

**FEMALE RELIGIOSITY  
IN POST-SECULAR SOCIETY:  
ISLAM IN KAZAKHSTAN**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.21.2.15>

**Ainura BOLYSBAYEVA**

*Ph.D. Student, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,  
al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

**Aigerim BOLYSBAYEVA**

*Master of Social Sciences, Lecturer,  
Department of Sociology and Social Work, al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

**Kairat ZATOV**

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Department of Religious Studies,  
Nur-Mubarak Egyptian University of Islamic Culture  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

**Nurgul TUTINOVA**

*Ph.D. (Religious Studies), Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work and  
Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, Karaganda University of Kazpotrebsoyuz  
(Karaganda, Kazakhstan)*

## ABSTRACT

**T**oday, religious renaissance across the post-Soviet space has moved into the center of academic attention mainly because post-Soviet countries have found themselves at the crest of religious awareness in the form of revived traditional religions. In Kazakhstan, this process has taken the form of Islamic revival, the religion of the autochthonous population, which lived in the territory of the contemporary state.

According to many authors, the family is the main religious socialization institution: mothers as its main agents play the key role in raising the younger generation. This means that female religiosity requires close attention and detailed studies.

With this aim in view, we carried out an online opinion poll among women 18 years and older in all regions of Kazakhstan to identify the interconnection between religious practices and involvement in religious

life, on the one hand, and confessional self-identity, on the other, as well as the role of demographic statistical data (age, in particular) in shaping religious consciousness. We paid a lot of attention to the correlation between the degree of religiosity and the presence of Islamic dogmas in everyday life.

Our studies brought us to a conclusion that the faithful generally tend to overestimate the extent of their religiosity. This means that the majority of our respondents can be described as conventional believers whose knowledge of the main Islamic dogmas is weak and who do not observe religious practices. Religious holidays and fasting are the two most frequently observed practices; praying and religious clothes are the two frequently avoided practices. Their performance requires a lot of time and the need to change appearance and lifestyle.

**KEYWORDS:** *female religiosity, religious identity, confessional (self)identity, religious socialization, religious practices, religious consciousness.*

## *Introduction*

### **Problem Statement**

As one of the fundamental social institutions, religion has not lost its importance in the contemporary world. According to the forecasts published by the Pew Research Center, by 2050, only 13% of the planet's total population will remain outside any religion (in 2010, their share was 16%). It is expected that by 2050 Islam as the fastest growing religion will achieve parity with Christianity for the first time in history: there will be 2.8 billion (or 30% of total population) Muslims; and the figure for Christianity will be similar, at 2.9 billion, or 31%.<sup>1</sup> "Contemporary Islam as a confessional network is open, it can spread far and wide, it demonstrates great adaptability to the changing conditions and (as distinct from the majority of religions) is not rigidly centralized; there are no hierarchies and

<sup>1</sup> See: "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," available at [<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050>], 2 March, 2021

complicated decision-making mechanisms, which speaks of its fairly good future in the epoch of globalization.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, Islam is one of the quickly developing religions in Kazakhstan. According to the latest (2009) population census, the majority of Kazakhstanis (70%) spoke of themselves as Muslims.<sup>3</sup> Abdurmalik Nysanbayev, a scientist from Kazakhstan, has written that the share of those who belong to religious communities and follow all religious norms is much smaller, not higher than 12-13%. The rest (about 60%) are not involved in religious life, do not belong to religious communities, do not attend services and do not follow religious rules, which makes their religiosity nominal.<sup>4</sup> Today, the question of religiosity and, what is even more important, of the degree of religiosity, remains a topical one in Kazakhstan.

## Review of Previous Research

The academic community has never let the problem of religious identity and its formation out of sight and treated the processes of religious conversion,<sup>5</sup> Islamic identity,<sup>6</sup> the role of religious identity in the context of national<sup>7</sup> and civil identities<sup>8</sup> and inclusiveness/exclusiveness of religious identity<sup>9</sup> as the most topical.

The doctoral thesis of Gulim Dosanova “Female Religiosity and New Muslim Practices in Kazakhstan,” in which the author discussed practicing women Muslims living in the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan,<sup>10</sup> and the research project “Girls and Women in the Context of the Religious Situation in Kazakhstan” carried out by the Institute of Equal Rights and Equal Possibilities of Kazakhstan (Almaty) with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kazakhstan<sup>11</sup> can be considered the most important among the recent research on female religiosity.

