

## DOES THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS RITES AND RITUALS DIMINISH ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR MUSLIM FAMILIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA?

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**Abstract:** According to the percentage of Muslims in the total population of the country, North Macedonia is on the third place in Europe. With about one third of the entire population being Muslim, our country is right after Albania and Bosnia and Hercegovina.

Islam is an Abrahamic monotheistic universal religion and the second largest religion in the world. The followers of this religion are called Muslims. Muslims believe that God gave his divine word in the form of revelations through various prophets and that Muhammad was the last of God's Messengers. Every religion has its own religious traditions and customs that have existed for centuries.

Certain sacred practices and rituals are very important to Muslims. They are a significant way that enables followers of Islam to remember history, express conviction, and grow in devotion.

Some rituals are practiced daily, like prayer; others are practiced annually, like those aligned with specific Islamic holidays. The Five Pillars of Islam are five practices regarded by all sects of the Islamic religion as essential to the Muslim faith.

Although there are important differences between Christianity and Islam regarding traditions, customs and cultural heritage. However, in both religions, due to the secularism in our country, the impression is that religion diminishes its meaning in everyday life. Young people adapt to the contemporary way of life that brings great changes in the practice of religious rituals and practices. This paper is about religious rituals and customs as religious elements and their meaning for Muslim families in Macedonia. The paper aims to determine whether and how often Islamic rituals and practices are practiced. Specifically, does their practicing reduce the importance for Muslim families? For the purposes of this paper, a quantitative survey of 60 Muslim religious subjects' was conducted to answer questions related to their views on religion and its practice.

**Key words:** Muslim believers, Islamic religion, Muslim rituals, Muslim families

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## Introduction

Islam is a monotheistic religion, one of the Abrahamic religions. It is the second most widely spread religion in the world. The followers of this religion are called Muslims. Muslims believe that God delivered his Divine Word in the form of revelations through various prophets and that Muhammad was the last messenger of God. The spread of Islam continues to this day. As the fastest growing major religion in the world today, Islam is on course to overtake Christianity as the world's largest religion by 2050 ([https://www.whyislam.org/brochures/islam-explained/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgLaKw4Tq5wIVh6wYCh2fbg0IEAAYASAAEgKESfD\\_BwE](https://www.whyislam.org/brochures/islam-explained/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgLaKw4Tq5wIVh6wYCh2fbg0IEAAYASAAEgKESfD_BwE)). In Macedonia, the Islamic religion expanded most by the colonization of the large Turkish population and by the policy of voluntary or forced Islamization that the Ottoman Empire systematically and continuously pursued over the Macedonian population.

Islam means submission, submission to God. Islam is based on the holy book of the Qur'an, which came as a message from God-Allah through the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an is a source of Islamic faith, morality, and law. It presents the basic divine aspirations, intentions and wills, as well as the tasks of people towards God and life. Religious buildings of Islamic faith are mosques and madrasas. There are about 600 mosques in Macedonia. This religious community mainly includes Albanian, Turkish, Bosnian, Roma and Macedonian believers. Islam as a system has five important elements of Islamic science called the Five Pillars of Islam: - Witnessing (Shahadah) - Prayer (Salat) - Zekat - Islamic Post – Pilgrimage (<https://www.mymasjid.ca/beginners-guide-understanding-islam/chapter-2/>).

Religion and religious values are very important for Islamic believers, and on the other side there is a family that through the process of socialization and its educational function plays a major role in learning about religion, inheriting and adopting the religious values we have. In fact, the family is the most important community for creating and maintaining the morale of its members (Лукиќ, 1974 pp.4). The first moral upbringing, the first moral standards one gets is in the family. Religious morality (as well as faith itself) is by far the most traditional, and even conservative, so difficult to change (Ibid.,560).

The reasons for this research are precisely the claims of many authors who believe that modernization nowadays affects the decline of religion and religiosity and respect for the traditions of the entire society, primarily young people. Sociologists believe that adapting to modernization carries with it a kind of betrayal of traditional principles and values.

