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RELIGIOSITY IN A POST-SOVIET RURAL COMMUNITY: BELIEF, RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

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Etik bəyan: Bu çalışmanın ərsəyə gəlməsi prosesində elmi və etik prinsiplərə riayət olunduğu və istifadə olunan bütün mənbələrin ədəbiyyat bölməsində göstərildiyi müəllif (lər) tərəfindən bəyan olunmuşdur.

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Religiosity in a post-soviet rural community: belief, religious practice, and religious knowledge

Abstract: This article examines belief, religious practice, and religious knowledge in a post-Soviet rural community. Its empirical basis is a survey of 137 residents aged 15 and older in Lovayın village, Astara district, Azerbaijan, reported in a master's thesis completed in 2009. Interviews and observations from the original study provide contextual information. The analysis descriptively compares selected indicators of religious life. While 93.4% of the sample reported believing in God without doubt, 39.4% performed all prescribed daily prayers and 60.6% observed the entire Ramadan fast. Religious knowledge was rated as moderate by 48.2% of respondents; 33.6% described their knowledge as poor or nonexistent. Books and religiously knowledgeable acquaintances were the most frequently reported sources of religious information. These findings demonstrate the limitations of assessing religiosity through a single indicator. Widespread belief does not imply equally widespread regular observance or highly rated religious knowledge. The differences are discussed in relation to the Soviet legacy, local social relations, and opportunities for religious learning. State secularism is distinguished from religiosity as an empirical feature of social life. The conclusions concern a particular community and historical period and provide a basis for future comparative research.

Keywords: Sociology of religion, religiosity, post-Soviet society, religious belief, religious practice, religious knowledge, Azerbaijan.

Postsovet kənd icmasında dindarlıq: inanc, ibadət və dini bilik

Xülasə: Məqalədə postsovet kənd icmasında inanc, ibadət və dini bilik araşdırılır. Tədqiqatın empirik əsasını Azərbaycanın Astara rayonunun Lovayın kəndində 15 yaş və yuxarı 137 sakin arasında aparılmış və 2009-cu ildə tamamlanmış magistr dissertasiyasında təqdim edilmiş sorğunun nəticələri təşkil edir. İlkin tədqiqatın müsahibə və müşahidə materiallarından kontekstual məlumat kimi istifadə olunur. Təhlildə dini həyatın seçilmiş göstəriciləri təsviri səviyyədə müqayisə edilir. Respondentlərin 93,4%-i Allaha şübhəsiz inandığını bildirdiyi halda, 39,4%-i bütün gündəlik namazlarını qılır, 60,6%-i isə Ramazan orucunun tamamını tutur. Respondentlərin 48,2%-i dini biliyini orta səviyyədə qiymətləndirir; 33,6%-i biliyinin zəif olduğunu və ya heç dini biliyinin olmadığını bildirir. Kitablar və dini bilgili tanışlar dini məlumat əldə etmək üçün ən çox müraciət edilən mənbələrdir. Bu nəticələr dindarlığın tək bir göstərici əsasında qiymətləndirilməsinin məhdudluğunu göstərir. İnancın geniş yayılması müntəzəm ibadətin və dini bilik haqqında yüksək özünüqiymətləndirmənin eyni dərəcədə yayılması demək deyil. Aşkar edilmiş fərqlər sovet irsi, yerli sosial münasibətlər və dini öyrənmə imkanları kontekstində müzakirə olunur. Dövlətin dünyəviliyi sosial həyatın empirik

xüsusiyyəti kimi dindarlıqdan fərqləndirilir. Nəticələr konkret icmaya və tarixi dövrə aiddir və gələcək müqayisəli tədqiqatlar üçün əsas yaradır.

Açar sözlər: din sosiologiyası, dindarlıq, postsovet cəmiyyəti, dini inanc, ibadət, dini bilik, Azərbaycan.

Introduction

Research on religion in post-Soviet societies requires attention to processes that are connected but not interchangeable. Religious institutions, individual affiliation, everyday practices, and religious knowledge may develop at different rates and in different directions. Greater public visibility of religion does not necessarily indicate more regular observance or deeper knowledge of religious teachings. Establishing the characteristics of religious life therefore requires separate consideration of what people believe, which practices they perform, and how they learn about religion. This distinction provides the starting point for the present study.