---

<sup>2</sup> E. Baydarov, “Globalizatsia i Islam: problemy i protivorechia,” *Mir cheloveka. Filosofskiy i obshchestvenno-gumantarny zhurnal*. No. 1 (51), 2012, pp. 32-37.

<sup>3</sup> See: “Itogi natsionalnoy perepisi naselenia 2009 goda,” available at [https://stat.gov.kz/census/national/2009/general], 2 March, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See: A.N. Nysanbaev, E.E. Burova, A. Saylaubekkyzy, “Osobennosti identichnosti kazakhstanzev v usloviakh polikulturnogo obshchestva,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 7, 2019, pp. 37-47.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Religioznye konversii v postsekuliarnom obshchestve (opyt fenomenologicheskoi rekonstruktsii)*, Collective monograph, ed. by A.Kh. Bizhanov, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies KN MON, Almaty, 2017, 431 pp.

<sup>6</sup> See: M.K. Bektenova, *Formirovanie islamskoi identichnosti v postsekuliarnom obshchestve: kazakhstanskii realizm*. Doctoral (PhD) thesis: 6D020600—Religious Studies.—Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies, Almaty, 2017, 135 pp.

<sup>7</sup> See: M.S. Shaykemelev, “Kazakhskaya identichnost v kontekste modernizatsii obshchestva,” Monograph [Second revised and enlarged edition], Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies KN MON RK, Almaty, 2020, 230 pp.; N. Tutinova, B. Meirbayev, A. Frolov, K. Bagasharov, “Republic of Kazakhstan: Ethnoreligious Identity as an Integration Factor,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 147-160.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Қоғамдық сананы жаңғырту міндеттері аясындағы қазақстандық бірегейлікті қалыптастыру: 3 кітап* (Formation of Kazakhstan Identity in the Context of Modernization of Public Consciousness. Book 3), IFPR KN MON RK, Almaty, 2020, 668 pp. (in Kazakh).

<sup>9</sup> See: *Қазақстандағы діни бірегейліктің инклюзивтілігі мен эксклюзивтілігі мәселелері: Ұжымдық монография* (Problems of Exclusiveness of Religious Identity in Kazakhstan: collective monograph), IFPR KN MON RK, Almaty, 2020, 236 pp. (in Kazakh).

<sup>10</sup> See: G.M. Dosanova, *Zhenskaia religioznost i novye musulmanskie praktiki v Kazakhstane*, Doctoral (PhD) thesis: 22.00.00—Sociological sciences.—Lev Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, 2010, 129 pp.

<sup>11</sup> See: M. Uskembayeva, T. Rezvushkina, *Polozhenie devushek i zhenshchin v kontekste religioznoi situatsii v Kazakhstane. Gendernoe issledovanie*. Akvfn, 2018, 306 pp.

In view of academic importance of both publications, we deem it necessary to point out that until today the Islamic identity of Kazakhstani women was not treated as a special phenomenon. The “gender aspect is especially important, since socialization in families depends on mothers rather than fathers. ... This means that their personal experience, which they share with their children, is much richer.”<sup>12</sup>

So far, scholars of sociology of religion have not yet agreed on the criteria for assessing the degree of religiosity. “There are those (the French school of Gabriel Le Bras) who concentrate on religious practices, while others point at religious self-identification as the main factor.”<sup>13</sup> Antonina Kirillova, who studied religiosity of Muslim migrants,<sup>14</sup> and Ekaterina Grishayeva, who worked with Orthodox Christians,<sup>15</sup> relied on the performance of religious rites.

Other scholars treat religious self-identification as a real criterion of religiosity.<sup>16</sup> Some authors tried to reconcile both indicators.<sup>17</sup>

In an attempt to identify the roles of different religious practices in shaping religious self-identities, we proceeded from the following basic hypotheses:

1. Respondents tend to exaggerate the degree of their religiosity: women may follow certain religious practices guided by their preferences and believe it enough to speak of themselves as practicing believers.
2. Importance of religious practices correlates with their duration: the strictly limited practices are more popular than those that require daily observance.
3. Young women between 18 and 29 years of age and women who are 61 and older are two most religious population groups. The former consider religion a source of social experience, while the latter associate religion with axiological transformation and preparation for afterlife.

