

Examining the Impact of Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.) on COVID-19-Related Stress Levels

Hashem Fathi¹ | Niloufar Dadar² | Saeed Safari Farimani³

1. M.Sc. Student of Nursing, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Razavi Khorasan, Iran. (Corresponding Author)

Email: hashemfathi79@gmail.com

2. Professional Doctorate Student, Arak University of Medical Sciences, Arak, Iran.

3. Anesthesia Technician, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Razavi Khorasan, Iran.

Article info

Abstract

Article type:
Research Article

Received:
7 November 2024

In Revised form:
11 February 2025

Accepted:
16 February 2025

Published:
18 March 2025

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the impact of visiting the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.) on reducing stress caused by COVID-19 in the year 1400 (2021). This descriptive-analytical research was performed on 60 pilgrims selected via convenience sampling. Data were collected using the standard CSS-18 questionnaire and analyzed with SPSS-24 software. The findings indicated that the mean stress score decreased from 40.1 ± 19.26 before the visit to 38.33 ± 15.71 after the visit, although this difference was not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$). However, stress was lower in married individuals compared to singles ($P < 0.01$), and an inverse relationship was observed between the number of children and stress levels ($P = 0.016$). Furthermore, individuals with stronger religious beliefs experienced a significant reduction in stress. The pilgrimage, with its various dimensions and aspects, can be effective in reducing preoccupation, restlessness, and improving concentration.

Keywords: Shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.), Pilgrimage (Ziyarat), Stress, COVID-19, Mental Health.



Reference: Fathi, Hashem, Dadar, Niloufar, Safari Farimani, Saeed. (2024). Examining the Impact of Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.) on COVID-19-Related Stress Levels. *Imam Reza (A.S.) and Contemporary Sciences*. 2(6). 128-159.

Publisher: Imam Reza (A.S.) International University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijs.2025.427610.1101>



1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic ,as a global health crisis ,has led to profound psychological consequences in addition to extensive loss of life .The stress caused by this disease ,due to the unknown nature of the virus ,lack of access to a definitive cure, and restrictive measures like quarantine ,became one of the main challenges for societies .This stress can lead to the emergence or exacerbation of problems such as fatigue ,cognitive ,emotional ,and physical disorders ,and even destructive behaviors like substance use .In this context ,the role of coping resources for reducing this psychological pressure is highly significant .Religious beliefs and practices ,as one such resource ,have always been emphasized by mental health specialists and even the World Health Organization .Within the cultural-religious context of Iran, pilgrimage to holy sites ,especially the shrine of Imam Reza(A.S).holds a special place .This research was designed and conducted with the aim of filling the existing research gap regarding the objective impact of pilgrimage on stress caused by a specific crisis (COVID-19), based on the hypothesis that pilgrimage can reduce stress through mechanisms such as creating inner peace, giving meaning to suffering, and strengthening the sense of trust in God (tawakkul).

2. Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research were as follows:

To determine the level of (COVID-19)related stress in participants before and after the pilgrimage.

To examine the relationship between pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza(A.S). and the reduction of (COVID-19)related stress.

To determine the relationship between the frequency of pilgrimages and the duration of stay at the shrine with stress levels.

To investigate the role of demographic variables) age ,gender ,marital status ,number of children ,education level (and the level of religious beliefs on the degree of stress changes.

3. Methodology

This study was descriptive-analytical and conducted as a field study in 2021 (1400 SH). The statistical population consisted of pilgrims to the shrine of Imam Reza

(A.S.). Using G-power software and for comparing the means of two dependent groups, a sample size of 50 was determined, selected from pilgrims via convenience sampling. To reduce sample attrition, lottery-based prizes were offered to those who completed both questionnaires.

