

Impact of Islamic practices on the mental health of Muslims

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Abstract

Background: The article is an attempt to provide a true and clear understanding of the principles of Islam and their psychological influence on the followers. Like all religions, Islam, its teachings and rituals also have an impact on the everyday life of an individual. This makes the study of mental health in relation to Islam an important field of research which is very much required in the current global sociopolitical scenario.

Aim: The aim of the article is to discuss various Islamic rituals and how they influence on mental health. To provide a clear understanding of Islamic principles, the impact of Islamic rituals on mental health and to understand factors outside of Islam that contributes to poor mental health outcomes.

Materials and Methods: To explore the research question, a literature review was conducted. Deakin library resources were used through EBSCOhost, databases such as MEDLINE complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, CINHALL Complete, and Psychology were also systematically explored for appropriate peer-reviewed research literature. Reference lists of the retrieved articles were also searched. Google Scholar was also used to search for and obtain literature unavailable in other databases. Articles relating to Islamic principles and mental health outcomes were included.

Results: At the end of literature review, it is concluded that Islamic rituals play a constructive part in developing the personality of the believer where some rituals are seen encouraging a disciplined lifestyle and some play a part in increasing self-control. Following most of the Islamic rituals reduces stress and depression of everyday life.

Conclusion: It is recommended that non-Muslims should participate more in exploring Islam and conduct studies on it with the western perspective. For studies to be more neutral, researchers from different religious backgrounds should work together with the help of scales especially meant for measuring Islamic religiosity.

Introduction and Background

Religion has been one of the most widely discussed topics among societies all around the globe. It has existed in all cultures and societies, making a huge impact on the lives of people following it. More than two-thirds of the world's population believe in God and follow one of the religions currently present. Research on religion seems to be divided on the issue of mental health effects as some studies show that religion has a negative impact on the mental health of a person, while some say that it leaves a positive impact. For instance, Ganga and Kutty conducted a study about people who followed Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity.^[1] The

study results showed that religiosity does not have positive mental health effects. On the other hand, a study by Lewis and Cruise^[2] talk about optimistic and beneficial impacts of religion on the psychology of its followers. In another study, people reported that they found peace, boost in self-esteem, and felt more intelligent by being more religious.^[3] Whereas Ellis, in 1980, reported that religiousness leads to emotional disturbance and rigidity. Similar findings were given by Gartner in 1996. Religiosity was related to a positive mindset and psychological well-being.^[4] In another study, it was concluded that religion gives the discipline and has an impact on personal well-being which leads to better psychological functioning. It was also

reported that rituals in a religion, such as prayers, yoga, and meditation have a significant effect on mental well-being and general health.^[5] As it can be seen from the above examples, a variance is seen in the research and loads of arguments and studies are seen on both sides.

Like all religions, Islam, its teachings and rituals also have an impact on the everyday life of an individual. Following a set of principles, every day leads to psychological effects. The effects of Islamic principles on the mental health of an individual have been under scrutiny amid the rise of extremist organizations. Muslims living in multicultural societies around the world have to face discrimination and are asked to answer questions from non-Muslims. This makes the study of mental health in relation to Islam an important field of research which is very much required in the current global sociopolitical scenario.

Rationale

Research that has been conducted to develop a better understanding of the psychological impacts of Islam is rarely seen. Basic principles of Islam are not known very well in the general public outside of Islam. Due to the recent unstable sociopolitical situation in the Islamic world, it is often seen as the faith of intolerance. Rituals, like in every other religion in the world, are an important part of Islam and help in defining the character of Muslims. What are the basic Islamic rituals and how they affect everyday lives is a topic that needs to be explored and researched so that there is more awareness about these principles among other faiths which can bring misconceptions and confusions to an end?

Research question

What factors impact on the mental health outcomes of Muslims?

Research objectives

The objectives are as follows:

1. To provide a clear understanding of Islamic principles.
2. To explore the impact of Islamic rituals on mental health.
3. To understand factors outside of Islam that contributes to poor mental health outcomes.

