

**Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Religious Activities and Faith of Worshippers
in Kenya; A Case Study of Narok Town, Kenya**

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Abstract

The novel covid-19 pandemic led to change in lifestyles and other social activities including religious gatherings. In Kenya, the government restricted attendance of worship places in March, 2020 to help curb the spread of covid-19. This study sought to determine the impact of this restriction on the members faith and activities towards their religions. A descriptive survey was carried out in Narok town, as a representative of other parts of the country. Questionnaire and interview guide as well as observation were used for data collection. The study found out that majority of the members still had strong faith in their religious doctrines and leaders. About half of the respondents were still actively engaged in other religious activities such as reading holy books and following weekly sermons on media. However, there was a significant difference in most religious activities carried out by worshippers before and after the pandemic. Radio and television

were the most exploited media of transmitting weekly sermons. A good proportion of the respondents were afraid that continuous absenteeism from worship places would significantly alter their faith.

Key words: Covid-19, Religious Activities, Faith.

1 Background of the Study

Like many other sectors of life, religion has suffered during the global Covid-19 public health crisis. To comply with new social distancing measures, religious institutions around the world have sent their congregants home (Bryson *et al.*, 2020). Physical closeness, once a source of spiritual solidarity, now comes with the high risk of spreading infection. Older people, young children and the sick amongst other vulnerable people are at more risk for serious complications and death from Covid-19 (Wiemers *et al.*, 2020). This category of people was thus advised to keep away from social gatherings. However, the older generation and other people with other prevailing medical conditions require divine intervention. Research shows that this category of people frequent worship places more than the rest of the community (Swihart *et al.*, 2020).

Religious gatherings have proven to be hotbeds for outbreaks of the novel corona virus. Half of South Korea's transmission cases were traced back to a meeting of the Shincheonji (Shim *et al.*, 2020). In Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, several hundred Muslims who attended a mosque service contracted the virus (Aljazeera.com, 2020), and in Washington, DC, a rector tested positive for the virus after performing communion at an Episcopalian worship places with more than five hundred congregants (cbcnews.com, 2020). In an extraordinary gesture in February, Saudi Arabia banned foreign arrivals and halted visits to Mecca and Medina for *umrah*, a religious pilgrimage that Muslims can undertake at any time of year (Algaissi *et al.*, 2020). Riyadh also briefly shuttered the Great Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina for disinfection. Buddhist

New Year celebrations, which often bring thousands of people together for public water fights and other events, have been canceled across South Asia (Algaissi *et al.*, 2020).

Although attending religious services together is not possible at the present time due to COVID-19 restrictions, people of faith can often congregate “virtually” by participating in services that are now being live streamed. When life was “normal,” one might have been so busy that there was no time for spiritual matters, with hobbies, jobs, housework, recreational activities, social and family activities filling up every moment of the day. Now that normal activities have virtually come to a halt, there is lots of time for activities that will help build spiritual health.

Kenya, in particular, is a highly religious country with diverse religious groups with high levels of religious participation across various religious traditions. Belonging and participating in various religious activities is essentially important to many people across the country. A study showed that for 95 per cent of Kenyans, faith informs how they conduct their daily lives (theelephant.info, 2020).

Given the important role of religion in the lives of millions of people, it is important that we change how we practice our faiths in the face of this global pandemic. In this paper the implications of the covid-19 pandemic on religious activities are critically analyzed. Given that the viral pandemic has existed only for more than 7 months or so, there is minimum empirical research, available on this topic. The evidence base for this paper largely derives from newspaper articles on the internet rather than scientific empirical studies but indicates what is happening to religious beliefs and practices. Much of the information on the Net pertains to religion which is a central, though not exclusive, focus of this paper. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to examine the impact of covid-19 pandemic on religious activities in Narok town.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is descriptive design. The study aimed at collecting information from respondents on their opinion in relation to the effect of covid-19 on religious activities. The researcher used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained using questionnaires. It facilitated in gathering systematically, the factual information necessary for making good decision in the research. The secondary data was found from books, unpublished works and journals.

