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## **RELIGION AND MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC – ADAPTATION OF THE RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF MUSLIM AND ORTHODOX BELIEVERS IN BELGRADE**

The main goal of this paper is to examine the influence of religion on the preservation of mental health of Muslim and Orthodox believers in Belgrade during the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Relying on Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie and the integrative social function of religion, the research tested the hypothesis according to which religion has favorably affected the preservation of the mental health of Muslim and Orthodox believers in Belgrade during this pandemic. Religion was operationalized through life in accordance with the principles of religious doctrine, the frequency of visiting religious objects and the frequency of following religious practices, while mental health was measured using the Kessler scale of psychological distress, whereby the characteristics of their positive and negative symbiosis were taken as indicators of the mutual connection between these two dimensions. Using a semi-structured interview on a non-probabilistic sample, made up of a total of 20 believers chosen deliberately, the main hypothesis of the article was confirmed. Bearing in mind the methodological limitations of the findings obtained through the qualitative research regarding the possibility of their generalization, the general conclusion is that worsening mental health and increasing stress would lead to an increase in religiosity and suppression of the negative effect of stress on health, where mediating factors must also be taken into account, the effect of which on mental health depends on the degree of religious involvement.

**Key words:** religiosity, mental health, mental hygiene, social ties, COVID-19 pandemic