

## The Role of Ulama in Covid-19 Pandemic Response in Bireuen Regency, Aceh

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### ABSTRACT

The involvement of ulama in disaster management, including the COVID-19 pandemic, is highly significant in Aceh. As influential figures, ulama serve as community references in accepting or rejecting policies. This study analyzes the role of ulama in breaking the chain of COVID-19 transmission in Bireuen Regency using a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data was collected through FGDs with the Bireuen Ulama Consultative Council and documentation studies. Findings reveal that ulama acted as risk communicators, motivators, role models, and advisors, shaping public perception and compliance with health protocols. Their role enhanced awareness and adherence to preventive measures. However, this study is limited to specific roles, suggesting the need for further research to explore other contributions.

## INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus or severe acute respiratory syndrome 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a type of virus that attacks the respiratory system. The disease caused by the virus is known as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19). Coronaviruses can cause everything from mild respiratory problems, serious lung infections, to death (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2020). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the Covid-19 outbreak as a global pandemic because the level of spread of the Covid-19 virus has expanded to various countries (WHO, 2020).

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia sees the Covid-19 virus as a serious threat to the survival of the community. On March 31, 2020 through Presidential Decree No.11 of 2020, the President of the Republic of Indonesia established Covid-19 as a disease that has the potential to cause Public Health emergencies and countermeasures must be taken. Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) activities are one of the responsive actions to the Covid-19 virus outbreak. This is as stated in Government Regulation No. 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in the context of accelerating the handling of Coronavirus Disease 2019 which was also passed on the same day by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia.

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia only established the status of the Covid-19 outbreak as a national disaster on April 13, 2020 through Presidential Decree No. 12 of 2022 concerning the Determination of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) Non-Natural Disaster as a National Disaster. This is due to the continuous increase in the number of casualties and property losses, as well as the increasingly widespread scope of affected areas in Indonesia, resulting in implications in the social and economic fields of society. The classification of the Covid-19 virus outbreak into a non-natural disaster is based on the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 24 of 2007 concerning Disaster Management which states that non-natural disasters are disasters caused by non-natural events or events, such as technological failure, modernization failure, epidemics, and disease outbreaks.

For the duties and responsibilities in the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic at the regional level, the President of the Republic of Indonesia delegated it to the Governor, Regent/Mayor in each region, this is as stated in Presidential Decree No.12 of 2022 that, the Governor, Regent/Mayor acts as Chairperson of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Coronavirus Disease 2019 Handling in the regions. Responding to this, on April 1, 2020 the Governor of Aceh issued Aceh Governor Decree Number 440/1028 concerning the Establishment of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19.

Handling in Aceh. In particular, the religious sector is tasked with monitoring and evaluating government policies in the religious sector; conducting mental/spiritual guidance for Islamic preaching so that people do not panic; and socializing clean and healthy lifestyles in accordance with Islamic law.

The emergency response status for handling Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Aceh Province was established by the Governor of Aceh on March 20, 2020 through the Decree of the Governor of Aceh, No. 360/969/2020 concerning the

Determination of Provincial Scale Emergency Response Status for Handling Coronavirus Disease 2019. Aceh itself is one of the regions with a significant increase in positive cases. Based on Aceh's Covid - 19 statistical data, as of February 17, 2021, the total confirmed positive cases were 9,403 cases, 1,284 cases were treated, and 380 cases died (COVID-19 Handling Task Force, 2020) . Bireuen Regency is one of the zones most exposed to the Covid-19 virus . The region is one of three districts/cities in Aceh Province with a significant increase in positive cases. So that the area was once designated as a red zone (Government of Aceh, 2020). Aceh's charismatic cleric from Bireuen was also reportedly exposed to Covid-19 (Serambi Indonesia, 2020).

The ulama have a very large share in shaping the behavior patterns of people's daily lives with Islamic nuances. Acehnese society in general has positioned the ulama in an honorable and strategic position and role in society. The sociocultural conditions of the religious Acehnese society have made the community highly respect and glorify the ulama. Generally, the people of Aceh have made the ulama a guide and role model in life. This indicates that the community is more likely to listen to and accept anything that is related to the religious field and preached by the ulama. Therefore, as a religious and Islamic region, the religious approach in the process of disaster risk reduction in Aceh is very important and strategic to run.

The term "Ulama" comes from the Arabic "Ulama", which is the plural form of the word "alim", which means "one who knows". In Indonesia, the term "ulama" is also often used in the singular form, in addition to meaning "knowledgeable", it also means pious or taqwa (Zulkifli, 2018) . In Aceh Qanun Number 2 of 2009 concerning the Ulema Consultative Assembly, ulama are defined as public role models who have moral integrity and a deep understanding of Islamic teachings derived from the Al-Quran and Hadith and are able to practice them. According to Hasan (1987) , ulama have two main tasks, namely, exploring religious aspects as a scientific function and fostering the community in implementing and maintaining religion in everyday life as a social function and task. Furthermore, Quraysh Shihab (1996) mentions that in the task of fostering society, scholars must teach and explain the science and teachings of Islam, decide the problems or issues that are being faced by the people, become examples and role models in practicing the teachings of Islam.

