



Survey on Religiosity

Survey Findings



Who are we?

Al Hassan Institute (AHI) operates as a think-tank, aimed at offering clarity to the contemporary issues of Shi'a youth. Backed by a team of experts in statistics, data analysis, behavioral health, Islamic fiqh and jurisprudence, demography and sociology - AHI creates a centralized effort of realigning Shi'a youth to their identities.

AHI was incepted in April of 2022 with a mission to realign Shi'a youth in the West (US, CAN, UK, EU, AUS, NZ) to their identities. At AHI, we employ a ground up approach to offering faith-based solutions to the contemporary issues of our youth, specifically by offering research backed by precise data.

What makes us **unique**?

- The first of its kind think tank developed to serve Shi'a youth in the West.
- 501(c)(3) 509(a)(2) Tax-exempt public charity.
- We do not purchase any of the data used for research, nor do we sell the data we collect.



**Al Hassan
Institute**

DATA, RESEARCH, AND
FAITH-BASED SOLUTIONS.



Abstract

Shi'a Youth in the West live a unique and challenging experience. Raised in an environment that sometimes is at a clash with their religious and cultural values, Shi'a youth in the West must meet expectations both from their secular peers, schools, and professional settings; along with the religious and cultural expectations of their families. In order to serve these youth, evaluating the level of their religiosity is crucial, in order to identify needs and come up with possible solutions.

Upon surveying individuals via social media platforms, e-mail campaigns, text campaigns, and in-person, a sample of 62 respondents was examined to take a closer look at religiosity, as it pertains to Shi'a youth living in the West (the term West will refer to US, Canada, EU, UK, Australia, New Zealand). The sample criteria was as follows: females and males, between the ages of 15-25, living in the West.

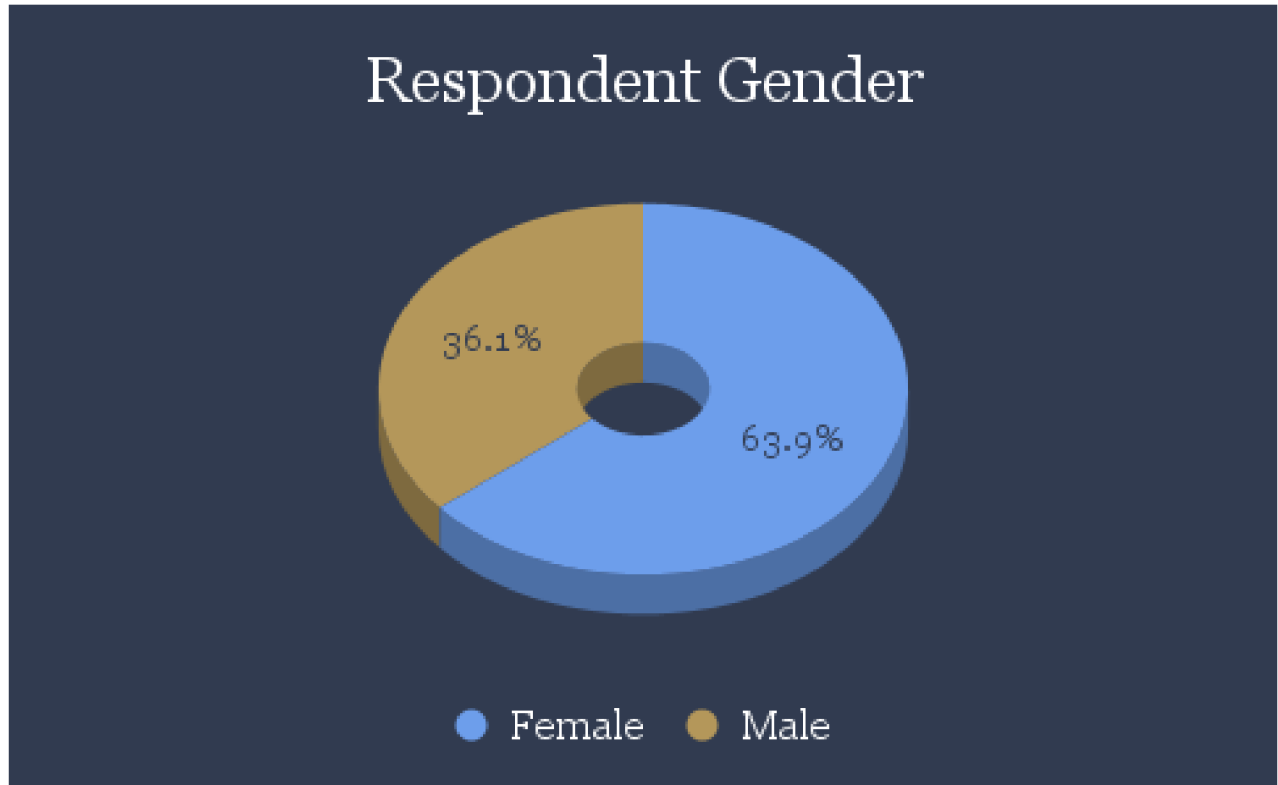
The AHI research team chose to focus on questions that gauge religiosity, especially those pertaining to Salat, fasting, maintaining a Halal diet, going to Hajj, Umrah, or Ziyara, and treating others kindly. The main goal behind choosing these questions was to get a baseline understanding of what challenges our youth are facing, in order to focus relief efforts in an accurate and beneficial manner.