## Research Sample

We carried out our poll between October 2020 and January 2021 to study the specifics of religious identity of female Muslims. Our general sample was 5,703,744 women, who identified themselves as Muslims (we arrived at this figure on the basis of the population census of 2009). The sampling frame was 750 women over 18 years of age; the poll was carried out in two stages: a quota sampling by age, place of residence and nationality at the first stage and snowball sampling at following stages.

---

<sup>12</sup> G.S. Shirokalova, O.K. Shimanskaia, A.V. Anikina, “Sushchestvuiut li gendernye osobennosti religioznosti studentcheskoy molodezhi?” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 6, 2016, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> V. Bakrac, M. Blagievic, “Konvetsionalnaia religioznost molodezhi Chernogori.” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 12, 2014, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> See: A.I. Kirillova, “Vovlechenost v religioznye praktiki kak faktor integratsii migrantov,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 119-128.

<sup>15</sup> See: E.I. Grishayeva, O.M. Farkhitdinova, V.A. Shumkova, “Religioznost veruiushchikh Ekaterinburgskoi metropolii: ot ortodoksii k postsekuliarney eklektike,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 8, 2017, pp. 106-117.

<sup>16</sup> See: E.I. Arinin, D.I. Petrosian, “Osobennosti religioznosti studentov,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 6, 2016, pp. 71-77; S.V. Ryzhova, “Osobennosti izucheniia religioznoi indentichnosti rossian,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No.10, 2016, pp. 118-127.

<sup>17</sup> See: V. Bakrac, M. Blagievic, op. cit., pp. 104-110.

## Social-Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Women of several age groups were involved: 18-29 years, 42.8%; 30-45, 28.7%; 46-60, 19.3%; 9.2% of women in our sampling were over 61. The respondents resided in three cities of the republican status: Nur-Sultan, 3.2%; Almaty, 7.9%, and Chimkent, 6.0%. All 14 administrative regions were divided into 5 geographical regions—Northern (that supplied 11.6% of the respondents); Southern (43.5%), Eastern (6.1%), Western (16.0%) and Central (5.7%). At the time of our studies, 49.7% of the polled women were married; 45.2% had no husbands (40.9% of them were never married; 1.9% were divorced, 2.4% were widows). Half of the polled women (52.8%) had higher education; one-fifth, incomplete higher education (20.3%), the number of women with secondary and secondary specialized education was small: 8.9% and 8.8%, respectively; 6.4% of the polled had academic degrees. The shift towards women with higher and incomplete higher education is obvious and explainable. Despite possible inaccuracies in representation, it has an advantage that allowed us to focus on and study in detail this most socially active population group, which is involved to a much greater extent than the others in all economic and social processes.

One-third of the polled were university or college students (34.1%), 18.8% spoke of themselves as specialists in education and medicine; 7.5% were employed in the service industry; 6.53% presented themselves as businesswomen; 4%, as civil servants; the same share of the polled were employed in industry, construction, transport and communications. The law and order structures employed 2.4% of the polled; 0.4% worked in agriculture, 11.2% were either temporarily unemployed and/or were on maternity leave; 8.5% were pensioners.

The majority of the polled assessed their material status as average or above average. This means that nearly half of the polled (46.7%) cannot afford luxury goods (cars and flats); one-third of the polled (30.3%) belong to the top-earning group: they can afford anything at any price; 13.5% belong to the lower middle class who cannot afford TV sets, refrigerators, etc.; 1.9% spoke of themselves as the lowest-earning social group: 1.6% of them cannot afford clothes (which can be assessed as comparative poverty); 0.3% of the polled women are absolutely poor—they cannot ensure their basic food requirements. The number of the respondents below the living standards is probably larger, since 7.9% remained “undecided.” This means, in particular, that they do not want to discuss their low living standards.

For several reasons our sampling was shifted towards the middle and higher economic groups. Objectively, this happened because at all times the middle class was and is society’s cornerstone of sorts, therefore, detailed studies of this social group suggests conclusions about the socioeconomic frame of society as a whole. There are certain subjective reasons which we have mentioned above: people do not want to discuss their real social status, they prefer to upgrade their material incomes in questionnaires. On the whole, it is commonly believed that these shifts do not affect or do not greatly affect the poll’s representative value.