The data collection tool was a questionnaire in two sections: the first section contained demographic information, and the second section was the standard Corona Stress Scale (CSS-18), whose validity and reliability (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.91) had been confirmed for the Iranian lifestyle. This 18-question questionnaire covered three main components: Psychological Stress States (10 questions), Somatic Stress States (5 questions), and Stress-Related Behaviors (3 questions). Scoring was based on a 5-point Likert scale from “Never” (0) to “Always” (4), with a higher total score indicating greater stress.

The procedure was such that the “pre-pilgrimage” questionnaire was distributed at the shrine’s entrance, and the “post-pilgrimage” questionnaire was collected from the same pilgrims at the exit. After collection, data were entered into SPSS version 24 software and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (paired t-test to compare stress before and after, correlation test to examine variable relationships).

4. Findings

Out of 95 distributed questionnaires, 60 follow-up questionnaires were completed (response rate 64%), and after removing incomplete questionnaires, data from 50 participants were included in the final analysis. The mean age of participants was 32.55 years with a standard deviation of 11.15. 56.7% were male and 43.3% female. 68.3% were married and 41.7% reported “high” religious beliefs.

Overall Stress Changes: The mean total stress score decreased from 40.1 ± 19.26 before the pilgrimage to 38.33 ± 15.71 after the pilgrimage. Although this decrease was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($P=0.178$), it indicated a decreasing trend.

Impact of Demographic and Belief Variables:

Marital Status: Married individuals (mean stress: 40.30) reported significantly less stress than single individuals (mean stress: 52.60) ($P<0.001$).

Number of Children: A significant inverse relationship was observed between a higher number of children and lower stress levels ($P=0.016$).

Level of Religious Beliefs: Individuals with stronger religious beliefs experienced

a greater reduction in their stress levels. This decrease was statistically significant between the group with strong beliefs and the group with moderate beliefs ($P=0.016$).

Residence: Although non-local pilgrims (55%) showed more sensitivity, no statistically significant relationship was found between being local or non-local and the degree of stress change.

Analysis of Stress Components: Examination of the three components of the CSS-18 questionnaire revealed that during the COVID-19 period, the “Psychological Stress States” component (such as restlessness, mental preoccupation, and concentration difficulties) had the highest burden. In contrast, the “Somatic States” component (such as changes in appetite and sleep) showed the least changes. Furthermore, the “Stress-Related Behaviors” component, including following news and adhering to protocols, had increased significantly in most individuals. Interestingly, “prayer and supplication” as a coping behavior had increased during the COVID-19 period, even among those who did not strongly believe in its effect.

5. Conclusion

This study showed that although pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.) alone, within a short timeframe, did not create a statistically significant reduction in the overall stress score, it played an important moderating role for several key variables. In other words, pilgrimage can be effective within a context of individual beliefs and social support. Marital status and having children, as symbols of family social support, along with strong religious beliefs, were significantly associated with lower stress levels and a greater reduction in stress after the pilgrimage. These findings support the theoretical framework of the research, which emphasizes the role of religiosity and spiritual practices in creating psychological peace, giving meaning to suffering, and strengthening resilience. It seems that the peace derived from pilgrimage is a deeper and more qualitative process that cannot be fully captured solely by quantitative tools over a short period. Being in the spiritual atmosphere of the shrine, performing rituals, and seeking intercession (tawassul) can lead to emotional release, creation of hope, and redefinition of the stressful situation in the pilgrim’s mind.

Study limitations include convenience sampling, a relatively small sample size, the use of self-report questionnaires, and the timing of the study during a phase of the pandemic where the initial intensity of stress had subsided.

Suggestions for future research include :conducting longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes to track long-term effects ,employing qualitative methods(interviews) to better understand the lived experience of pilgrims ,and controlling for important confounding variables such as history of mental illness and the degree of direct exposure to the disease .Finally ,while observing health protocols ,the capacity of holy places like the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S).can be utilized as supportive-spiritual environments for promoting community mental health in facing future crises.

Keywords: Shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.), Pilgrimage (Ziyarat), Stress, COVID-19, Mental Health.