2.2 Target Population

The target population on which the findings were generalized in this study consisted of the religious members in the 17 religions in Narok County and their leaders.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Procedures

A sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain informational about the whole. (Webster, 1985) The research in this study made use of purposive sampling. The sample of the target population consisted all religious members from Narok County. Random sampling was employed in the selection of two (2) members from each religion. Thirty-four (36) respondents filled the questionnaires. A total of ten (10) interviews were administered to religious leaders.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

The main purpose of this study is to find out the effect of covid-19 on religious activities. In order to achieve this, the researcher made use of questionnaires and interviews as research instruments. The questionnaires consisted of both open ended and closed ended questions. Closed ended questions were used because they are easy to fill in and are relatively objective and fairly easy to tabulate. Open ended questions were used to allow the respondents to express themselves freely without restrictions.

2.5 Validity and Reliability of Research Guides Used

Questionnaires were quite reliable since they were easy to administer and encouraged confidentiality thus, reducing biasness. Interviews enabled the use of open-ended questions that aided in acquiring reliable findings and more detailed answers. Both were subjected to the test-retest reliability method to check for their consistency in results after a duration of 11 days. A group of 12 respondents (volunteers) was used. There was a similarity index of 63% in the results at the two instances of testing. Observation also ensured gathering of reliable data. The 12 respondents were also assigned with the same task and a 67% similarity index observed. A face validity of the research guides was conducted by 4 volunteers. A pilot study was then conducted to determine the validity of the data collection instruments used. Each of the 47 initial distinct research questions in the questionnaire guide (excluding bio-data section) was assigned to 3 different respondents. In total, there were 141 respondents (volunteers). The data was then debugged and the minimum and maximum values recorded. After a critical analysis check, 9 questions were found to be confusing and leading. These questions were plucked out. The ultimate validity score was thus 38/47 (80.85%) and the outcomes were found to strongly favor the use of these research guides.

2.6 Data Collection Procedures

The tested and approved research instruments were personally delivered to various respondents. The respondents answered the questions from questionnaires as individuals and not as a group. The questionnaires were received by the researcher after they were duly completed.

2.7 Data Analysis Procedure

Data processing took place first. It consisted of data organization and data recording. Here the process of coding the answers to questions was adapted. Tallying took place for each response. The data analysis helped to reduce the data to manageable summaries. The data was then computed using statistical package for social scientists, SPSS version

23. Inferential statistics using parametric paired t-test was adopted. Frequencies and descriptive statistics such mean and standard deviation were adopted in the analysis.

3 Results and Discussions

3.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Figure 1 show the gender percentage of respondents who participated in the study. 53% of the respondents were male while 47% were female. The fair distribution of respondents as far as gender was concerned was informed by the study's sampling rationale as well as abundance of the two genders in the study area. However, Hannover *et al.*, (2018) report that most religious doctrines, especially Christianity record more females than male. This is attributed to female's faith on the doctrines of Christianity and a feel of relief and calm whilst in churches and other worship places. **Table 1** shows that 38.9% of the respondents who participated in the study were in age bracket between 21- 30, 38.9% were aged between 31-40, 11.1% were 41-50 and 11.1% were in 50 years and above. Most of the respondents were between age 21 and 30 and 31-40 years.

This age distribution was informed by the literacy level of the respondents as guided by sampling procedures as well as cooperation of respondents during sampling. Ten Kate *et al.*, (2017) indicated that the inclination towards worship places increase linearly with age. This implies that there are more older people in worship places compared to younger (youthful) ones. This is guided by the morals of the said age-brackets and faith whereby youthful worshippers feel that they require more time for economic and other social matters. The older population have already surpassed these issues and have more time for religious activities in worship places. However, in the wake of covid-19 pandemic, the older population are more vulnerable to this disease as well as other affiliated diseases and are advised to fully keep of social gatherings such as worship places. **Table 1** shows that among the respondents, who participated in the study, 47.2% were single 50% married and 2.8% were divorced. From **Table 1**, most of the congregants were married. Some of the new roles are assigned to married individuals is to ensure that they promote

religious values to younger members of the society. This is supported by the firm emphasis of most religious doctrines on marriage and family as a key pillar of a holy society. Both Christianity and Islam have very strong emphasis on family matters and perceive marriage with a lot of dignity. It is thus not surprising that about 50% of the respondents were married. Covid-19 pandemic might have affected the stability of most families (and thus marriages) due to the increased contact time of family members as well as reduced economic abilities (Fegert *et al.*, 2020). By extension, weakening of families also weakened the faith of its members towards religious doctrines. Mahoney (2010) reported that there is a direct correlation between stable families and religion.

