



Nishma Research Survey – Health, Emotional, Financial & Religious Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Jewish Community

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A growing number of surveys are being conducted relating to the coronavirus/COVID-19. Some have touched on aspects of the Jewish community, but they have been based on small samples and have not well-explored issues specific to Judaism.

We are pleased to announce the first broad survey of the Jewish community on this topic. This non-random, opt-in survey was conducted May 4-19, 2020, among 860 Jews in the U.S., across Non-Orthodox and Orthodox denominations, and was sponsored and funded by Nishma Research as a service to our community.

According to Mark Trencher, president of Nishma Research, “the coronavirus pandemic has created stress, challenges and sadness within our Jewish community, but it has also spurred thought and creativity around ways to continue and even enhance our Jewish practices and ideals. This survey was both needed and an opportunity, and we took advantage of this unique time period to explore a broad range of related issues.”

SOME INTERESTING FINDINGS

The Haredi Difference – Haredi responses are usually different from those of both Modern Orthodox and Non-Orthodox (generally Conservative) Jews – two groups that respond somewhat similarly in a number of areas. For example:

- 26% of Haredi respondents report having contracted the virus, compared to 4% of Modern Orthodox and 5% of Non-Orthodox.
- 64% of Haredi are worried that someone in their household will contract the coronavirus, compared to 71% of Modern Orthodox and 72% of Non-Orthodox.

Different Impact on Younger vs. Older Groups – In many ways, younger adults suffer more from the pandemic than their elders. Those under 40 suffer more from social isolation and economic insecurity, and unmarrieds are particularly affected (36% feel personal isolation to a great extent, the highest level among all groups). Interestingly, couples with one child experience more feelings of isolation than other couples.

- Older people (age 70+) are certainly medically more vulnerable and express more worry, but they experience little sense of isolation and they are not much affected financially.

The Pain of Being Poor – Groups most affected financially include those with lower incomes, less education, unmarried and the self-employed. Across all metrics of physical, emotional and financial impact, those with less than a college degree are most adversely affected.

Religious Institution Initiatives and Value – Over 85% of synagogues are offering online classes, and a majority of their members have participated. Orthodox synagogues less often offer online prayer (90% of Non-Orthodox do so, compared to 68% of Modern Orthodox and 20% of Haredi). Across denominations, a plurality of respondents say they are “somewhat satisfied” with online prayer.

– In terms of perceived value, synagogues have more than held their own. More than two thirds of synagogue members say their views on the value of synagogue membership haven’t changed, and the vast majority whose views have changed now see more value in being a synagogue member.

Impact on Feelings of “Jewishness” – Some other surveys have asked whether the pandemic has affected people’s faith. We asked whether people’s experiences have affected how they feel “Jewishly” in such areas as sense of connection, community, involvement, and spirituality.

– Very few (5% or less) say their feelings of Jewishness have been weakened, and a substantial majority feel no change or have mixed feelings.

– Interestingly, a notable minority say their feelings of Jewishness have been strengthened, and this feeling is strongest among the Haredi (38%), which is interesting in light of the heavier incidence of the virus among this group.

Technology is a Big Winner ... Here to Stay? – People like the new uses of technology that they have experienced. The majority of Non-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox say their synagogue is offering online prayer, and all groups are active in conducting online classes.

– A minority of Modern Orthodox (29%) believe their rabbis should give thought to halachic flexibility (e.g., technology on Shabbat or Jewish Holidays) even after the pandemic.

Federal Flop ... But Little Political Impact – Respondents are satisfied with the coronavirus responses of their local Jewish community, the medical/scientific communities and their local government, but dissatisfied with the federal government response.

– Satisfaction with “how President Trump has responded to the coronavirus outbreak” stood at 8% among Non-Orthodox, 20% among Modern Orthodox and 46% among Haredi.

– There is little measurable impact on political views. Haredi are still strongly pro-Trump, while Modern Orthodox are still strongly pro-Biden and Non-Orthodox are still virtually unanimously pro-Biden. Voting preferences since February have shifted between 1% and 2% toward Biden, but the small shifts are within the margin of sampling effort, so it is safe to say that views have not changed notably.