Materials and Methods

To explore literature on the impact of Islam on the mental health of Muslims, a literature review was carried out. This section will discuss the search strategy used and also the terms used for the search of precise literature. Furthermore, the criterion set for the selection of articles will be discussed. The analysis of literature and search results will also be looked into detail.

Search strategy

The literature was searched using Deakin library resources and other search engines such as Google Scholar to find data from various reliable sources. Literature search was conducted

through EBSCO host. As seen in Table 1, systematic search of the various databases was conducted including Academic Search Complete, CINAHL complete, Global Health, Health Source-Consumer Edition, Health Source-Nursing/Academic edition, MEDLINE Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, and Psychology.

The search strategy used the following keywords:

(impact* or effect* or influenc* or outcome*) and (religio* or faith* or belie* or spiritual*) and (Islam*) and (mental* health* or well-being). The terms used were defined as the search went onto produce more accurate literature. Similar terms were added used to find more articles from other databases. Furthermore, a manual search was done from the reference list of the articles to find more information.

Inclusion criteria

To assure reliable, valid, latest and accurate research, the information forming the basis of this review is from academic peer-reviewed journal articles, reviewed online books, material reviewed by scholars, information from reliable government departments. Furthermore, references from Holy book of Quran are given. Publications on the impact of Islam on mental health are only included because it is a vast topic and is entirely different from other faiths. Only the articles published in the English language or translated in English were included in this literature review. Only full-text articles were included. A time period was not included as it would make the search too narrow. Articles mentioning Islamic principles, the psychological impact of Islam and external factors influencing the mental health of Muslims was only included.

Exclusion criteria

Published work on impacts of religion on mental health other than Islam was excluded from the review. Articles with incomplete text and only abstracts were also excluded from the study, due to lack of information. Articles published in Turkish,

Table 1: The search results of databases and number of articles

Database	No of articles
SocINDEX	61
CINAHL complete	27
Health policy reference center	25
MEDLINE complete	24
Science Direct	18
Academic one file	15
Expanded Academic ASAP	7
Info Trac Health reference center	7
Humanities	6
General one file	4
British library ethos	2
Communication and mass media	1
General reference center gold	1

Urdu, Arabic, and languages other than English were also excluded. Furthermore, the articles unrelated to mental health outcomes relating to the topic were excluded due to irrelevance.

Analysis and relevance

The initial search resulted in 366 articles and the results are located in Table 1.

After removal of duplicates, the search narrowed down to 255 articles. Articles were also searched from Google Scholar search engine. Database of Religion and Philosophy was also explored. Reference lists of the relevant papers were also searched to get more relevant articles.

As seen in Figure 1, 170 articles were removed on the basis of abstract and title not being relevant. On further screening, 38 articles were excluded due to the criteria set for language. 25 articles were further excluded for not containing full text. A total of 13 articles were included from the search for literature review.

Discussion

In this section the Islamic principles, their impact on mental health and factors outside the sphere of Islam which affect the mental health of Muslims will be discussed. Overwhelmingly, literature talks about the positive impacts of Islam and its rituals, whereas a little contradiction is also seen in literature where it is reported that Islamic rituals lead to anxiety and adaptation of negative habits in some individuals. Furthermore, the perception

and treatment of mental illnesses in the Islamic culture were discussed in literature. Religions do differ, if we look at the aspects of background, spirituality, and everyday practices. Some differences among religions are clear cut whereas some can be termed as understated. In the current era of chaos, politics, terrorism, and uncertainty it is very important to study the psychological health impacts of religions and cultures.^[6]

The population of Muslims in the western countries is increasing day by day; still, it is observed that the west and its culture are not fully aware of the Islamic religion, values, teachings, and the culture it brings with it. This lack of knowledge is also found among the western medical and psychological practitioners, which makes Muslim patients more hesitant to seek medical help especially for the issues related to psychology, the reason being the difference in the beliefs of the practitioner and the client and also the lack of knowledge about Islamic lifestyle. Therefore, it is very important to gain knowledge about Islam and its customs for other communities.

