

Knowledge in Dealing with the COVID-19 Based on the Guidance of Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah: A Cross-Sectional Survey among the Pharmacy and Health Sciences Diploma Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Medicine and communicable disease control are embedded in many Islamic teachings as conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the Al-Quran, Al-sunnah, and Al-hadith more than 1400 years ago. Therefore, when the COVID-19 outbreak hits Malaysia, with the majority of the population being Muslims, the society should be equipped with knowledge in dealing with this pandemic. This study investigates the knowledge towards dealing with COVID-19 based on the guidance of Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) among undergraduate students in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: A cross-sectional study using self-constructed questionnaires was performed. The questionnaires were pre-validated and distributed to pharmacy and health sciences students via an online survey platform. One of the selection criteria was that the respondent must be a Muslim. **RESULTS:** The students scored a median of 26 (IQR 4) in the knowledge test. Students' percentage knowledge levels were divided into three categories: poor (n=42, 15%); moderate (n=207, 73%) and good (n=33, 12%). The lowest scored knowledge item was observed on the Islamic terminology, Maqasid Shariah (4.3%), and differences between hadith and sunnah (20.9%). No significant differences in knowledge scores were observed in the pre-determined independent variables such as age, year of study, accommodation, and previous religious school admission. **CONCLUSION:** The study findings suggest that the students have a good understanding of scientific aspects of COVID-19 but lack knowledge in handling the pandemic as recommended by Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah.

Keywords

Al-Quran, Al-Sunnah, hadith, COVID-19, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of novel Coronavirus disease 2019 or better known as COVID-19 has cost about 6 million deaths worldwide to date. COVID-19 is caused by pathogenic Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 or SARS-CoV-2.¹ This disease can be transmitted from human to human by respiratory droplets, airborne, and fomites during a face-to-face conversation without distancing, sneezing and coughing.^{2,3} The first four COVID-19 cases were reported in Wuhan, China, on 29 December 2019.⁴ Meanwhile, the first confirmed COVID-19 in Malaysia was on 25th January 2020. Nonetheless, until 11th March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic.¹ Following this, WHO has issued several guidelines for dealing with COVID-19, such as wearing a face mask, regularly cleaning hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers, physical distancing, and staying at home. COVID-19 is not the only pandemic that befell in human history. Several disease outbreaks have cast deleterious effects on human lives, such as the "Black Death" in 1346-1353 AD, Spanish Flu in 1918-1919 5, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2003.⁶ Other

epidemics such as leprosy and cholera also happened during Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) time, as mentioned in authentic hadith.⁷ Despite the bleak picture, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had provided guidelines in the form of hadiths to guide people in dealing with the epidemics since more than 1400 years ago.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia is a multi-racial country, and Islam is the constitution's religion while other religions are free to be practised. The Al-Quran is the primary scripture in Islam, while Al-sunnah and Al-hadith are secondary resources. Al-Quran is the word of Allah S.W.T., which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Arabic gradually through the mediation of the angel Gabriel U.S.⁸ Al-Quran consists of the main guidelines of all aspects of life, such as faith, worship, Islamic regulation, and morality.⁹ Al-Sunnah is defined as anything attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in terms of words, deeds, confession, nature of events, and morals, whether in gestures or silence.¹⁰ Al-Sunnah and hadith derived from the same source, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).¹¹ Hadith refers to reports of statements or actions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence by the authentic narrators.¹²

Many countries have been actively involved in COVID-19 research. A study involving undergraduate students in Shaanxi Province, China, revealed that the knowledge level was significantly higher in undergraduates from public universities and medical majors than those from private schools and non-medical majors.¹³ Other countries have also taken active action in observing the knowledge level in mitigating COVID-19, such as among the healthcare providers¹⁴, the government sector¹⁵, scholars, and professionals.¹⁶ In Malaysia, three recent studies had explored the knowledge, attitudes, and practices among the general public on COVID-19; however, the scope of these studies was principally focused on social-medical aspects.^{17,18,19} There remains no study to explore how the teachings of Islam as written in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) have influenced the knowledge of Muslims in dealing with COVID-19. The extent how which Muslims, particularly undergraduate students are

aware and understanding of these guidelines remains unclear. Given the widespread COVID-19 infection, this study is warranted to examine the knowledge of Islamic health preservation guidelines among pharmacy and health sciences students in dealing with COVID-19.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design, Sample Size, And Participants