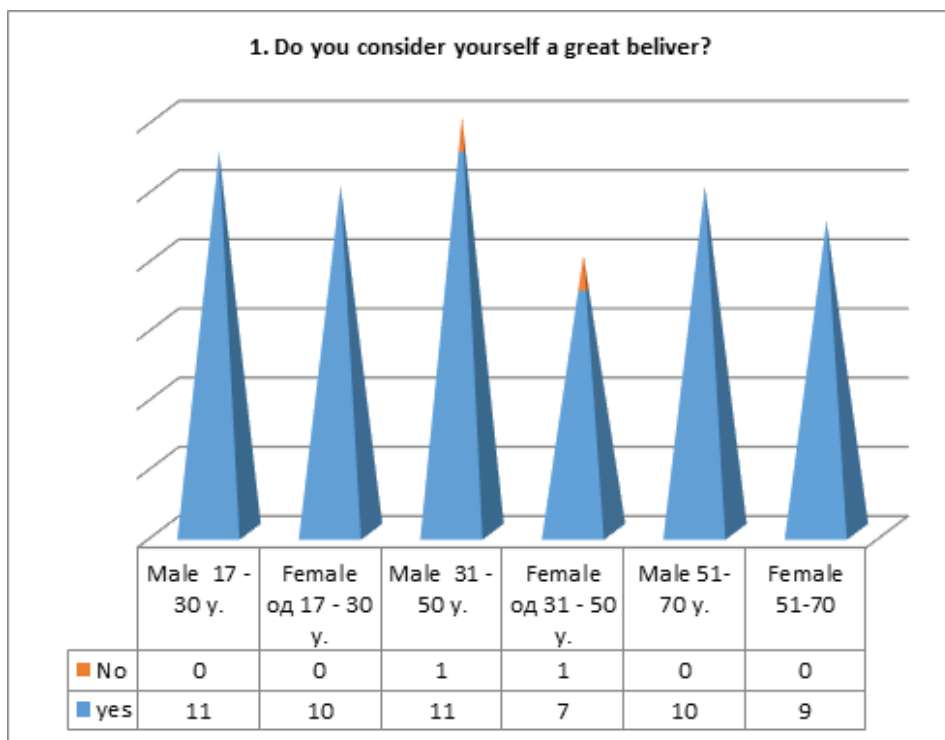
However, several researches on a similar topic have been conducted in the last decade. All of the researches have shown that Muslims have big respect and dedication toward religion and that religion influences their everyday life. In the research "Religion and presence of hate speech in the Republic of Macedonia" (Agency "Rejting", 2014), it was reported that nearly half of the respondents (45.8%) answered that they were strongly committed to their religious community, 39.5% said they were moderate

adherents and 12.6% stated that they were not affiliated with their religious community. Except for weddings, funerals and baptisms, 54.3% of all respondents practiced customs only on religious holidays, 14.2% practiced religious customs more than once a week, 11.2% once a week, 8.7% practiced customs more than once a month, 7.3% several times a year, 2.3% of respondents practiced customs at least once a year and only 2% of respondents in the survey said they never practiced religious customs. In the Konrad Adenauer research (2015) on religious affiliation, it was noted that 70% percent of the respondent believed they had good knowledge of their religion and half of them regularly visited religious site. Another study about citizens' perception of religion and its role in multi-confessional societies, which was conducted in late November 2016 by the Institute for Political Research in Skopje (IPIS), noticed that the influence of religious teachings on people's daily lives is significant. 25% thought that it was big, for 30.3% it was somewhat big, for 27.7% it was small and for 13.8% religion had no influence at all. Among Muslims, religion had a greater impact on everyday life (58.3% large and 15.8% somewhat larger) than on Christians (15.6% large and 35.1% somewhat large). Regarding practicing religious rituals (fasting as part of the practice of religion), 54% of the Orthodox Christians respondents (19% and 35% respectively) stated that fasted regularly or sometimes, with the percentage among Muslims being much higher in this regard, i.e., as many as 94% (84% and 10% respectively) answered in the affirmative (Blazevski, 2016).

### **1. A Survey on Religious Rites and Rituals in Muslim Families**

For the purposes of this paper, a survey with Muslim interviewees was conducted. The questions were related to religion and religious traditions and rituals of Islamic believers. Respondents answered a questionnaire with nine close ended questions. Research sample was chosen from multiconfessional environment in the Republic of North Macedonia. A total of 60 Muslim respondents were interviewed, 11 of whom were male and 10 female aged 17 to 30 years, 12 male and 8 female respondents aged 31 to 50 years and 10 female respondents and 9 male respondents aged 51 to 70 years. The survey was conducted in April 2018.

