

Phenomenon Of Suicide During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysia: An Overview of Hadith Perspective

Ahmad Izzuddin Abu Bakar¹

Abstract

Recent suicide cases have shown a significant increase. Experts and authorities link this phenomenon to the financial pressures experienced by the community. The situation stems from the unfavourable economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting nearly every country worldwide. Islam prohibits any form of action leading to suicide. Past studies have shown that this belief prevents the widespread occurrence of suicides among Muslims. This article will highlight the Hadith perspective in detail on the act of suicide. This will strengthen the existing beliefs among Muslim individuals, thus preventing them from falling into such issues. The method used is qualitative content analysis. Hadiths regarding suicide will be gathered and analysed. The meanings conveyed will be extracted and arranged. The research findings illustrate the following: 1. Suicide is a major sin, 2. Suicide is included in the sin of killing a human being, 3. Perpetrators will be punished according to their method of suicide, 4. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not pray over their bodies but instructed others to do so, 5. Suicide does not lead to disbelief, and 6. Islam prohibits hoping for death.

Keywords: *Suicide, Hadiths on Suicide, Suicide in Malaysia, Suicide During Covid19, Covid19*

INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) hit the country, the incidence of suicide has seen a significant increase. The Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) reported 468 cases from January to May 2021. Whereas in 2019 there were only 609 cases, and in 2020 only 631 cases. Experts believe this trend is closely related to the mental health of the community experiencing financial problems due to the loss of income sources caused by the downturn in the economy as a result of the pandemic (Safeek Affendy Razali, 2021).

As known, Islam strictly prohibits its followers from committing suicide, categorizing it as a major sin and a crime. This belief serves as a barrier to the widespread occurrence of suicides among Muslims compared to followers of other religions (Rose Fazilah Ismail et al., 2018). This article will examine the Hadith perspective, which is the second source of the religion, on the action in depth and comprehensively. This will strengthen the stance of the Muslim community against suicide and thereby save them from falling into such acts.

The study is conducted using the qualitative method of content analysis. Generally, it involves observation, assessment, and analysis of the hadiths related to suicide issues. The content of the hadith text will be examined from various angles. Afterward, the conveyed meanings will be extracted, elucidated, and organized. The original text of a hadith will be included for verification purposes.

Definition and Several Key Factors of Suicide

According to Merriam-Webster Online English Dictionary suicide is defines as the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally. Meanwhile, the Cambridge English Online Dictionary defines it as the act of killing yourself intentionally. In terms of terminology, Durkheim (1952) defines it as behaviour that results in death, whether directly or indirectly, from some positive or negative action carried out by the victim. O'Carroll et al., (1996) define suicide as death due to self-inflicted injury with intent while Ame Husna Kamin & Salleh Amat (2015) define that the committed is to end one's own life with the hope that death will solve the problems faced.

¹ Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Tel: +60179771842, E-mail: izzuddin@usim.edu.my

Based on the definitions presented, researchers agree that the act of suicide has the following three elements: 1. Done intentionally or with intent, 2. Performed by oneself, and 3. Resulting in death or the taking of life.

There are several factors that influence suicidal behaviour, including depression, substance abuse, especially drugs, financial pressure, and others (Noor Hisham Abdullah, 2015). Depression is a form of psychiatric disorder that affects individual emotions. Typically, individuals will experience sadness, melancholy, low self-esteem, helplessness, despair, fatigue, loss of appetite, insomnia, inability to focus, and self-blame for every incident that occurs (Meilanny Budiarti Santoso et al., 2018; Nor Ba'yah Abdul Kadir et al., 2018).

Depression is classified as one type of mental illness. In Malaysia, it is identified as a major mental illness and is often reported to occur. The National Morbidity Survey conducted by the Ministry of Health Malaysia in 2015 found that the prevalence of mental disorders among adults aged 16 and above was 29.2 percent (Rose Fazilah Ismail et al., 2018).

Mental illnesses, especially depression, play a significant role in the phenomenon of suicide in society. This is evident through past studies linking mental health and suicidal tendencies. At least, someone with suicidal tendencies has a disorder, and most often it is depression (Nurul Sofiah Ahmad Abd Malek et al., 2020).

Substance abuse, particularly drugs, also contributes to suicide cases. This is due to the imbalance of chemical fluids in the brain structure known as dopamine and serotonin. These changes affect normal operations by disrupting the function of the reward system, motivation, and behaviour. It alters motivation and emotions, thus creating depressive symptoms such as dysthymia, anhedonia, and feelings of misery often associated with depression (Rose Fazilah Ismail et al., 2019).

