



# الْبُحْثُ فِي الْأَفْئِدَةِ الْأَوَّلَى لِلْحُرُوفِ الطَّبِيعِيَّةِ فِي الْبَلَادَةِ الْأَرْجَنْبِيَّةِ

## Pilgrimage as a Social Strategy of Health

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### Abstract

Pilgrimage is a religious, spiritual and mystical issue and it consists of meeting people and visiting places that are respected and honored as well as considered superior and of extraordinary nature by pilgrims. The purpose of this article is to show that pilgrimage is one of the important sources of health for pilgrims.

Examples of phenomenological and semantic analysis of pilgrimage experiences and supplication of pilgrims visiting the Shiite Imams' shrines clearly indicate that their sense of devotion, humility, and compassion signifies improved spiritual health; their sense of being forgiven, calmness and lightness indicates improved mental health; their link with hosts and with the companions and feeling close to and friendly with them demonstrates social health and finally, their increased self-care and ability to suspend routine consumption patterns during pilgrimage trips, especially the *Arbaeen* journey which is associated with walking and austerity, signifies improved physical health.

These findings suggest that pilgrimage is an effective social strategy for health and produces and reproduces various types of health. Consequently, not only physical health but also all aspects of health should be considered in pilgrim health promotion programs.

**Key concepts:** Pilgrimage, Pilgrimage journey, Health, Health Promotion Programs, Social Strategy

## **Introduction**

Pilgrimage (*Al-Ziyarah*) is essentially a religious, spiritual and mystical issue. (Salvin,2003; Collins,2010 & 2015). In its common sense, pilgrimage comprises of meeting people and visiting places that are respected and honored as well as considered superior and of extraordinary nature by pilgrims. (Taghizade,2001; Hakim,2011;)

Although the significance and function of pilgrimage vary among followers of different Islamic denominations, “pilgrimage” is a very important religious ritual for the Shiites; in the Shiite Hadith texts, it is emphasized that Muslims go on a pilgrimage to the tombs of the Prophet of Islam and his family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). Paying respect for the family of the prophet and following their practice and way of life constitute an important part of Shiite religious beliefs. (Hakim,2011; Sobhani,2014).

Iran and Iraq are the major Shiite pilgrimage centers, and tens of millions of pilgrims from around the world travel to the pilgrimage cities of these two countries, especially Karbala, Najaf and Mashhad.

This paper intends to demonstrate the fact that pilgrimage is a socio-religious phenomenon and a multidimensional source of providing health for pilgrims who obtain most of their health needs through going on a pilgrimage journey.

## **Results and Discussion**

Examples of phenomenological and semantic analysis of pilgrimage experiences and supplication of pilgrims visiting the Shiite Imams' shrines clearly indicate the following: their sense of devotion, humility, and compassion signifies improved spiritual health. (Yousofi et al. 2011; Razavizadeh, 2017).); their sense of being forgiven, calmness and lightness indicates improved mental health. (Yousofi et al. 2011; Razavizadeh, 2017); their link with the hosts and with the companions and feeling close to and friendly with them demonstrates social health (Yousofi et al. 2010) and finally their increased self-care and ability to suspend routine consumption patterns during pilgrimage trips, especially the *Arbaeen* journey which is associated with walking and austerity, signifies improved physical health.

These findings indicate that pilgrimage is a social strategy of health, resulting in producing and reproducing different sorts of health, namely physical, mental, social and spiritual. However, this finding does not mean that pilgrims do not face health challenges and constraints on pilgrimage journeys; rather it emphasizes that not only pilgrims' physical health promotion but also their comprehensive health promotion must be taken into consideration in planning health promotion programs.

Mention should be made that planning such a program requires careful need assessments, consideration of intervention patterns, and continuous evaluation of the results of program implementation (SIRPS,2013; Binkley & Johnson,2013).

Taking into Consideration the dynamics of pilgrimage experiences and pilgrimage journeys, criteria of fluency (sequence of steps), flexibility (responding to the situational needs) and functionality will be the key criteria in setting up health promotion programs for pilgrims (SIRPS,2013; Binkley & Johnson,2013).

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