Amirfakhræi and Alinaghizadeh^[7] conducted a study among the medical students of the Bandar Abbas Azad University of Iran in 2012 with the aim of studying mental health impacts among students who pray and fast regularly, those who pray and fast sometimes and those who do not pray and fast during the month of Ramadan. 200 students were enrolled in the study, and with the help of a questionnaire, the study was conducted 2 weeks before the start of the holy month of Ramadan and 2 weeks after the month of Ramadan. The self-reported scores clearly suggested that students who prayed and observed fast regularly had high self-esteem, less depression, and anxiety that resulted in enhanced mental strength. The mean value of general health improvement from depression increased from a value of 7.1 before Ramadan to 10.1 after Ramadan. Similarly, values of social dysfunction and anxiety were also seen gaining improvement.^[7]

These results are completely in line with the study conducted by Akuchekian *et al.*^[8] In his study Akuchekian *et al.* enrolled 100 medical students in Iran. The study was designed to analyze the effect of praying and fasting during the month of Ramadan on the coping strategies adopted by students. 100 students were enrolled, and a pre- and post-test survey was conducted with the help of a questionnaire. The results revealed that unproductive coping strategies such as believing in superstitious, self-medication, impulsiveness, and daydreaming were reduced after the month of Ramadan among students. Results revealed that mean values of self-medication, wishful thinking and superstitious decreased from $P = 0.0013$ before Ramadan to $P = 0.005$ after Ramadan. The significant decline in negative coping mechanisms shows an increase in self-control and the tendency of turning toward religion in difficult times.^[8] Moreover, Table 2 indicates the level of mental health on following Islam.

A similar study by Loewenthal *et al.* was conducted in the United Kingdom among people belonging to different religions. A questionnaire was used to determine the efficacy of prayers on depression. The Muslims in the study scored highest ineffectiveness of religious coping activities of prayers. This