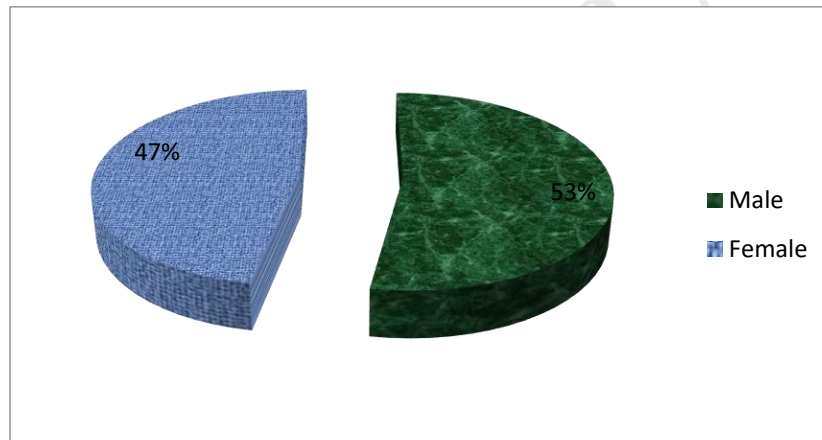


Figure 1: Gender of the respondents

From **Table 1**, majority of congregants were employed. From the study, only 25% of the congregants were unemployed. About 30.6 % of the respondents were in informal sectors, 44.4% were employed 25% had no job. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) indicates that most unemployed worshippers tend to concentrate more on their livelihoods and perceive religious matters to be secondary. As a result, they are likely to miss out on most of the worship sessions. Additionally, these group of worshippers also have frustrations stemming from their lack of employment. They thus vehement their frustrations through other activities such as drugs and alcohol abuse, immoral sexual engagements or other sports. Some of the unemployed respondents attested that they believe God had forgotten

them and did not have any justification to go to worship places. This situation was worsened by covid-19 pandemic which saw more job losses and pay-cuts or furloughs to the employed category.

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

Demography of worshippers	% Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent
Age (years)		
21-30	14	38.9
31-40	14	38.9
41-50	4	11.1
50 and above	4	11.1
Marital Status		
Single	17	47.2
Married	18	50.0
Divorced	1	2.8
Occupation		
Artisan and other temporal jobs	11	30.6
Employed	16	44.4
Unemployed	9	25.0
Religion		
Christian	33	91.7
Islam	3	8.3

a

About 91.7% were Christians and 8.3% were Muslims. From this finding the religious background of the respondents will definitely influence the kind of activities that they participate in their respective denomination. The large percentage of Christian respondents was due to the nature of the study area. Like most other East African nations,

^a Demographic information of the worshippers

majority of Kenyans are Christians by faith. There are few Muslims and Hindus amongst other religions. This is attributed to efforts put by missionaries during the colonization era.

3.2 Effects of The Pandemic on Religious Activities

The study inquired the respondent’s opinion on the level of activeness on religious matter before the covid-19 pandemic which led to closure of worship places. From **Table 2**, 72.2% indicated that they were very active 16.7% were less active, 8.3% were relatively active and 2.8% were inactive. This implied that majority of the worshippers were still in touch with religious activities in one way or another. The pandemic had not significantly affected their religious activities albeit restricting their religious congregations. This indicated that the bulk of the worshippers fully understood that religion was independent of worship places. Krause *et al.*, (2011) studied the theological correlation between worshipper’s faith and attachment to worship places and also found similar results.

Table 2: Effects of Covid-19 On Religious Activities

Religious Activity	Response (%)	
	Frequency	Percent
Before the covid-19 pandemic led to closure of worship places, how active were you in religious matters		
Very active	26	72.2
Quite active	6	16.7
Relatively active	3	8.3
Inactive	1	2.8
What was your reaction after learning that worship places were closed due to Covid-19 Pandemic		
I was afraid my faith would reduce	24	66.7
It was a relief to me so that i can rest from experience	1	2.8
I was not bothered at all	8	22.2

Other	3	8.3
How have you been observing worship after closure of worship places		
Via TV	18	50.0
Via radio	5	13.9
Via YouTube/Facebook and other social media	9	25.0
Family worship	1	2.8
Not even concerned	2	5.6
How can you rate your ability to participate in worship in the place of worship in the place of worship as far as time is concerned?		
I feel that I must sacrifice the time, comfortably and without regrets	32	88.9
Am usually slightly busy on these days/hours	2	5.6
Am never busy on these day/hours but prefer to use the time to rest or for leisure	2	5.6
Opinion on attending worship places after the pandemic		
I am very worried and will not attend even with strict social distancing and hygiene rules	2	5.6
I will only attend when strict rules are placed	16	44.4
I will attend but with some rules (not necessarily very strict) placed	11	30.6
I will attend without any fear even without any rules placed	7	19.4
How strong is your faith with god after the fatalities that have taken place due to Covid-19		
Stronger than before	18	50.0
No change in faith with him	13	36.1
Weaker than before	5	13.9

