

Research Paper:

The Role of Prayer on Social Risk Behaviors in Muslim College Students in Iran



Amir Qorbanpoor Lafmejani¹ , Sajjad Rezaei^{2*} , Hamid Qorbanpoor Lafmejani³ 

1. Department of Educational Sciences and Counseling, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.

2. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.

3. Department of Quran Science and Hadith, Faculty of Literature And Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.



Please cite this article as Qorbanpoor Lafmejani A, Rezaei S, Qorbanpoor Lafmejani H. The Role of Prayer on Social Risk Behaviors in Muslim College Students in Iran. Health, Spirituality and Medical Ethics Journal. 2021; 8(2):111-122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.32598/hsmej.8.2.7>

 <http://dx.doi.org/10.32598/hsmej.8.2.7>



Article info:

Received: 10 Sep 2020

Accepted: 12 Apr 2021

Publish: 01 Jun 2021

Keywords:

Students, Alcohol drinking, College, Prayer, Juvenile delinquency

ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Coping with risky behaviors (social delinquencies) consumes a substantial share of a nation's budget; however, paying attention to these cases can lead to the prevention and treatment of such risky behaviors. The present study aimed to determine the main and interaction effects of gender and prayer behavior, as a recommended behavior in Islam, on the attitudes of students toward risky behaviors.

Methods: This retrospective or ex post facto research aimed to investigate the effects of prayer on the tendency to social risk behaviors in 2019. In total, 340 male and female students from the University of Guilan (169 prayerful & 171 prayerless) were selected by purposive sampling method. Accordingly, the study subjects completed the Attitude on Social Delinquencies Inventory (Aghaei & Teimurtash, 2010). To determine the main and interaction effects of prayer and gender on the total score as well as the dimensions of attitudes to social delinquencies, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) were used in a 2×2 factorial design.

Results: Concerning the subscales, the findings suggested that the examined prayerless students were more prone to robbery, free sex relations, suicide, and home escape. At the level of gender differences, regardless of prayer behavior, males were more prone to free sex relations, and home escape, than females. Furthermore, the interaction effects of group membership and gender were only significant on aggression. Thus, the mean scores of aggression tendency were higher in the prayerless male group.

Conclusion: The obtained data supported the protective role of prayer behavior in reducing the tendency to risk behaviors (especially aggression in males) in the examined Iranian Muslim students.

* Corresponding Author:

Sajjad Rezaei, PhD.

Address: Department of Psychology, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.

Phone: +98 (911) 3390785

E-mail: rezaei_psy@hotmail.com

Introduction

Attending college is a significant subtle stage of youths' lives; this period is often accompanied by changes in attitudes, roles, expectations, and relationships. Problems with satisfying sexual needs, identity, conflicts with parents, generation gap, over-willingness to spend time with friends, relations with the opposite sex, career prospects, and marriage issues are among the stressors for youth and students, in Iran. Presently, major issues, including the tendency to substance use, illicit free sex relations, street fights, robbery, and drug trafficking threaten the young generation of Iranians, especially students [1]. Moreover, there exist potentials for gender differences in risky social behaviors, i.e., extensively studied [2]. The fight against social delinquencies will be fruitful when being initially focused on prevention; secondly, their socioeconomic and political contexts are eliminated; thirdly, family relationships are improved [3].

Individuals have always encountered numerous social abnormalities and searched for their causes and motivations to find ways to prevent and treat them [4]. Coping styles, such as prayer and praying are among the factors influencing individuals' response to pressure, and to some extent, present a protective role [5]. Among the issues considered to protect and prevent social abnormalities are religious copings and behaviors related to religious teachings, including prayer [6].

Religious beliefs and behaviors are effective in preventing and alleviating mental disorders and related problems, such as suicide, Substance Use Disorders (SUDs), anxiety, depression, and antisocial behavior [7]. Empirical evidence indicated that over the past years, numerous studies focused on religious coping styles in different age groups [8].

Despite the effect of religiosity and religious coping on confronting different issues, few empirical studies assessed the role of religiosity and religious behaviors, including praying in predicting attitudes to risk behaviors (or social delinquencies). The literature revealed that regarding the role of religiosity in reducing social delinquencies (or risky behaviors), most Iranian research concerns SUDs [9], while other delinquencies, including free sexual behavior, aggression, home escape, suicide, and robbery, remain unaddressed.

Additionally, a great body of international literature explored the role of religiosity and religion in reducing various social delinquencies, including suicide [10], sex-

ual behaviors, such as homosexuality, out-of-marriage sexual attitudes, and activities, as well as premarital sex, multiple sexual partners, and risky sexual behaviors [11], SUDs [12], and aggression [13]. Wallace et al. [14], Lawrence et al. [15], and Chamrathirong et al. [16] argued that religious youths manifested less harmful behaviors that endangered their health, such as carrying weapons, getting into fights, drinking, and drunk driving. There is ample evidence that religion helps individuals better cope with life stresses, and provides a source of hope and meaning in life [10].

