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**EFFECTIVENESS OF SPIRITUAL RETREAT OF I'TIKAF ON LOVE OF LIFE, AND  
FORGIVENESS IN COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**BAHRAMI F, ESAVI M, KAZEM ZADEH ATOOFI\* M, DADFAR M, GHAZAIE POUR  
ABARGHOUEI F, ASGHARNEJAD FARID AA, SABERI ZAFARGHANDI MB,  
RAMEZANI FARANI A, AND KOLIVAND PH**

**\*Corresponding Author: E-mail: [atoofi.m@gmail.com](mailto:atoofi.m@gmail.com)**

<sup>1</sup>PhD in philosophy and psychology, Department of Islamic theology, and Department of counseling, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>2</sup>PhD in economy, Department of economy, School of Economy, University of Allameh Tabatabaie, Tehran, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Ms in clinical psychology, Department of clinical psychology, School of Behavioral Sciences & Mental Health-Tehran Institute of Psychiatry, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>4</sup>PhD in clinical psychology, Department of clinical psychology, School of Behavioral Sciences & Mental Health-Tehran Institute of Psychiatry, International Campus, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>5</sup>GP, School of Behavioral Sciences & Mental Health-Tehran Institute of Psychiatry, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>6</sup>PhD in psychology, Department of mental health, Department of clinical psychology, School of Behavioral Sciences & Mental Health-Tehran Institute of Psychiatry, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>7</sup>MD in psychiatry, Department of addiction, School of Behavioral Sciences & Mental Health-Tehran Institute of Psychiatry, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>8</sup>PhD in clinical psychology, School of Behavioral Sciences & Mental Health-Tehran Institute of Psychiatry, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>9</sup>PhD in organizational behavior management, Shefa Neuroscience Research Center, Tehran, Iran

**ABSTRACT**

There are months in Islamic calendar that are superior to the other months because of the days in them. One of these months is the Holy month of Rajab, which has much significant and some virtues, and is the key to the opening of the months of goodness and blessing. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (saww) has said: "Rajab is the month of God". Rajab identifies the beginning of the spiritual season. One of the practices in the 13th, 14th and 15th days of Rajab is I'tikaf religious spiritual tradition. I'tikaf is a very powerful spiritual retreat. In Islam religion it means to stay in a mosque (Masjid) for a specific time period, for the purpose of worshipping God as praying, orison, reading the Holy Quran, Dua and Fasting, while maintaining certain conditions. Love of life (LOL) is a new sub-component on the well-being domain and positive psychology. Forgiveness is one of religious spiritual well-being dimensions. Previous studies have reported that religiosity and spirituality promoted mental health and well-being components. The aim of this study was to effect of spiritual retreat of I'tikaf on the love of life, and forgiveness. It was a pretest-posttest study. A convenience sample of 50 Shia Iranian female undergraduates and postgraduates selected from different faculties at Iran University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), participants in the I'tikaf three-day tradition of the Holy month of Rajab. They completed the Persian versions of the Love of Life Scale (LLS), and Forgiveness subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48). Data were analyzed by dependent T-test. Results showed that there were significant differences between the LLS scores before and after the I'tikaf. The students obtained higher score on the LLS after the I'tikaf than before the I'tikaf. There were significant differences between the MI RSWB 48 subscale scores of Forgiveness (one of immanent components) before and after the I'tikaf, the students obtained higher score on the FO after the I'tikaf than before the I'tikaf. It seems religious spiritual traditions can cause positive attitude towards life, improve psychological well-being, and enhance forgiveness. Religious spiritual intervention in community planning, and religious spiritual counseling for students' mental health and well-being; use of time series research designs for more reliable results in future research are recommended.

**Keywords: I'tikaf, Rajab month, Love of life, Religious Spiritual Well-Being, Forgiveness, College students**

## INTRODUCTION

Religiosity and spirituality are one of correlates of health, especially mental health. Various research have shown that there were a significant association between religiosity and happiness [1, 2], mental health, well-being and religiosity [3-5], well-being and religiosity [6], internal/external religious orientation, mental health and depression[7], religiosity, spirituality, mental health, and mental health treatment outcomes [8], subjective well-being and religiosity [9-10], subjective well-being, health and religiosity [11]. Religiosity prevented risky behaviors [12]. Spirituality and religiosity predicted depression and suicidal ideation [13-14]. Religiosity and spirituality were positively associated with depression, mania, and past suicidal ideation [15]. Religious interventions reduced psychiatric symptoms and improved mental disorders [16-20]. Some studies have evaluated dimensions of religious spiritual well-being in college students [21-25].

In Islam religion there are appropriate strategies to reduce of stress and psychological problems, also coping with them. I'tikaf, a type of fasting along with other forms of prayers, is one of the appropriate strategies for decreasing of psychological distress. I'tikaf is an Arabic

word to stay in a particular place. It is an Islamic practice consisting of a period of retreat in a mosque (Masjid) for a certain number of days in accordance with the believer's own wish. In the state of I'tikaf, a person can stand, sit, sleep, etc... "The person who secludes himself (in the Masjid in I'tikaf) in true faith and hope (for the reward of Allah), all of his/her previous sins shall be forgiven" (Kanzul Ummal, Hadith 24007). I'tikaf is a tradition which has been in Islam from the first days of the revelation. One of the practices in the 13th, 14th and 15th days of Rajab month is I'tikaf religious spiritual tradition. There are six conditions for the person who wishes to partake in the Divine blessing of I'tikaf: Intelligence (Aql), True Faith (Iman), Intention (Niyyat), Fasting (Sawm) During I'tikaf, Permission and Place. The Allah said in Suratul Baqarah (2), Verse 125: "'And when we made the House a pilgrimage for mankind and a (place of) security, and said, 'Appoint for yourselves a place of prayer on the standing-place of Ibrahim [Maqam-e-Ibrahim].' And we enjoined Ibrahim and Ismail saying: 'Purify My House for those who visit (it) and those who abide (in it) for devotion, those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves'.