A cross-sectional study using a self-constructed questionnaire was performed from July to August 2021. Convenience sampling was conducted among the Faculty of Pharmacy and Health Sciences students in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Penang branch, Bertam campus. The survey was conducted online using the Google form platform. The link to the survey was distributed to the students through social media, mainly via WhatsApp, as it is the most popular social platform among the students. The sample size was calculated using Raosoft, an online sample size calculator. The student population in the institution was about 1000 persons. Based on the sample size calculator (with a 95% confidence level), the minimum number of participants needed in this study was 278 persons. The inclusion criteria are as the following:

- i) The participant must be an undergraduate student.
- ii) The participant must be from the pharmacy or health sciences faculty.
- iii) The participant must be a Muslim.

Ethical Permit and Consent Note

This study was approved by Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia research ethics committee, [REC/07/2021 (MR/607)]. This study was conducted following the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data Collection Tool

The questionnaires consist of three sections. Section 1 consists of eight questions that capture the respondents' backgrounds. While in sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire, a total of 16 questions were constructed based on a literature review to assess respondents'

knowledge in dealing with COVID-19 based on the guidance of Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah. There were ten questions in section 2 related to general knowledge on COVID-19, Al-Quran, and Al-Sunnah in the knowledge domain section. All of the questions in section 2 were closed-ended, and the given answer options were "Yes", "No", or "I don't know". In the third section, there were six questions focused on specific Al-Quran verses and hadiths related to handling a pandemic. The question's structure was multiple choices, whereby the respondents were required to choose all the correct answers.

Three expert personnel from the Islamic revelation study of two local universities were invited to validate the questionnaire. No item was dropped by the experts during this validation. After that, five students were randomly selected for the questionnaire face validation. All comments such as terminology definition and wordy sentences were rephrased and adjustments were made accordingly.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software. The knowledge scores were calculated by summing the correct answers provided by the students and converting them into percentages. Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis test were used to compare the median knowledge scores in pre-determined factors, including the age, year of study, accommodation, and previous religious school admission. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all statistical procedures.

RESULTS

A total of 282 students of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Health Sciences returned responses (Table 1). Most respondents were female, with 178 (63.12%) and 49 (17.38%) for the Faculty of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, respectively. The respondents' median (IQR) age was 20 (IQR 2). The majority of the participants ($n = 173$, 61.4%) had attended a religious school before entering the university.

Table 1: Respondents' sociodemographic characteristics

Characteristics		N = 282			
		Pharmacy (n=224)		Health Sciences (n=58)	
		n	%	n	%
Gender	Male	46	16.31	9	3.19
	Female	178	63.12	49	17.38
Age, median (interquartile range)		20 (IQR 2)			
Age	18-20 years old	127	45.04	41	14.54
	21-27 years old	97	34.39	17	6.03
I am a Muslim since	I am born	224	79.43	58	20.57
Marital status	Single	224	79.43	58	20.57
Year of study	Year 1	42	14.89	17	6.03
	Year 2	96	34.04	26	9.22
	Year 3	86	30.50	15	5.32
Current accommodation	In the campus	92	32.62	11	3.90
	Family home	101	35.82	34	12.05
	Rented house/room	31	11.00	13	4.61
Have you ever attended a religious school while in primary/secondary school?	Yes	137	48.58	36	12.77
	No	87	30.85	22	7.80

Respondents' Overall Knowledge Scores

The students scored a median knowledge score of 26 (IQR 4). Based on Bloom's cut-off point 20, the percentage knowledge scores were divided into poor ($< 60\%$), moderate (60-79%), and good (80 – 100%) levels. Most of the students (73%) were found to have moderate knowledge scores (Figure 1).

