic verses, hadith, and other Islamic teachings to provide guidance and support to their clients. Practical tips on how to incorporate Islamic practices into daily routines, such as prayer, recitation of the Quran, and remembrance of Allah were also supplied. Additionally, Islamic counselling offered a safe and non-judgmental space for Muslim academia to express their concerns and challenges without fear of stigma or discrimination. Through Islamic counselling, Muslim academia could address their mental health concerns while also strengthening their faith and spirituality. By undergoing Islamic counselling during the pandemic, Muslim academia received the support and guidance they needed to maintain their well-being and thrive academically and personally.

4.2 Performing Five-time Daily Prayers

In the review, it is found that studies done by Achour et al. (2021), Awaad et al. (2021), and Zin (2022) reported that Muslim lecturers and students who performed five-time daily prayers had a positive and significant correlation with their well-being. This is consistent with findings by Achour et al. (2016a) and Edman and Koon (2000) that prayer is a means of turning their worries into positive supplications and is found to be a commonly used as health intervention in various countries.

4.3 Reciting the Quran

The review reveals that Awaad et al. (2021) and Zin (2022) conducted studies which showed that Muslim lecturers and students who engaged in reciting the Quran had a strong and positive relationship with their well-being. Reciting the Quran can allow one to have a positive relationship with their well-being due to its potential psychological benefits, such as providing a sense of calm, reducing anxiety and stress (Zarea Gavani et al., 2022), promoting positive thinking and spiritual connection, and offering a source of guidance and comfort in difficult times (Setiadi, 2023). A study by Kannan et al. (2022) also indicates that the impact of listening to rhythmic verses of the Quran on the brain is similar with that of music and rhythmic therapy which can have healing properties and provide a sense of purpose and meaning to one's life.

4.4 Exercising Belief in Qada & Qadar'

The review finds that exercising belief in Qada & Qadar' which also means to accept and adapt to reality was a trait embraced by Muslim academia to withstand the pandemic (Achour et al., 2021; Zin, 2022). It had the potential to create a sense of calm within one's heart, which could prevent feelings of restlessness and anxiety when faced with problems. This finding is also supported by Amijaya et al. (2022) that suggests that Allah wills each destiny but the efforts portrayed by all beings to overcome the obstacles will not be in vain.

4.5 Attending On-line Religious Activities

Attending on-line religious activities can be a way for lecturers and students to maintain their well-being amidst the pandemic (Achour et al., 2021; Awaad et al., 2021). This is supported by Michaels et al. (2022) that propose regular attendance at religious services led individuals feeling a stronger sense of belonging and perceived that the pandemic as having a lesser impact on their lives. During the pandemic, virtual religious services were feasible as they were free and safe, and advice could be gained from Muslim scholars on YouTube videos (Aboo Bakar, 2021a). This advice could provide a sense of community and social support from the Muslim worldwide community, which could reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Additionally, religious practices such as prayer, meditation, and mindfulness can help the academia manage stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic.

4.6 Spending Time with Family and Friends

Muslim academia were also reported maintaining their well-being amidst COVID-19 by spending time with family and friends (Yunus & Eid, 2022). This finding echoes the finding of Bakar and Tazijan (2022) who stated that this kind of coping strategy provided them a sense of social support and connection, which was crucial during times of stress and uncertainty. They had engaged in activities, such as having meals together, engaging in hobbies or interests with their loved ones, and playing games, without forgetting measures and guidelines set by health authorities like wearing masks, practising physical distancing, and avoiding large gatherings to ensure safety while spending time with others during the pandemic. Muslim academia had also stayed connected with their community and friends virtually through social media, video calls, and online gatherings.

4.7 Exercising Gratitude

Muslim academia had been affected by the pandemic like everyone else, and they had had to find ways to maintain their well-being. One way of maintaining well-being was by exercising gratitude (Daulayet al., 2022; Yunus & Eid, 2022). Gratitude is the act of being thankful for the blessings in our lives. All blessings come from Allah, and expressing gratitude is an act of worship. Exercising gratitude could be done in several ways including keeping a gratitude journal, reflecting on the blessings of Allah in their lives and reminding themselves of all the good things they had, such as health, family, work and shelter, and shifting focus from what was lacking to what was present and cultivated a positive mindset (Aboo Bakar, 2021b). Next, seeking refuge in Allah, such as praying and reciting supplications and asking for protection, strength, and guidance during difficult times, was also an act of exercising gratitude. Gratitude helps ones appreciate what they have, rather than focusing on what they lack. It can allow them to develop a positive outlook on life, which can help them cope with stress and anxiety.