Considering the protective role of religious beliefs and behaviors in reducing high-risk behaviors, such as conduct disorder, infidelity, alcoholism, SUDs, youth delinquency, antisocial behaviors, such as murder, fights, and strife, rape, robbery, aggression, free sexual behaviors, and white marriage, the literature lacks empirical studies on the role of prayer in predicting the tendency to social delinquencies (risky behaviors) in Iran. Therefore, the current research aimed to determine the difference in the tendency to social risk behaviors among prayerful and non-prayerful students of Guilan University in Guilan City, Iran, in 2019.

Methods

This was a retrospective or ex post facto research. This study aimed to measure students' tendency toward social delinquencies. We also determined the differences respecting risky behaviors of prayerful and non-prayerful students. A prayerful student is a subject who has been saying his diary prayers since puberty and saying one of the prayers at a university mosque, college, or dormitory, in the congregation or individually. A prayerless individual does not believe in prayer as a divine duty; therefore, failed to say prayers after puberty not only during the pre-student period, but also during university, neither individually nor in the congregation. The statistical population of this study involved all prayerful and prayerless students of Guilan University (northern Iran) who were selected by the purposive sampling approach. The University of Guilan has a large mosque and two large dormitories complex for male and female college students. Each college also has a prayer room where students visit to pray. This research mainly focused on students' praying behaviors; therefore, during the call to prayer (Azan), the researcher and colleagues visited the mosque and prayer room; after a short interview and justifying the students and attracting their participation, we distributed a questionnaire among them in the large mosque of University and the prayer rooms of the dormitories (in male & female students), and the prayer

rooms of all Colleges of University (Humanities, Architecture, Technical, Agriculture, Basic Sciences, Mathematics, Mechanics, & Sports Sciences). The detailed information of the study sample is listed in [Table 1](#). Concurrently, the inventory was distributed on the university campus to invite prayerless students to participate in the study. Before distributing the inventory, their prayerlessness status was identified through a short interview to invite them to complete the inventory. The interview questions were as follows: Do you believe in prayer? Have you said your daily prayers regularly in the last 6 months?

G*Power was used to define the sample size considering the F-value and the effects of group membership in Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) [17]; given type I error (α) as 0.01 at 99% Confidence Interval (CI), the test power and effect size were measured as 0.95 and 0.04, respectively for the groups of prayerful and prayerless students. Besides, the presence of the 6 independent variables (including different dimensions of social delinquencies, i.e., robbery, aggression, substance abuse, free sex relationship, suicide, & home scape), a sample size of 320 was obtained ($n=160$ for each group). However, a relatively larger sample size was considered to address sample dropout and possible non-collaboration. The inclusion criteria of the study included the following: being a student at the University of Guilan, willingness to cooperate in the project, and attending college prayers room at dormitories and mosques while Azan times for prayer in the prayerful group. The exclusion criteria included reluctance to cooperate with the researcher and providing incomplete inventories.

The following tool was used to collect the required data in this research:

Attitude on Social Harms Questionnaire: This 42-item tool was developed and validated by Aghaei and Teymurtash in 2010 [18]. The content validity ratio of this scale was assessed and confirmed by faculty members and practitioners in associated domains [19]. The questionnaire items were reduced to 6 categories using the factor analysis technique. Furthermore, its construct validity was confirmed. To determine the internal consistency of the items, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the whole inventory was estimated as 0.85. In the present study, social delinquencies, including robbery, aggression, SUDs, free sex, suicide, and home scape were explored. The scoring is based on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Higher scores indicate a greater tendency to social delinquencies [19]. In the current research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency reliability of this questionnaire was calculated to be 0.84.

The obtained data were analyzed in SPSS v. 22 using descriptive statistics (e.g. percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, tables, & charts). Besides, ANOVA and MANOVA were employed to investigate the main and interaction effects of prayer and gender on the total score as well as the dimensions of a tendency to social delinquencies, respectively. Once group membership (prayer or prayerless) \times gender (male or female) interactions were significant, interaction effects diagrams were used to better illustrate the achieved results.

Results

In total, 340 students participated in the present study. Of whom, 173 subjects were female and the rest were male. The Mean \pm SD age of the study sample was 21.35 \pm 2.27 years, ranging from 18 to 31 years. [Table 1](#) illustrates the demographic data of the research sample.

[Table 2](#) presents the mean and standard deviation values of the study groups concerning the total score as well as different gender-wise dimensions of a tendency to social delinquencies.

To prevent the error of multicollinearity, ANOVA was used once for the total score of the Social Delinquencies Inventory; MANOVA was applied for its subscales considering the Bonferroni correction ($\alpha/6$ adjusted $P=0.0083$). Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was not used because age was not correlated with the score of social delinquencies attitude ($r=0.057$, $P=307$).