## Distribution of the Respondents by Degree of Religiosity

Our first question was about the degree of religiosity as assessed by the polled themselves on a scale ranging from profoundly religious, who observe all forms of religious practices, to atheists. This was a filter that left only religious people in our project; those who selected the variants “I am an agnostic” and “I am an atheist” were removed from the poll.

The high degree of religiosity among women is connected with the religious renaissance of the ~~last few decades, evident throughout the post-Soviet space. According to sociologists, there were~~ relatively more women than men among the believers in Soviet times. According to the studies carried out by N. Tezherova, the share of women among the faithful was relatively high: they dominated among those who took part in holidays, performed religious rites, attended church services and belonged to religious communities.<sup>18</sup> This is true today, which is confirmed by the studies carried out by Margarita Uskembayeva and other scientists.<sup>19</sup>

The degree of religiosity is just as important. We have opted for the following scale: an active believer involved in religious life who observes all religious rites and a conventional (cultural, passive) believer who, while not involved in religious life, speaks of herself as a believer.

The majority (68.5%) spoke of themselves as conventional believers, whose religious life is limited to celebration of religious holidays. This is explained, in particular, by the fact that religion as part of the centuries-old national traditions developed into one of the ethnoreligious characteristics. Most of our respondents, therefore, treat religion as part of their national identity.

There were 30% among our respondents who spoke of themselves as active believers; later, however, we discovered that a considerable part of our respondents overestimated the degree of their religiosity and that the share of women who observed all religious practices (praying, fasting (uraza), hijab and reading religious literature) was not as large as expected. It seems that self-identification as an active believer

- (a) rests on performance of certain (selected) religious obligations and
- (b) allows the respondent to speak of herself as a Muslim, first and foremost, and as a practicing believer for whom religious consciousness is the basic one.

Young girls and women of two age groups—18-29 and 30-45—demonstrate high religious activity (35.2% and 32.6%, respectively); 26.1% of women of 60+ speak of themselves as religiously active; the age group of 46 to 60 demonstrates the lowest degree of religiosity (21.4%).

The contingent of believers is growing younger; religious institutions are moving to the fore as some of the most important socialization agents which shape the worldview of the younger generation.

There is a reason for the relatively small number of believers in the 46-60 age group:

- (a) the respondents of this age group spent the largest part of their conscious life in an atheist society and
- (b) as an economically active population group, they cannot dedicate much time to religious practices.

The degree of religiosity is inversely proportional to the educational level. The number of active believers is highest among women with secondary education (53.7%), while the share of women with academic degrees in the same category is two times lower (25%).

This can be explained by the illusory compensatory function of religion, when the believer tries to change her life through religious practices (prayers, spells, etc.).

The next question was related to the specifics of religious denomination as another filter needed to identify the respondents of religious identities unrelated to our project: the answer “other religion” meant disqualification.

As a result, we identified 49.4% of the respondents as Sunni Muslims of Hanafi madhab, which is an expected result: the majority of the Islamic ethnicities of Kazakhstan belong to this religious school. A small group (1.7%) represented Shi'a Islam; 0.4%, Salafi Islam; 0.3% of each group were

---

<sup>18</sup> See: V.G. Pivovarov, *Religioznost: opyt i problema izuchenia*, Mary Book Publishers, Yoshkar-Ola, 1976, 184 pp.

<sup>19</sup> See: M. Uskembayeva, T. Rezvushkina, op.cit.

Malikites and Shafites of Sunni Islam; 0.1% were Hanbalites. This group consisted mainly of Azeri and Chechen women, whose ancestors had belonged to these schools and madhabs for centuries.

Slightly less under one-half of the respondents (47.7%) know nothing about the school to which they belong, which means that

- (a) the majority of Muslims are Muslims by birth, they accept Islam as part of their ethnic culture and
- (b) there is no interest in religious life and religious knowledge.

Several researchers have pointed out that ethnicity and religion are treated as close or even identical phenomena in Kazakhstan.

We have identified the following correlation with the degree of religiosity: over half of the conventional Muslim women do not know to which school of Islam they belong; the similar value among practicing believers is two times lower. This means that the respondents who speak of themselves as cultured Muslims accept Islam automatically (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Awareness of Belonging to a Branch or School of Islam  
in the Respondents with Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Group of Respondents by Degree of Religiosity	Aware of the Trend/School of Islam to Which They Belong	No Clear Answer
1	As a practicing believer I observe all religious rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	72.1	27.9
2	I am a believer, but I limit myself to religious holidays, rarely attend mosque	43.3	56.7

The above means that religious knowledge among the population of Kazakhstan (including its female part mainly involved in raising the younger generation) is not high. This makes it a fertile soil for information of all sorts being spread by groups with different intentions and increases the danger of radicalization of women.