**Table 1. Duties of the Ulama in Islamic Society**

Scholarly Tasks	Deepening the field of religion
Social Duty	Guiding people in practicing and defending religion :
	• Delivering Islamic teachings
	• Explaining Islamic doctrines
	• Resolving community issues
	• Serving as a role model in practicing Islamic teachings

Source: (Hasan, 1987) and (Shihab, 1996)

Based on the point of view of social psychology, a role is defined as a certain behavior attached to a person which is a manifestation of other people's expectations of someone who holds a certain status or position in a particular group. Meanwhile, according to Merton, a role is an action that appears to

someone at an event, or in other words, a role is a collection of action patterns displayed by a person in occupying a certain social structure.

Being involved in handling health issues is nothing new for the ulama. Ulama have contributed several times in the process of handling epidemics, such as obesity and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Some of the roles that the scholars have played in the process of handling health problems are as follows:

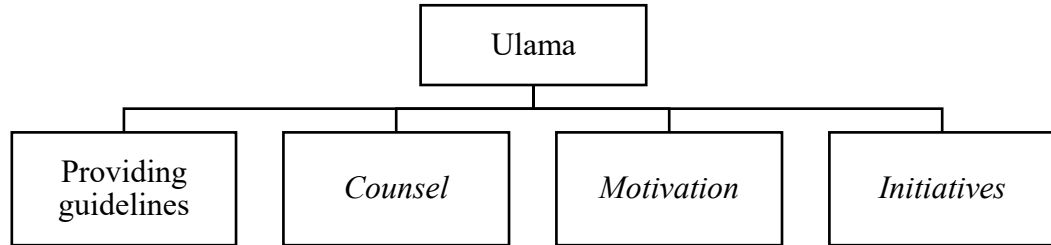


Figure 1. The Role of Ulama in Handling Health Problems

Source: Anshel & Smith (2014)

Based on the description as described above, this study focuses more specifically on the role played by ulama in Bireuen Regency as communicators, motivators, advisors, and role models in shaping community risk perceptions of the threat of the Covid-19 virus.

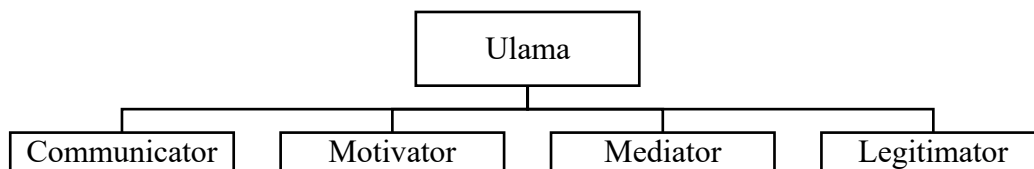


Figure 2: Role of Ulama in Handling Health Problems

Source: Wahyudin et al., (2019)

First, the communicator is one of the elements in communication, namely the person who conveys the message (information) to the communicant. As a communicator, ulama must have knowledge, master, and must explore any information that will be communicated to the public. The role of ulama as communicators will be seen through the ability of ulama to convey risk information (risk message) related to the COVID-19 pandemic to the public, including the potential dangers that will be faced and the actions that the community must take in overcoming them.

Second, a motivator is a stimulating, encouraging, or driving figure that causes motivation in others through providing information and motivation to carry out something. The role of ulama as a motivator is their ability to encourage people to practice a clean and healthy lifestyle according to Islamic law in the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic.

Third, an advisor is a figure who provides advice or suggestions to someone. So in this case, the ulama as an advisor is a figure who provides advice or input to either the community or the government, in the form of a warning or recommendation to the community to heed the government's call in the form of implementing medical procedures in the context of controlling and / overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic based on Islamic law.

Finally, because of credibility and the factor of public acceptance (receptive audience), a cleric appears as a model that is always emulated by the

community. For this reason, the role of ulama as a guide is the quality of ulama to be a role model for the community in their behavior in order to avoid the danger of the Covid-19 outbreak.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

The approach used in this research is qualitative. This research is a scientific study aimed at obtaining a complete picture of a problem from the perspective of the research subject. This research deals with ideas, perceptions, opinions, or beliefs of research subjects, all of which cannot be measured by numbers (Basuki, 2006) .