As per [Table 3](#), ANOVA results in the form of a 2 \times 2 factorial design indicated that the main effect of the group 4% of the difference concerned gender. Meanwhile, the calculated F-value for the interaction effect of group membership \times gender was not significant for the total score of a tendency to social delinquencies ($F=0.387$, $\eta^2=0.001$, $P=0.534$). Accordingly, Levene's test results suggested that the error variance of the groups was equal for the dependent variable of the total score of attitude toward social delinquencies ($F=2.383$, $df_1=333$, $P=390$).

Before running the MANOVA, it was specified that the Box' M statistic was statistically significant (Box's $M=80.952$, $F=1.244$, $P<0.092$); these findings indicated that the covariance matrices of the dependent variables were equal at different levels of the independent variables.

In the following, Levene's test was performed for determining the error variances for the dependent variables. The collected results demonstrated that all subscales of the Social Delinquencies Inventory had an equal error

Table 1. The demographic data of the study sample (N=340)

Characteristics		No. (%)
Gender	Female	173(50.9)
	Male	167(49.1)
Educational Level	BA	296(87.1)
	MA	28(8.2)
	PhD	3(0.9)
	Not reported	13(3.8)
Prayer status	Prayerful	169(49.7)
	Prayerless	171(50.3)
College type	Literature faculty	95(27.9)
	Agriculture	37(10.9)
	Basic Science	59(17.6)
	Engineering	53(15.6)
	Physical Education	30(8.5)
	art and architecture	31(9.1)
	Not reported	35(10.3)

variance at different levels of the independent variables; thus, the Wilks' Lambda test (λ) was used to determine the significance of multivariate effects. The result of the Bartlett test of sphericity indicated sufficient correlation between the dependent variables ($\chi^2=464.046$, $df=20$, $P<0.0001$). Therefore, the analysis could be continued. Subsequently, the 6 subscales of the Social Delinquencies Inventory were simultaneously used to analyze the significant differences among the research groups (MANOVA). The Wilks' Lambda test (λ) results signified that the main multivariate effects for groups ($\lambda=0.816$, $F=12.350$, $\eta^2=0.184$, $P<0.0001$) as well as gender ($\lambda=0.888$, $F=6.886$, $\eta^2=0.112$, $P<0.0001$) ranged in the linear composition of the scores of the dependent variables, explaining 18% and 11% of the total variance, respectively. However, no significant difference was found for the interaction effect of group membership \times gender ($\lambda=0.974$, $F=1.439$, $\eta^2=0.026$, $P=0.199$).

Table 4 demonstrates the group effects; the overall significance of the MANOVA model, as well as the individual effect of each independent variable on different dimensions of social delinquencies in a 2×2 factorial design. Furthermore, with 6 dependent variables, the Bonferroni alpha level was calculated to determine the significance level ($\alpha/6$ adjusted $P=0.0083$).

As per the MANOVA results presented in **Table 4**, the main effect of group membership significantly impacted theft ($\eta^2=0.059$, $F=21.045$, $P<0.0001$), free sex relations ($\eta^2=0.109$, $F=40.878$, $P<0.0001$), suicide [$\eta^2=0.029$, $F=10.048$, $P=0.002$], and home escape ($\eta^2=0.129$, $F=49.368$, $P<0.0001$). These findings suggested that the prayerless group, compared to the prayerful group, reported a higher tendency toward robbery, free sex relations, suicide, and home escape. The main effect of gender was also significant on free sex relations ($\eta^2=0.044$, $F=15.30$, $P<0.0001$), and home escape ($\eta^2=0.053$, $F=18.529$, $P<0.0001$). The common mean of these two gender groups in **Table 2** suggested that the male group reported a higher tendency for free sex relations and home escape. Finally, the interaction effect of group membership \times gender was only significant on the aggression dimension ($\eta^2=0.019$, $F=6.311$, $P=0.0012$). In other words, except for aggression, there was no difference in the interaction effect of group membership \times gender in the other dimensions of social delinquencies. An interaction effect diagram was used to examine the main as well as the interaction effects of group membership \times gender; the results of which are presented in **Figure 1**.