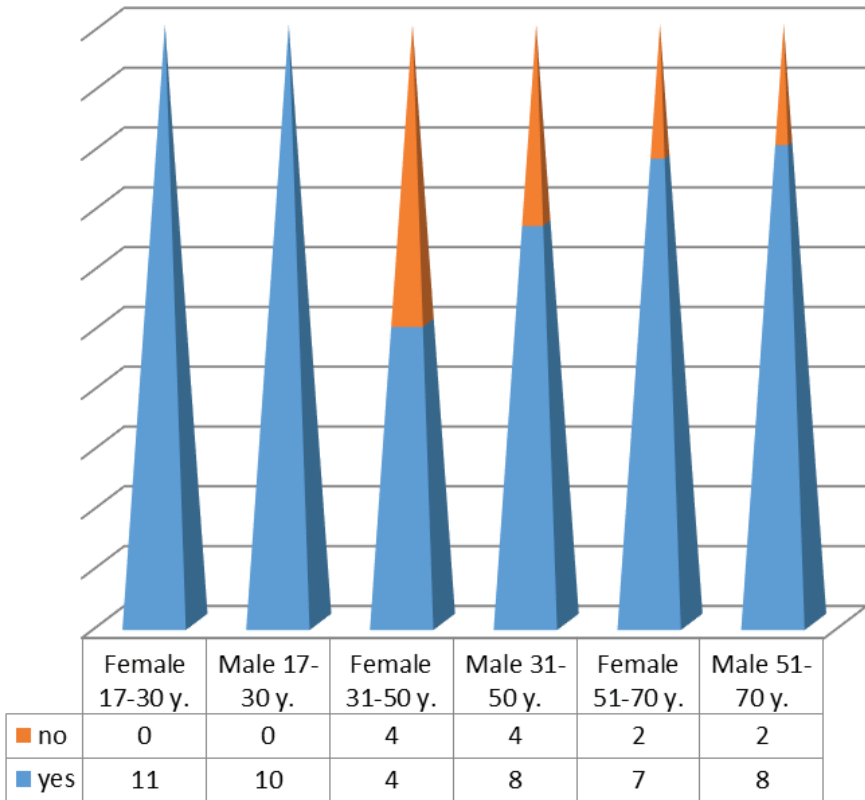
The first question concerned their religiosity, i.e., whether they consider themselves to be great believers. Two possible answers were offered: Yes or No. Of the 17 to 30-year-olds in both the male and female groups, all respondents (21 respondents) stated that they were major believers in their religion, i.e., 21 respondents answered yes to the first question. Among male respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 11 respondents answered yes to the question and 1 respondent answered no to the question. Among female respondents aged 17 to 30, 7 respondents answered yes and 1 respondent answered no. Among male and female respondents aged 51 to 70, all 19 respondents answered that they considered themselves to be great believers.