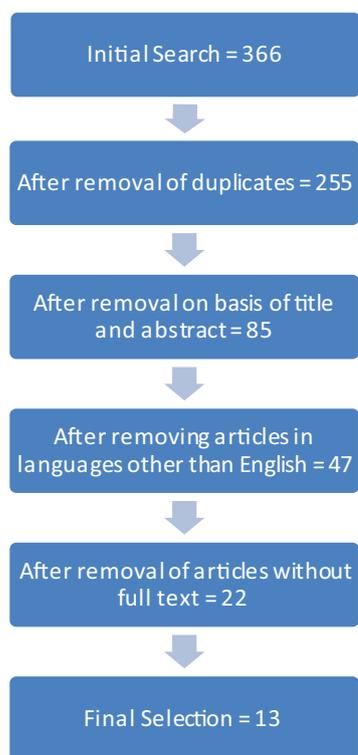


Figure 1: Flowchart of the process of selection of articles

Table 2: The level of mental health on following Islam

Author	Title	Year	Type of study	Islamic principle	Conclusion
Amirfakhraei and A, Alinaghizadeh ^[7]	The impact of praying and fasting on mental health of students attending Bandar Abbas branch of Islamic azad University in Iran 2012	2012	Randomized trial	Fasting and praying	Higher mental health scores in students who often and always fast and pray
Antoon Geels ^[17]	A note on the psychology of Dhikr: The Halveti-Jerrahi order of dervishes of Istanbul	1996	Qualitative research	Dhikr: Recitation of Quran	Restrained ego and clear mind
Akuchekian <i>et al.</i> ^[8]	Effect of holy month of Ramadan on coping strategies	2004	Pre AND Post-test survey	Fasting	Decrease in negative coping strategies during Ramadan. Increase in punctuality and respect for relations
Abdel Khaled ^[18]	Religiosity, subjective well-being, self-esteem, and anxiety among Kuwaiti Muslim Adolescents	2011	Self-reporting		Religiosity results in happiness and satisfaction of life
Abdel-Khalek ^[19]	Religiosity, happiness, health, and psycho pathology in a probability sample of Muslim adolescents	2007	Self-reporting study	Paryer	Males show higher scores of happiness, mental and physical health than females
Clingingsmith <i>et al.</i> ^[20]	Estimating the impact of the Hajj: Religion and tolerance In Islam's global gathering	2009	Interviews	Hajj	Hajjis are more tolerant and peacefully inclined and reject violence
El Azayem and Hedayat-Diba ^[21]	The psychological aspects of Islam: Basic Principles of Islam and their psychological corollary	1994	Qualitative research	Praying	Islamic principles reduce mental illnesses and offer mental stability and strength
Henkel ^[22]	Between belief and unbelief lies the performance of Salat: Meaning and efficacy of a Muslim ritual	2005	Qualitative research	Praying	Creates a well disciplined and organized lifestyle. Keeps physically and mentally active
Johnsdotter <i>et al.</i> ^[23]	Koran reading and negotiation with jinn: strategies to deal with mental ill health among Swedish Somalis	2010	Individual interviews	Recitation of Quran	Quran recitation is perceived to treat mental illnesses among Somalis traditionally
Harris ^[24]	"The oil is sizzling in the pot:" Sound and emotion in uyghur Qur'anic Recitation	2014	Qualitative research	Dhikr: Quran recitation	Leads to spiritual and emotional well being. Increases spirituality and obedience to God
Roy <i>et al.</i> ^[11]	Ramadan fasting and competitive Sports: psychological adaptation within socio-cultural context	2012	Open ended interview	Fasting	Athletes adapt positive coping strategies. Gain mental strength
Sayeed and Prakash ^[25]	The Islamic prayer (Salah/Namaaz) and yoga togetherness in mental health	2013	Qualitative research	Prayer	Prayer has similar physical and mental health as with yoga meditation.
Yucel ^[26]	Prayer and healing in Islam	2011	Pre- and post-test survey	Prayer	Positive healing effects on patients, for example, reduced blood pressure, motivation for being healthy

study was not conducted during the month of Ramadan and it only focused on praying effects of different religions. Hence, it can be deduced that praying outside the month of Ramadan also leads to declining in depression.^[9]

Another similar result was obtained in a study carried out in Turkey among 500 students. The results showed about 40% of the students found happiness and comfort in praying whereas 25.8% of students believed that their sins have been washed away and that makes them more calm and contented. Another positive psychological effect during the month of Ramadan was reported in a Jordanian study which states that during the month the rate of parasuicide declines.^[10]

Furthermore, the study conducted by Roy *et al.*, among Malaysian archers to study coping strategies generated during sporting events in the month of Ramadan. Individual interviews were conducted among 11 archers with the experience of national and international level of sports. The results revealed that though the athletes found it difficult to perform while observing fast but were able to adapt to the condition using coping strategies such as self-awareness, better preparation, focusing more on the sport, enhancing will power, and increasing self-control. The athletes gained more control on their mind by maintaining calm and managing their time, nutrition, and also arousal.^[11]