According to **Figure 1** and **Table 2**, the interaction effect of group \times gender indicated that the mean scores

Table 2. The gender-wise descriptive statistics for different dimensions of social delinquencies attitude in the study groups

Variable	Gender	Prayer Status	Mean±SD	N
Robbery	Female	Prayerful	13.80±3.76	89
		Prayerless	16.15±4.69	82
		Total	14.92±4.38	171
	Male	Prayerful	15.85±4.34	80
		Prayerless	17.88±4.69	86
		Total	16.90±4.63	166
	Total	Prayerful	14.77±4.16	169
		Prayerless	17.03±4.76	168
		Total	15.90±4.60	337
Aggression	Female	Prayerful	17.15±4.48	89
		Prayerless	16.69±4.02	82
		Total	16.93±4.26	171
	Male	Prayerful	16.31±3.47	80
		Prayerless	18.08±4.19	86
		Total	17.23±3.95	166
	Total	Prayerful	16.76±4.05	169
		Prayerless	17.40±4.15	168
		Total	17.08±4.11	337
Substance abuse	Female	Prayerful	18.75±2.31	89
		Prayerless	19.07±2.43	82
		Total	18.91±2.37	171
	Male	Prayerful	18.46±2.90	80
		Prayerless	18.96±2.72	86
		Total	18.72±2.81	166
	Total	Prayerful	18.61±2.60	169
		Prayerless	19.02±2.58	168
		Total	18.82±2.59	337
Free sex relations	Female	Prayerful	13.94±5.07	89
		Prayerless	17.70±5.99	82
		Total	15.75±5.83	171
	Male	Prayerful	16.24±5.30	80
		Prayerless	20.05±5.35	86
		Total	18.21±5.64	166
	Total	Prayerful	15.03±5.29	169
		Prayerless	18.90±5.78	168
		Total	16.96±5.86	337

Variable	Gender	Prayer Status	Mean±SD	N
Suicide	Female	Prayerful	15.63±5.18	89
		Prayerless	17.68±5.56	82
		Total	16.61±5.45	171
	Male	Prayerful	15.82±5.52	80
		Prayerless	17.52±5.45	86
		Total	16.70±5.53	166
	Total	Prayerful	15.72±5.33	169
		Prayerless	17.60±5.49	168
		Total	16.66±5.48	337
Home escape	Female	Prayerful	12.49±3.86	89
		Prayerless	15.65±4.84	82
		Total	14.01±4.62	171
	Male	Prayerful	14.35±4.39	80
		Prayerless	17.94±4.53	86
		Total	16.21±4.80	166
	Total	Prayerful	13.37±4.21	169
		Prayerless	16.82±4.81	168
		Total	15.09±4.83	337

of aggression tendency were higher in the prayerless male group (Figure 1). These findings suggested that the prayer behavior is effective in correcting/inhibiting the tendency to robbery, free sex relations, suicide, and home escape. Furthermore, the interaction of prayer with gender, especially in males, can protect them from aggressive tendencies.

Discussion

The present study determined the role of prayer in reducing risk behaviors among the students of Guilan University. The relevant results revealed that the prayerless group was more prone to risk behaviors than the prayer-

ful group. Other research findings indicated that females tend to be less susceptible to social delinquencies than males, such as having free sex relations and home escape. Concerning interactive effects, the simultaneous effect of group membership and gender (the interaction of prayer & gender) was only significant on aggression. Accordingly, the mean scores of the favorable attitude towards aggression were higher in the non-prayer male group. In other words, the behavior of praying protected individuals on extremist attitudes towards aggression, especially in the examined praying male students. Specifically, at the subscale level, the prayerless subjects were more prone to robbery, free sex relations, suicide, and home escape than their prayerful counterparts. The

Table 3. ANOVA data on the gender-wise comparison of the total score of social delinquencies attitude between the study groups

Source	Dependent Variables	Mean Square	df	F	P	Partial Eta-squared
Groups	Social delinquencies	127116.65	1	47.64	0.0001	0.125
Gender	Social delinquencies	3413.12	1	12.78	0.0001	0.037
Gender × groups	Social delinquencies	103.27	1	0.387	0.534	0.001

Table 4. The gender-wise MANOVA data to compare different dimensions of social delinquency attitude between the study groups

Source	Dependent Variables	Mean Square	df	F	P	Partial Eta-squared
Groups	Robbery	403.81	1	21.045	0.0001	0.059
	Aggression	35.90	1	2.165	0.142	0.006
	Substance abuse	14.24	1	2.114	0.147	0.109
	Free sex relations	1205.72	1	40.878	0.0001	0.029
	Suicide	295.99	1	10.048	0.002	0.129
	Home escape	959.73	1	49.368	0.0001	0.045
	Gender	Robbery	301.96	1	15.73	0.0001
Aggression		6.16	1	0.372	0.542	0.001
Substance abuse		3.34	1	0.495	0.428	0.044
Free sex relations		451.30	1	15.30	0.0001	0.0001
Suicide		0.027	1	0.001	0.976	0.053
Home escape		360.20	1	18.529	0.0001	0.00
(Gender × groups)		Robbery	2.085	1	0.109	0.742
	Aggression	104.66	1	6.311	0.0012	0.00
	Substance abuse	0.698	1	0.104	0.748	0.00
	Free sex relations	0.044	1	0.001	0.969	0.00
	Suicide	2.65	1	0.090	0.764	0.00
	Home escape	3.85	1	0.198	0.657	0.001

finding was consistent with those of Wallace and Forman [14], Cook [10], Alcántara and Gone [20], Lawrence et al. [15, 21], Lester [22, 23], Mueller et al. [24], Shah and Chandia [25], Tetley [26], Jäckle and Wenzelburger [11], Koenig [13], Adamczyk and Pitt [27], Sinha et al. [12], and Chamrathirong and associates [16]. Wallace and Forman [14] found that religious youths performed less risky behaviors, such as carrying a weapon, getting involved in fights, drinking, and drunk driving. Cook [10] also noted that religion acts as a complete supportive factor against suicide. Understanding the relationship between spirituality, religion, and suicide is critical in assessing and treating at-risk populations.