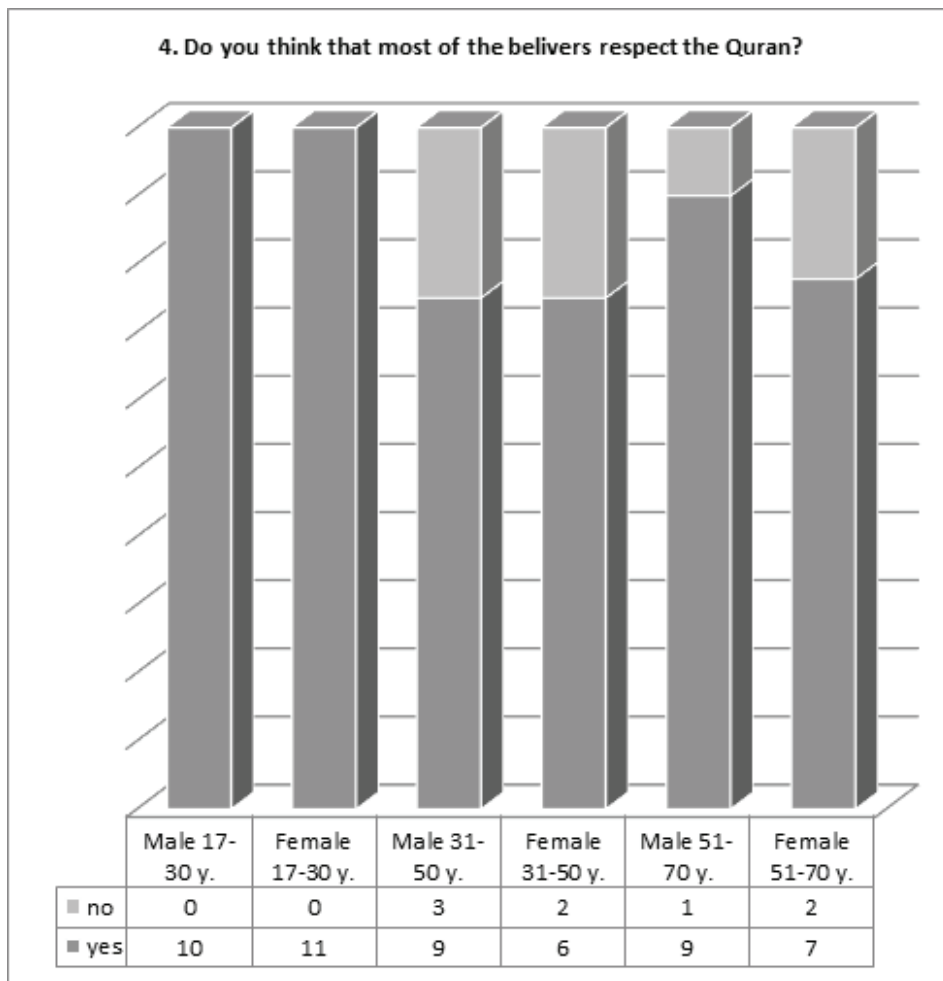
The second question “Do you think religion contributes to harmony in the family?” offered two possible answers: yes and no. All 60 respondents answered that religion contributes to family harmony.

Regarding the third question, respondents answered whether the oldest member in their family made decisions about the education and future of the younger generations. Respondents up to 30 years of age believed that the oldest member - the father - should make decisions about their education and future and a total of 21 respondents answered the question affirmatively. Among male respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 8 respondents answered yes to the question and 4 respondents answered no to the question. Among female respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 4 respondents answered yes to the question and 4 respondents answered no to the question. Coming to the female respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 7 respondents answered the question in the affirmative and 2 respondents gave a negative answer. Among male respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 8 respondents answered yes to the question and 2 respondents answered no to the question. Spreadsheet and graphical representation:

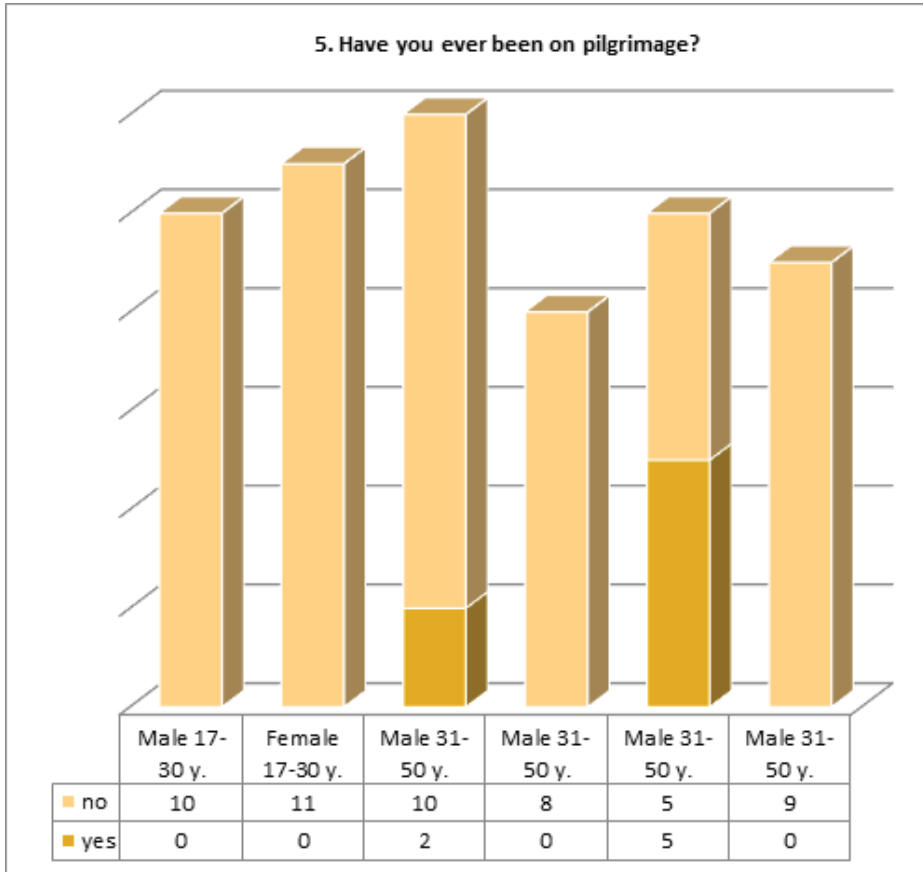
**3. Does the oldest member in your family make the decisions about education and future of the younger ones?**