Azerbaijan offers a useful setting for examining these relationships. Soviet restrictions on religious institutions coexisted with the transmission of religious meanings through families and local traditions. Taştan (2003) draws attention to the preservation of religious and national values through customs and ceremonies. Hasanov's (2007) analysis similarly locates religious continuity within family relations, everyday life, and collective memory. Religious life consequently extends beyond formal institutions. Understanding how this historical experience appears in a particular community nevertheless requires local empirical evidence rather than assumptions about a uniform national pattern.

A central difficulty in studying religiosity is the conflation of religious belonging with religious activity. Someone identifying with a religion may not regularly fulfill all its obligations. Participation in a ceremony likewise provides insufficient evidence about that person's beliefs or knowledge. Religious knowledge itself requires differentiation: familiarity with terminology, the ability to read sacred texts, information about religious matters, and the perception of oneself as knowledgeable are distinct indicators. Earlier research on Azerbaijan includes survey-based work on religiosity (Faradov, 2001) and a study of religious life among university students (Erten, 2008). These different settings underscore the need to specify the population to which findings apply.

The present study draws on empirical material from Lovayın village in Azerbaijan's Astara district. The original investigation documented beliefs, practices, religious knowledge, and religion's place in social relationships (Ganbarov, 2009). This article focuses on three aspects of that material: the prevalence of belief, participation in religious practices, and religious knowledge. Its purpose is to identify

variation within religious life by comparing these indicators, while retaining the local setting that gives the findings their meaning.

The principal research question is: How are belief, religious practice, and religious knowledge expressed in a post-Soviet rural community, and what does their comparison reveal about religious life? The analysis first examines responses concerning basic beliefs, then the regularity of selected practices, and finally self-assessed knowledge and information sources. Throughout, comparisons between sample percentages are distinguished from evidence of statistical relationships between individuals' responses. The article contributes a multidimensional description of one community at a particular historical moment. The material may support later comparison, provided that sampling procedures, question wording, and calculations are sufficiently comparable.

A Multidimensional Approach to Religiosity

The sociology of religion examines religious life through the relationships between belief, conduct, and social organization. Wach's (1995) distinction between theoretical, practical, and sociological expressions of religious experience shows why religion cannot be reduced to an individual's inner life. Expressing beliefs, performing rituals, and forming religious associations are complementary activities, but each can be investigated separately. The principal implication for empirical research is that different religious expressions should not be treated as interchangeable measures of the same phenomenon.

A multidimensional analysis distinguishes religious experience, ritual, belief, knowledge, and social consequences. Religious experience concerns feelings and experiences associated with the sacred; ritual concerns participation in ceremonies and acts of worship; belief concerns acceptance of religious teachings. Knowledge refers to familiarity with religious concepts, while consequences concern the expression of religious commitments in everyday conduct and relationships. These dimensions are connected without automatically determining one another. Knowing a teaching does not necessarily imply believing it or acting accordingly (Ganbarov, 2016, pp. 14–18; Köktaş, 1993, p. 54). The present article addresses three dimensions; it does not test a complete model of religiosity.

The belief dimension concerns respondents' positions on fundamental articles of faith, including God, prophets, sacred books, the afterlife, angels, and destiny. These indicators principally measure declared belief. They do not fully establish its philosophical justification, emotional depth, or the meaning assigned to each concept. Two respondents affirming belief in the afterlife may understand it differently. Whether their understandings coincide would require further investigation rather than an inference from their selection of the same response category.

The practice dimension concerns religion's behavioral expression. Ritual prayer (*namaz*), fasting, supplication (*dua*), and reading the Quran are the principal indicators considered here. Their timing and participation requirements differ: prescribed prayers recur daily, Ramadan fasting is concentrated in one month, and supplication may occur in varied circumstances. Their prevalence can be compared, but treating them as equivalent points on an intensity scale requires justification. This attention to types and frequency of observance is consistent with the empirical approach used by Köktaş (1993).