The research team however has identified potential weaknesses in the survey, namely in the lack of questions on certain core Islamic beliefs and practices, such as Tawhid, paying Khums, refraining from listening to music, reading Quran, attending the masjid, and paying Sadaqa. A revised follow-up survey will be administered to include these questions in the coming months and new findings will be published accordingly.

The study found that the majority of respondents (52.5%) identified themselves as more religious than average (scale of 1-5 was used, 1 - not religious, 2 - somewhat religious, 3 - moderately religious, 4 - more religious than average, 5 - above average in religiosity).

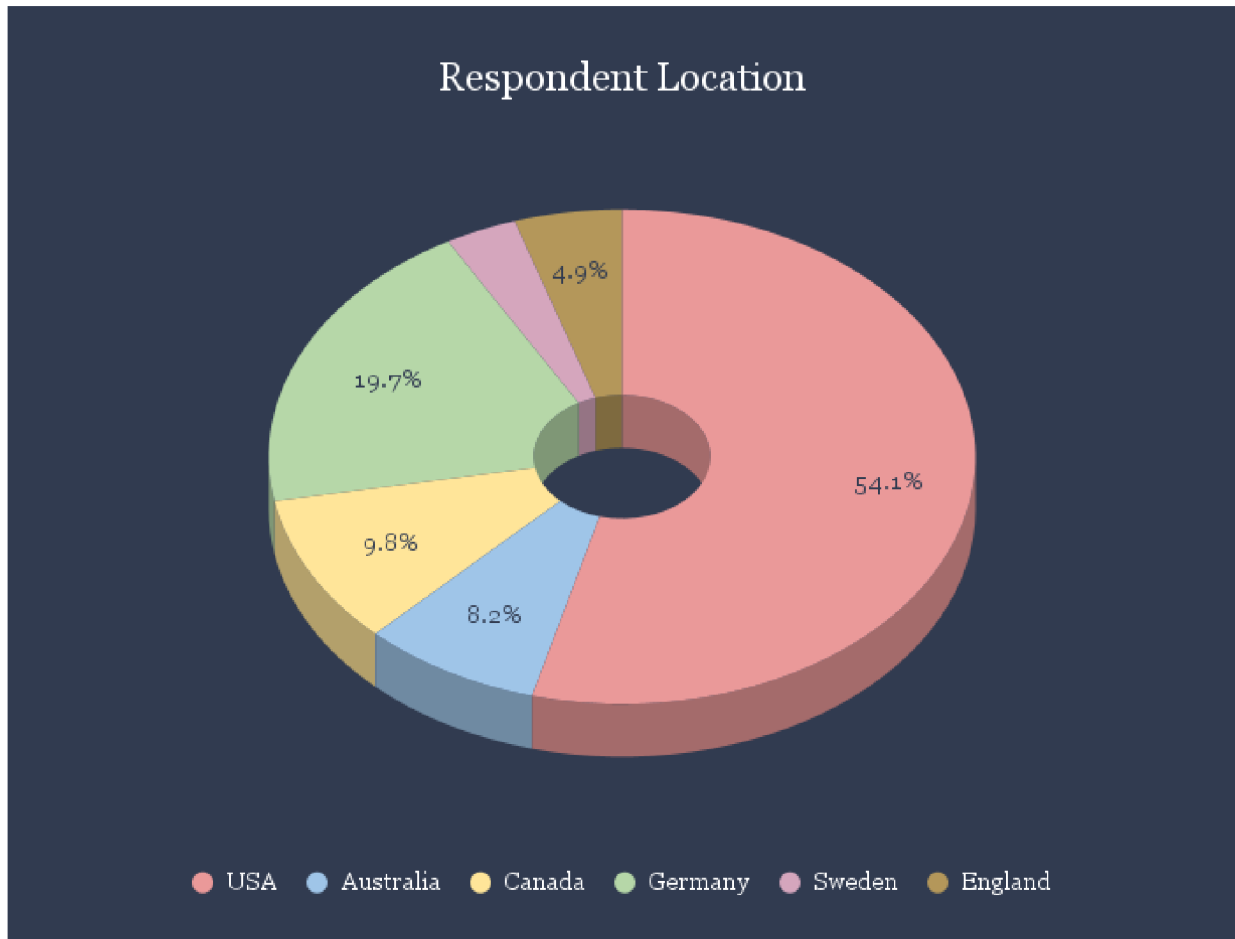
The most homogenous result was to the following question: How important is the way we treat others? 93.4% of respondents answered that the way we treat others is extremely important, based on a 1-5 scale (1 - not important, 2 - somewhat important, 3 - moderately important, 4 - very important, 5 - extremely important).