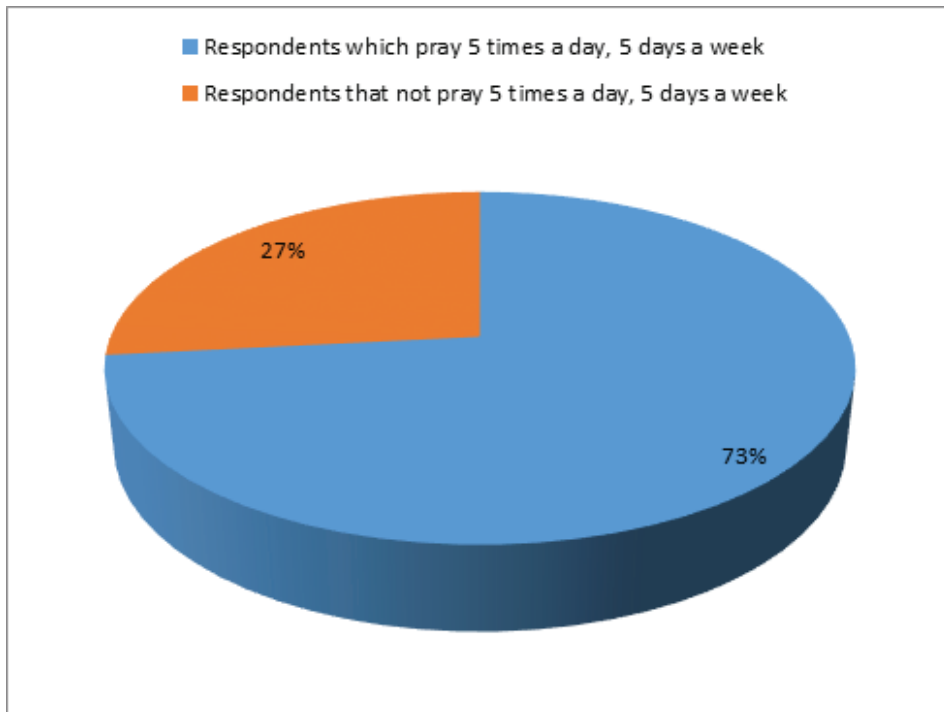
To the 4th question “Do you think that most of the believers respect the Quran?” Male and female respondents aged 17 to 30 answered yes to the question (21 respondents in total). Among male respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 9 respondents answered yes and 3 respondents answered no to the question. Among female respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 6 respondents answered yes to the question and 2 respondents answered no to the question. Among male respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 9 respondents answered yes to the question and 1 respondent answered no to the question. Of the female respondents aged 51 to 70, 7 answered yes and 2 answered no. Spreadsheet and graphical representation:



The 5th question asked the respondents whether they had ever been on pilgrimage. Two possible answers were offered: yes and no. Of the respondents aged 17-30, all answered no to the question. Among male respondents aged 31 to 50, 2 respondents answered yes and 8 respondents answered no to the question. Among male respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 5 respondents answered yes to the question and 5 respondents answered no to the question. A total of 7 out of 60 respondents said they had been on pilgrimage. Spreadsheet and graphical representation:

