

Guest Editor Introduction to the Special Issue: “Psychosocial Impacts and Cultural Responses to COVID-19: Mental Health in Diverse Muslim Communities”

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and far-reaching impact on global mental health, exposing systemic inequities while disrupting the psychological, social, and spiritual well-being of communities worldwide. For Muslim populations, whether in Muslim-majority nations or as religious minorities, the pandemic intersected with existing stressors, including sociopolitical instability, economic precarity, and limited access to culturally sensitive mental health services. In this context, the relevance of examining Muslim mental health through a culturally and spiritually attuned lens has never been more urgent. The Journal of Muslim Mental Health, as a leading platform committed to advancing scholarship on the psychological well-being of Muslims across diverse contexts, is uniquely positioned to address the complexities of how Muslims experienced, interpreted, and coped with the COVID-19 crisis. This special issue responds to that call by showcasing empirically grounded, contextually rich research that explores the pandemic's multifaceted psychological consequences among Muslim individuals and communities. The selected studies illuminate not only the vulnerabilities exacerbated by the crisis but also the resilience found in faith-based coping, communal bonds, and sociocultural resources that are deeply embedded in Muslim life. Together, they contribute to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of Muslim mental health in times of collective trauma and transformation.

This special issue presents four original research articles that offer critical insights into how Muslim individuals and communities across various global contexts navigated the psychological burdens of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each study contributes to the growing body of culturally responsive mental health scholarship by examining protective factors, risk pathways, and culturally grounded coping strategies within Muslim populations. Through diverse methodologies and geographically varied samples, these articles deepen our understanding of the intersection between faith, psychological distress, and resilience in a time of global crisis.

In “*Suicidal Ideation among Pakistani Youth during the COVID-19 Outbreak: Moderating Role of Religious Orientation and Social Connectedness*”, Noor Ul Ain Muneeb and Sumara Masood Ul Hassan explore the psychological mechanisms underlying suicidal ideation among university students in Pakistan during the height of the pandemic. Grounded in the Strain Theory of Suicide, this study uniquely focuses on the protective potential of intrinsic religious orientation and perceived social connectedness in buffering the effects of psychological strain

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and depression. By highlighting how faith and interpersonal bonds serve as vital psychological resources, the study contributes to a critical reorientation in suicide research in Muslim contexts—from a deficit-based lens to one emphasizing cultural resilience. Its findings have significant implications for the design of upstream prevention programs, suggesting that suicide prevention efforts among Muslim youth should incorporate spiritual frameworks and community-based interventions.

From Southeast Asia, the article *“Prevalence of Internet Gaming Disorder and Its Association with Loneliness and Leisure Boredom Among Malaysian Gamers During the COVID-19 Pandemic”* by Nur Laila Azzwa Nordin, Nor Ba’yah Abdul Kadir, and Rusyda Helma Mohd examines the psychosocial correlates of digital dependency among Malaysian youth. In the wake of lockdowns and prolonged isolation, the study investigates how emotional and social loneliness, as well as leisure boredom, contribute to problematic gaming behavior. The authors reveal emotional loneliness as a key risk factor for Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), while social loneliness and boredom are found to be less influential. This distinction challenges conventional assumptions and fosters a more nuanced understanding of the emotional needs that drive online behavior during periods of crisis. The study not only sheds light on pandemic-era behavioral health concerns but also offers valuable recommendations for developing interventions that address emotional support and digital wellness in Muslim-majority societies.

Turning to the Middle East, *“Fear of COVID-19, Academic Stress, and Mental Health in Gaza Strip: The Mediating Role of Locus of Control and Self-Esteem”*, led by Guido Veronese and colleagues, investigates how fear of the virus and educational pressures interact with psychological well-being among students in the Gaza Strip. Situated in a region of chronic political conflict, the study reveals how internal locus of control and self-esteem mediate the impact of pandemic-related stressors on mental health. These findings are particularly compelling as they contextualize COVID-19-related distress within the broader ecology of adversity faced by Gazan students. The research underscores the necessity for culturally grounded, gender-sensitive mental health interventions, particularly in protracted conflict settings. It contributes to the field by emphasizing internal psychological resources as vital targets for intervention and support in Muslim populations experiencing layered vulnerabilities.

Finally, the article *“The Relationship Between Coping and Well-Being Among South African Muslims During the COVID-19 Pandemic”* brings a minority perspective from the African continent. This repeated cross-sectional study examines coping strategies and psychological well-being among South African Muslims across two waves of the pandemic. The authors document a shift over time from more adaptive coping strategies—such as acceptance and positive religious coping—to less functional coping patterns in the second wave, reflecting the toll of sustained crisis. By situating religious coping within the historical and sociopolitical context of South African Muslim communities, the study highlights how a legacy of resistance, spirituality, and collective identity continues to shape psychological adaptation in times of stress. The research broadens the scope of the journal by bringing attention to Muslim mental health experiences in underrepresented regions. It offers culturally informed recommendations for sustaining well-being during prolonged public health crises.

Collectively, the articles in this issue represent a vital scholarly contribution to the field of Muslim mental health. They underscore the importance of centering culture, spirituality, and community in both research and intervention and demonstrate the value of cross-regional perspectives in capturing the diversity of Muslim experiences. As we reflect on the enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, these studies not only document the psychological costs but also reveal the sources of resilience that have sustained Muslim individuals and communities through a time of profound uncertainty.