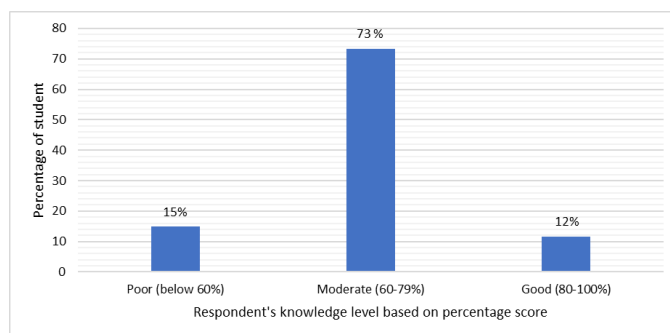


Figure 1: Students' overall knowledge scores

Itemised Analysis of Respondents' Understanding of COVID-19 and Islam Terminologies and Revelation

As demonstrated in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were found to have a good understanding of the scientific aspects of COVID-19, including the virus's origin ($n = 253$, 89.7%), the main clinical symptoms associated with COVID-19 ($n = 274$, 97.2%) and

devastating consequences of COVID-19 on the elderly, infants and people with chronic diseases (n = 276, 97.9%). In terms of knowledge of Islam, almost all of the respondents (n=278, 98.6%) understand the definition of Al-Quran although a lesser number of respondents (n=216, 76.6%) scored correctly on the meaning of hadith. However, in items 7, 8, 9, and 10, which lead to more in-depth questions about terminology and revelation in Islam, less than 30% of respondents answered the questions in these items correctly. Alarmingly, only 4.3% of students could provide the correct answer on the definition of *Maqasid Shariah* (item 9).

Table 2: Respondents' understanding of COVID-19 and Islam

Statements	n (%)		
	True	False	Don't know
1. The novel coronavirus was first started in Wuhan, China, as the cause of a cluster of pneumonia cases.	253 (89.7)	15 (5.3)	14 (5.0)
2. The main clinical symptoms of COVID-19 include dry cough, fever, headache, and fatigue.	274 (97.2)	7 (2.5)	1 (0.4)
3. Elderly, infants and people who have chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and chronic lung disease, are more likely to be severely affected after being diagnosed with COVID-19.	276 (97.9)	1 (0.4)	5 (1.8)
4. COVID-19 can be transmitted by symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals through respiratory droplets.	248 (87.9)	18 (6.4)	16 (5.7)
5. Al Quran is the words from Allah through the angel of Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Al Quran authenticity of content is preserved until now.	278 (98.6)	1 (0.4)	3 (1.1)
6. Hadith is anything that attributed to the Prophet Muhammad saw in terms of words, deeds, endorsement, or nature, whether physical or moral and Sirah either before and after becoming the Messenger of Allah.	216 (76.6)	12 (4.3)	54 (19.1)
7. "From Abu Hurairah narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Run away from the leper as you would run away from a lion". (Hadith narrated by Sahih al-Bukhari: 5707)	121 (42.9)	80 (28.4)	81 (28.7)
This hadith suggests that people should ignore and run away from sick patients.			
8. Al-Hadith and Al-Sunnah contain different meanings.	167 (59.2)	59 (20.9)	56 (19.9)
9. Maqasid shariah is a sharia court that functions to preserve order, achievement of benefit, and prevention of harm, religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property.	236 (83.7)	12 (4.3)	34 (12.1)
10. "O you who have faith! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, hurry towards the remembrance of God, and leave all businesses. That is better for you, should you know. And when the prayer is finished, disperse through the land and seek God's grace, and remember God greatly so that you may be successful." (Al-Quran, Surah Al-Jumu'ah, 62: 9-10)	133 (47.2)	80 (28.4)	69 (24.5)

*Correct answers are in bold

Itemised Analysis of Respondents' Knowledge of Pandemic Control-related Hadith

Table 3 reveals the ability of respondents to understand the Quranic and hadith with regards to disease, treatment, and prevention. Of note, students generally performed well in most hadiths except hadith no. 2 which delineates the quarantine order, the need to be patient when dealing with cholera and endemic as general as well as a great reward for obeying Allah's command. However, only 51.8% of respondents understood that this hadith not only teach people about cholera prevention but also applies to other infectious diseases. Furthermore, most students did not understand that this hadith also expound on the "quarantine statement", "discouraging the people

from socialising" and "encouraging people to work and worship at home" as the percentage of correctness range between 7.4% to 40.4% (Table 3).