I'tikaf causes to closeness to the God (Allah), and has beneficial consequences in reducing of psychiatric symptoms and spiritual health. Islamic practices and ceremonies and planning to attend in these ceremonies can play an effective role in generate to cultural practices to deal with stress and mental disorders. Efficacy of I'tikaf has been reported in two studies. For example a study showed that I'tikaf reduced the General Health Questionnaire -28 (GHQ-28) scores in subscales of anxiety, somatic symptoms, social dysfunction, and depression[26]. Fallah, and Nikfarjam (2004) reported that participation in the I'tikaf ceremony significantly increased the happiness, and interventional programs that do in the I'tikaf, create the conditions that increase the rate of spiritual happiness[27].

Love of Life (LOL) is a new concept on the well-being domain and positive psychology. Many studies have been carried on love of life, and its relations with other psychological variables among various sample [28-41].

Forgiveness is a psychological construct. It is one of religious spiritual well-being dimensions [22].

The aim of this study was to effect of spiritual retreat of I'tikaf on the love of life, and forgiveness.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

It was a case study of Iran University of Medical Sciences (IUMS) female students, and pretest-posttest study. A convenience sample of 50 Shia Iranian female undergraduates and postgraduates selected from different faculties at Iran University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), participants in the I'tikaf three-day tradition of the Holy month of Rajab in Mosque (Masjid) of Hazrat Imam Hussein at IUMS. I'tikaf ceremony included special religious activities and programs such as worshipping the God (Allah) as praying; telling/Zekr 1000 names of Allah; orison; reading the Holy Quran; contemplation on the Vagheeh, Zoha, and Falagh Suras; Dua i.e. Ahd Dua, Ome-Davood actions Dua; oral presentations about religious issues i.e. hadiths and narratives by clergymen/women; mourning in the death night of Hazrat Zeinab; reading of pilgrimage of Hazrat Imam Hussein; chanting and birth celebration of Hazrat Imam Ali; chanting of dawn; and fasting.

All students completed the Persian versions of Love of Life Scale (LLS), and Forgiveness subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48). The Love of Life Scale (LLS), was developed by

Ahmed M Abdel-Khalek (2007), is a 16-item scale to measure the respondent's love of life, answered on a 5-point scale: No (1); A little (2); Moderate (3); Much (4), and Very much (5). A typical item is "Life is full of pleasures". Cronbach alpha for the Persian version of the LLS was 0.94 [28, 30, 37]. Good validity and reliability has been reported for the LLS [37-39]. The Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48) was developed by Human-Friedrich Unterrainer, is a 48-item scale to measure the respondent's religious spiritual well-being, answered on a 6-point scale from "I totally disagree (1) to I totally agree (6). A typical item is "There are people whom I will never be able to forgive". Good psychometric characteristics have been reported for MI

RSWB 48 [22]. Data were analyzed by dependent T-test. Ethical considerations were considered.

## RESULTS

Findings showed that there were significant differences between LLS scores before and after the I'tikaf. The students obtained higher score on the LLS after the I'tikaf than before the I'tikaf. Findings showed that there were significant differences between Forgiveness (FO) scores before and after the I'tikaf. The students obtained higher score on the FO after the I'tikaf than before the I'tikaf (Table 1).

**Table 1- Means, standard deviation and t-test for the total score on the LLS and subscale of Forgiveness (FO) of the MI RSWB48 for Shia female college students participants in the I'tikaf three-days tradition of the Holy month of Rajab (N=50)**

Love of Life Scale (LLS)	Pre-test		Post-test		t df=49	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Total score	63.42	11.74	65.52	12.40	-1.93	.058
Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48)						
Forgiveness (FO)						
	25.207.52		27.487.25		-3.32	.002

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Findings of present study showed that I'tikaf as a religious spiritual tradition can cause positive attitude towards life and improve psychological well-being. Participation in I'tikaf enhanced love of life in college

students. Our finding is consistent with results studies of Nikfarjam, Palahang, Deris, and Solati (1998), and Fallah, and Nikfarjam (2004)[26-27]. They reported that I'tikaf improved mental health and increased happiness in individuals who participated in

I'tikaf ceremony. On the basis of obtained finding, we suggested religious spiritual intervention in community planning. Shakeri Nia (2010) revealed that students who participated in I'tikaf had high religious identity, and religious attitude, and psychological hardiness, and also good mental health. He recommended more support and planning for I'tikaf tradition [42]. Religions of Buddhism and Christianity (i.e., Cistercian Christian denomination) have religious practices similar to I'tikaf in Islam religion [43]. In Christian religion, one of foundations of development of spirituality in human is spiritual retreat [44].

Findings of present study showed that I'tikaf' religious spiritual tradition can enhance forgiveness. Many studies have been done on the forgiveness [45] for example relationship between forgiveness and happiness [46], forgiveness, relationship quality and stress [47]. One study showed that forgiveness intervention reduced revenge and avoidance motivations effectively [48].

The present study had some limitations such as sampling method, sample size, lack of male sex, and follow-up phase.

Overall, the goal of Islamic strategies is being health and having mental health.

Using of religious spiritual concepts and methods can promote health in individuals. Inclusion of religion in emotional/cognitive framework and structure and transfer to faith can guarantee integration in personality and subsequently, cause mental health. Religion has a high potential for effective and successful life. Religious spiritual counseling is recommended for students' mental health and well-being. The use of time series research designs for more reliable results in future research is suggested.

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