Religious knowledge is considered at two levels: respondents' assessments of their own knowledge and the sources and resources through which they learn. These are complementary but distinct. High self-assessed knowledge need not produce a high score on an objective test, and possession of religious books does not establish regular reading. Huber and Huber (2012) likewise distinguish an intellectual dimension from ideology, experience, and public and private practice in their Centrality of Religiosity Scale. Their approach provides an additional conceptual reference; the present questionnaire was not administered as that scale and cannot retrospectively be scored as one.

Distinguishing dimensions also requires separating sociological analysis from normative judgments. The purpose is to understand reported beliefs and practices rather than classify respondents as authentic or inauthentic believers. Differences in observance do not automatically establish insincerity, ignorance, or absence of religious commitment. Günay's (2005) treatment of religion within its broader social context supports an interpretation attentive to multiple influences rather than a single explanatory factor.

The rural setting adds another consideration. Wolf's (2000) discussion of peasant societies connects religious experience with family life, rites of passage, and local relationships. Günay's (1999) study of Erzurum and surrounding villages also provides a relevant precedent for investigating religion in a defined sociocultural setting. Practices should therefore be situated within everyday relations as well as individual choices. Close relationships may sustain a shared religious vocabulary without producing identical observance among all residents. The existence of a village community does not itself establish religious uniformity.

The Post-Soviet Context and Secularism

The term *post-Soviet* is used as a historical designation, not as an automatic explanation of religious revival. It locates the community within conditions emerging after a period of restrictions on religious institutions. Yunusov's (2004) historical account of Islam in Azerbaijan and Hasanov's (2007) analysis of continuity and change provide broader contexts for this transition. Neither context explains every

individual response. Attributing nonobservance solely to Soviet atheism, for example, would require evidence about the person's life history and religious socialization.

Qənbərov (2019, pp. 101–115) distinguishes phases of Soviet religious policy rather than presenting it as a single unchanging regime. Repression, subsequent institutional supervision, and changes during perestroika constituted different conditions. This differentiation matters because residents of different ages did not experience the same historical circumstances. Yet identifying whether an age difference reflects generational experience, a life-course effect, or another influence requires a research design capable of separating those possibilities. The historical discussion therefore guides interpretation without establishing a causal relationship between age and religiosity.

Taştan's (2003) emphasis on continuity through customs and ceremonies suggests that restrictions on institutions need not imply the complete interruption of religious transmission. The Lovayın material, combining high belief prevalence with varied practices, is relevant to this discussion. Kotecha's (2006) regional account also draws attention to the interaction of Islamic and ethnic identities in Azerbaijan, supporting sensitivity to local differences. The present survey, however, does not directly compare Soviet and post-Soviet observations. Historical continuity remains an interpretive context rather than a change measured by this dataset.

Secularism must also be defined carefully. Qənbərov (2019, pp. 28–32) differentiates secularism as a principle organizing state–religion relations from secularization as change in religion's social position. Casanova (2006) similarly separates institutional differentiation, the decline of beliefs and practices, and the privatization of religion. These distinctions mean that a secular state does not, by itself, demonstrate weak personal belief. Conversely, widespread belief does not establish the legal character of state–religion relations. Institutional arrangements and individual religiosity require evidence at their respective levels of analysis.

Religious education illustrates the practical importance of this distinction. The secular organization of schooling, access to religious information outside school, and individual interest in learning are separate issues. Qənbərov's (2019, pp. 153–160) discussion of religious education helps contextualize respondents' reported use of books, family members, acquaintances, and religious specialists. The survey does not establish that a particular educational policy caused a particular practice. It describes learning preferences and perceived needs within the historical and institutional environment of the original research.

Methodology

The article reexamines empirical findings from the author's master's research completed at Selçuk University in 2009 (Ganbarov, 2009). The original study offered

a broad account of social and religious life in Lovayın; the present analysis selects findings concerning belief, practice, and knowledge. The author's other work contributes to the theoretical framework (Ganbarov, 2016; Qənbərov, 2019). The original research also drew on the empirical traditions represented by Günay (1999) and Köktaş (1993) when developing its method, hypotheses, and questionnaire.

The study population comprised actual village residents aged 15 and older. Because official population figures differed from actual residence, a list of eligible residents was prepared and individuals were randomly selected. When a selected person was absent or declined participation, another person was selected. The final survey included 137 respondents (Ganbarov, 2009). The replacement procedure and absence of a separately reported total number of people initially approached prevent calculation of a response rate and limit assessment of the sample's representativeness.