From **Table 2**, 66.7% indicated that they were afraid and their faith may reduce due to distancing themselves to their worship places for too long. Only 2.8% indicated that it was a relief to them hence they can rest from going to worship places daily, 22.2% were

^b Effects of covid-19 on religious activities

not bothered 8.3% had other reaction. About half of the respondents i.e. 50% indicated that they have been worshipping via TV 13.9% via radio, 25.0% via social media (youtube, facebook and zoom) and 8.3% were not even concerned about the issue. The respondents indicated that most local and national media houses supported their religious leaders by subsidizing the subscription rates necessary to air worship sermons through their media. Such collective responsibility was seen as being key and timely as a way to give back to the community during the tough times. McKay and Whitehouse (2015) found out that there was no significant deviation between the faith of worshippers who follow sermons through media and those attending physically.

About 88.9% indicated that they must sacrifice the time, comfortably and without regrets 5.6%, indicated that they are usually slightly busy on these days/hours and 5.6% indicated that they were busy on these day/hours but prefer to use the time to rest or for leisure. From **Table 2**, 5.6% indicated that they are very much worried and will not attend even with strict social distancing and hygiene rules. 44.4% of the respondents, indicated that they will only attend when strict rules are placed. This group of worshippers felt that even though going to worship places was essential, it was more critical to practice Ministry of Health regulations to keep the disease away. One of the respondents was quoted justifying;

.. God require us to protect ourselves first, and try to help ourselves before turning for His support. This is supported by Biblical verses...

About 30.6% indicated that they will attend but with some rules (not necessarily very strict) placed and 19.4% indicated that they will only attend without any fear even without any rules placed. About 50.0% indicated that the faith was stronger than before 36.1%, indicated that there was no change in faith 13.9% indicated that it was weaker than before. This indicates that there was no significant effect of the pandemic towards religious affiliations. These findings are supported by Abdulla (2018) who indicated that

majority of worshippers were able to distinguish between religion and worship places without reducing their religious faith.

3.3 Respondents Opinion on Time and Other Resources Spend in Worshipping Places

Table 3: Respondents’ Opinion on Essential Worship Matters Related to Covid-19 Pandemic

Implications of Not Going to Worship Places	Not Sure (1)	Strongly Disagree (2)	Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Saving on time	1(2.8%)	7(19.4%)	14(38.9%)	8(22.2%)	6(16.7%)	3.31	1.064
Saving on resources	0(0.0%)	3(8.3%)	7(19.4%)	19(52.8%)	7(19.4%)	3.83	.845
Relieved of the tiresome task	4(11.1%)	4(11.1%)	7(19.4%)	14(38.9%)	7(19.4%)	3.44	1.252
Reduced closeness to God	0(0.0%)	14(38.9%)	3(8.3%)	19(52.8%)	3(8.3%)	3.13	0.745

From **Table 3**, 2.8% were not sure if they were saving time by not going to worship places due to the pandemic 19.4% strongly disagreed, 38.9% disagreed, 22.2% agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed. An average of 3.31±1.064 of the variable was obtained implying that most worshippers did not concur that going to worship places wastes time. No respondent was sure if they were saving resources by not going to worship places due to the pandemic 8.3% strongly disagreed, 19.4% disagreed, 52.8% agreed and 19.4% strongly agreed. The average score was 3.83±0.845 implying that most worshippers disagreed with the belief that not going to worship places saved resources. In the past, there have been

^c Worshippers opinion on essential matters related to covid-19

concerns on the amount of, tithes and offerings that congregants offer in worship places. However, this study disqualified that theorem by showing that congregants were quite contented with the resources they spent in worship places since it was a voluntary task. About 11.1% of the respondents were not sure if they were having a relief by not going to worship places due to the pandemic 11.1% strongly disagreed, 19.4% disagreed, 38.9% agreed and 19.4% strongly agreed with a mean of 3.44 ± 1.252 . This figure also supported the fact that going to worship places was not a bother to most of the residents. None of the respondents was sure if they were moving closer to God by not going to worship places due to the pandemic 38.9% strongly disagreed, 8.3% disagreed, 52.8% agreed and 8.3% strongly agreed with a mean of 3.44 ± 1.252 .