Studies in the West support the statement that drug abuse increases the risk of psychiatric illnesses such as depression, anxiety, affective bipolar disorder, and psychosocial disorders such as schizophrenia, which result in symptoms of hallucinations and delusions. In Malaysia, several studies on drug addicts have found that almost half of them suffer from depression (Rose Fazilah Ismail et al., 2019). Consequently, these issues will trigger suicidal tendencies and attempts.

Financial stability is fundamental in almost all aspects of life. Good financial conditions enable individuals to obtain basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Not only that, it allows a person to spend more time with family, entertainment, and the like. Generally, financial well-being promotes better psychology (Nazuha Shamshuddin et al., 2018).

Research made abroad, such as in Korea, mention that women with low socioeconomic status have a significantly higher suicide attempt rate (Nor Ba'yah Abdul Kadir et al., 2018). Similarly, in this country, statements by the Director-General of Health reaffirm the same (Noor Hisham Abdullah, 2015). This is supported by reports on websites such as ismawebnet, which mention that the Director of the Criminal Investigation Department (JSJ) of Bukit Aman, Datuk Seri Abd Jalil Hassan, stated that investigations by JSJ found three main causes of suicide incidents: emotional stress, family problems, and financial factors (Fazleen Safina, 2021).

Suicide During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia

The lung infection known as the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has impacted nearly all countries and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). Physical distancing measures were implemented as a rapid preventive strategy to curb the spread of the virus. These measures, however, have raised significant mental health concerns due to the disruption of normal life and the imposition of new norms. According to Abdul Aziz et al. (2020), these measures have had adverse effects on mental health, including anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Previously, a study by Julianne Holt-Lunstad and her team indicated that the mortality rate could increase by 29% among individuals who experience chronic social isolation.

Recently, the incidence of suicide has surged within the community. Experts have linked this phenomenon to deteriorating mental health conditions resulting from the enforcement of lockdowns or Movement Control

Orders. This ongoing situation has triggered a chain reaction of adverse effects. Many individuals have lost their jobs or are working under non-conducive conditions from home. Children not attending school have added to the burden on parents managing them. Owners and employees of small and medium enterprises have been unable to operate, and recreational activities, communal prayers at mosques, shopping, and various other activities have been hindered.

A press statement by the Malaysian Ministry of Health on June 29, 2021, regarding the current state of COVID-19, noted an increase in suicide cases. They had advised families and those around them to recognize early symptoms of depression that could lead to suicidal behavior to enable early intervention.

Dr. Ruziana Masiran, Senior Lecturer and Psychiatrist at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University Putra Malaysia Teaching Hospital (HPUPM), stated that the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals can be observed from various aspects, including emotional disturbances such as increased irritability, anxiety about contracting and spreading the virus, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies (Liza Mokhtar, 2020).

The Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) recorded 609 suicide cases in 2019, 631 cases in 2020, and 468 cases from January to May 2021. On average, two suicide cases occur daily from 2019 to May 2021. This data includes 281 men and 1,427 women. Among the victims, 872 were aged 15 to 18, and 668 were aged 19 to 40. The most common methods were hanging (75.1%), jumping from buildings (13.6%), and ingesting toxic substances (5.7%) (Safeek Affendy Razali, 2021).

The state of Johor recorded the highest number of cases in 2019 and 2020, with 101 cases. In contrast, Selangor recorded the highest number of cases from January to May 2021, with 117 cases. The three main causes identified were family problems, emotional stress, and financial issues (Safeek Affendy Razali, 2021).

The Perspective of Hadith on the Phenomenon of Suicide

There are numerous hadiths that address the act of suicide, documented in esteemed collections such as Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Tirmidhi, among others. Collectively, these hadiths hold a status of being *Maqbul*, meaning they are accepted as valid evidence. These hadiths are categorized into four types: *Sabih*, *Sabih Lighairih*, *Hasan*, or *Hasan Lighairih*.

Upon observation, evaluation, and analysis, researchers have classified the Hadith's perspective on this phenomenon into the following points:

Suicide as a Major Sin in the Hadith

The Hadith views the act of suicide as a major sin. In Islam, sins are categorized into two types: major sins (*Kaba'ir*) and minor sins (*Sagha'ir*). Major sins are; 1. Sins that incur a prescribed punishment (*Hudud*) in this world, such as murder, adultery, theft, 2. Sins that are promised for divine retribution and, 3. Sins that will be cursed by Allah and His Messenger in the hereafter. Minor sins include offenses such as entering a mosque with dirty clothes, talking while the imam is delivering the sermon, or boycotting a fellow Muslim for more than three days.