Respondent Gender



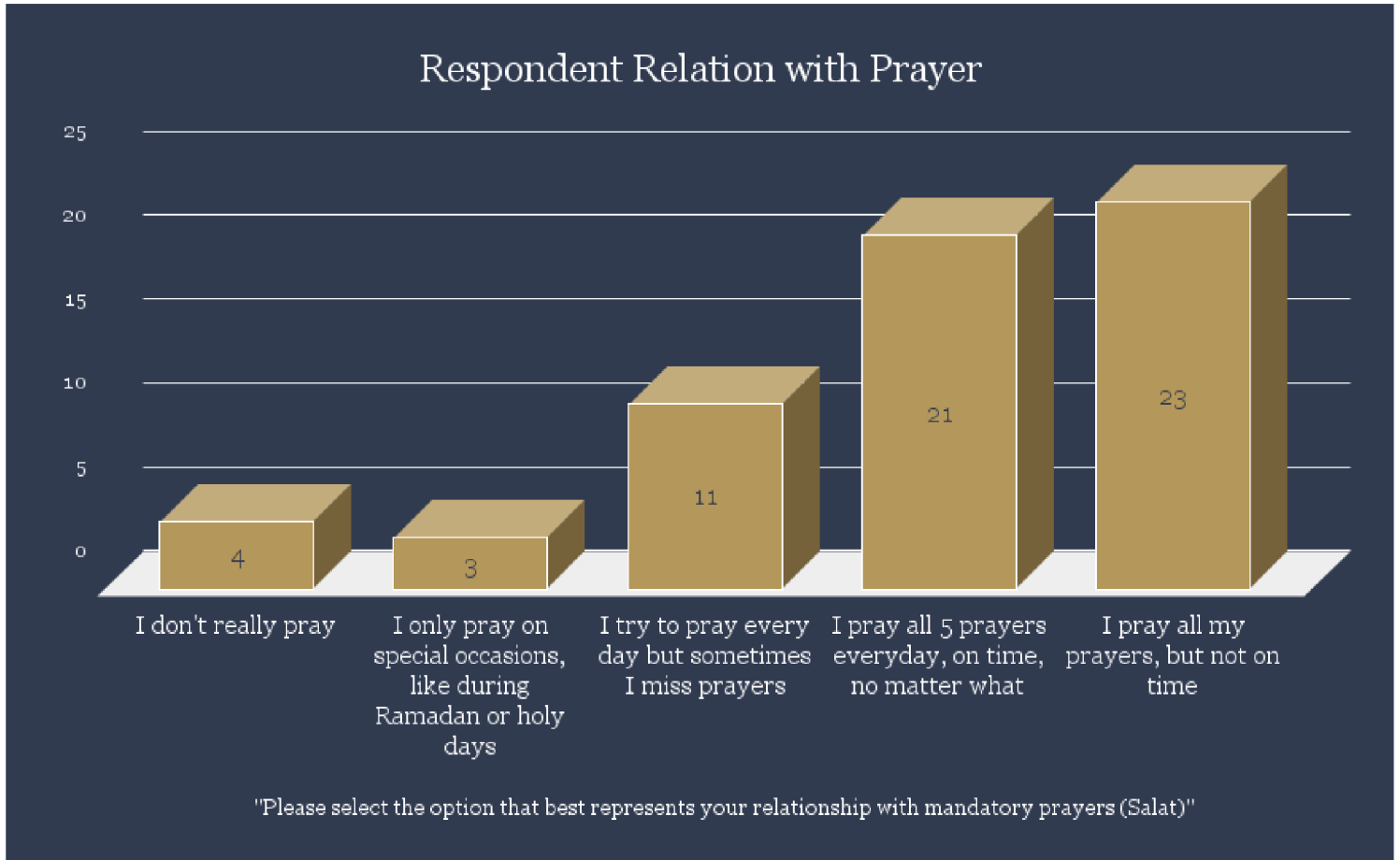
Of the 62 person sample, 63.9% of them were female, and 36.1% were male. The higher concentration of females responding to our surveys could be for many reasons. According to studies like (Smith, 2009) women might be more likely to respond to surveys if they perceive the social importance of doing so. It could also be implied that a higher concentration of women are current Al-Hassan Institute supporters and therefore more likely to offer their survey responses.