While the statement in Table 3, item 6, Al-Quran, Surah An Nisa', 4:29, this verse explicitly mentions property ownership and consuming ethics, secondly on personal and community care. There is a contradiction of response between the answer options "not to cheat in business and commit suicide" and "not to harm yourself and others". Despite both answers containing similar meanings, there were inconsistent students' scores with the first answers observed at 66.7% correctness and the latter reported at 47.5% correctness.

Factors Affecting Respondents' Knowledge Scores

Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests were performed to identify the possible factors that may affect respondents' knowledge scores. Nonetheless, no significant differences in knowledge scores were observed in the pre-determined independent variables (Table 4).

Table 4: Factors affecting respondents knowledge scores

Independent variables	Median knowledge scores	Z-score/ Chi square value	p- value
Age	< 21-year-old	26	0.316
	≥21-year-old	26	0.752*
Year of study	Year 1	27	0.788
	Year 2	26	0.674+
	Year 3	26	
Accommodation	In the campus	26	2.530
	Family home	27	0.282+
	Rented house/room	26	
Attended religious school before?	Yes	26	-1.160
	No	26	0.246*

*Mann-Whitney U test; +Kruskal Wallis test

DISCUSSION

This cross-sectional survey aimed to examine the knowledge level of Islamic health preservation guidelines among pharmacy and health sciences students in dealing with COVID-19. The study findings suggested that respondents could answer the scientific-related questions well. Similar to Alabed et al¹⁸, the respondents in both the previous and this study were aware of the cause of COVID-19 origin (89.7%), symptoms (97.2%), and transmission (87.9%). This could be because the

Table 3: Respondents' knowledge of pandemic control-related hadith

Statement Al-Quran or hadith	Answers	N (%)	
		Yes	No
1. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "If you get wind of the outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; and if it breaks out in a land in which you are, do not leave it. Hadith narrated by Sahih Al-Bukhari :5737 and Sahih Muslim: 2219) This hadith refers to:	Lockdown order during epidemic/pandemic.	233 (82.6)	49 (17.4)
	Self-quarantine order.	172 (61)	110 (39)
	Make the health crisis worse.	2 (0.7)	280 (99.3)
2. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "It (cholera) was a Punishment sent by Allah on whom he wished, and Allah made it a source of mercy for the believers, for if one in the time of an epidemic plague stays in his country patiently hoping for Allah's reward and believing that nothing will befall him except what Allah has written for him, he will get the reward of a martyr." (Hadith narrated by Sahih Al-Bukhari :3474) This hadith is referring to:	I don't know.	18 (6.4)	
	Cholera prevention only.	10 (3.5)	272 (96.5)
	Cholera prevention and other infectious diseases.	146 (51.8)	136 (48.2)
	Encourage people to be patiente.	155 (55)	127 (45)
	Those who obey the regulation will be rewarded by Allah.	144 (51.1)	138 (48.9)
	Quarantine statement.	114 (40.4)	168 (59.6)
3. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment." (Hadith narrated by Sahih Al-Bukhari: 5678) The hadith suggests that:	Discourage the people from socialising.	41 (14.5)	241 (85.5)
	Encourage people to work and worship at home.	21 (7.4)	261 (92.6)
	I don't know.	37 (13.1)	
	People need to find a cure for a disease.	239 (84.8)	43 (15.2)
	Prevention is better than cure.	113 (40.1)	169 (59.9)
4. In Islam, Allah forbade the man from wearing silk garments. But Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had granted a concession to Zubair b. Al-'Awwam and Abdul Rahman b. 'Auf for the wearing of a silk shirt during a journey because both of them had been suffering from skin disease. (Hadith narrated by Sahih Muslim: 3870) The hadith suggests that:	People can rely on Allah without effort.	4 (1.4)	278 (98.6)
	I don't know.	15 (5.3)	
	Man can wear a silk garment.	2 (0.7)	280 (99.3)
	Islam is a tolerant religion when facing an emergency situation.	262 (92.9)	20 (7.1)
5. "This Habbatus Souda (black cumin) is healing for all diseases except death." (Hadith narrated by Sahih Muslim: 2215) The hadith suggests that:	I don't know.	20 (7.1)	
	People are not allowed to take medicine except for black cumin.	1 (0.4)	281 (99.6)
	Black cumin can stop the epidemic/pandemic.	69 (24.5)	213 (75.5)
	This hadith is NOT authentic.	35 (12.4)	247 (87.6)
6. O you who believe, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful. (Al-Quran, Surah An Nisa', 4:29) This Quranic verse refers to:	I don't know.	1 (0.4)	
	Not to cheat in business and commit suicide.	188 (66.7)	94 (33.3)
	To self-care in all situations except during an epidemic/pandemic.	35 (12.4)	247 (87.6)
	Not to harm yourself and others.	134 (47.5)	148 (52.2)
	I don't know	43 (15.2)	

*Correct answers are in bold

respondents in this study were mainly pharmacy and health sciences students.