---

## The Main Social Institutions and Agents of Religious Socialization

The answers to the question about the agents of religious socialization confirmed beyond doubt that the religious component of identity has shifted from the older to the young generations. An absolute majority (60%) answered that they had learned about religion from their parents; this means, albeit indirectly, that the majority of the respondents learned about their religion in childhood. This is confirmed by Gulnar Baltanova, Russian expert in Islamic studies who has written that atheist ideology turned Islam into a “kitchen religion.”<sup>20</sup> This helped it survive in the minds of common people. “The fact that the family was and remains ‘the main carrier of religiosity’ has been confirmed by many

---

<sup>20</sup> G.R. Boltanova, *Musulmanka*, Logos, Moscow, 2007, 376 pp.

studies. In Ivanovo, for example, 20.8% of the respondents were raised as believers (75% of them were women, 25%, men). The studies carried out in 2007 among students revealed that religious education affected girls more than young men.”<sup>21</sup>

The age-related factors demonstrate an obvious trend: the older the polled group, the lower the role of parents as suppliers of information about religious identity. The relatively high index of relatives as sources of information for the 60+ respondents has stirred a lot of interest. We have explained this phenomenon by the fact that they were raised during the time of militant atheism and learned about religion from their younger relatives (children, etc.). Today we are observing re-socialization of the elder generation, for whom their adult children serve as agents.

When talking about degrees of religiosity, we found out that for both categories of the respondents, parents were the primary agents of religious socialization; one out of five women from among conventional Muslims could not remember from whom and when she had heard about religion for the first time (see Table 2).

Table 2

**Sources of Information about Religion:  
Respondents of Different Religiosity Degrees, %**

No.	Groups of Respondents by Degrees of Religiosity	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Parents	62.1	58.7
2	Spouse	3	1.7
3	Relatives	11.6	6.5
4	Friends	3	2.3
5	Teachers at university, school	3	4.4
6	Employer, colleagues	0	0.6
7	Religious figures (imams, mullahs, etc.)	6	2.9
8	The media	0.4	0.6
9	Do not remember	8.2	20.8
10	Other	2.6	1.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

## **Correlation between Religious Self-identification and Observance of Religious Practices**

In our attempt to define the interconnection between religious practices, their observance and self-identification of the respondents, we proceeded from what Charles Y. Glock said about the five

<sup>21</sup> G.S. Shirokalova, O.K. Shimanskaia, A.V. Anikina, op. cit., p.80.



dimensions of religious commitment: ideology (adherence to the principal beliefs), ritual activities (rituals and practices), experience (the “feeling” aspect of religion), the intellectual side of religion and practice (sometimes subdivided into private and public rituals) and consequences.<sup>22</sup> We will concentrate on ritual activities and practices and their outcrops in secular life as two dimensions of primary importance for our purposes.

In all confessions, the following practices are most important: attendance of religious services, prayer, fasting and observance of religious holidays. It should be said that Islam presents five basic requirements to its followers: Tawhid (monotheism); uraza (fasting), praying, zakat (a form of almsgiving) and hadj. In view of the fact that according to the rules of Islam women are not obliged to attend mosques and perform hadj on their own without male protection, and that zakat is obligatory only in the presence of sufficient income, these points were removed from our list of indicators.

Tawhid, the belief in oneness of Allah as the Creator, explains why we offered our respondents certain statements that contradict monotheistic principles and relied on the questionnaire suggested by Demian Beliaev<sup>23</sup> and elaborated by Ekaterina Grishayeva.<sup>24</sup> Having adjusted them to our purposes, we added certain indicators: belief in numerology, feng shui, psychics, amulets and assistance from the souls of the dead.

These questions were selected out of many other variants for the following reasons:

- (a) (false)sciences—astrology, numerology, feng shui—are very popular today;
- (b) our choice of the faith in amulets, psychics and souls of the dead is explained by the fact that for a long time Tengrianism remained the dominant religion in what is contemporary Kazakhstan, retreating gradually under the pressure of Islam.