Respondent Location



Half of the respondents identified their geographical location as residing within the United States, with the second largest concentration of respondents residing in Germany. This may be due to the simple fact that Al-Hassan Institute is largely active within the United States given limited resources and lack of partnerships and outreach efforts. If a stronger effort is placed on expanding the reach of the administered surveys, a different distribution of respondent geographic location might be reflected.

Approaching Religiosity



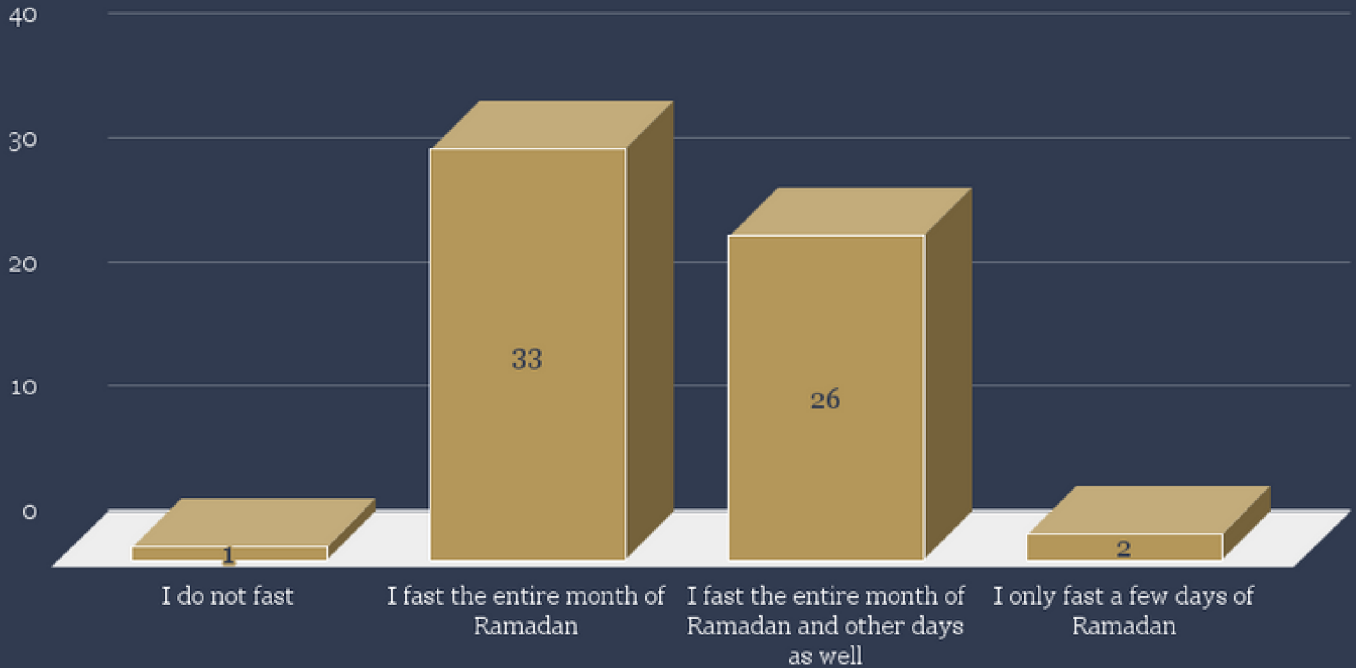
Answering the question: Please select the option that best represents your relationship with mandatory prayers (Salat), it is found that almost a third of the respondents identify they do have challenges performing their prayers on time, with another third facing challenges with missed prayers, not praying at all, or only praying on special occasions. In a study done by Pew Research, it was found that only 16% of adults aged 18-29 prayed daily, with only 10% of younger millennials saying they pray daily. Some youth face busy schedules, trouble prioritizing their faith over secular responsibilities, or simply finding prayer as a mundane task.

Salat is the basis of our faith, as outline by the following hadith:

Rasul Allah PBUH stated: The supportive pillar of faith is Salat, and it is the first of what is viewed (by Allah during judgement) among the actions of the son of Adam. If it was good (if his/her prayers were good) then the rest of his/her actions will be viewed (by Allah), and if it was bad (his/her prayer), then the rest of his actions would not be considered or viewed." - Wasa'il al-Sh'ia, Al-Hurr Al-'Amili, V4 P35.

روى عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم: "إنَّ عَمُودَ الدِّينِ الصَّلَاةُ وَهِيَ أَوَّلُ مَا يُنظَرُ فِيهِ مِنْ عَمَلِ ابْنِ آدَمَ فَإِنْ صَلَّحَتْ نُظِرَ فِي عَمَلِهِ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَصَحَّ لَمْ يُنظَرْ فِي بَقِيَّةِ عَمَلِهِ" - الحر العاملي، وسائل الشيعة، ج4، ص 35.