Researchers suggested that spirituality can act as a shield against suicidal behavior [20]. The relationship between religiosity and suicide is complex [21]. Besides, religiosity plays a protective effect against suicidal

ideation [28]. Tetley [26] also found that religiosity was inversely related to suicidal ideation. Researchers also clarified that religion may not prevent suicidal ideation but prevents suicidal behavior and attempt [15, 21]. Religion has an inverse relationship with non-lethal suicidal behaviors (ideas & efforts) and a protective effect on them [22]. The rate of suicidal behaviors is lower in Muslim societies [23]. Mueller et al. [24] found that individuals who were more religious and spiritual had better health, longer life, better coping skills, a better quality of life, as well as less anxiety, depression, and suicide. Shah and Chandia [25] stated that individuals who were more loyal to Islam had lower suicide rates. There is ample evidence that religion helps individuals to better cope with life stresses, reduces the incidence of depression and substance abuse, promotes social support, and provides a source of hope and meaning in life. Suicide is

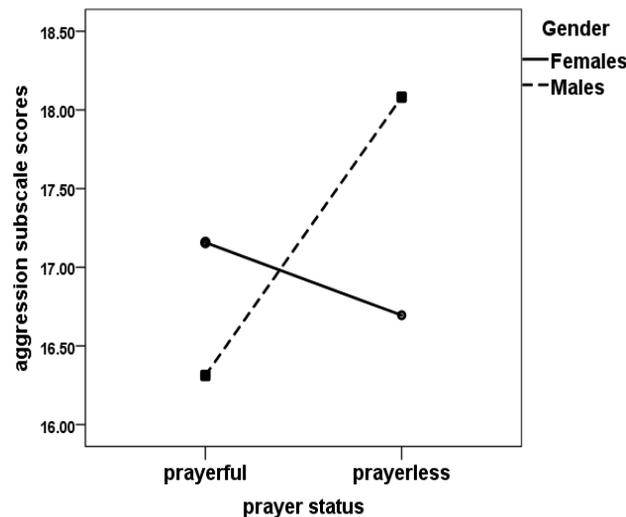


Figure 1. The gender-wise interaction effect of group on aggression

illegal and prohibited in numerous Islamic countries; as a result, it is less reported than in other countries [10].

Regarding free sex relations, religious populations have a more negative attitude toward homosexuality. Muslims have a highly negative attitude toward homosexuality [11]. According to Koenig [13], numerous studies indicated that religiosity was negatively related to extramarital sexual behaviors. She added that religiosity is reversely correlated with premarital sex, multiple sexual partners, risky sexual behaviors, and the risk of Sexually-Transmitted Diseases (STDs) (due to free sex relations). In Islam and some other religions, it is forbidden to have sex with the same or opposite sex, without marriage. Masturbation is also strongly forbidden in Islam. Religious beliefs have a profound effect on individuals' attitudes toward homosexuality. Life among Muslim nations reinforces the negative view of homosexuality, even if one is not religious. Muslims have a more negative attitude toward homosexuality, compared to Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists, and even atheists [27]. Sinha et al. [12] found a relationship between religiosity and reduced high-risk behaviors, such as smoking, drug abuse, and sexual behaviors, as well as depression. Research indicated that spirituality in the family can play a protective role in adolescent delinquency [16].

Other gender-wise research findings indicated that, regardless of prayer behavior, men were more prone to free sex relations and home scape. Female students were not inclined to commit social delinquencies, such as free sex relations or escaping from home. This finding was in line with those of Walsh [2], Zaw et al. [29], Petersen and Hyde [30], Oliver and Hyde [31], Romero-

Estudillo et al. [32], and Seth and colleagues [33]. Walsh [2] found that men with higher self-esteem have more sex and more sexual partners. Zaw et al. [29] explained that positive norms about premarital sex increased the risk of sexual behaviors in men. They also reported that high-risk sexual behaviors are prevalent among the youths in Myanmar. Peterson and Hyde [30] found that men had relatively more sexual experiences than women; they also had a more positive attitude toward sexual experiences. Men also had attitudes, i.e., more positive and reported more experiences than women in watching porn videos, masturbating, casual sex, and attitudes toward casual sex. Oliver and Hyde [31] noted that men reported higher rates of masturbation and casual sex than women. Likewise, Romero-Estudillo et al. [32] found that women prefer to engage in a lasting relationship with a commitment, i.e., accompanied by love and trust. Seth et al. [33] also found that women avoid situations that lead to sex, compared to men, and have less casual sexual partners due to STDs.