The answers were distributed as follows:

- “Amulets help people”—39.5%
- “I trust psychics and fortune tellers and seek their help”—22.5%
- “Souls of the dead can help their living relatives”—45.5%
- “I believe in astrology and horoscopes”—30.5%
- “I believe in numerology”—36%
- “I believe in feng shui”—16.5%

According to the above, nearly half of the respondents believed in souls of the dead that help their living relatives and in the power of amulets, which can be explained by historical and geopolitical circumstances, such as Tengrianism, which is based on the cult of ancestors, and the fairly slow expansion of Islam across the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan, which took nearly eleven centuries (7th-18th centuries).

Today, belief in astrology and numerology is fairly popular among Muslim women due to the widespread interest in new esoteric teachings that may offer life-planning methodologies.

One-fifth of the polled believe that psychics can help sort out certain problems.

The correlation between these answers and the sociodemographic characteristics of our respondents is highly interesting: the respondents between 46 and 60 years dominate in all categories except “souls of the dead help their living relatives.”

---

<sup>22</sup> See: C.Y. Glock, R. Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, Chicago, 1965.

<sup>23</sup> See: D.O. Beliaev, “Opyt empiricheskogo issledovaniya geterodoksalnoy religioznosti v sovremennoy Rossii”, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No. 11, 2009, pp. 88-98.

<sup>24</sup> See: E.I. Grishayeva, O.M. Farkhitdinova, V.A. Shumkova, op.cit.

We have discovered that the educational level merely affects beliefs: indeed, religion and the faith in the supernatural are irrational and, therefore, cannot be rationally analyzed.

As could be expected, Muslim women seek support of their dead relatives (51.5%); they believe in amulets (44%); trust recommendations of numerologists (42.3%) and astrologists (34.4%); one-fourth of them turn to psychics; one out of five follows the rules of feng shui in everyday life.

Here is another surprising fact: nearly one-third of practicing Muslim women are also willing to seek the support of the souls of their dead ancestors (32.4%), believe in amulets and charms (28.9%), nearly one out of five considers numerology and astrology sciences (21.7% and 18.8%, respectively); 13% have admitted that they seek support of psychics. The majority of women who identify themselves as deeply religious adepts of a monotheist religion are not alien to religious syncretism (see Table 3).

Table 3

**Indicators of Religious Syncretism  
in Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Groups of Respondents by Degree of Religiosity	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)		I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque	
		Partially or Completely Agree	Partially or Completely Disagree	Partially or Completely Agree	Partially or Completely Disagree
1	“Amulets help people”	28.9	71.1	44.0	66.0
2	“I trust psychics and fortune tellers and seek their help”	13.0	87.0	26.7	73.3
3	“Souls of the dead can help their living relatives”	32.4	67.6	51.5	48.5
4	“I believe in astrology and horoscopes”	18.8	81.2	34.4	65.6
5	“I believe in numerology”	21.7	78.3	42.3	57.7
6	“I believe in feng shui”	8.7	91.3	20	80
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>	

The next block of questions is related to the ritual aspect of religious identity; it contains questions about reading religious literature, observance of religious practices: praying, fasting (uraza), religious holidays and wearing religious clothes (hijab).

An analysis of the results obtained revealed that religious holidays are the most popular and most frequently observed religious ritual. An absolute majority (96.3%) celebrate, to different degrees, Kurban ayt (bayram), Oraza ayt (bayram), etc. This is explained not only by the religious factors, but also by the mentality of the local population. Hospitality is one of the distinctive features of the people of Kazakhstan and Kazakhs as the titular nation.

Fasting is another frequently observed ritual (71.2%), which is explained by several religious and practical factors.

The religious factors include

- (a) possible exoneration of sins;
- (b) available information found in religious literature about the doors to heaven that would open only to those who fast.

The practical reasons include

- (a) fairly short fasting time (one month a year) and
- (b) the simplicity of the procedure compared with other religious practices: unlike praying, fasting requires no time.

According to our poll, fasting is a habit in the younger (18-29-year-old) and elder (over 61) generations: 79.4 and 75.4%, respectively. Young girls treat religion as an important channel of socialization through which they acquire life experience. Women of 61+ are mainly pensioners who reassess their values, revise their interests and priorities and prepare themselves for the afterlife.