Respondent Relationship with Fasting



"Please indicate your relationship with fasting"

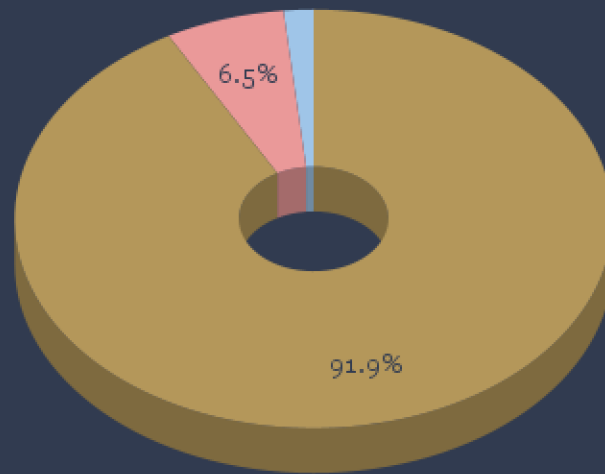
Comparing and contrasting respondents' relation with fasting and Salat, it is found that there is a higher frequency of respondents who face challenges with performing their mandatory prayers, and most respondents do meet their minimum mandatory or Wajib requirements of fasting. Some studies show that fasting is by and large performed at a much higher rate than mandatory prayers. A study by Pew Research in 2012 titled "The Worlds' Muslims: Unity and Diversity" took a look at global trends on Muslims religious practice, beliefs, and affiliations indicated that 93% of respondents indicated they fasted the entire month of Ramadan, while only 63% performed all five mandatory daily prayers.

Fasting for many is simply refraining from something (not ingesting anything during daytime), while Salat is performing an action, which takes time and effort. In addition, the communal aspect to fasting during Ramadan, especially sharing the meal of Iftar (breaking the fast) activates social cohesion in communities. According to a study done by Sharma in 2015, gatherings, like Iftar gatherings directly promote social cohesion as a community and increase the sense of security among community members. Fasting outside of Ramadan is also strongly recommended, especially on holy days such as the 15th of Sha'baan, the day of 'Arafah, and other occasions. Thus, fasting outside Ramadan should be stressed entirely.

The following tradition is attributed to Imam al-Ridha (AS) and describes the greatness of fasting in the month of Sha'baan: Relayed by Abbas b. Hilal "I heard Abal Hassan Ali b. Musa al-Ridha state" 'He who fasts a day in Sha'baan for the sake of Allah's rewards will enter Jannah, and he who performs Istighfaar 70 times in each day of the month will be placed in the realm of Rasul Allah in Jannah, and he who offers alms, even in the size of half a date, Allah will forbid the fire upon his body And he who fasts the final three days of Sha'baan and connects his fast with Ramadan, will receive the reward of fasting to full months" - *The Attributes* by Kulayni V2 P139.

عيون أخبار الرضا (ع) (5) الخصال: المظفر العلوي، عن ابن العياشي، عن أبيه، عن علي بن الحسن بن فضال، عن محمد بن الوليد، عن العباس بن هلال قال: سمعت أبا الحسن علي بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام يقول: من صام من شعبان يوماً واحداً ابتغاء ثواب الله دخل الجنة، ومن استغفر الله في كل يوم من شعبان سبعين مرة حشر يوم القيامة في زمرة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله ووجبت له من الله الكرامة، ومن تصدق في شعبان بصدقة ولو بشق تمره حرم الله جسده على النار، ومن صام ثلاثة أيام من شعبان ووصلها بصيام شهر رمضان كتب الله له صوم شهرين متتابعين - الخصال ج 2 ص 139.

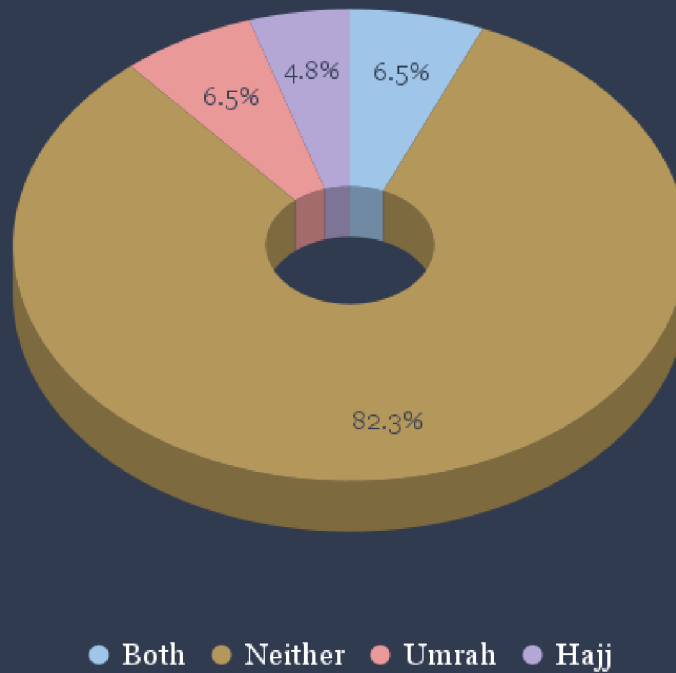
Respondent Halal Diet



- I only, strictly eat halal meat
- I sometimes, very rarely don't eat halal meat
- I eat everything that is not halal except pork (1.6%)