To explain this finding in the Iranian students, the role of satellite networks, access to porn channels, premature sexual puberty among boys, economic problems, and the inability of youth and students to marry can be mentioned. Using satellite networks has been prevalent among Iranian families for about 15 years. Most of these programs focus on sexuality issues, i.e., among the reasons for premature sexual puberty among Iranian boys. At present, premature sexual maturity in Iranian boys has reached the age of 9 to 10 years. Additionally, the satisfaction of sexual desire before marriage, whether in the form of masturbation or heterosexuality, or homosexuality, is canonically and legally forbidden (masturbation although forbidden religiously has no pros-

ecution). Moreover, the economic situation in Iran is hard enough and young Iranians fail to afford marriage services (the average age of marriage for Iranian men is close to 30 years); thus, it is difficult for them to accept the economic responsibility of marriage, in which case, some youth prefer to satisfy their sexual needs in the form of free sex or masturbation.

Recently, the phenomenon of white marriage has also been observed in Iran. Although there are no official statistics on this phenomenon in Iran; the reports of clinical referrals in academic counseling centers and classroom conversations indicate such a phenomenon among some students. Some youth and students prefer to satisfy their sexual needs in this way. Maybe this is why home escape or distancing from family (or moving away from the family environment to attend universities far from where the family resides & living in dormitories can also be an example) is also among the young people's options to emancipate from the pressure of their families, norms, and laws. This is because families are also religiously or traditionally opposed to free sex or masturbation. Young individuals (mostly boys) prefer to study in distant cities to overcome this generation gap. In situations where there is no family supervision, it is easier for them to engage in high-risk behaviors (e.g. drinking alcohol, using psychotropic substances, watching porn videos, & having free sex).

The obtained data indicated that the interaction effect of group membership by gender was only significant regarding aggression; thus, it suggested that the mean scores of the tendency to aggression were higher in the prayerless students. In other words, the prayer behavior protected the prayerful group, especially on aggression attitudes. The finding was in line with those of Leach et al. [34], Watkins [35], Huesmann et al. [36], Shorey et al. [37], Sævarsdóttir [38], and Koenig [13]. Leach et al. [34] documented that individuals with an inner religious orientation exhibited less aggressive behaviors. Watkins [35] noted an inverse relationship between religiousness and aggressive behaviors; religious individuals have accepted ethical values and learned to behave responsibly and care for others. Individuals who are skeptical of religious beliefs also receive higher scores on aggression. Shorey et al. [37], in line with the present study, found an inverse relationship between spirituality, and verbal and physical aggression in men living in SUDs treatment centers.

In Iran, also, aggression is not culturally approved for women. Since childhood, girls are forbidden to express anger and other negative emotions, and if they do, they are no longer known as good-behaving girls, while boys will not be blamed for expressing negative emotions. For example,

if a boy insults someone (verbal aggression), parents are more comfortable with him than a girl. Sævarsdóttir's [38] study also revealed that boys are more aggressive than girls. Girls learn to control anger and aggression. Anger management is also a learned behavior. Besides the role of attitudes and cognitions on controlling anger and aggression is inevitable. Individuals who pray because of their religious belief in God, the Resurrection, and the Day of Judgment, are therefore more likely to attempt not to be aggressive and control anger. This is because Islamic religious teachings emphasize that anger and aggression towards others will be punished in the Hereafter. There are numerous verses and traditions about anger control; among the most important of which are verse 134 of Surat al-Imran ("for those who curb their anger and those who forgive people. And Allah loves the charitable"); verse 29 of Surat al-Fath ("Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who are with him are harsh against the unbelievers but merciful to one another"). In this regard, Koenig [13] concluded that religiosity can reduce feelings of guilt, anger, and aggression; there is a reverse relationship between religiosity, delinquency, and aggression.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study results emphasized the protective role of prayer behavior on the tendency to social delinquencies; we also observed that prayerless students reported a higher tendency toward aggression. Therefore, it is recommended to focus on strengthening religious behaviors to prevent or reduce aggressive behaviors and other social delinquencies, especially in males.

This study was associated with all limitations of a retrospective or ex post facto design. Additionally, future research should address committing crimes and unlawful acts (i.e., more objective than the scores on a questionnaire) rather than assessing the tendency to social delinquencies by young individuals.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

To observe ethical considerations, the study participants were explained that they could withdraw from the study at any stage of the research; an informed consent form was obtained from the study participants and the students were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information. All study procedures were conducted per the ethical standards outlined in the Helsinki Declaration [39].

Funding

This article is based on a research grant (approved on 23 October 2018) and funded by the Deputy of Cultural and Social Affairs at the University of Guilan.