This research is classified as case study research, which is a study used to understand an issue or problem by examining a particular case, such as an event, process, activity, program. The data needed in this research was collected using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) techniques and documentation studies. FGD or focus group discussion is a systematic and directed discussion held in order to examine in depth an issue or problem (Bisjoe, 2018) . In this case, in order to examine the existence of the ulama process in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen Regency, an FGD was held with the Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU) of Bireuen Regency at the MPU Secretariat of Bireuen Regency.

Documentation studies need to be carried out to enrich data through documents related to the involvement of ulama in the pandemic response process, be it from journals, newspapers, magazines and other sources that are considered relevant.

**Tabel 2. Daftar Narasumber**

No.	Name	Position
1	Tgk. Nazaruddin	Chair
2	Drs. Tgk. Djamaluddin Idris	Vice Chairman I
3	Tgk. H. Sayed Mahyeddin	Vice Chairman II
4	Tgk. Amiruddin Yusuf	Chairman of Commission A
5	Tgk. Sudirman Ismail, S.Pd.I	Chairman of Commission B
6	Tgk. Muhajir	Chairman of Commission C
7	Tgk. Saifuddin Muhammad	Secretary of Commission A
8	Tgk. H. Ismail Muhammad	Secretary of Commission B
9	Drs. Tgk. Razali A. Wahab	Secretary of Commission C
10	Tgk. Zulkifli Muhammad	Member
11	Tgk. Syarwanuddin	Member
12	Tgk. Zulfikri M. Kasem	Member

Source: Attendance List of FGD Activities

Documentation studies need to be carried out to enrich data through documents related to the involvement of ulama in the pandemic response process, be it from journals, newspapers, magazines and other sources that are considered relevant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Role of Ulama in Overcoming the Covid-19 Pandemic*

Religious factors cannot be ignored in efforts to deal with the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Religion is one of the main factors that has influenced people's perspective and attitude and even behavior towards disasters (Muhtada, 2020) . The handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen Regency cannot be separated

from the role of ulama. They are figures who have a great influence on the audience. Ulama occupy a strategic position in Islamic society, including for the people in Bireuen Regency in particular. Ulama are figures who understand and master the teachings of Islam, therefore their words and behavior are always used as a reference for action by the community. The quality and capacity of the ulama in Bireuen Regency make them often visited by people from various regions to seek knowledge and opinions from a religious perspective on a problem. So that often public acceptance or rejection of an idea, idea, and even a program is also spearheaded by the ulama.

Presidential Decree No.12 of 2022 stipulates the Governor, Regent/Mayor as the Head of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid -19) Handling in the Region. Responding to this, on April 1, 2020 the Governor of Aceh issued Aceh Governor Decree No. 440/1028 on the Establishment of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19 Handling in Aceh. The religious sector is charged with monitoring and evaluating government policies in the religious field, conducting mental/spiritual guidance for Islamic preaching so that people do not panic, and socializing clean and healthy lifestyles in accordance with Islamic law.

The active role of ulama in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen is based on religious responsibility, in addition to reasons for national and state responsibilities. In the early days of the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus in Aceh Province, as an anticipatory step the Aceh Provincial Ulema Consultative Assembly (MPU) issued Taushiyah on Deterrence and prevention of disease outbreaks by inviting the public to get closer to Allah and pray to be kept away from all diseases, improve the quality of their worship by praying in congregation at the nearest mosque, and reading Qunut Nazilah at every prayer time, appealed to the public to always maintain personal and environmental hygiene, invited the public to consume food that is halalan thayyiban, advised the government to be able to sterilize places of worship and public facilities, asked the public to remain calm and not panic, while especially to parents and guardians, ulama appealed to maintain and guide and supervise children when in the family and community environment.

As a form of responsiveness, when the condition of the disease outbreak is increasingly widespread and widespread in the midst of society until there are people who are confirmed positive for Covid-19, the Ulama issued further Taushiyah No. 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Worship and Other Religious Social Activities in Emergency Conditions. And through this taushiyah, the ulama mandated, first, that all Muslims improve the quality of their worship while endeavoring to keep themselves away from the dangers and threats of the Covid-19 outbreak/virus. Second, to always remember to pray and heed government regulations in efforts to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, Muslims are encouraged to carry out worship at their respective residences, especially Friday prayers, can be replaced with Zuhr prayers at home. Fourth, the Azan for every fard prayer time can still be announced as usual in every house of worship such as in mushalla, meunasah, and mosque. Fifth, in every mosque that organizes congregational prayers, it is obligatory to obey medical instructions and implement health protocols, such as establishing

distance between worshipers (physical distancing). Sixth, the general public is asked not to hold large gatherings such as tasyakuran, kenduri, tahlilan, and samadiyah, dhikr /rateb together or other crowd activities until the dharurat condition is lifted by the government. Seventh, the public is advised not to travel outside the region, and for the people of Aceh who are abroad are advised not to return to Aceh for a while, and if they have to keep returning, they must be willing to undergo a quarantine process. Eighth, the public is urged to carry out directions and comply with the rules set by the government in the context of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic, including not going out at night at a predetermined time and maintaining social distancing in crowded places.