A high concentration of respondents (over 91%) indicated their strict adherence to a halal diet, as it pertains to Islamically slaughtered Zabiha meats. According to a 2016 report by the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of North America, the US Halal food market is a \$20 billion industry. With a continuously growing demand for Halal food all across the West, it will become easier to maintain a Halal diet. The prevalence of Halal food and its easy accessibility might be the reason for this high level response. Still for the 6.5% of respondents facing a struggle with maintaining a Halal diet, there could be possible explanations. According to a Pew Research study, only 48% of Muslim Americans adhere to a strict Halal diet. Since the vast majority of American Muslims are Sunni, this could be the reason for different views of what constitutes Halal meat. A difference between Hanbali Sunnis and Ja'ffari Imami Shi'a is the interpretation of fifth verse in the chapter "al-Maidah" which states "This day [all] good foods have been made lawful, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them." (Quran 5:5). The Hanbalis interpret this portion of the aya as allowing Muslims to consume the meat of Ahl al-Kitaab which are Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians (see Bin Baz fatwa #13978). However, a main component for meat to be Halal for Ja'ffari Imami Shi'a is for the individual performing the slaughter to be Muslim. Some additional ramifications might also exist for the followers of Ayatollah Sistani, which holds the view that the meat slaughtered by a Nasib (an individual who publicly opposes/shows hatred towards the Ahlulbayt) is also deemed haram.

Respondent Relation with Hajj and Umrah.



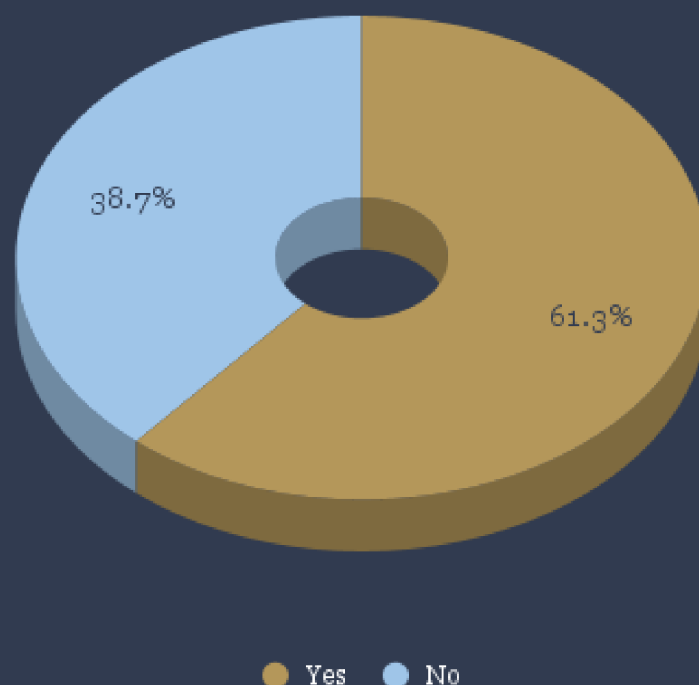
The majority of respondents (82.3%) indicated they have not been to Hajj nor 'Umra. With current challenges due to financial costs associated with Hajj, the difficulty of finding a reliable Hajj group in North America and Europe, issues with visas, and the amount of time required off school or work, many youth are facing challenges meeting the demand of accomplishing this mandatory pilgrimage. However, as outlined in the next section of the study, we notice that a larger portion of respondents have been on Ziyara trips (visitations to the Ahlulbayt). These trips, although cheaper in price, still require a certain amount of money, acquiring a visa for most foreign country passport holders visiting Iran or Iraq, and also taking time from school or work.