Authors' contributions

Conceptualization, data collection and supervision: Hamid Qorbanpoor Lafmejani; Amir Qorbanpoor Lafmejani; Methodology and data analysis: Sajjad Rezaei; Investigation, writing original draft, and writing – review & editing: All authors; Funding acquisition and resources: Amir Qorbanpoor Lafmejani.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgments

The authors want to thank the the Deputy of Cultural and Social Affairs at the University of Guilan.

References

- [1] Bazzazian S, Rajaei Y, Afsari L. [The inhibitor role of religious beliefs and family belonging in tendency towards smoking, addictive substance and alcohol consumption (Persian)]. *J Fam Psychol*. 2014; 1(1):19-28. <http://ijfp.ir/article-1-51-fa.html>
- [2] Walsh A. Self-esteem and sexual behavior: Exploring gender differences. *Sex Roles*. 1991; 25(7-8):441-50. [DOI:10.1007/BF00292533]
- [3] Ahmadi SA. [Psychology of adolescents and youth: Personality, behavior, education, occupation, delinquency and addiction (Persian)]. Tehran: Termeh, Mashal Publication; 1993.
- [4] Sotoudeh H. [Social pathology (Persian)]. 23rd ed. Tehran: Avaye Noor; 2015. <http://opac.nlai.ir/opac-prod/bibliographic/2104613>
- [5] Nouri Ghasem Abadi R, Peyrovi H. [Tips for adjusting to student life (Persian)]. 5th ed. Tehran: Tehran University Counseling Center; 2012. <http://opac.nlai.ir/opac-prod/bibliographic/818702>
- [6] Nouri Ghasemabadi R. [Family and student (Persian)]. Tehran: University of Tehran Student Counseling Center Publication; 2015.
- [7] Asghari F, Kurdmirza EO, Ahmadi L. [The relationship between religious attitudes, locus of control and tendency to substance abuse in university students (Persian)]. *Res Addict*. 2013; 7(25):103-12. <http://etiadjpajohi.ir/article-1-306-en.html>
- [8] Davoodvandi F, Shokri O. [The strategies towards positive and negative religious cope: Psychoanalysis of the scale of RCOPE among Iranian students (Persian)]. *Ravanshenasi va Din*. 2015; 8(1):41-62. <http://ravanshenasi.nashriyat.ir/node/295>
- [9] Jalilean Kaseb F, Rashidi AR, Hojat Khah M. [The role of religious orientation, self-concept and self-efficacy in predicting tendency to addiction with mediation by psychological hardness in male students (Persian)]. *Res Addict*. 2017; 10(40):145-60. <http://etiadjpajohi.ir/article-1-1112-en.html>
- [10] Cook CCH. Suicide and religion. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2014; 204(4):254-5. [DOI:10.1192/bjp.bp.113.136069] [PMID]
- [11] Jäckle S, Wenzelburger G. Religion, religiosity, and the attitudes toward homosexuality-A multilevel analysis of 79 countries. *J Homosex*. 2015; 62(2):207-41. [DOI:10.1080/00918369.2014.969071] [PMID]
- [12] Sinha JW, Cnaan RA, Gelles RJ. Adolescent risk behaviors and religion: Findings from a national study. *J Adolesc*. 2007; 30(2):231-49. [DOI:10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.02.005] [PMID]
- [13] Koenig HG. Religion and medicine II: Religion, mental health, and related behaviors. *Int J Psychiatry Med*. 2001; 31(1):97-109. [DOI:10.2190/BK1B-18TR-X1NN-36GG] [PMID]
- [14] Wallace Jr JM, Forman TA. Religion's role in promoting health and reducing risk among American youth. *Health Educ Behav*. 1998; 25(6):721-41. [DOI:10.1177/109019819802500604] [PMID]
- [15] Lawrence RE, Brent D, Mann JJ, Burke AK, Grunebaum MF, Galfalvy HC, Oquendo MA. Religion as a risk factor for suicide attempt and suicide ideation among depressed patients. *J Nerv Ment Dis*. 2016; 204(11):845-50. [DOI:10.1097/NMD.0000000000000484] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [16] Chamratrithong A, Miller BA, Byrnes HF, Rhucharoenpornpanich O, Cupp PK, Rosati MJ, et al. Intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices and the reduction of adolescent delinquency in urban Thailand. *J Adolesc*. 2013; 36(1):79-89. [DOI:10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.09.011] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [17] Faul F, Erdfelder E, Lang AG, Buchner A. G* Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behav Res Methods*. 2007; 39(2):175-91. [DOI:10.3758/BF03193146] [PMID]
- [18] Aghaei AA, Taimurtash H. [The survey of relationship and process between social deviance and community security (Persian)]. *Daneshnameh*. 2010; 3(4):3-22. https://daneshnameh.srbiau.ac.ir/article_4013.html
- [19] Bagherikerachi A, Rezaeifard A, Mehrabi AH. [Students awareness about puberty changes and their relationship with attitude towards social harm (Persian)]. *Q J Soc Work*. 2018; 7(3):61-8. <http://socialworkmag.ir/article-1-445-en.html>
- [20] Alcántara C, Gone JP. Reviewing suicide in Native American communities: Situating risk and protective factors within a transactional-ecological framework. *Death Stud*. 2007; 31(5):457-77. [DOI:10.1080/07481180701244587] [PMID]
- [21] Lawrence RE, Oquendo MA, Stanley B. Religion and suicide risk: A systematic review. *Arch Suicide Res*. 2016; 20(1):1-21. [DOI:10.1080/13811118.2015.1004494] [PMID] [PMCID]