The sample included 75 men and 62 women. There were 44 respondents aged 15–25, 56 aged 26–40, 29 aged 41–60, and seven aged 61 or older; age was missing for one respondent. Younger and middle-aged residents therefore predominated. The original study describes a social setting shaped by agriculture, family connections, and labor migration, with religious life predominantly situated within a Sunni-Shafi'i tradition. These characteristics identify the context of the findings rather than explain them causally.

The original investigation combined a questionnaire with interviews and observations. Here, the latter are used only as contextual material in the form reported in the thesis. Separate interview counts, complete transcripts, and systematic coding results are unavailable for this analysis, so no independent qualitative analysis is claimed. No identifying respondent information is presented. The findings are treated as evidence from the period covered by the original research rather than as a measurement of present-day religious life.

Belief is examined through doctrinal questions; practice through ritual prayer, fasting, supplication, and Quran reading; knowledge through self-assessment, information sources, and religious books in the home. The original unit of analysis was the individual respondent, but this reanalysis uses published aggregate tables. It therefore presents no new correlations, regressions, or individual profiles. Different percentages establish different levels of prevalence within the sample, but do not fully reveal how the dimensions combine within the same individuals.

All percentages are recalculated from the reported counts using the full sample, N = 137, and rounded to one decimal place. Thus, 128 respondents expressing belief in God without doubt represent 93.4% of the sample. The original table's 94.1% uses 136 valid responses as its denominator. Responses are unchanged; the denominator is standardized. Indicators from different questions are not added

together, and multiple-response questions are calculated separately for each option. The tables specify these distinctions to make comparisons transparent.

The study concerns one village. It does not represent Azerbaijan's entire population, all post-Soviet societies, or an ethnic group as a whole. Inconsistencies between category counts in some original cross-tabulations preclude their use for new association claims. Self-assessed knowledge is not an objective measure of religious literacy. Finally, a single cross-sectional survey cannot establish the rate, direction, or causes of religious revival. These limitations define the scope within which the descriptive findings can be interpreted.

The Prevalence of Religious Beliefs

The findings indicate widespread acceptance of basic religious beliefs. Belief in God without doubt was reported by 128 respondents, representing 93.4% of the sample. Seven believed but expressed some doubts, while one reported believing because others did; one response was missing. No respondent explicitly selected disbelief in God. The answers therefore primarily describe variation within an affirmative orientation toward belief. Although belief appears to constitute a broadly shared reference point, this does not mean that everyone held an identical religious worldview (Ganbarov, 2009).

Table 1: *Affirmative Responses Concerning Basic Religious Beliefs*

Indicator	n	%
Belief in God without doubt	128	93.4
Firm belief in Muhammad's prophethood	127	92.7
Belief in all prophets	122	89.1
Belief in all sacred books	122	89.1
Belief in the afterlife without doubt	119	86.9
Belief in angels without doubt	116	84.7
Belief in destiny	121	88.3

Note. N = 137. Each row concerns a separate question; percentages must not be summed. Percentages were recalculated from the original counts. Source: Ganbarov (2009), Tables 10, 15–16, 18–19, and 21–22.

Firm belief in Muhammad's prophethood was reported by 127 respondents. Belief in all prophets and all sacred books was reported by 122 respondents in each case. These differences underscore the distinct content of the questions: a position on a particular prophet cannot simply be merged with a general statement concer-

ning all prophets. Identical totals for two indicators also do not establish that precisely the same respondents gave those answers. Such a conclusion would require matching individual records.

Belief in the afterlife without doubt was reported by 119 respondents, belief in angels without doubt by 116, and belief in destiny by 121. These figures are somewhat lower than the figure for unequivocal belief in God. Widespread religious belief thus coexists with differences in the acceptance of particular teachings. Different interpretations, information levels, or personal doubts are possible explanations, but the available answers cannot distinguish between them. The differences can be described more confidently than their causes can be established.

The social setting also matters when interpreting these high figures. Observations in the original study suggest that religious meanings occupied an important place in everyday relationships and ceremonies (Ganbarov, 2009). In such a setting, personal conviction and the wish to provide a socially acceptable answer may not be easily separated. This possibility does not invalidate respondents' statements. It instead underlines the distinction between measuring declared belief and investigating the full range of a person's religious experience.