However, in this study, the students performed relatively poor in the questions involving the Islamic terminologies such as the meaning of hadith, or Quranic verses, as in

Table 2. There were less than 30% of the respondents who could provide correct answers for items 7, 8, 9, and 10. Students in this study could have discombobulated between Maqasid Shariah and Shariah court. Shariah court is an institution where any parties can seek justice for the problems pertaining to Islamic law matters to determine their claims and rights.²¹ In comparison, Maqasid shariah is the Islamic ruling based on levels of necessity, as the preservation and safeguarding of five fundamentals in one's life that includes protection of religion, protection of life, protection of intellect, protection of wealth, and protection of lineage.^{22,23} The word Maqasid shariah is a terminology rarely used in everyday life; hence, many students may not be aware of its meaning.

From our observation, the students can understand the literal meaning of the hadith well but not with the implicit meaning found in the hadith as shown in Table 3. For instance, even though hadith item 2 has mentioned cholera prevention measures, the students cannot relate this hadith to other infectious diseases as reflected by the low percentage in answer correctness of between 7.4% to 40.1% (Table 3). Besides that, social distancing and quarantine are crucial knowledge in dealing with a pandemic. Based on Abu Samah et al¹⁷, a recent study in Malaysia reported that the majority of the respondents were aware of the social distancing importance in their study. In the teachings of Islam, there are also clear hadiths about quarantine and lockdown orders during an epidemic, as in Table 3, hadith item 1 and item 2. The statement "self-quarantine order" in hadith item 1 and "encourage people to work and worship at home," in hadith item 2 reflect the quarantine instructions by the hadith. Nevertheless, the responses given by the respondents in this study were inconsistent for both hadiths. These findings collectively suggested that students could not assimilate the true underlying meaning of these hadiths and hence could not able to apply the preventive measure as delineated in the hadiths in dealing with COVID-19.

As shown in this study, the respondents could generally perform well in scientific knowledge but not in Islamic teachings. These could be due to limited formal education on disease control from the Islamic perspective. To

strengthen the students' knowledge, there would be a need for teaching staff who are experts in Islamic disease prevention, treatment, and control in formal education. This idea is supported by a study done in Indonesia where the information contained in Islamic provisions is insufficient to teach Muslims and a specific instructional method based on Islamic disaster control provisions is essential.¹⁶ The authors also proposed a curriculum and teachers specialised in Islamic-based disaster control education in the local community in Indonesia.

The interpretation of results in this study should take into consideration the study's strengths and limitations. This study explored a wider scope of knowledge in dealing with COVID-19 by including both the scientific and Islamic revelation perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive view of students' knowledge. However, since this study was limited to pharmacy and health sciences students within a single institution, it cannot be generalised to other students throughout Malaysia. Therefore, a larger scale of study that includes other universities could be a viable future research project to explore students' knowledge and its impact on attitude and practice concerning dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic based on the Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah.

CONCLUSION

Much information about the COVID-19 prevention strategy and national vaccination programme have been accomplished, yet substantial new cases of COVID-19 emerge every day in Malaysia. Although Muslim students in the pharmacy and health sciences disciplines were able to master the scientific aspects of COVID-19, there seems to be a lack of thorough understanding of the health and safety terminologies in Islamic teaching, hadith, and verses of the Quran. Our study reveals potential knowledge gaps among the Muslim students on Islamic teachings on pandemic-related control. This is crucial to be taken note of by the individual, society, and educational institutions considering that a better understanding of Al-Quran and Al-sunnah could promote a sense of piety and deep earnestness in following the Islamic teaching in handling pandemics.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no potential conflict of interests with regards to the research, authorship, and publication of the study.

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