Such a task implies that the role of the ulama in handling the COVID-19 pandemic is important through a risk communication approach. Disaster risk communication is defined as a communication process that is at risk of dealing with a hazard, including the emergence of a disease outbreak (Lundgren & McMakin, 2013) . In order for the response process to a risk to run effectively, information about the potential hazards that will be faced by the community and information about actions or decisions that must be taken when/when the danger will occur are two main messages that are very important to convey to communicants. Because in essence, risk communication is carried out in order to trigger an action so that the communicant is better prepared when facing danger. Therefore, the message about a hazard event that has the potential to impact the community must be conveyed properly (Krimsky, 2007) .

The Quran and Hadith are the main reference for Muslims in understanding, behaving, and conducting themselves, including in understanding, behaving, and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ulama in Bireuen Regency understand the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic in various ways, ranging from punishment and trials/tests. The Covid-19 pandemic is a punishment for people who disbelieve in Allah, while for people who are obedient and obedient, the moment of this pandemic is an arena or opportunity to gain great rewards and raise the degree of faith for trials/examinations from Allah. Some scholars also argue that the Covid-19 pandemic is one of the signs of Allah's greatness expressed as a form of warning to all humans.

Although there are differences of opinion among scholars in interpreting the Covid-19 pandemic, in principle this is still in line with the concept of disaster theology, which is a theory of disaster with its various complexities based on the views of the Al - Quran and Hadith (Mustaqim, 2015). Furthermore, Zainuddin (2013), details the characteristics and specifications of the use of the term disaster in the Qur'an and Hadith as follows:

**Table 3. Characteristics of the use of the term disaster in the Qur'an**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Cause</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Goal</b>
Calamity	The sins and deeds of humans that lead to physical and non-physical damage	Poor conditions and loss of security and peace of mind in living life	One who disobeys, does wrong or sins	Forging humans to remain optimistic, enthusiastic, and not despairing even because of their own behavior

Bala'	Will and by the power of God even though it is not	Pleasant and/or unpleasant conditions	All mankind, believers and disbelievers alike	<b>The way to seek forgiveness for sins, elevate one's standing and dignity, cleanse the soul, and test the quality of one's faith</b>
Slander	The will of God given as a warning	Pleasant and/or unpleasant conditions	All human beings, whether believers or disbelievers	As a warning so as not to get a harsher warning
Azab	Disobedient human behavior	Torment and punishment with the potential to annihilate or destroy	Sinners	As a rebuke from God that makes us realize that there will be no repetition.

Source: (Zainuddin, 2013)

Some of the roles played by ulama in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen Regency are as follows:

### *Ulama as Communicators*

Communicators are parties in the communication process who act as senders of messages to communicants. Communication practiced in the Covid-19 pandemic disaster management process is aimed at delivering information about risk (risk message) to the community. Krinsky states that the disaster risk communication process is a communication process that focuses on delivering information in the form of potential hazards (risks) and actions or actions that must be taken when hazards threaten (Krinsky, 2007). This indicates that the risk communication process must run well.

Trust and credibility are two of the most valuable risk assets for communicators when communicating risk information. A well-delivered message, in addition to increasing understanding of the dangers of the pandemic, can also reduce the fear and panic that engulfs the public and will encourage behavioral changes that lead to heeding the Government's call in efforts to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic (Patrianti, 2020).

Ulama socialize to the public about how to understand and/or respond to Covid-19 based on Islamic teachings. The strategy has succeeded in shaping community risk perceptions in pandemic mitigation efforts. However, the information regarding the risk of Covid-19 itself was obtained by the ulama from the government and other sources such as academics, health workers and other relevant sources due to the limited understanding of the ulama, considering that Covid-19 is a virus that must also be understood in medical science. For this reason, ulama actively coordinate for the accuracy of information conveyed to the public. Because in disaster management, accuracy of information is needed

by the community, because the purpose of disaster communication is to reduce uncertainty so that people can act effectively to protect themselves from threats (Rudianto, 2015).

Islamic da'wah activities are the moments most often utilized by scholars in providing risk information. For example, when becoming a khatib, filling recitations, and when conducting religious lectures. This momentum is utilized because ulama consider that people are more interested in listening when something is explained based on religious perspectives, including regarding the Covid-19 outbreak.

In the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, communicators are also required to be able to determine the most appropriate means of communication to convey risk messages to recipients. In order to prevent crowds, ulama choose alternatives in conveying risk information. The use of YouTube is an example of the media used by scholars in conveying information about Covid-19. This is one of the innovations in pandemic conditions because it supports the process of implementing health protocols. Using YouTube can prevent crowds, because people can obtain information in their respective places of existence.

