

Explaining the Effectiveness of Saying Prayers in the Structure of Health

Mohammad Yarahmadi¹ , Mohammad Jafar Mahdian² , Marzieh Karamkhani³ ,
 Reza Norouzi-Koohdasht^{4*} , Turaj Hasani-Rad⁵ 

1- Department of Mathematics, Faculty of Basic Sciences, Khorramabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khorramabad, Iran.

2- Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Humanities, Boroujerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Boroujerd, Iran.

3- Department of Medical Education, Faculty of Medical Education, Center for Religious and Health Studies, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

4- Department of Educational Management, Farhangian University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

5- Department of Educational Management, Payame Noor University, Kuhdasht Center, Kuhdasht, Iran.

*Correspondence should be addressed to Mr. Reza Norouzi-Koohdasht; Email: r.norouzi20@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Today, human's health is known as one of the most important concerns in the 21st century. However, researchers have focused on different dimensions of health rather than only on the physical health. In this respect, saying prayers is one of the obligatory religious practices that can play an important role in human's mental, physical, social, and spiritual health. Accordingly, the present study was aimed at explaining the effectiveness of saying prayers in the structure of health.

Methods: This is a review study. Using library sources, the effects of saying prayers on different dimensions of health were described based on the existing sources of interpretation and the related research findings. The data were collected using archived documents as well as the Quran and Nahj al-Balaghah and other specialized books, articles, and primary narrative and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) sources. The authors reported no conflict of interest.

Results: Based on the findings, there is a strong and positive relationship between saying prayers and the four dimensions of health including physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. The results of field research confirm this effect and in few cases the relationship between saying prayers and health has been reported to be weak.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, saying prayers plays an important role in increasing the feeling of satisfaction and health. Attention to this important issue can be increased more than ever before by developing and including appropriate educational programs in the structure and content of the textbooks in different fields and at higher education levels. In addition, by developing the capacity and ability to cope with the problems and difficulties, reinforcing an appropriate value system, cultural programs and workshops, we can prevent different diseases.

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Summary

Background and Objective

Islamic texts, which are considered as the divine compass, have justified the path to health and

enjoying health for human beings. However, by health, its physical dimension is usually meant and its social, mental, and cognitive dimensions have not been of as much concern. In 1977, George Engel introduced the biological, mental, and social model of health (1). According to this

model, health is the result of a mutual interaction between biological, psychological, and social factors. Some scientists have explained the role of religion in the framework of social factors that are influential in health and some others add an additional fourth dimension namely the spiritual dimension to the three mentioned components (2). Considering the fact that the religion of Islam is the most complete religion and takes into account the other world as well as this world (3), one of its goals is human wellbeing and peaceful and healthy life (4). Accordingly, the present study attempts to explain the effectiveness of saying prayers in improving the physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of health.

Methods

This is a review study. For collecting data based on the library sources, the Quran, Nahj al-Balaghah, national and international articles, and other specialized, Islamic, and interpretational books related to Islamic sciences, Kaafi, Bihar al-Anwar, and Wasa'il al-Shia were used. Islamic scientists' views and opinions were also used for interpreting the results. The sources used in the present study were obtained from the available sources in the time range of 1982-2019 and primary sources were also used.

Results

In the present study, the effectiveness of saying prayers in improving the dimensions of health was examined and separately and generally presented using arguments. In physical health, the results of numerous studies show that recurrent participation in religious ceremonies has positive effects on physical health (5). By increasing individuals' ability to maintain their welfare, it contributes to their physical health. Imam Ali (pbuh) referred to this issue stating that: "Piety is the medicine for your hearts and cure for your diseases of your body" (6). Generally, among the positive effects of prayers on physical health are the positive effect on the fetus, changing the levels of melatonin and serotonin, improving the immune system, reducing stress and reinforcing the positive emotional states, improving heart and vessels health, contributing to cleanness and beauty, improving the health of the mouth and teeth, alleviating the joints' pain, improving the blood flow, better functioning of the digestive system, improving cleanness of the body. It is also a kind of practicing yoga.

Social health includes an evaluation of such results as the satisfaction with life, happiness, self-confidence, and being in a good mood.

Previous studies show that religious people have a more positive feeling of social health compared to the non-religious people (8). The relationship between religious commitment and social health has been confirmed in numerous studies. Religious contribution and taking roles and accepting responsibility for religious activities affect social health (9). In addition, a person who is committed to attending congregation and Friday prayers gradually becomes familiar with the desirable value system of the society and internalizes these values; consequently, a desirable value system is developed and reinforced within him/her (10). Overall, among the effects of prayers on social health, a feeling of superiority, improved social relationships, adaptability to social constraints, respecting others' rights, lack of a motivation to oppress other people, helping others and improved social status can be mentioned.

By creating a belief in the invisible, belief in human development and growth in line with his passing through the complexities of life and arranging one's personal life based on an organized and purposeful relationship with a transcendent being and understanding the presence of a transcendent being in the world of existence. This existential dimension of human being is intrinsic and inborn and is developed and promoted based on human growth and development and as the result of religious practices and rites (11). According to the Holy Quran, prayers give identity to a person because one who says his/her prayers finds a religious and pious identity (4). These two identities have a personal dimension, according to the Quran and statements of the infallible Imams (peace be upon them), because faith and piety originate from human heart (4) and are then manifested and reflected in human action. These factors lead to spiritual health of the person who says prayers. Generally, the effects of prayers on spiritual health leads to a meaningful relationship with God, achieving perfection, lack of fear of death, increased life expectancy, low expectations, worshipping and gratifying God, and monotheism.

Conclusion

The results of the present study pointed to a strong and positive relationship between the different components of the four dimensions of health and saying prayers. The explanation for this relationship is that saying prayers contributes to individuals' health in all four dimensions by creating mental peace and a feeling of sociability and attention to the society, preventing and

treatment of depression and grief, eliminating anxiety and preventing suicide, preparing the individual for treatment, increasing his/her ability to maintain welfare and the capacity to deal with the problems and difficulties, requiring the individual to observe the preconditions for prayers, reinforcing a desirable value system, and giving identity to the individual. Prayers can provide a source of satisfaction to the individual. Balazadeh reported that prayers and religious rites have an influential role in reducing the excitements and the risk of cardiovascular diseases (12). The study by Dofesh and Ibrahim also showed a positive and meaningful relationship between prayers and increased activity of the parasympathetic system, reduced performance of the sympathetic system and positive effects on the brain's functioning (13), which is in line with the findings of the present study. However, the results of some studies are not consistent with the findings of the present study. The results of the study by Awaiz showed that prayers has no effect on the dimensions of health (14). Niazi *et al.* also found a weak relationship between the level of mental health and religiosity (15). Pourmajed *et al.* believe that there is a meaningful correlation between saying prayers or religiosity and the dimensions of health, but its effect is only indirect (16).

Generally, the relationship between saying prayers and health is an under-researched area despite the researchers and authorities' interest in this issue and there is a need for further studies in this regard. However, it should be noted that this issue has an intertwined structure and is complicated in nature. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive and multi-dimensional theories to combine the insights of the different approaches including those in the medical sciences, sociology, and psychology and restate the mutual and complicated effects of different factors based on the religious sciences. Accordingly, hybrid studies at higher levels are required for promoting the plans in this respect.

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Conflict of interest

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Authors' contribution

Writing the introduction, discussion, and method sections: authors one-three; Writing the findings and conclusion sections: authors four and five.

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