Only 10% of those who spoke of themselves as practicing Muslims do not fast; the share is three times higher (32.9%) among conventional Muslims. Here is another interesting fact: the number of women who fast every year is 70.3% among active Muslims, while the index is three times lower (37%) among cultural believers (see Table 4).

Table 4

**Fasting among Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Fast?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Yes, every year	70.3	37.9
2	Yes, according to circumstances, once in several years	9.1	16.4
3	Yes, I fasted for the first time last year	8.6	9.4
4	No, I do not fast	6.0	27.1
5	I fasted in the past, but do not fast now	3.9	5.8
6	Other	2.1	3.4

Our questions about reading religious literature produced the following results. Slightly over half of our respondents read the Koran and the Hadiths relatively regularly. We divided the respondents into several groups according to their answers. The group that frequently reads religious books comprised 13.3% of the respondents (4.33% of them read every day, 9.04%, several times a week); 20% read rarely (5.7% read once a week, 15.3%, once a month). A similar share of the respondents read very rarely (19.9%), while a large share of the respondents (one-third) admitted that they do not read religious literature and receive information about religion from other sources.

We have discovered that the respondents of 18-29 and over 61 read religious books more often than members of all other groups. At the same time, women between 46 and 60 have practically no interest in religious literature.

Education, likewise, is responsible for the interest in religious literature. The greatest share of those interested in religious literature (68.7%) was found among women with secondary education; while the share was much lower (47.8%) among women with higher education.

As could be expected, the share of those interested in religious literature is higher among practicing Muslim women (75.4%) than among conventional believers (43.5%). The number of women who frequently read religious literature among the active believers is six times higher than among conventional believers (see Table 5).

Table 5

**Reading of Religious Literature by Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Read Religious Literature?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Every day	10.8	1.5
2	Several times a week	21.1	3.7
3	Once a week	11.2	3.3
4	Once a month	18.5	12.3
5	Several times a year	13.8	22.7
6	Do not read	14.7	44.6
7	Other	9.9	11.9

Praying five times a day (namaz or salah) is another ritual component of religious identity. We added the option “pray several (not necessarily five) times a day,” since during the pilot project we encountered respondents who had just started their religious practices, or, being too busy, limited praying to one or two times a day.

A considerable number of women (63.7%) do not follow this practice; it is observed by a quarter of the polled (23.7%), out of whom 17.4% pray five times; 6.3% pray at certain times (in the morning or in the evening) depending on their schedule: part of the prayers fall on working/studying hours. For different reasons (time shortage, negative attitude of parents to praying, lack of habit, etc.) 7.6% of the Muslims discontinued praying.

Women between 40 and 60 turned out to be less religious; at the same time, women over 61 (13%) said that they pray at least several times a day. Half of them (50%) said that they had started praying a year before. This confirms our hypothesis that after retiring they experience an axiological transformation that leads to a greater appreciation of religious values.

Young women between 18 and 29 (10.3% of them) pointed out that they stopped praying for certain reasons.

Praying is a habit with women with secondary (31.3% pray five times and 3% several times a day) and specialized secondary (25.8% pray five times and 10.6% several times a day) education. Among women with incomplete or/and complete higher education and academic degrees, the share of those who pray does not exceed 20%.

It should be pointed out that only 60.9% of the respondents who spoke of themselves as active believers pray five times a day; 6.9% of this group stopped praying for certain subjective reasons (they were not ready, it was hard to fit praying into work or studies, parents objected to this practice,

etc.); 15% of those who called themselves conventional Muslims either pray or do not pray five times a day, half of them discontinued praying (see Table 6).

Table 6

**Praying by Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Pray?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Yes, I pray five times a day	49.4	3.3
2	Yes, I pray several times a day	11.6	3.9
3	Prayed in the past, but no longer do	6.9	7.9
4	No, never prayed	29.2	79
5	Other	1.3	1.6
6	Undecided	1.7	4.4

Religious clothing turned out to be the least popular of religious practices: only 8.8% of the respondent wear a hijab. According to worldwide practice, religious identity needs a lot of time, sometimes the whole life, to be completely accepted. In most of cases, the process ends with head covering, which means that the woman has completely accepted Islam.

Hijab is worn mostly by women between 30 and 45 (15.8%); the share of those who wear hijab is the smallest among women of 46-60 (3.5%).