Scholars unanimously agree (*Ijma'*) that taking one's own life is a major sin. Some even argue that it is a graver sin than murdering another person, based on specific religious texts, particularly hadiths.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Whoever throws himself from a mountain and kills himself will be in the Hellfire, throwing himself down therein forever. Whoever drinks poison and kills himself will have his poison in his hand and will drink it in the Hellfire, wherein he will dwell forever. Whoever kills himself with an iron weapon will have that weapon in his hand, stabbing his abdomen in the Hellfire, wherein he will dwell forever" (Bukhari, 2016).

Muhammad bin Ali bin Adam al-Athyubi (2017), in his explanation of this hadith, states that it clearly forbids the actions mentioned and classifies them as major sins. These sins negate the perfection of one's faith, which is why this hadith is placed under the topic of faith.

The severity of suicide as a major sin is evident from the phrase, "he will dwell therein forever." This phrase indicates the gravity of the sin. According to Ahlul-sunnah Waljamaah, the hadith does not imply that those who commit suicide are disbelievers (kafir). Other texts affirm that every believer will eventually enter paradise (Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz, 2007).

This understanding is further supported by the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who refrained from performing the funeral prayer for individuals who died by suicide. Ibn 'Abd al-Bar (2018) explains that the Prophet's abstention from the funeral prayer was intended to dissuade people from committing major sins.

Suicide as Part of the Sin of Killing

Islam holds the preservation of human life in the highest regard (Musa al-Syatibi, 2017). Consequently, there are numerous prohibitions against killing in the religious texts, including hadiths. One such hadith states:

Anas (RA) reported: The Prophet (PBUH) was asked about major sins. He said, "Associating others with Allah, disobedience to parents, killing a person, and false testimony" (Bukhari, 2016).

Included in the sin of killing a person is the act of suicide. This is because the human body is essentially the property of its Creator. Allah SWT created the human body, and thus its use must follow the regulations set forth by Him. Just as one is not permitted to misuse wealth, lifespan, knowledge, and similar blessings, one is also not allowed to misuse one's own body. Humans do not grant life to themselves and therefore do not have the right to take it away; it is Allah SWT who bestows life. Consequently, individuals do not have the authority to end their lives before the appointed time.

Ibn Daqiq al-'Ied (2018) emphasizes this meaning in his explanation of the hadith. He asserts that the sin of committing a crime against oneself is equivalent to committing a crime against another person. This is because a person's body is not their absolute property but rather belongs to Allah. It can only be treated in ways that are permitted by Allah. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (2005) also discusses this matter, stating that the hadith prohibits killing any human being, whether it be oneself or another, as humans are the property of Allah.

Punishment According to the Method of Suicide

Individuals who commit suicide will be punished according to the method they used to end their lives. They will repeatedly enact their method of suicide in Hell for as long as they remain there. In addition to the hadith mentioned earlier, there are other hadiths that elucidate this form of punishment. For instance:

Abi Qilabah reported that Thabit bin al-Dhahhak, who was among those who pledged allegiance under the tree, narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "Whoever swears by a religion other than Islam, he is as he said; and there is no vow upon the son of Adam for what he does not own; and whoever kills himself with something in this world will be punished with it on the Day of Judgment; and whoever curses a believer, it is as if he killed him; and whoever accuses a believer of disbelief, it is as if he killed him" (Bukhari, 2016).

Abu Hurairah (RA) reported: The Prophet (PBUH) said: "He who strangles himself will strangle himself in Hell, and he who stabs himself will stab himself in Hell" (Bukhari, 2016).

Allah SWT has set a principle, known as *al-Jaza' Min Jins al-Amal* (recompense is of the same nature as the action), where each person is repaid according to their deeds. This principle is derived from observing the texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. It serves as a stern warning to deter people from committing sins. For example, the prohibition against wrongfully taking the property of orphans is highlighted in the Qur'an, warning that those who do so may die and leave behind his children as weak orphans. Similarly, a hadith mentions that a compassionate leader will receive compassion from Allah SWT, and vice versa (Khalid bin Usman al-Sabt, 2018).

The Prophet's (PBUH) Refrain Himself from Performing Funeral Prayer for Those Who Commit Suicide, While Instructing Others to Do So

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not perform the funeral prayer (Salat al-Janazah) for those who committed suicide. However, he instructed his companions to perform it. The obligation to properly handle

the deceased, which includes performing the funeral prayer, remains. This communal obligation (*fardu kifayah*) must be fulfilled by some members of the community; otherwise, the entire community bears the sin for its neglect.

Jabir bin Samurah reported: "A man who had killed himself with a broad-headed arrow was brought to the Prophet (PBUH), but he did not offer the funeral prayer for him" (Muslim, 2006).

