



Islamic Worldview, Fasting and Health

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Dear editor

It was shown that Islam has positive effects on health (1). Fasting as Islamic teaching is generally investigated from the biological point of view. Several articles have shown that fasting leads to physical health. Moreover, the obtained results of some other studies were indicative of positive functions of fasting, such as the enhancement of spiritual well-being (2), improvement of mental health, elimination of depression (3, 4), and decreased level of social dysfunction (5).

An important point which has been ignored is the effect of Islamic worldview on fasting. When we talk about worldview, it is more about the effects of our values (Muslims) on well-being. Some of the Islamic values include prayer, zakat, pilgrimage (haj), as well as devotion and surrender. Koenig et al. (6) mentioned several items in Islam which led to physical health and longevity (Figure 1).

As Figure 1 shows health and well-being in Islam include other dimensions, which is ignored in most of the studies in the Islamic world, For example the effect of Fasting on decline the greed, aggression and other negative

behaviors as well as promoting positive behavior such as honesty, which need more attention in the related investigations. Interestingly, according to Figure 1, health even physical health is related to our Islamic values. Figure 1 shows that fasting is an important factor, which affects health and well-being. Therefore, this letter is an attempt to explore the main question of how fasting affects health.

In order to answer this question, Holy Quran, Chapter 2, Verse 183 points out that "Believers, fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you; perchance you will be cautious". As this verse shows fasting is related to piety and caution. Here, the main function of fasting is not health but piety; therefore, fasting has an indirect effect on health. As can be seen in Figure1, fasting alongside other Muslim behaviors, such as attendance to mosque, daily prayer, reading Quran, devotion, and surrender, and pilgrimage (haj), can affect human virtues. These virtues entail forgiveness, honesty, self-discipline, altruism, generosity, humility, gratefulness, patience, and dependability. As we know these characteristics are important for being a healthy person.

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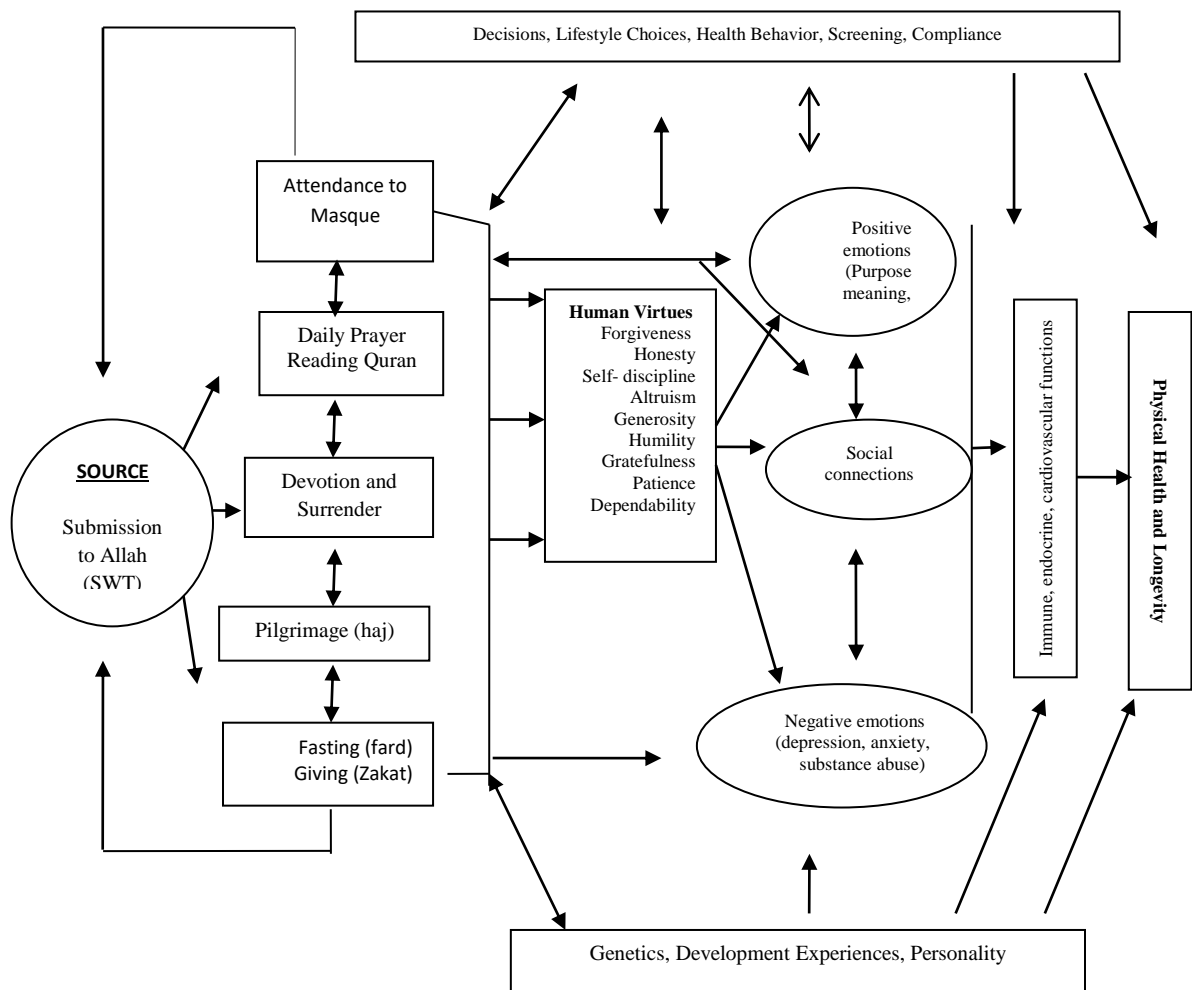


Figure 1. Theoretical causal model explaining the effect of Islam on Health (6)

These items affect different dimensions of health, including physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects.

I believe that human virtues, as shown in Figure 1, are important for health and well-being. There are other human virtues in Islamic worldview which have a significant effect on health. For instance, Islamic teachings recommend that we should not be greedy. Although this issue has not been investigated, it seems that greed has a negative effect on our physique, psyche, as well as our social and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, Islam has a

holistic view of a human being and fasting is a part of this holistic existence. Muslims or the believers to Islamic teaching should pay attention and act on the basis of all these teachings, which leads to the healthiness of individuals from all different aspects.

Generally, health and well-being are not limited to the physical or psychological aspect of health. It seems, in Islam teachings, health, and well-being are related to all dimensions of human beings. The holistic view of health contributes to the understanding that all teachings are related to total health, including

fasting. Therefore, fasting is the main part of Islam teachings which affect human virtues as well as the human body. The effects of fasting on human virtues lead to the formation of hope, contentment, patience, and non-greediness. It means that this human virtues are important for healthy life. Fasting is an important way for leading to these virtues. This feature of fasting as an important teaching of Islam has positive effects on all dimensions of health, which highlights the needs for more theoretical and practical studies.

Conflicts of interest

Author(s) declare no conflicts of interest.

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