4.8 Controlling the Learning Environment

Muslim academia had to adapt to the challenges presented by the pandemic to maintain their well-being and control their learning environment (Yunus & Eid, 2022). Controlling the learning environment included creating a dedicated study space at home that was almost free from distractions. This finding supports the conclusion reached by Bakar and Tazijan (2022), and Li and Che (2022). Clear boundaries with family members or roommates could be set to ensure uninterrupted study time. Controlling the learning environment also incorporated an established routine which outlined specifically studies, prayer, and exercise to maintain a healthy work-study-life balance. Physical and mental health was also taken care of by exercising regularly and getting enough sleep.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this research paper delves into the realm of the coping mechanisms utilized by the Muslim academia amidst the pandemic crisis. The study uncovered that Muslim academia employed a diverse range of coping strategies to maintain their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. These strategies include undergoing Islamic counselling, performing five-time daily prayers, reciting the Quran, exercising belief in Qada & Qadar', attending religious activities, spending time with family and friends, exercising gratitude, and controlling the learning environment.

Based on the findings, it is imperative to highlight the importance of continuing to employ these coping strategies to promote the well-being of Muslim academia. Engaging in Islamic counselling is an excellent way to seek guidance and support while adhering to Islamic principles and values. Additionally, regularly performing five-time daily prayers, reciting the Quran, and exercising belief in Qada & Qadar' can enhance spiritual and psychological fortitude, enabling Muslim academia to better cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic.

However, there are three limitations of this study, and they are listed below:

- a) **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The study may involve a limited sample size or a particular geographical focus, which could potentially affect the generalizability of the findings to a more extensive Muslim academic community. It is important to

recognise that the experiences of Muslim academia may vary across different geographical regions, cultural contexts, and academic institutions;

- b) Cross-Sectional Design: This study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing coping strategies at one specific point in time, that is during Covid-19. Longitudinal research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these coping strategies evolve over time in response to the ongoing pandemic and other external factors; and
- c) Cultural Diversity: The Muslim community encompasses a wide range of cultural backgrounds, leading to substantial variations in coping strategies based on individual cultural contexts and interpretations of Islamic understanding. This study may not encompass the complete array of coping strategies employed by Muslim scholars.

While acknowledging the limitations, it cannot be denied that the rich cultural diversity within the Muslim community and the resultant variations in coping strategies are worth noting. The coping strategies highlighted in this study, rooted in Islamic principles and practices, are adaptable for individuals from diverse backgrounds to enhance their well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic. They can be utilized by individuals from diverse backgrounds to promote their well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The findings of this research underline the importance of continuing to employ these strategies and adapting them to individual needs and circumstances. For instance, undergoing counseling and spending time with loved ones are universal practices that can be adopted by anyone regardless of their religious affiliation. Additionally, practising gratitude and controlling the learning environment are effective strategies that can benefit individuals in any setting, whether academic or personal. Furthermore, while the study highlights the significance of performing five-time daily prayers and reciting the Quran, individuals who are not Muslim can still benefit from engaging in similar practices that promote spirituality and self-reflection. Attending religious activities, albeit virtually, can also provide individuals from all parts of the world with a sense of community and support during these challenging times. The coping strategies highlighted in this study can be adapted and implemented by individuals from all walks of life, regardless of their religious or cultural background. It is essential to prioritize self-care and mental health, and incorporating these coping strategies can be an effective means of doing so. These strategies can help individuals maintain their well-being during and after the pandemic.

In conclusion, it is recommended that educators, mental health practitioners, and other stakeholders acknowledge the significance of these coping strategies and integrate them into mental health and educational programmes to support both the Muslim academic community and similar groups amidst the pandemic and beyond. Understanding religious nuances is integral to the development of targeted, effective interventions aimed at enhancing ones' overall well-being. By employing these strategies, Muslim academia and alike can thrive academically and personally, achieving their goals and contributing to society at large.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The paper focuses specifically on coping strategies employed by Muslim academia amidst Covid-19. This is a relatively unexplored area of research, offering valuable insights into the experiences of Muslim academia. Written in a narrative review, it allows a more flexible and contextual understanding of the complex involvements of Muslim academia in coping with difficulties; and these have been drawn from multidisciplinary studies whose focuses were on psychology, sociology and Islamic studies. This paper has practical implications, such as the importance of seeking Islamic counselling, praying and supplicating, gratitude journaling, and reflecting on the blessings of Allah. These strategies can be used by Muslim academia and alike to cope especially with the internal conflict, like stress and anxiety of the pandemic, and promote their well-being.

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