Due to the lack of current research offered on this topic, especially on why youth are going to Ziyara but not to Hajj nor 'Umra, we cannot identify a concrete reason on why the issue is occurring. A follow up survey will be administered by Al-Hassan Institute in order to gather more information, and subsequent research will be published. It should be stated however that Hajj is an important aspect to our faith. In a tradition attributed to Imam Zayn al-'Abideen (AS), he speaks to a man by the name of Shibli on the deep esoteric and hidden meanings behind the rituals of Hajj. The following is a short part of the tradition:

Imam al-Sajjad (AS) to Shibli: "Did you shake hands with (touch) the stone (black stone), and stand at the site of Ibrahim, and pray two ruk'as there?"
Shibli: "Yes I did." It is narrated that the Imam let out a loud shriek as if his soul was leaving his body, then said: "He who shook hands with (touched) the black stone, shook hands with Allah SWT, oh poor one, do not waste the blessings of what its holiness has been made great, and annul the (handshake) with violation." - Mustadrak al-Wasail V10, P166-172

عن الامام السجاد ع للشبلي: صافحت الحجر ووقفت بمقام إبراهيم (عليه السلام) وطلبت به ركعتين؟ قال: نعم، فصاح (عليه السلام) صيحة كاد يفارق الدنيا، ثم قال: (آه آه)، ثم قال (عليه السلام): (من صافح الحجر الأسود، فقد صافح الله تعالى، فانظر يا مسكين، لا تضيع أجر ما عظم حرمة، وتنقض المصافحة بالمخالفة، وقبض الحرام نظير أهل الآثام) - مستدرک الوسائل 10: 166-172، نقلاً عن كتاب شرح النخبة

Respondents answer on whether they have been to Ziyara or not.

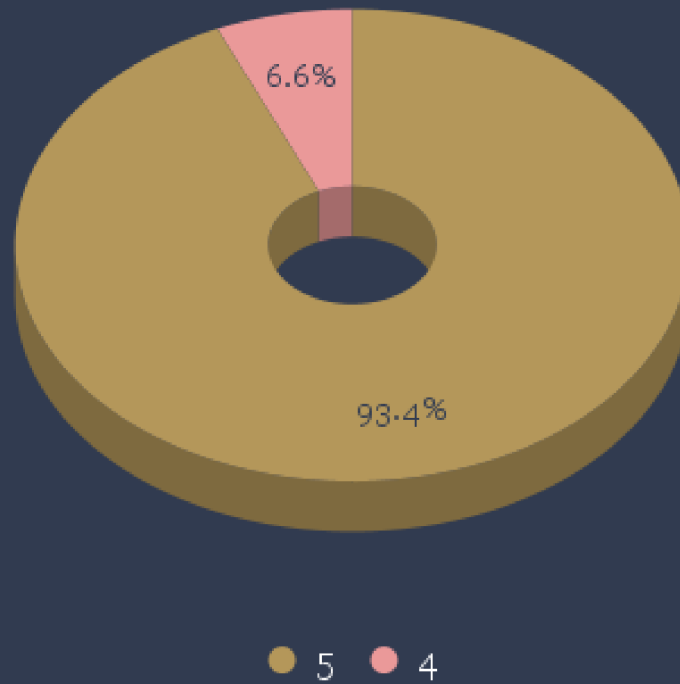


Over half of the respondents (61.3%) did indicate that they have been to Ziyara (visitation of the Ahlulbayt) at one point in their lives, and this is not a surprising metric given the high importance placed on the Ziyara by thousands of authentic traditions. Furthermore, travelling to Iraq is now considered safe and convenient for most travellers, opening up religious tourism to many. Just during the Ziyara of Arba'een (40th day after Ashura) the Iraqi Ministry of Tourism estimated 21 million pilgrims visited the Holy Shrine of Imam Hussain (AS) in Karbala.

In a study done on how religious pilgrimage may affect mental health in the *Journal of Religion and Health*, researchers conducted a longitudinal study and found that many respondents had a higher sense of general well-being, especially when it came to their mental health, after religious pilgrimage. In a separate study on Hajj in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, researchers found that pilgrims experienced an increased feeling of unity, more favorable sentiments towards women, especially relating to female education. Additionally pilgrims had a heightened sense of equality and less racist sentiments. This could likely be due to the intermingling of so many people from different ethnic backgrounds gathered for the same reason. The same points can be inferred from Ziyara trips, as they do gather individuals from different ethnicities, religions, nationalities, ages, and sexes.

Emphasizing the importance of Ziyara to our youth is essential. Organizing youth Ziyara groups, establishing micro-loans or grants to fund youth Ziyara trips, and enhancing their understanding of the benefits of Ziyara both in this life and the hereafter are essential.