The belief findings should likewise remain distinct from the knowledge findings. Affirming belief in God or the afterlife does not establish detailed familiarity with theological explanations. Acceptance through family and community life and learning through systematic religious instruction are different pathways. The survey does not identify the formation of each respondent's beliefs. High affirmative response rates therefore cannot establish uniformly high religious knowledge among village residents.

Variation in Religious Practices

The practice indicators present a more differentiated picture. Fifty-four respondents, or 39.4%, reported performing all prescribed prayers. Seven prayed only on Fridays and religious holidays, and 25 prayed occasionally. Forty-nine respondents, or 35.8%, reported never performing ritual prayer; two did not answer. Combining the categories reporting some participation gives 86 respondents, or 62.8%. This combined figure indicates some practical engagement with ritual prayer and must remain distinct from regular daily observance (Ganbarov, 2009).

Table 2: *Selected Indicators of Religious Practice*

Indicator	n	%
Performs all prescribed prayers	54	39.4
Prays only on Fridays and religious holidays	7	5.1
Performs ritual prayer occasionally	25	18.2
Never performs ritual prayer	49	35.8
Observes the entire Ramadan fast	83	60.6
Observes part of the Ramadan fast	5	3.6
Never fasts	44	32.1
Offers supplication frequently in all circumstances	73	53.3
Offers supplication only after ritual prayer	42	30.7
Offers supplication only in difficult circumstances	18	13.1
Reads the Quran daily	10	7.3
Reads the Quran occasionally	38	27.7
Reports being unable to read the Quran	85	62.0

Note. N = 137. Selected responses to separate questions are shown; no overall total applies. Full Ramadan observance includes 59 respondents who fasted throughout Ramadan only and 24 who also fasted on certain other holy days. Source: Ganbarov (2009), Tables 27, 32, and 42–43.

The substantial shares reporting regular ritual prayer and no ritual prayer demonstrate that the community does not fit a single pattern of observance. Daily practitioners, occasional participants, and nonparticipants inhabit the same social environment. Describing the community solely through its most active practitioners would overlook this variation. Conversely, the proportion reporting no ritual prayer cannot by itself establish weak religious attachment throughout the community. Other practices and beliefs must also be considered.

Full Ramadan fasting was more widespread than complete observance of daily prayers. Fifty-nine respondents fasted throughout Ramadan only, and 24 also fasted on certain other holy days, producing a total of 83. Five fasted during part of Ramadan, 44 never fasted, two gave other answers, and three did not respond. Fasting was consequently widespread but not universal.

The difference between full Ramadan observance and complete daily prayer observance was 21.2 percentage points. This invites consideration of the distinctive organization of each practice: daily repetition and participation concentrated in a particular calendar period create different routines. The original study also reports

increased religious activity during Ramadan (Ganbarov, 2009). That observation suggests a possible role for shared religious time. Because the effect of the social environment on fasting was not separately measured, however, it remains a contextual interpretation.

Supplication extends the picture beyond prescribed ritual observance. Seventy-three respondents offered supplication frequently in all circumstances, 42 only after ritual prayer, and 18 only during difficulties. Three reported never doing so, and one answer was missing. In total, 133 respondents, or 97.1%, reported supplication in at least one of these forms. Its prevalence was therefore very high, although this aggregate figure does not imply equal frequency among respondents.

Distinguishing supplication from ritual prayer is analytically important. Not performing ritual prayer does not necessarily mean never offering supplication. The overall distributions suggest that personal expressions of religious engagement may extend beyond regular prescribed observance. The published tables do not, however, identify exactly how many nonparticipants in ritual prayer practiced supplication. No additional figures for individual combinations are therefore proposed. The supported finding concerns differences in the prevalence of practices.

Quran reading occupies an area of overlap between practice and knowledge. Ten respondents read it daily, two on Friday nights, and 38 occasionally. Eighty-five reported being unable to read it; one did not wish to read it, and one did not answer. The original interpretation discusses Quran reading in relation to engagement with the Arabic text (Ganbarov, 2009). The result must therefore not be generalized into a measure of overall literacy or the ability to read all religious materials.