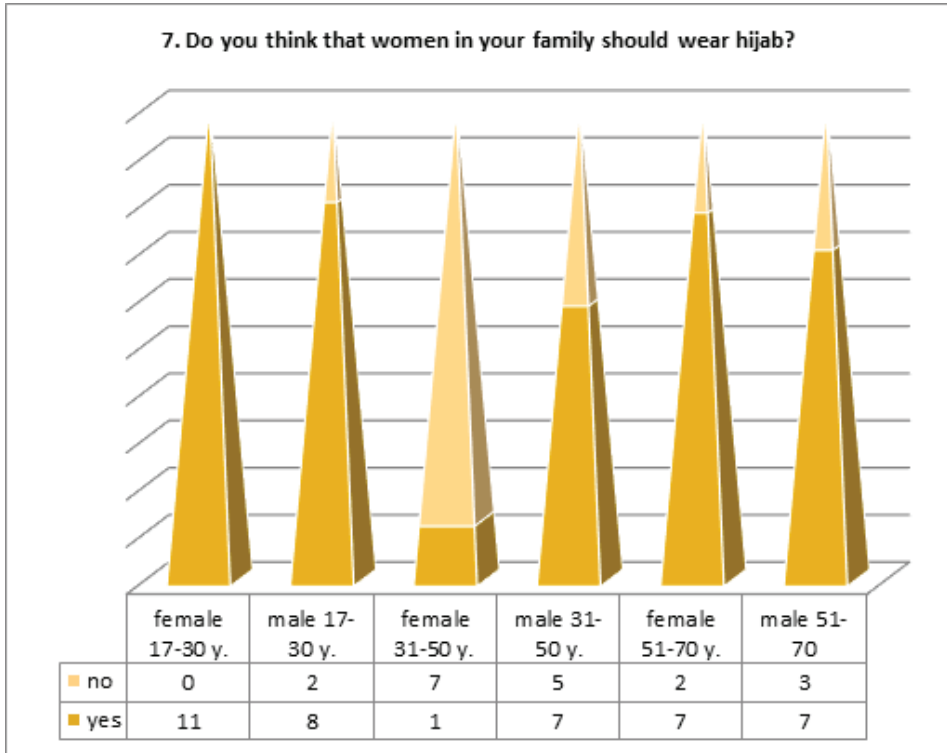


The sixth question was whether respondents of the Muslim faith practiced daily 5-day prayers, which is the second of the Five Pillars in the Islamic faith, and an obligatory religious duty for every Muslim. It is a physical, mental, and spiritual act of worship that is observed five times every day at prescribed times. Two answers were offered: yes and no. Of the male respondents aged 17 to 30 years, 9 respondents answered yes and 1 respondent answered no to the question. Of the female respondents aged 17 to 30 years, 8 respondents answered yes and 3 respondents answered no. Among male respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 10 respondents answered yes and 2 respondents answered no. Coming to the female respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 7 respondents answered yes and 1 respondent answered no.. Among male respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 9 respondents answered yes and 1 respondent answered no to the question. Among female respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 7 respondents answered yes and 2 respondents answered no to the question. Out of 60 Muslim respondents, 44 respondents said they practiced the 5-day prayer while 16 respondents said they did not pray.