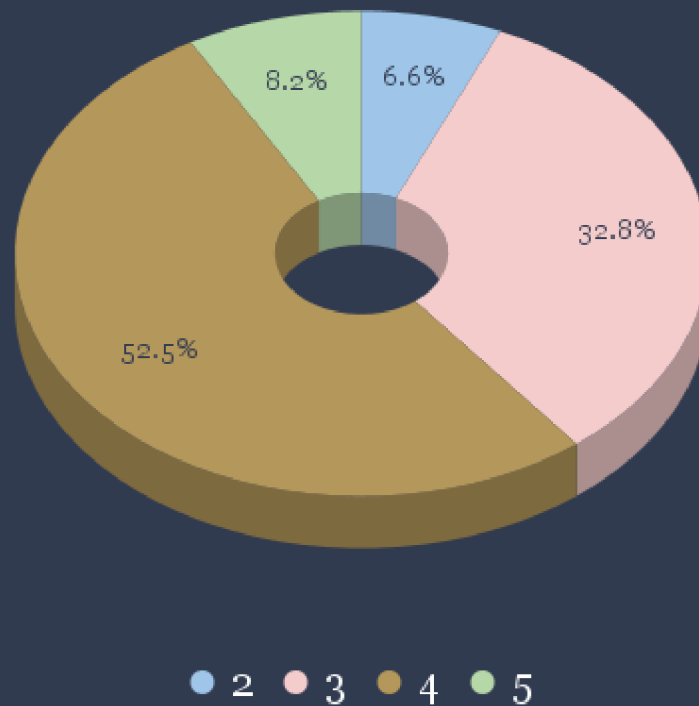
Answer to: How important is the way we treat others? (1-5)



One of the most uniform results observed was in response to the question: "How important is the way we treat others?" Utilizing the same scale used for the other questions in the survey (1 - not important at all, 2- slightly important, 3 - averagely important, 4 - above averagely important, 5 - extremely important), over 93% of respondents did indicate that the way we treat others is an extremely important part of being a good, religious Muslim. This is not contrary to the teaching of Islam found within the Holy Quran and as taught by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the Ahlulbayt (AS). Allah SWT states in the Holy Quran, "They act with altruism towards 'the emigrants' even though they may be in need. And whoever is saved from the selfishness of their own souls, it is they who are 'truly' successful." (Quran 59:9) The virtue of altruism or Ethaar is one of the most noble character traits emphasized within the faith of Islam. In a tradition attributed to Imam Ali (AS), he says, "Altruism is the highest of the noble traits."

We must keep in mind however that although treating others is a major component of our faith, it is not actually entirely what our faith falls on and what constitutes being a religious Muslim. Certain contemporary scholars do hold this view, especially when it comes to interpreting the following verse: "Only those who come before Allah with a pure heart 'will be saved'." (Quran 26:89). While the more plausible and better held view of top Imami exegetes interprets "having a pure heart" as having a heart that is pure from sin, not simply pure from treating others poorly.

Respondent Religiosity Level out of 5



The main objective of this research study was to find a baseline metric of religiosity of Shi'a youth and young adults living in the West. Over half of the respondents' self-held reflection of personal religiosity was "more religious than average," with over a third of the rest identifying as "averagely religious." Given the cultural landscape of the West, being "too religious" might not be something seen as trendy or "cool" by our youth. Furthermore, when we take into consideration the almost two-thirds of respondents that faced challenges with their prayers, we need to give thought on what exactly constitutes as "being religious." After administering the survey, our research team identified some weaknesses within the research, especially concerning lack of questions on Tawhid, reciting the Quran, refraining from listening to music, masjid attendance, paying Khums, Zakat, and Sadaqah, among other questions that would otherwise constitute a "religious" individual. Follow up research will be focused on these points at a greater effort and separate surveys will be administered to gather data on the missed topics.

The overall landscape of the religiosity of Shi'a youth in the West is not totally negative. Identifying that our youth are facing challenges with Salat and performing Hajj and Ziyara offers us a baseline on where we should focus our efforts. Alims, public speakers, youth group organizers, and all those in positions of leadership within the Muslim community should put more effort into assisting youth in overcoming the challenging hurdles they face when it comes to Salat. AHI will work in the coming months to put out an easy to follow actionable list on Salat which will ease the challenges our youth face on the issue.

Conclusion

Shi'a Youth in the West live a unique and challenging experience. Raised in an environment that sometimes is at a clash with their religious and cultural values, Shi'a youth in the West must meet expectations both from their secular peers, schools, and professional settings; along with the religious and cultural expectations of their families. In order to serve these youth, evaluating the level of their religiosity is crucial, in order to identify needs and come up with possible solutions.

Upon surveying individuals via social media platforms, e-mail campaigns, text campaigns, and in-person, a sample of 62 respondents was examined to take a closer look at religiosity, as it pertains to Shi'a youth living in the West (the term West will refer to US, Canada, EU, UK, Australia, New Zealand). The sample criteria was as follows: females and males, between the ages of 15-25, living in the West.

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A comprehensive actionable list on what can be done by Alims, youth leaders, public speakers, and parents on how to encourage youth to maintain performing their religious duties, and how to maneuver through the challenges and hurdles especially of performing Salat will be produced in the coming months.

The following has been a humble execution of our religious duties and requirements, with the mission to realign Shi'a youth living in the West to their true identities, and helping relieve them of their many challenges. If you would like to offer support, donate, or join our mission, please visit www.hresearch.org

May Allah Hasten the Reappearance of Our Master