One of the members of the Honorary Council of Ulama MPU Bireuen Regency who is also the head of one of the leading Islamic Education Institutions in Bireuen Regency, Tgk. H. Hasanoel Basri H. Gadeng or often called Abu MUDI is also a former positive Covid-19 patient. He is the 151st patient of Covid-19 Aceh. After receiving treatment, one of the leading scholars in Bireuen Regency through a short video entitled "Abu Mudi's Testimony After Treatment" uploaded to the MUDI TV YouTube channel conveyed his experience and struggle in fighting the Covid-19 virus as well as providing clarification about the Covid-19 pandemic which continues to be disputed by the community.



Cleric conveys the risk of Covid-19 through YouTube  
(Source: YouTube MUDI TV, 2020)

*"I am Abu Mudi, Mudir of the Ma'hadal 'Ulum Diniyah Islamiyah (MUDI) Islamic Education Institute Mesjid Raya Samalanga, the 151st Aceh Covid-19 patient out of a total of 415 people to date, Saturday, August 1, 2020. Alhamdulillah, due to the permission and power of Allah and the sincere prayers of all the people, (at this time) I was allowed to go home from Dr. Zainoel Abidin Hospital Banda Aceh. However, I am recommended by expert doctors to continue to carry out further self-isolation for 14 days by practicing health protocols at my residence. This Covid-19 outbreak is real (true existence). What I felt from the*

*beginning was not a fabrication. The symptoms of weakness, dizziness, and decreased appetite are signs that lead to Covid-19. This is what the expert doctor told me. So with this I am committed to following all the doctor's recommendations, and this is a form of effort that we must obey when we are tested positive for Covid-19 by an expert doctor. Avoid finding fault and justification. This will certainly disrupt the performance of government doctors in the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic. Thank you for all the attention that has been given by the Aceh Government who has been pleased and continues to monitor my progress throughout the day. And to the entire Covid-19 Task Force Team at RSUD dr. Zainoel Abidin Banda Aceh. Thank you for the hard work of the doctors who have provided good treatment to me, and also the health workers who have taken care of me during this difficult time. And for every good prayer and support from my family, friends and relatives, and those who always remain beside me and to the entire community who always prayed for me during this time. Finally, I advise that this pandemic should not be taken lightly. Adhere to health protocols as recommended by the government and medical guidelines, never ignore them. Everything is for the benefit of all of us." (Abu MUDI, YouTube, August 1, 2020)."*

**Table 3. Ulama as Communicators in Countering the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Role of Islamic Scholars	Duties/Responsibilities
Communicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socializing to the public how to understand and respond to the Covid-19 pandemic based on Islamic teachings</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conveying risk messages to the public</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifying issues/hoaxes circulating in the community</li> </ul>

Source: Data processing results, 2022

***Ulama as Motivators***

Motivation has a function as a driving force for someone who has the desire and desire to spend their abilities, energy and time to achieve a purpose and goal (Siagian, 2004). The role of ulama as a motivator in the field of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic is as a figure who motivates the community to be involved in efforts to reduce the increase in the number of positive Covid-19 cases by implementing health protocols and carrying out clean and healthy living behaviors during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The crisis conditions that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic have had a psychological impact on the community, such as the emergence of panic and pessimism in the community. This is where the importance of encouragement and enthusiasm from the ulama to the community. The function of religion here mentioned by the ulama is as a provider of calm for people who feel psychologically uncomfortable. Therefore, the motivational messages delivered by the ulama to the community are full of Islamic values and teachings. This helps the community to be calm and not panic while facing the threat of the Covid-19 virus outbreak.

Ulama utilize their religious authority in providing understanding to the public about what needs to be done in efforts to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. The understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic is presented by ulama to the public from an Islamic perspective so that it is easy for the public to understand and understand. This approach is considered more effective in providing information to the public (Muhtada, 2020) . By using religious idioms, the clerics can easily and freely interact with their worshipers, providing an understanding of why a religious ritual or practice of worship is temporarily better carried out in isolation at home or at the residence of each worshiper, this is in order to create a sense of security for others to create a great benefit. Through a cultural religious approach, the government's appeal becomes easier to understand and accept by the community.

Through the practice of Islamic da'wah, ulama encourage people to seek safety, because seeking safety is a religious recommendation when someone is in danger, including against the threat of Covid-19. Ulama often convey arguments sourced from both the Al-Quran and Hadith which contain commandments or recommendations on how a Muslim's attitude and behavior should be in the face of an outbreak, to rewards for someone who is always sincere in making efforts in carrying out health protocols. Although the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak have caused many negative things for the survival of the community, on the other hand, the ulama also encourage the public to realize the wisdom behind an event, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Ulama expect the community to also make this condition an opportunity as well as an opportunity to improve the quality of worship and piety to Allah. Activities that are recommended include repentance to ask for forgiveness for sins from violations that have been committed, because according to scholars, crisis conditions like this can occur due to human mistakes and sins. Another activity that can be done is to contemplate the power and majesty of Allah, that Allah is able to create conditions such as those being experienced and felt in an instant and apply in all parts of the world. Thus, according to the scholars, the quality of one's faith and worship of Allah will increase so that it is believed to reduce the psychological impact and will give birth to calmness in one's soul.



