

A study of the Impact of Fasting in Ramadan on Self-esteem

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ABSTRACT

Some studies have mentioned the positive influence of fasting on the improvement of individual's mental quality. The purpose of the present research is to assess the impact of fasting on the individual's self-esteem. The present study is a **descriptive cross sectional** which has been carried out to evaluate the impact of fasting on 60 subjects. The data gathering tools including Demographic information questionnaire, and Cooper Smith's self-esteem inventory which were fulfilled 10 days before and after Ramadan. The data then was analyzed using SPSS 15, T-tests, Pearson's correlation coefficient and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Research findings revealed that the subjects' average of self-esteem increased by $p < 0.01$ comparing with the average before Ramadan. Moreover, there is a meaningful relation between the self-esteem and age of the subjects < 0.01 . According to the findings, Fasting in Ramadan can improve self-esteem.

KEYWORDS: Ramadan, fasting, self-esteem.

1. INTRODUCTION

If fasting is practiced as described in Islam along with other Islamic teachings, it is not only important to protect your health physically but also, mentally. In other words, fasting is having a complete plan for physical and mental health. Fasting is not specific to Islam but in other religions e.g. Christianity, it is customary too. It is widely practiced and considered as one of the most important religious duties. In old medicine fasting was especially important in such a way that Pythagoras and Hippocrates-the father of medicine- practiced fasting as a way to cure some of illnesses. Avicenna dedicated a chapter of his book- Ghanoon - to elaborate on fasting as a treatment. Harith-al-Thaqafchaldea - A well-known physician in Mohammad (PBUH) time-considered fasting as the only way to cure illness. Recently, in Europe and many other countries, there are health care centers in which many illness and diseases are treated by fasting. When Ramadan starts, our routine changes and these changes revive the spirits and refresh us up because our spirit can understand eating habits and sleeping patterns etc. Experiences and psychology have shed light on the matter (6). Self-esteem means the acceptance and volubility the individual put on himself (1). Psychologists claim that having self-esteem is a part of mental health and regard having self-esteem as main and leading factor for individual social-emotional adaptability. An individual who enjoys a high self-esteem values himself positively and treats himself and others decently (2). Moreover, he is highly adaptable when facing stressful and critical situations (3). Thus, having self-esteem boosts individual's mental health. Self-esteem is one of the most important bases for individual character and helps one take glory and be honorable. All people regardless of, age, sex, religion, cultural background and occupation need self-esteem. It can affect all aspects of our life and it is the essence for freedom and magnificence. People who enjoy self-esteem never endure humiliation or indignity. They never fall into disgrace and compromise their dignity and grace. Self-esteem, on the other hand, is one of the most important ethical virtues and the index of having mental health besides, it is a motivation to carrying out plans and meeting needs. In other words, self-dignity or self-respect, in addition to being positive attribute religiously and psychologically, can guarantee to shape other desirable behaviors at home or in society (4). Several factors can influence self-esteem and mental health. The important ones, to be mentioned are spirituals and religious beliefs. It has been emphasized in Islamic culture and teachings that faith and self-confidence can increase human strength to bear hardship in life. In the "Holy Quran" sura 6-AL-ANAAM- verse 82 it reads: "Those who believe and obscure not their belief by wrong doing, theirs is safety; and they are highly guided". So, the individual acts faithfully and for God's satisfaction. That is why, he feels God is always accompanying him and helping him. Thus, he feels secure and peaceful and never panics or experiences distress (5). From Islamic point of view, fasting boosts mental and psychological health and God says in the holy Quran "and that ye fast is better for ye if you did but know"(6). Fasting controls lust and purifies body and mind (7). There have been numerous studies on the effect of fasting on weight control, fat burning, decreasing blood pressure, and reducing the risks of cardiovascular diseases (8-10). Some findings, however, were different. a case in point, was Banner(1). He mentioned that while fasting can help nervous and digestive systems to relax physiologically and help them to regulate their metabolism, it has no effect whatsoever on the frequency of headaches (11). However, there have been fewer studies on the mental effects of fasting. Although, we can't claim that physical and mental benefits of

fasting are separated, we can argue that stress, exhaustion, feeling lonely, tension and fear are to some extent mental protest accompanying physical conditions (12). Over the past 50 years in Russia, it was revealed that fasting is the most effective treatment for schizophrenia. After experimenting with 10000 patients over 30 years, it was concluded that 70% of schizophrenics were healed by fasting to the extent that, they could continue with their active lives (12).

Ramadan is a great time to break the destructive social habits, battling mental problems and achieving peace of mind. Moreover, there are cases that people addicted to drugs or alcohol gives up their habits because of religious commitments (13). According to the holy Quran, the psychological impacts of fasting are self-restraint, the capacity to control impulsive behavior through abstinence and suppressing sudden desire. Some of the psychological impacts of self-restraint are:

1-feeling valuable and self-efficacy

2- the effect on mental health, its different aspects and approach to self being, controlling excitement, being aware of one's weaknesses, enjoying simple joys and attitude toward others.(inclination for intimate and long-lasting friendship, feeling responsible, (attitude toward life) including development of facilities for self-interest, ability to make decisions and being eager to work efficiently.

3-Self-awareness

4-Pleasant interpersonal relations (13)

5- The absence of feeling melancholically guilty or being self-critical.

Other effects of fasting are: enhancing emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy (14). That is why the researcher decided to embark on studying the effects of fasting on self-esteem.

METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-descriptive study in which 60 apparently normal subjects who decided to fast in 2012 were studied. According to comparative formula of 2 averages and safety factor of 95 percent the equivalent turned out 20 which considering interfering factors the minimum of sample population was 60. The subjects were selected randomly and the criteria for selection were:

A- Deciding to fast the whole Ramadan.

B- To be willing to participate and the external factors were:

1-Being physically sick 2- Being mentally sick 3- Taking psychiatric drugs .

4- At the end of the experimental Period- Ramadan- subjects who couldn't fast for 21 days were eliminated from the research. For ethical considerations, those who were perfectly willing were asked to take part. Moreover, instead of their names, subjects used a special code or number on their questionnaires so that their questionnaires so that their data on the study remain confidential. Cooper smith self-esteem inventory (15) and questionnaires containing demographic information were used to gather data.

Cooper smith self-esteem inventory includes 10 questions for whom the subjects had to express his true feelings for each statement choosing A-strongly agrees B-agree C-disagree D-strongly disagree. They were mark 1-2-3 or 4 for grading purpose. The summation of subjects' grades indicated his self-esteem grade. The grades were categorized into a) smaller than 25 for low self-esteem and b) greater than 25 for high self-esteem.

The index was measured twice, once 10 days before Ramadan and, once 10 days after Ramadan. The data then was analyzed and studied using SPSS software, descriptive tests, Paired T-tests, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and one-way analysis of variance.

Findings

Among 60 samples, 49 people (81.8%) were female and the rest male. 51 people (85%) were married and 9 (15%) were single.22 (%36/7) people of the sample had one child. The average age for men was 30.09 ± 9.4 and for women 34.2 ± 9.06 . 51.7% (31 of the samples) were employees and the rest were self-employed.

The samples' education degree was as %6.07 (4 subjects) were high school dropouts. 53.3% (32 subjects) were high school graduates, %6.7 (4 subjects) had Associate degree, 26.7 (16 subjects) had Bachelor's degree and %3.3 (2 subjects) had Master's degree. Among those who specified their spouses' education, %16.7 (10 subjects) were high school dropouts; %51.7 (31 subjects) were high school graduates; %6.7 (4 subjects) had associate degree and %25 (15 subjects) hold Bachelor's degree. %36.7 (22 subject) had one child.

The self-esteem mark of %81.7 (49subjects), before fasting was greater than 25 while after fasting the number of subjects increased to (59 subjects) %98.3. $P < 0.01$.

The average of subjects' self-esteem before Ramadan was 30.2 ± 4.6 while it increased to 32 ± 3.2 after Ramadan. Furthermore, couple T indicated that the difference is meaningful as well as the findings from one- way analysis of Variance between self-esteem and some demographic features revealed that:

There is no difference between the married and single subjects' average self-esteem before and after fasting. It is the same among different people of different level of education and self- employed or state employees.

Moreover, according to Pearson's correlation tests, there is a meaningful relation between the average of self-esteem marks with subject's age after fasting. $P < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that fasting during Ramadan has a considerable positive effect on the boosting self-esteem: the average of self-esteem has considerable increase in comparison with self-esteem index before Ramadan which is in accord with numerous studies done before for instance Javanbakht who studied the impact of fasting in Ramadan on self-esteem and mental health of university students. The findings indicated that fasting has considerable effects on boosting self-esteem and mental health of the sample population(6). Besides, Ansari and Jaberi in a research titled "the impact of fasting in Ramadan on university students" showed that there is a meaningful difference between the self-esteem index of subject before and after Ramadan (2). In another study titled "the effect of fasting on university students' mental health" which was carried out by Shafiee, the results showed that fasting can improve the mental health (16). In a study conducted by MoqadamNiya titled "The Effect of Fasting in Ramadan on The Level of Stress" results showed a meaningful difference between the level of stress before and after of Ramadan(17). Another study titled "the effect of fasting on mental health" was carried out by Sadeqi whose results pointed out that fasting has a positive effect on mental health(18). A study titled "the impact of fasting on the condition of mental health" was done by Qahremani in the city of Gonabad whose finding findings showed that there is a meaningful difference between the mental health conditions of subjects before and after Ramadan and it help the improvement of mental health conditions and help to decrease the mental disorders (19).

The research carried out religious beliefs and faith positively affected self-esteem boost in individuals. In a study done by Fhryng, Miller and Show (1997) there was a positive meaningful relation among religious beliefs and mental health, hopefulness and other positive aspects of temperament was observed(20). Kamford(1997) also reported that religious beliefs can boost self-esteem and reduce depression(21). Zvrn and Johnson(1007) also believe that practicing in religious activities has a huge impact on individual mental health and it can help to improve life expectancy(22). Lindgren also provided a mass of evidence which showsthat religious beliefs have positives effect on patients' lifestyle and can help the treatment of diseases (23). In a study which has been recently carried out on medical students in Rozbeh hospital in Tehran the results showed that creeds and religious beliefs can help to reduce stress and depression in group.(24). In present study, we confronted with some limitations. Data was collected through self-evaluation questionnaire so participants' responses were less accurate resulted in bias. Having no control group is the other limitation of this study. It is suggested an extensive study to be done to control better and achieve more valid results.

Conclusion

According to the finding of the study we can say fasting in addition to having positive physical effects, can hugely impact mental health positively specifically individuals self-esteem. The result of this research in accordance with some other studies affirmed that fasting increase the quality and quantity of self-esteem. There is the need for further case studies on the effect of fasting on self-esteem.

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