3.4 Respondents Correlation of Their Worship Experiences Before and After the Pandemic

From **Table 4**, It can be noted that respondent's time spent in worship before pandemic Covid-19 and time spent in worship during the pandemic Covid-19 period were weakly and positively correlated ($r = 0.294, p < 0.05$) with a significant average difference between the two variables $p=0.000$ with ($t_{35} = -4245, p < 0.05$). It can also be noted from the results that the respondent's time spent in reading bible and inspirational material before closure of worship places during the pandemic Covid-19 and time spent in reading bible and inspirational material during the pandemic Covid-19 period were weakly and positively correlated ($r = 0.294, p < 0.05$) with the significant differences of the two-variable $p=0.000$ ($t_{35} = 5.656, p < 0.05$). The results indicated that the respondent's time spent in praying and mediation before pandemic Covid-19 and time spent in praying and mediation during the pandemic Covid-19 period were weakly and positively correlated ($r = 0.178, p < 0.05$) with a significant average difference of the two variables where $p=0.000$ ($t_{35} = 5.493, p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Paired respondents’ opinion on correlation of worship experiences before and after the pandemic

Paired Worship Correlations (Before and After the pandemic)	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation& Means
	Mean	S.d	Std	95% CI					
				Lower	Upper				
Time spent per week in worship places	-.917	1.296	.216	-1.355	-.478	-4.245	35	.000	N = 36, r= 0.294, Mean 1= 2.00 mean 2= 2.92
Time spent per week reading bible and inspirational material	1.056	1.120	.187	.677	1.434	5.656	35	.000	N = 36, r= 0.224, Mean 1= 3.36 mean 2= 2.31
Time spent per week praying and mediation	1.111	1.214	.202	.700	1.522	5.493	35	.000	N = 36, r= 0.178, Mean 1= 3.33 mean 2= 2.22
Time spent per week preaching Gods Message	1.139	1.125	.188	.758	1.520	6.073	35	.000	N = 36, r= 0.137, Mean 1= 2.92 mean 2= 1.78
Resources spent in religious charitable activities per week	1.556	1.539	.256	1.035	2.076	6.065	35	.000	N = 36, r= 0.159, Mean 1= 3.19 mean 2= 1.64
Closeness to God	-1.778	.929	.155	-2.092	-1.463	- 11.479	35	.000	N = 36, r= 0.124, Mean 1= 3.19 mean 2= 1.42

d

^d Correlation of worshippers’ religious activities and faith before and after the pandemic

The results noted that the respondent's time spent in preaching Gods Message before closure of worship places and time Spent in preaching Gods Message during Covid-19 period were weakly and positively correlated ($r = 0.137, p < 0.05$). Showing a significant average difference between responses with $p = 0.000$ ($t_{35} = 6.073, p < 0.05$). The results also indicated that respondent's resources spent in religious charitable activities per week before the pandemic Covid-19 and resources spent in religious charitable activities during the Covid-19 period were weakly and positively correlated ($r = 0.159, p < 0.05$). Indicating a significant average difference between two responses with $p = 0.000$ ($t_{35} = 6.065, p < 0.05$). The results indicated that the respondent's level of closeness to God before Covid-19 and level of closeness to God during Covid-19 period were weakly and positively correlated ($r = 0.124, p < 0.05$). There was a significant average difference between the two responses with $p = 0.00$ ($t_{35} = -11.479, p < 0.05$).

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has confirmed that the level of activeness on religious matter before the covid-19 pandemic was very high for almost all members. It was also confirmed that a good number of respondents were afraid and their faith may reduce due to the pandemic. Most respondents 55% used TV and radio to follow worship proceedings. Respondents had mixed reactions on willingness to attend religious services after the Covid-19 pandemic with majority indicating that they will only attend when strict rules are placed. There was a significant difference between the religious activities before the pandemic Covid-19 and during the pandemic.

The authors recommend the need for religious leaders to sensitize their members on covid-19 pandemic guidelines. Religious members are also encouraged to give their charitable offerings through online developed applications.

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Conflicts of Interests

There are no conflicts of interest to disclose in this study.

Data Availability Statement

All the data used in this study is enclosed within the article and any other supplementary sheet(s) attached.

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