Current impact of mental health of muslims

A rise in post-traumatic stress disorder has been among Muslims after 9/11 attacks. Studies by Galea *et al.*, (2002),^[12] and Ras and Suarez, (2009), indicated that in relation to 9/11 PTSD rates have been higher among populations of Arabs and Muslim Americans.^[1,13] Another study reported by Van Der,^[14] in his article, which endorses this view was done by Abu-Ras and Abu-Badar in which 350 surveys were completed from places such as mosques, community centers, and hospitals. 77 of the participants reported facing discrimination and negative experiences, whereas out of those, 63% reported to have faced ill-treatment at the workplace including verbal abuse.^[14] The data collected also suggested that 11% faced physical attacks and loss of employment. Furthermore, the data suggested that higher rates of depression and anxiety were reported after 9/11 (Van Der, 2012). This discrimination leads to alienation and oppression from the non-Muslim, predominantly Western society and Muslims living abroad may get disheartened and turn toward militant form of Islam.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Overwhelmingly, literature talks about the positive aspects of Islamic rituals on the mental health of Muslims. Constructive psychological impacts of discipline, self-control, clarity of thought, peace of mind, tolerance, and spiritual well-being are largely talked about. Certain opinions and data were seen in literature against the positive effects especially by women who reported adverse effects such as anxiety, depression, and stress due to certain Islamic rituals and religiosity. In general, Muslims linked the role of Islam with life satisfaction and psychological well-being. After the incident of 9/11, Muslims have been the primary target of discrimination and racism. Various studies show the rise in depression, fear and anxiety among Muslims especially among those living in the West. The reaction of such incidents mostly had harmful impacts on the mental health of Muslims.

Gaps in literature

Not many studies have been done on the topic specific to each and every Islamic principle and its effects on mental health. Scientific evidence needs to be inculcated into the studies to make the studies more reliable and consistent. Not much work has been done on the spiritual aspects of the principles, which cannot be measured in terms of numbers. The principles of Hajj, Shahada (Oneness of Allah), and remembrance of Allah, have not been studied in the context of mental health. Furthermore, the research on factors outside Islam affecting Muslim psychology is rare.

Bias

Most of the work on Islam has been done by Muslim researchers who can raise the question of bias in favor of Muslims or

Islam. On the other hand, non-Muslim researchers might not possess the appropriate perspective for commenting on Islamic teachings. Studies based on scientific evidence can be taken as a tool to justify the findings by Muslim researchers.

Recommendations

To overcome the bias in literature researchers from different religious backgrounds should come forward and participate in the Islamic and cross-religious related studies. Views from different backgrounds can help in the elimination of a lack of accuracy in studies. Furthermore, the Muslim researchers are essential for such studies as to view the religion in the right perspective and keep the study focused whereas non-Muslim researchers can bring in the perspective and experience from other religions. Especially the Western perspective has to be taken into account while conducting studies so that it has a far-reaching result and is also accepted by the societies where Muslims are living in a minority.

The use of psychometric tools for the assessment of Islamic religiosity and its impact should be made common so that the empirical studies on Islam will provide evidence which will be signed and accepted by the society at large. Certain scales have been developed by researchers such as Muslim Attitudes Towards Religion Scale.^[15] Use of such scales will help differentiation between general religiosity and Islamic religiosity if the components of Islam, for example, praying 5 times a day, pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting during Ramadan, and refrain from alcohol and pork are included. Another scale in the perspective of the psychology of Muslims can be used which was developed by called as the psychological measure of Islamic religiosity.^[16] Mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety can be calculated and confirmed by the help of such scales.

The media should also play its role in raising awareness against the psychological effects that discrimination and racism have on communities and cultures that are misunderstood. Moreover, the education systems in Muslim part of the world especially the madrasa education should be updated, and religious teachings should be given side by side with other modern subjects such as computer science, mathematics, sociology, geography, and history. Introducing these reforms can bring a change in Muslim societies and their attitudes toward Western education and culture.

Muslim scholars should play their role and provide awareness among non-Muslims of the Islamic teachings of peace and intolerance. Furthermore, the renowned Muslim scholars should come forward to denounce the acts of terrorists and advice Muslims to reject such groups and spread peace. Awareness of Islamic principles and practices will bring harmony among different religions and will bring peace all over the world.

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Authors' Contributions

Khawaja Saad Najam brought the idea of this innovative topic and helped in the whole paper write-up. Anam Waheed, Rabia Sannam Khan, Dr. Rashid Hassan supported in the completion of the survey form, a compilation of tables, figures, and English improvement.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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