This hadith illustrates the view that it is recommended (hadith) for leaders, scholars, and prominent figures in the community to abstain from attending the funeral prayer of a person who has committed suicide. This abstention serves as a deterrent, instilling fear and discouraging others from engaging in such a condemned act. This perspective is upheld by the Maliki and Hanbali schools of thought.

Suicide Does Not Lead to Disbelief

Ahlussunnah Waljamaah does not pronounce the ruling of disbelief upon the perpetrator of suicide. Based on the entirety of evidence concerning those who commit major sins, where Allah SWT forgives all sins except for polytheism, there are even individuals who committed suicide in Medina, upon whom Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sought forgiveness and prayed for.

Narrated by Jabir that al-Tuffail bin Amru al-Dausi came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said: "O Messenger of Allah, do you have a fortress that is fortified and prevents enemies?" He (the narrator) said: The Bani Daus had strength during the Jahiliyyah. The Prophet (PBUH) declined as Allah had reserved it for the Ansar. When the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina, al-Tuffail and some others from his tribe migrated with him. They were uncomfortable staying in Medina due to the climate, and some fell sick and couldn't endure it. One person took a broad-headed arrow and pierced his joints, causing blood to flow from his hands until he died. Al-Tuffail (PBUH) him in his dream, appearing handsome and with his hands covered. He asked him: "What did your Lord do to you?" He replied: "He forgave me because of my migration to His Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)." He asked: "Why do I see your hands covered in blood?" He replied: "It was said to me: We will not repair what you have damaged." Al-Tuffail narrated this to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), who then said: "O Allah, forgive his hands." (Muslim, 2006).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) acknowledged al-Tuffail's dream where a member of his tribe who committed suicide was in paradise, forgiven by Allah SWT. Moreover, the Prophet (PBUH) sought forgiveness so that Allah SWT could beautify the damaged hands. Requesting forgiveness should not be made unless the person is still a Muslim.

Regarding the phrase "*Khalidan Mukhalladan Fiba Abadan*" (to abide therein forever), mentioned in the preceding hadith, it does not mean that the person who commits suicide is a disbeliever and will remain in hell forever. Such an interpretation would contradict the evidence from the Quran and Hadith on the same matter. Therefore, scholars provide several interpretations: firstly, it applies to those who commit suicide and justify the act; secondly, it means to stay for a long time in hell, similar to the Arabic expression "I will not speak to you forever," while intending to speak after a certain period; and thirdly, the punishment is as mentioned, but Allah SWT, out of His mercy, informs that a person who dies in Islam will not remain in hell eternally (Al-Nawawī, 2009).

Prohibition of Wishing for Death

Islam prohibits wishing for death because of worldly afflictions such as poverty, the death of loved ones, loss of wealth, and so on. However, if it is due to matters that challenge one's faith and religious trials, it is permissible. Likewise, wishing for a noble death such as martyrdom is allowed.

Narrated by Anas RA, he said: The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "None of you should wish for death because of a calamity that has befallen him. If he must wish for death, then let him say: 'O Allah, keep me alive as long as life is good for me, and cause me to die when death is good for me.'" (Bukhari, 2016).

Hadiths related to suicide are placed under the title 'Disliked (*Makruh*) to Wish for Death Because of Calamities'. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani indicated that the ruling is disliked due to the phrase 'if he must wish for death then say..!'

It implies that the action can be done but is not encouraged or strongly discouraged. If one cannot refrain from expressing it, then it is best to pray as suggested because humans do not know what will happen, and it is a form of surrender to fate (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī, 2005).

A long life is better because no one knows what will happen. It is a divine decree that no condition will last forever. This determination becomes a rule of nature regulated by Allah SWT. Human life alternates between hardship and ease.

"And indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease." (Quran, 94:5-6).

The most important thing is the opportunity to perform righteous deeds and the chances to repent. The remaining lifespan becomes an advantage for everyone. If one is righteous, they can increase their good deeds, and if one is sinful, they can seek forgiveness.

Narrated by Abu Huraira that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "None of you should wish for death. If he is a doer of good, perhaps he may increase his good deeds, and if he is an evildoer, perhaps he may seek forgiveness." (Bukhari, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Based on the hadiths mentioned, Islam unequivocally prohibits the act of suicide and anything that leads towards it. The perpetrator will be punished according to the manner in which they committed suicide. If they did it by jumping from a high place, they will repeatedly do so in the Hellfire. The sin of suicide is so grave that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not pray over their bodies. However, this act does not remove someone from the fold of Islam and render them a disbeliever. However, Islam prohibits believers from wishing for death due to worldly afflictions such as poverty and the loss of loved ones. Scholars state that wishing for death is disliked (*Makruh*).

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