Inability to read the Quran also differs from rejection of it as a sacred text. Acceptance of sacred books was high, while Quran-reading ability was less widespread. The significance attributed to a text may thus differ from the capacity to engage with it directly. Hearing recitation, reading a translation, and receiving someone else's explanation are distinct forms of engagement. Since the survey did not measure all these pathways with equal specificity, their relative prevalence cannot be established here.

Practices involving material resources provide additional evidence of differentiation. Eight respondents reported paying zakat annually, whereas 95 said they lacked the financial means but would pay if able. Annual payment of fitra was reported by 107 respondents (Ganbarov, 2009). These differences cannot be explained solely by stronger or weaker religious commitment. The conditions governing each practice, economic resources, and respondents' understanding of those conditions all require consideration. Accordingly, these figures are not converted into a single religiosity score.

Religious Knowledge and Sources of Learning

The knowledge findings follow a different measurement logic from the belief and practice indicators. Respondents were asked to assess their own religious knowledge. Ten rated it very good, 12 good, 66 moderate, and 34 poor; 12 reported having none. Three answers were missing. Those selecting good or very good thus numbered 22, or 16.1%, while those reporting poor or nonexistent knowledge numbered 46, or 33.6%.

Table 3: *Respondents' Self-Assessed Religious Knowledge*

Self-assessment	n	%
Very good	10	7.3
Good	12	8.8
Moderate	66	48.2
Poor	34	24.8
No religious knowledge	12	8.8
Missing	3	2.2
Total	137	100.0

Note. Percentages use N = 137. Category percentages may not sum to exactly 100 because of rounding. The indicator measures self-assessment rather than performance on an objective knowledge test. Source: Ganbarov (2009), Table 46.

The largest group selected the moderate category, while relatively few rated their knowledge highly. Yet moderate knowledge need not mean the same thing to every respondent. Some may regard familiarity with daily ritual requirements as sufficient, while others may expect extensive explanations of religious texts. Self-assessment potentially reflects both perceived information and expectations about what religious knowledge should include. The most accurate description of this indicator is therefore subjective assessment of religious knowledge.

The contrast between widespread belief and less widespread high knowledge ratings is a central finding. At the sample level, acceptance of religious teachings and perceived systematic knowledge do not have the same prevalence. This does not establish a general philosophical proposition that belief is inherently independent of knowledge. It shows that affirmative belief responses and high self-ratings are differently distributed in this survey. The distinction makes the social opportunities for religious learning a separate subject of inquiry.

Reported information sources offer insight into these opportunities. Forty-nine respondents consulted religious books independently, 47 approached religiously knowledgeable acquaintances, 20 consulted family members, seven an imam,

and five a molla, or local religious specialist. Two identified another source. The original account explains that seven respondents selected multiple options and their responses were coded as invalid or missing (Ganbarov, 2009). That category therefore includes more than silence or refusal to answer.

Table 4: *Reported Sources for Learning About Religious Matters*

Source	n	%
Independent consultation of religious books	49	35.8
Religiously knowledgeable acquaintances	47	34.3
Family	20	14.6
Imam	7	5.1
Molla	5	3.6
Other source	2	1.5
Recorded as invalid or missing	7	5.1
Total	137	100.0

Note. N = 137. Seven multiple-option responses were treated as missing in the original study; that classification is retained. Percentages are rounded. Source: Ganbarov (2009), Table 47.

Books and knowledgeable acquaintances together account for 96 respondents, or 70.1% of the sample. Individual reading and exchanges within personal relationships therefore occupy a prominent place in reported religious learning. Reading should not, however, be treated as wholly separate from social relationships. Book selection, recommendations, and interpretation may involve other people. Since the survey did not examine those connections, it cannot establish that individual reading occurred independently of social intermediaries.

The smaller shares consulting imams and mollas do not demonstrate that religious specialists played little part in community life generally. The question concerned where respondents turned to learn about a religious matter. Specialists may have different roles in organizing ceremonies or leading worship. Limited consultation also does not automatically imply distrust: accessibility, personal acquaintance, reading habits, and other circumstances could matter. The available data do not separately measure these explanations.