Tastafi recitation by Tu Sop with the theme Covid-19  
(Source: Youtube Yadara TV, 2020)

Ulama as leaders or teachers in a dayah also always encourage their students to make efforts against the Covid-19 pandemic. Ikhtiar is the earnestness of a Muslim to make an effort, thus enabling one to avoid despair and/or giving up easily. The effort referred to here is practicing health protocols and carrying out government and medical recommendations, namely by paying attention to personal hygiene to environmental cleanliness. In addition, clean and healthy behavior is a religious recommendation and a measure of the quality of one's faith. In a religious context, this kind of endeavor is part of an effort to save the soul so that it must be obeyed (Jubba, 2021).

**Table 4. Ulama as a Motivator in Countering the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Role of Islamic Scholars	Duties/Responsibilities
Motivator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="553 685 1385 792">• Conduct Islamic preaching to encourage the community to understand the Covid-19 pandemic based on Islamic values and teachings</li> <li data-bbox="553 801 1385 875">• Motivate the community to comply with Covid-19 prevention protocols</li> <li data-bbox="553 884 1385 943">• Encourage the public to always practice a clean and healthy lifestyle</li> </ul>

Source: Data processing results, 2022

***Ulama as Advisor***

The ulama have contributed to fostering and guiding the behavior and life patterns of the Islamic community. Especially in Aceh, the community positions the ulama in an honorable position and role. It is for this reason that the government makes the ulama a partner of the government in making a policy. so that the ulama have been gathered in a forum for the Ulema Consultative Assembly (MPU). MPU is a forum that brings together Muslim scholars and scholars affiliated with the Aceh Government from the Provincial to District/City levels. In addition to their function and duty to give consideration to government policies, ulama also have an obligation to provide enlightenment and guidance to the community based on Islamic teachings, usually delivered in the form of advice.

The pandemic continues to spread and grow beyond the government's control. Therefore, the government needs all the potential that exists in society to deal with this deadly plague in a cooperative manner. Ulama provide insights into the efforts that can be made, with all the resources they have. As a partner of the government, ulama participate in providing support to the government in efforts to control the Covid-19 pandemic. In the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen Regency, ulama as advisors are involved in providing advice, recommendations and views to the government in setting the direction of regional policies in the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen Regency.

Ulama actively provide input and comments directly or indirectly. Especially for the government, advice can be in the form of suggestions or input given by the ulama when the ulama are visited and/or fulfill government invitations in meetings to discuss policies or strategies in tackling the COVID-19

pandemic in Bireuen Regency. Here the ulama come as an institution, namely carrying the name of MPU. Meanwhile, indirect input that is often conveyed by ulama to the government is when giving lectures, either when they become khatib or when they are invited to fill recitations held by the community or the government. Among the suggestions/input given by the ulama to the government are; first, during the initial period of determining the status of the Covid-19.

Emergency Indonesia to limit, monitor, and tighten access in and out of Bireuen Regency, especially access for tourists both foreign and domestic, especially those from areas with high cases. Second, the government, in this case the Covid-19 Task Force, should avoid providing information that has the potential to trigger panic and fear in the community. Third, in making policies during the Covid-19 pandemic, the ulama advise the government to pay attention to the benefit of the community.

The Covid-19 virus is not only a physical threat to humans, but also a serious threat to the quality of people's mental health. Panic and pessimism are examples of the psychological impact felt by the people of Bireuen Regency during the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of the ulama's concern and sense of religious responsibility, the ulama are present to provide protection for the safety of the community by teaching positive values based on Islamic teachings so that people avoid panic and pessimism. The real form of support provided by the ulama in Bireuen Regency can be seen at every opportunity to carry out Islamic preaching activities. Ulama always foster public mentality/spirituality and socialize clean and healthy living procedures in accordance with Islamic law to the community.



Figure 6: Waled Nu advises the community to be patient in facing trials. (Source: Dayah Public Relations, 2020)

The advice given by Islamic scholars has shaped people's perception of risk in understanding and responding to the pandemic. People tend to understand the Covid-19 pandemic based on an Islamic perspective, both in terms of the risks, and the actions taken when dealing with the threat/danger of Covid-19. Among the positive values based on Islamic law that are instilled in the hearts of the community is the fighting spirit (*ikhtiar*) in an effort to reduce the transmission of the Covid-19 virus. This is in line with the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Number 14 of 2020 concerning the

provisions for the implementation of worship during the Covid-19 Pandemic, that the ulama advised the community to make every effort to maintain and avoid all things that have the potential to cause individuals to become increasingly exposed to the Covid -19 virus because this is also a vision in religion.