- [22] Lester D. Does religiosity predict suicidal behavior? *Religions*. 2017; 8(11):238. [DOI:10.3390/rel8110238]
- [23] Lester D. Suicide and Islam. *Arch Suicide Res*. 2006; 10(1):77-97. [DOI:10.1080/13811110500318489] [PMID]
- [24] Mueller PS, Plevak DJ, Rummans TA. Religious involvement, spirituality, and medicine: Implications for clinical practice. *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2001; 76(12):1225-35. [DOI:10.4065/76.12.1225] [PMID]
- [25] Shah A, Chandia M. The relationship between suicide and Islam: A cross-national study. *J Inj Violence Res*. 2010; 2(2):93-7. [DOI:10.5249/jivr.v2i2.60] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [26] Tetley GE. Exploring the role of religiosity on suicidal ideation: A study among a population-based sample of adolescents in the United States [PhD. dissertation]. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University; 2014. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/2393/>
- [27] Adamczyk A, Pitt C. Shaping attitudes about homosexuality: The role of religion and cultural context. *Soc Sci Res*. 2009; 38(2):338-51. [DOI:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2009.01.002] [PMID]
- [28] Hoffman S, Marsiglia FF. The impact of religiosity on suicidal ideation among youth in central Mexico. *J Relig Health*. 2014; 53(1):255-66. [DOI:10.1007/s10943-012-9654-1] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [29] Zaw PPT, Liabsuetrakul T, McNeil E, Htay TT. Gender differences in exposure to SRH information and risky sexual debut among poor Myanmar youths. *BMC Public Health*. 2013; 13:1122. [DOI:10.1186/1471-2458-13-1122] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [30] Petersen JL, Hyde JS. A meta-analytic review of research on gender differences in sexuality, 1993-2007. *Psychol Bull*. 2010; 136(1):21-38. [DOI:10.1037/a0017504] [PMID]
- [31] Oliver MB, Hyde JS. Gender differences in sexuality: A meta-analysis. *Psychol Bull*. 1993; 114(1):29-51. [DOI:10.1037/0033-2909.114.1.29] [PMID]
- [32] Romero-Estudillo E, González-Jiménez E, Mesa-Franco MC, García-García I. Gender-based differences in the high-risk sexual behaviours of young people aged 15-29 in Melilla (Spain): A cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*. 2014; 14:745. [DOI:10.1186/1471-2458-14-745] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [33] Seth P, Lang DL, DiClemente RJ, Braxton ND, Crosby RA, Brown LK, et al. Gender differences in sexual risk behaviours and sexually transmissible infections among adolescents in mental health treatment. *Sex Health*. 2012; 9(3):240-6. [DOI:10.1071/SH10098] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [34] Leach MM, Berman ME, Eubanks L. Religious activities, religious orientation, and aggressive behavior. *J Sci Study Relig*. 2008; 47(2):311-9. [DOI:10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00409.x]
- [35] Watkins SJ. Religiosity and aggression in college students [MA. thesis]. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University; 2003. <http://dc.etsu.edu/etd/799>
- [36] Huesmann LR, Dubow EF, Boxer P. The effect of religious participation on aggression over one's lifetime and across generations. In: Forgas JP, Kruglanski AW, Williams KD, editors. *The psychology of social conflict and aggression*. London: Psychology Press; 2011. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2011-07931-019>
- [37] Shorey RC, Elmquist JA, Anderson S, Stuart GL. The relationship between spirituality and aggression in a sample of men in residential substance use treatment. *Int J Ment Health Addict*. 2016; 14(1):23-30. [DOI:10.1007/s11469-015-9565-y] [PMID] [PMCID]
- [38] Sævarsdóttir ÍE. Aggression among adolescents: The role of religiosity, spirituality and parental and peer religion [BSc. thesis]. Reykjavík: Reykjavik University; 2018. <https://skemman.is/handle/1946/30686>
- [39] World Medical Association. World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. *JAMA*. 2013; 310(20):2191-4. [DOI:10.1001/jama.2013.281053] [PMID]

This Page Intentionally Left Blank