Family members accounted for 14.6% of responses. This figure does not capture their entire role in early religious socialization. Seeking information about a current issue and learning religious ideas during childhood are different activities. Someone currently preferring books may still have acquired a religious identity through family life. The family's position as the third most frequent source therefore

provides no direct evidence of declining intergenerational transmission. Establishing such a change would require religious life histories and investigation of practices within families.

Religious books in the home provide another indicator of the learning environment. The original table records 120 respondents with a Quran at home, 103 with prayer instruction books, 80 with books about the Prophet's life, and 73 with a Quran translation. Using the full sample, these figures represent 87.6%, 75.2%, 58.4%, and 53.3%, respectively. Since several book types could be present in the same home, the percentages must not be summed. Some original percentages used 136 valid responses; all are recalculated here using N = 137 (Ganbarov, 2009).

Widespread possession of the Quran and frequent reports of inability to read it are not contradictory. Possessing a sacred text may have religious and cultural significance, while reading its original language requires a learned skill. A book may also be used by another household member. Possession, personal reading, and comprehension must therefore be distinguished. The survey supplies partial information about the first two but does not directly measure comprehension.

Attitudes toward religious education complete this picture. One hundred and ten respondents, or 80.3%, considered it necessary. Six saw no need, 19 expressed no opinion, and two answers were missing (Ganbarov, 2009). A positive orientation toward religious learning was thus widespread. The question nevertheless does not identify preferred content, instructional methods, or institutional arrangements. Support for a particular curriculum or religious organization cannot be inferred without further questions.

Comparing the Dimensions and Discussing the Findings

Taken together, the results show why the community's religious life cannot be adequately described through a single level of intensity. Affirmative responses concerning basic beliefs are widespread; daily, seasonal, and situational practices attract different participation levels; high knowledge ratings are less common. A shared framework of belief consequently coexists with varied practices and learning experiences. A binary classification of the village as religious or secularized would obscure much of this empirical differentiation.

The first major finding concerns the difference between declared belief and regular daily observance. Belief in God without doubt was reported by 93.4%, while 39.4% performed all prescribed prayers, a difference of 54.0 percentage points. Acceptance of belief was clearly more widespread than complete daily observance. The size of the gap does not, however, explain individual behavior. Time requirements,

learned habits, and personal circumstances are possible lines of inquiry whose influence would need to be measured directly.

The second finding concerns variation within the practice dimension itself. Full Ramadan fasting was more widespread than complete daily prayer observance, while supplication formed part of many respondents' religious lives in different circumstances. Participation cannot be adequately captured by a simple distinction between practicing and nonpracticing. Someone who does not perform one practice may participate consistently in another. Future comparisons should therefore consider the type, frequency, and circumstances of observance together. The present findings provide descriptive grounds for this approach.

The third finding concerns the significance of self-assessed knowledge as a separate indicator. Only 16.1% rated their knowledge as good or very good. The contrast with belief and practice suggests that the community's religious life cannot be described solely through perceived theological competence. The large moderate category also resists a binary division into knowledgeable and unknowledgeable respondents. How people define adequate knowledge remains central. Interpretation should address both informational content and the social meaning of self-assessment.

Two knowledge-related findings are particularly useful when read together: 33.6% reported poor or nonexistent knowledge, while 80.3% considered religious education necessary. Low self-assessment and perceived educational need both appear within the sample, but the tables do not identify their exact overlap. Knowledge-related attitudes cannot simply be equated with indifference to learning. A distinction emerges between the value attached to learning and existing knowledge or skills, although its individual distribution requires further investigation.

The prominence of books and knowledgeable acquaintances helps identify the social environment within which this distinction occurs. Respondents do not rely on a single formal educational channel. Reading offers direct engagement with texts, while consulting acquaintances may allow explanation and follow-up questions. The survey does not compare the content or quality of these sources. Its findings concern the channels through which information is sought, rather than the inherent reliability of any one channel.

The difference between Quran ownership and reading ability also separates material resources from practical capacities. Keeping a Quran may express family identity, support worship, or serve another household member. Establishing its specific significance would require household observation and interviews. The methodological implication is nonetheless clear: possession cannot substitute for a mea-

sure of personal use. Access to a religious resource and the ability to engage with it should be measured separately.