The share of those who wear a hijab is the largest among women with specialized secondary (18.2%) and secondary (14.9%) education and those with academic degrees (10.4%). Only 5.3% of girls with incomplete higher education wear a hijab, which can be indirectly explained by the fact that secular institutions, including higher educational establishments, ban hijabs.

Interestingly, only 28% of those who speak of themselves as practicing believers in observance of all religious practices wear a hijab (see Table 7).

Table 7

**Wearing Hijab by Respondents of Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Do You Wear a Hijab?	I am a Practicing Believer, I Observe All Religious Rules (pray five times a day, etc.)	I am a Believer, but I Observe Only Religious Holidays, Rarely Go to Mosque
1	Yes, I wear a hijab	28	0
2	I wore it before, do not wear it now	1.3	0.8
3	Never wore	62.1	93
4	Other	3.9	1.7
5	Undecided	4.7	4.4

The above suggests that the hijab is no longer a marker of religiosity: many women follow all religious practices, yet only put on a hijab during praying.

The practical part of religious identity reveals the extent to which women are ready to follow religious norms in everyday life. To clarify the point, we asked several questions about religious sins, such as murder of innocent people and zinah, pre-marital sex.

Abortion without medical indications was supported, to a certain extent, by 24% of the polled women, while 21.9% refrained from a definite answer and preferred the “neutral” variant. The majority of women of 61+ disagreed with this statement (6.6%), while the respondents between 18 and 29 and 46 and 60 agreed: 26.6% and 28.1%, respectively.

Strange as it may seem, the attitude of women in both groups (either practicing or conventional Muslims) does not differ to any noticeable degree: 19.4% in the first group and 25.9% in the second group do not object to abortions.

The idea of civil marriage without nikah (a marriage contract) is supported by 14.4% of the polled; a more or less similar number preferred not to answer this question.

Retirees (82%) are staunchly against civil marriage, and not only for religious reasons: the elder generation cherishes the values of traditional marriage. Different shares of respondents in different age groups believe in sustainability of civil marriages: 15.1% of the respondents in the 18-29; 14.6%, in the 30-45 and 17.9%, in the 46-60.

A quarter of women with secondary education accept the idea of a civil marriage; in all other groups the share is 13-15.6%.

Among practicing Muslims, 10.4% supported the idea of a civil marriage; the share among conventional Muslims was 16.2% (see Table 8).

Table 8

**Acceptance of Civil Marriage and Abortion without Medical Indications by the Respondents with Different Degrees of Religiosity, %**

No.	Assessment of Acceptance	Acceptance of Civil Marriage without Nikah		Acceptance of Abortion without Medical Indications	
		I am a Practicing Believer	I am a Conventional Believer	I am a Practicing Believer	I am a Conventional Believer
1	Fully support	6.2	7.7	9.5	11.6
2	Partially support	4.3	8.5	10	14.3
3	Neutral	7.6	18.4	17.1	24
4	Partially oppose	17.5	23.8	22.3	25.3
5	Fully oppose	64.5	41.6	41.2	24.8
Total		100		100	

## Conclusion

Our studies of the Muslim population of Kazakhstan suggested the following conclusions. The majority of the respondents belong to a group of conventional believers, who are not well-versed in

the dogmatic foundations of Islam and not involved in religious practices. The majority of the polled women tend to exaggerate the degree of their religiosity; they speak of themselves as practicing believers, while fulfilling only a few selected practices and rites: religious holidays and fasting. Praying five times a day and wearing a hijab are the least popular in this group, which is probably explained by the obvious fact that religious holidays and fasting do not require a lot of time and last from one to three days (for holidays) and one month (for fasting—uraza). They are approved by society to a much greater extent than other practices. At the same time, praying and wearing a hijab requires time; our respondents treated them as serious changes for which they should prepare themselves. Our respondents and society as a whole believe that praying can be postponed until retirement. Girls between 18 and 29 and women 61+ are two most religious age groups. We have already mentioned that the younger generation born in independent secular Kazakhstan treats religion as a socialization channel. Women of the older generation associate religious identity with axiological transformation and preparation for the afterlife. The economically active women between 46 and 60 demonstrate the lowest degree of religiosity, probably due to the lack of time and are convinced that religious practices can wait until retirement.

On the whole, the majority of those who identify themselves as believers understand religion superficially.

The above suggests that the number of women who speak of themselves as Muslims, and as practicing Muslims, will increase, yet the share of devout believers who observe all practices will remain small.