The advice that ulama often convey to the community is related to commitment in implementing health protocols in the context of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic, such as wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance (physical distancing and social distancing), washing hands with soap, and reducing mobility, such as encouraging someone who is unwell to continue to worship at home first for the benefit and safety of many people. Ulama advise the public to always heed the government's recommendations, because this does not violate / change the faith of Muslims, but it is actually a recommendation in religion, especially in order to realize safety and common interests. Ulama instruct the community to be positive and prohibit doing unnecessary things, such as muddying the atmosphere by conveying news that cannot be accounted for its validity (hoax) because this can trigger panic and hinder the process of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in Bireuen Regency.

**Table 5. Ulama as advisors in the Covid-19 pandemic response**

Role of Islamic Scholars	Duties/Responsibilities
Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing fatwas, recommendations, and opinions to the government in determining policy directions in efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instilling positive values in accordance with Islamic law in the community in order to reduce the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibiting the community from doing things that could interfere with the performance of the government, doctors, and health workers in the process of combating the Covid-19 pandemic</li> </ul>

Source: Data processing results, 2022

***Ulama as Role Model***

For the people, especially in Aceh, ulama are credible figures with enormous influence in shaping people's behavior patterns. Skills in communication, persuasion, audience, mastery of religious texts that discuss healthy living, and the ability to embed health-related behaviors into one's values and spirituality have made them key players in promoting clean and healthy living procedures to the community during the Covid-19 pandemic (Anshel & Smith, 2014).

In shaping the perception of risk to the formation of preventive behavior in the community, of course, it is not enough if it is only conveyed verbally. This means that preventive behavior must also be exemplified, not just informed. Herein lies the urgency of the role of the ulama, because they are always the

central figure in public attention. Not only limited to conveying information, but ulama also need to be role models as an activity to transfer good personalities to form preventive behavior as the main capital in breaking the chain of transmission of COVID-19.

Changing people's behavior really requires intervention from people who are knowledgeable, credible, and accepted by the community like ulama (Anshel & Smith, 2014) . Ulama is a figure that has a great influence in the life and daily life of the community, because ulama are present as a model for the people of Aceh in general. Theologically, ulama are figures who are superior and skilled in the field of science and also experts in the field of religion, so that the ulama are referred to as the heirs of the prophets and apostles in continuing the duties and functions of the prophet in the actualization of Islamic values and teachings in people's lives. Therefore, ulama are used as government partners in raising awareness and changing people's behavior (Wahyudin et al., 2019) .

Ulama have become the main reference for the community in living their daily lives, so in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the exemplary function of ulama has a major influence in shaping people's risk perceptions. Therefore, the ulama always practice health protocols and implement a clean and healthy lifestyle according to Islamic teachings in their daily lives in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ulama's compliance with government regulations and medical recommendations is in order to carry out the role model function and as an effort to protect themselves from the threat of the Covid-19 virus.

Circular Letter of the Governor of Aceh Number 440/4820 concerning Preventing Corona Virus through Worship and Clean and Healthy Living Behavior, the Governor of Aceh appealed to the public to continue to behave as Islamic religious guidance in dealing with disasters (outbreaks), namely by implementing clean and healthy living behavior or maintaining personal and environmental hygiene such as, consuming healthy food to maintain a healthy immune system, routinely washing hands with soap, practicing proper sneezing and coughing ethics, avoiding direct contact with wild animals, checking yourself at the nearest health facility if you have a fever or other symptoms that lead to Covid-19, practicing physical distancing such as avoiding handshakes / fanfare when meeting others but still saying greetings, not making crowds / crowds that are considered unnecessary (social distancing), not traveling and / or visiting infected areas and people. The form of endeavor that is also considered the most important in this case is to improve the quality of worship, dhikr, and always pray to Allah for the sake of maintaining health and also to be given safety from all threats/dangers of disease, including the Covid -19 outbreak that is currently sweeping the world.

As a role model for the community, the ulema modeled efforts to the community as recommended by doctors and the government, namely washing hands properly using clean water and soap, wearing masks, and avoiding contact with large crowds. In addition, ulama also urge the community to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables to meet the needs of vitamins, minerals and food fiber needed by the body and to do physical activity every day. This is done

to increase immunity and preventive behavior in order to break the chain of transmission of the Covid-19 virus.