The post-Soviet context provides a historical framework for interpreting this variation. Transmission through families and communities and opportunities for organized religious instruction may follow different historical paths. Qənbərov (2019) situates religious institutions and educational opportunities within changing state–religion relations. The Lovayın findings add local empirical material to this broader discussion. They do not establish that a single historical factor produced the observed differences between belief, practice, and knowledge. The relationship between institutional history and individual experience remains an issue for further research.

The same distinction between levels of analysis applies to secularism. The state's legal organization concerns public authority, whereas the survey describes personal beliefs and practices. A secular state and widespread personal belief can coexist without logical contradiction. The conceptual distinction developed by Qənbərov (2019, pp. 28–32) helps clarify this relationship. Equating support for religious education with a position on the secular foundations of the state would attribute an unmeasured political view to respondents.

Nor should the concept of a rural community imply uniform religiosity. Close local relationships may facilitate shared religious language without equalizing daily schedules, learning opportunities, or personal interests. The different practice categories make that internal variation visible. Wolf's (2000) emphasis on family and local relationships helps locate individual conduct within its social setting. Assessing the setting's influence requires investigation of specific relationships and activities, beyond merely acknowledging that they exist.

Further analysis of individual records could establish which beliefs, practices, and knowledge ratings occur together. This would permit more precise descriptions of religious patterns, provided the original database can be located and its quality and coding verified. New data collection could supplement self-assessment with knowledge questions using transparent content criteria. Researchers could then investigate whether perceived knowledge corresponds to familiarity with specific religious concepts.

A repeated study could also introduce a temporal comparison. A new survey using comparable sampling and questions would help identify changes in religious practices. Original response meanings should be retained, with new options documented separately. Investigating newer information channels need not eliminate the earlier categories of books, family, and acquaintances. Measuring continuity alongside new forms of learning would support both historical comparison and a more complete account of contemporary information use.

Future measurement should also distinguish domains of knowledge. Recognizing articles of faith, knowing ritual procedures, explaining a text, and understanding religious history are different competencies. The original general self-assessment question does not establish which domain respondents had in mind. A moderate rating may therefore conceal different combinations of knowledge. Someone familiar with daily ritual procedures might regard their historical knowledge as limited; this is an illustration of a measurement issue, rather than a finding about a particular respondent.

The same consideration applies to information sources. Asking for one main source establishes a preference but may omit additional channels. The seven multiple-option responses coded as missing are significant in this respect. A future survey could ask separately about primary and supplementary sources, allowing researchers to examine how reading and interpersonal explanation combine within individual experience. Such a refinement would leave the historical percentages intact while making the structure of future data more informative.

Reanalysis consequently clarifies both what the earlier material establishes and what remains unanswered. Recognizing these boundaries enables more accurate use of the original findings and more focused subsequent research. Explicit limitations strengthen the basis for comparison by identifying the questions, categories, and units to which each conclusion applies.

Conclusion

The Lovayın material demonstrates that dimensions of religiosity are expressed at different levels within a post-Soviet rural community. Basic beliefs are widely accepted, practices vary in prevalence, and high self-assessed knowledge is comparatively limited. Belief, behavior, and knowledge must therefore be considered together. Selecting one dimension to represent religiosity as a whole would exclude a substantial part of the empirical picture.

Belief in God without doubt characterized 93.4% of the sample, compared with 39.4% reporting all prescribed daily prayers and 60.6% observing the entire Ramadan fast. Supplication adds evidence of religious engagement beyond regular prescribed observance. These percentages should not be combined into an overall religiosity rate: each describes a different orientation or practice.

The largest group rated its knowledge as moderate. Books and knowledgeable acquaintances were the leading information sources, and perceived need for religious education was widespread. The difference between Quran ownership and reading ability further highlights the distinction between possessing resources and being able to use them. Religious learning consequently requires attention to indivi-

dual skills and social relationships, while self-assessment should remain distinct from objective religious literacy.

A multidimensional approach thus provides a productive description of local religious life. Historical and theoretical discussions help interpret the findings without establishing their causes. The study concerns one community and a specific period rather than contemporary Azerbaijan as a whole. Within those limits, its systematically presented indicators offer a concrete starting point for further local research and methodologically comparable studies of change.

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