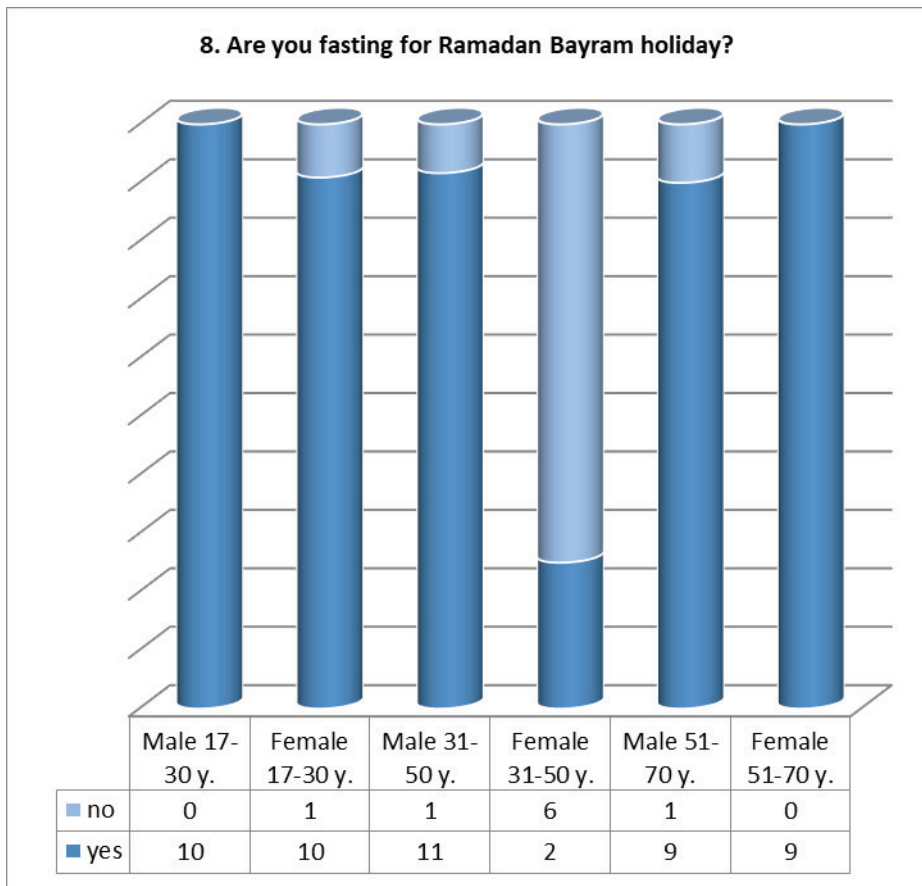


Hijab is a veil worn by some Muslim women in the presence of any male outside of their immediate family, which usually covers the head and chest. The term can refer to any head, face, or body covering worn by Muslim women that conforms to Islamic standards of modesty. Hijab can also refer to the seclusion of women from men in the public sphere, or it may denote a metaphysical dimension, for example referring to “the veil which separates man or the world from God (Glasse, 2001).” Certainly, the headscarf is tied to religion. Many women who cover talk about it as a way of demonstrating their submission to God and a constant reminder to hold fast to Islamic beliefs such as being honest and generous to those in need (<https://theconversation.com/why-do-muslim-women-wear-a-hijab-109717>). The 7th question was related to the respondents’ opinion on whether women should cover their heads with their headscarves (to wear hijab). According to the results of 28 female respondents, 19 answered yes to the question of whether they were in favour of covering the head of a woman and 9 female respondents were against covering the head of a Muslim woman. Out of 32 female respondents, 22 responded to the question positively and 10 respondents were against covering their heads.