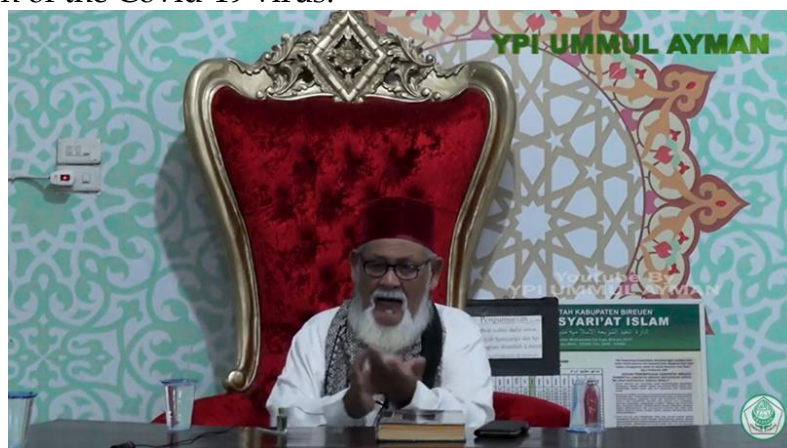


Figure 7: Waled Nu modeling the correct way to wash hands  
(Source: Youtube YPI Ummul Ayman, 2020)

In addition, the ulama also strongly encourage the community to always maintain their ablutions, because the ulama believe that ablution is also one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Because by keeping wudhu' the purity and cleanliness of the people is always maintained. Muslims are obliged to purify themselves (wudhu') every time they want to establish prayer, which is mandatory 5 times a day.

Religious rituals are also one of the media for shaping people's risk perceptions. Through the ritual of congregational prayer in the mosque, the ulama recite kunut nazilah and prayers to ward off misfortune. For some scholars and Acehese people, they believe that kunut nazilah and prayers to ward off misfortune are important religious commandments to be recited when facing a crisis, including the Covid-19 pandemic. The prayer is recited in order to ask Allah for help so that the disaster that is happening immediately passes.

The legality of the vaccine discussed in Presidential Regulation No. 99/2020 has received the approval of the scholars through the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the approval of BPOM on January 11, 2021. MUI stated that the Covid-19 vaccine produced by SinoVac-Life is halal and holy to be injected to the public. On January 14, 2021 the MPU clerics of Aceh Province issued a tausiah which was later used as the basis for the Aceh Governor Circular Letter No. 440/904 regarding the implementation of vaccinations in the context of COVID-19 prevention in Aceh Province. Furthermore, on January 19, 2021 the Government of Aceh held a special meeting with MPU Aceh in order to coordinate and garner support from Acehese leaders, scholars, and ulemas regarding the Covid-19 vaccination program. As a form of concern and moral responsibility of the ulama for the safety of the people of Aceh, the ulama agreed to fully support the vaccination program and believe that the program is a form of effort to avoid the deadly Covid-19 outbreak.

**Table 6. Ulama as Role Models in Combating the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Role of Islamic Scholars	Duties/Responsibilities
Role Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living a clean and healthy lifestyle in accordance with Islamic teachings</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicing health protocols</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the Covid-19 vaccination program</li> </ul>

Source: Data processing results, 2022

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in Bireuen Regency cannot be separated from the role of ulama. The role played by ulama is as communicators, motivators, guidelines, and advisors. These opportunities are utilized by the ulama to convey risk messages in order to form community risk perceptions on how to respond to the dangers of the Covid-19 outbreak based on Islamic teachings, as well as to straighten out the wrong understanding of the dangers of the Covid-19 virus. The information conveyed by the ulama to the community is valid information because the information obtained by the ulama is the result of coordination with the medical and government in the context of information accuracy.

The direction of government policy and medical procedures in the context of overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic are in line with and do not contradict the Islamic faith and Shari'ah. In principle, Islam also prohibits its adherents from throwing themselves into destruction or destroying others. Therefore, following the government's recommendations is the duty of every Muslim. Because fighting against Covid-19 is a form of representation of compliance with Islamic religious orders.

Islamic values provide peace of mind for people who feel the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Therefore, this is where the importance of encouragement from scholars who make people firm in patience so that they always make efforts and do not despair and panic when facing a disaster (pandemic).

The study recommends that the Bireuen Regency and Indonesian governments formally partner with ulama as credible risk communicators in pandemic and disaster management, while ulama should enhance their effective risk communication strategies that have proven to reduce public anxiety and improve compliance; additionally, clinical trials on ablution's preventive potential against COVID-19 should be conducted, along with further research on ulama's diverse roles in disaster management across different regions to develop more comprehensive risk communication models.

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religious leaders, demonstrating how faith-based and evidence-based approaches can synergize in crisis management, as well as to the community for their faithful compliance with health measures as an Islamic duty of preserving life. May these efforts inspire continued cooperation between religious, governmental, and academic institutions for future challenges, Alhamdulillahirabbil'alamin.

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