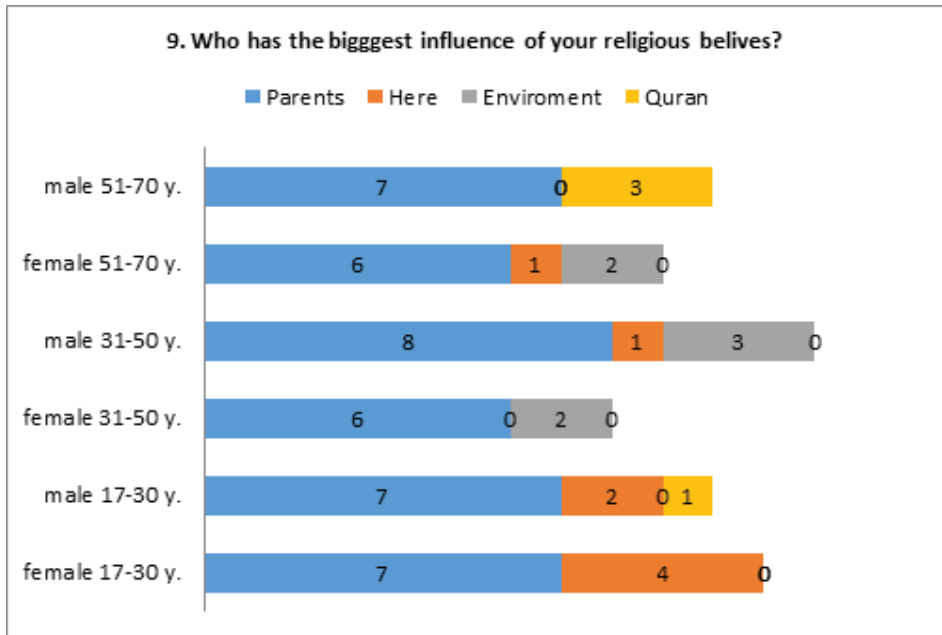




Ramadan Bayram, also known as Eid al-Fitr, which Turks often refer to as Şeker Bayramı, or the holiday of sweets. One of the longest and most important religious holidays in Turkey, this is a time of celebrating a month of fasting from dawn to dusk and enjoying feasting with family and friends. The official holiday began with the “arefe”, meaning the eve, which was yesterday with banks and government buildings only operating half day (<https://www.dailysabah.com/expat-corner/2019/06/04/all-about-ramadan-bayram-the-sweetest-of-holidays>). The 8th question was whether Muslim respondents held a strict fast for the Ramadan Bayram holiday. To this question among the respondents aged 17 to 30, out of 21 respondents, 20 responded that they were fasting while only 1 respondent answered that they did not fast during the Ramadan - Bayram holiday. Among male respondents aged 31 to 50, 11 respondents answered yes, and 1 respondent answered no to the question. Of the female respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 2 answered yes and 6 respondents answered no. Nine male respondents aged 51 to 70 years answered yes and 1 respondent answered no to the question. Among female respondents aged 51 to 70, all 9 respondents answered yes to the question. According to the results of a total of 60 respondents, 51 respondents fasted during the Ramadan Byram holiday and nine did not.



The 9th question asked who influenced the respondents' religious attitudes. For 7 female respondents aged 17-30 years, parents were the first influence. For 4 of the respondents in this group here were the first influence and then the parents. Among male respondents between the ages of 17 and 30, 7 respondents listed parents in the first place; two of them pointed to here and 1 chose the Quran. Female respondents age 31-50 referred to the parents as the religious influence (6), and 2 to the environment. Among male respondents aged 31 to 50 years, 8 respondents included parents, 3 respondents - environment and 1 respondent - here. From the group of female respondents aged 51 to 70 years, 6 emphasized parents, 2 respondents - environment and 1 respondent - here. Of the male respondents between the ages of 51 and 70 years, 7 respondents listed their parents in the first place and 3 respondents listed the Quran and the mosque.



### Conclusion

Having analysed the results shown before, we can conclude that Muslims are great believers. They believe in Allah i.e., that God has delivered His divine Word in the form of revelations through many prophets and that Muhammad was the last messenger of God. 58 out of 60 respondents considered themselves to be great believers. All of them believed that religion was very important for harmony in the family. Many of them thought the Muslim believers respected the Qur'an. A small proportion of respondents between the ages of 31 and 50 and respondents between the ages of 51 and 70, showed a little doubt that some Muslims did not respect the Quran. Older family members still had the key to the future of the younger, and respondents thought this should not change. According to the results, young respondents believed that their parents or their father, should decide on their education, their future, and their future spouse. A little disagreement can be noticed only on the question about wearing hijab. Younger females were against covering their heads, wearing hijab. Respondents observed the prayers and the five daily prayers (sabah, noon, ikindia, aksham, and jazz). 73% of them prayed five times five days a week. A small proportion of the respondents have been on a pilgrimage, usually the elderly. This might be due to not having enough financial opportunities, time and the young age of the respondents.

Researchers from analyzed studies conducted in the Republic of North Macedonia agreed that there is a certain discrepancy between attitudes and perceptions of

religion (according to which Macedonia is a country with a high religious population) by practicing it, that is, by knowing religion, defined as a real commitment, recognition of basic religious landmarks and religious teachings presented primarily in the content of the holy books as a basis for getting acquainted with religion. This discrepancy between perceptions and practices of religion is more noticeable among Orthodox, than among members of the Islamic faith.

In general, it can be concluded that religion is of great importance to Muslim families in our country. They are perceived as great believers and religion occupies an important place in their lives. They also believe that the family has an important role to play in transferring religious learning and religious values. The practice of religious rites and rituals is still practiced, even among younger generations. Clearly, it cannot be said that the modern way of life reduces the importance of religion in the lives of young Islamic believers and in their families as a whole.

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