

# Comparison of life expectancy and feeling of loneliness in Motakef and Non-Motakef University students

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## Abstract

The study compared life expectancy and feeling of loneliness among motakef and non-motakef students. This research employed a causal-comparative design, which was carried out during the second semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. The research instruments were Russell's loneliness and Snyder's life expectancy questionnaires. 100 subjects were selected for the experimental group (25 males and 25 females) and the control group (25 females and 25 males). Causal-comparative research design was applied and for data analysis, in addition to the descriptive statistics method, the Manova method was also used. The result findings showed that there is a significant difference between motakef and non-motakef students in terms of life expectancy and loneliness. The findings of the research revealed that participating in retreats and spiritual ceremonies improves the mental health of a person.

**Key words:** Etekaf, Life Expectancy, Loneliness

## Introduction

Religion and spirituality have many components that are potentially related to mental health, including participation in religious services, personal religious activities (for example, praying and reading scriptures), feeling connected or related to God or a Higher power, religious beliefs and religious confrontation (Rafiee, 2010). In addition, religion and spirituality may promote mental health through healthy lifestyles and behaviors and promoting social support. Some authors distinguish religion from spirituality by claiming that religion is more organized, while spirituality is more related

to a person's relationship with God or a higher power (Cohen and Koenig, 2004).

By predicting a type of worship called "Etekaf" which is actually a kind of solitude and introspection, Islam has thought of a solution to keep people away and prevent the scourge of God's forgetfulness and self-forgetfulness, which shows that the spirit of religious teachings is an invitation to gathering and community, man also needs programmes that connect him with his inner self. The secret of this is clear: usually continuous presence in the field of society and practical effort gradually strengthens the spirit of pragmatism in a person. The appearance of this spirit may make a person empty from the inside until he does not think

about anything other than action. A practical person does not even get a chance to properly evaluate the results of his work and efforts. Therefore, Etekef is a suitable situation for a person to explore his motivations and spirits and try to improve them. In addition to being soothing and freeing a person from mental pressures, prayer also gives a person spiritual development. After praying, the worshiper feels that he can deal with his problem more easily, and even if his problem is not solved, his tolerance and ability increase (Mirghafouri, Abuei, Darezereshki, 2018).

Despite the progress of scientific advancements and the use of new treatment methods, psychology has been unable to treat some diseases. For example, in the case of an extremely desperate person, all techniques and methods lose their effect, while religion can maintain its effectiveness in this case (Propest, 1988). Increasing life expectancy is defined as a positive motivational state that is based on successful sensory coordination, agent of thought and ways to reach the goal (Snyder, Irving, and Anderson, 1991).

Sligman (2002) points out that during the 20th century, psychological science mainly paid attention to mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, despair and hopelessness and neglected positive human emotions. In his opinion, man has a positive half and a negative half, and in addition to vulnerabilities, attention should also be paid to abilities and talents and to the positive aspects of human existence. In the axis of this positive half, there is also hope for the future. A person needs hope. Therefore, it is necessary to discover the openings of hope. For this purpose, Sligman turns to religion and for the first time opens the chapter of virtues in the science of psychology. He puts an end to the debate between psychology and religion during the 20th century and puts these two together. He considers the secret of living happily to be satisfaction with the past and hope for the future. Despair and disappointment lead to harmful personal and social effects and slows movement and destroys the vitality of the body (Shargawi, 1983). Sligman (2002) states that people who do religious things are happier than other people.

Allport (1954; quoted by Sadouqi, 2007) emphasizes that religious values are more comprehensive than other value categories and respond to human needs. Religion changes the face of the world from the point of view of a religious person and changes his perception of himself, creation and surrounding events. A religious person sees himself under God's all-round support and grace, thus giving him a sense of peace and deep spiritual joy. He considers himself obliged to endure hardships that cannot be justified by the power of reason with faith. Such a person does not feel hopeless and lonely due to the adversities and failures of life, because he considers God as his protector (Krause, 2003). Hope is also related to faith. So that faith is not viable without hope, and the basis of hope is nothing but faith (Snyder, 1995).

On the other hand, humans as social creatures have lived in groups since birth and performed most of their actions such as work and worship in groups (Shafi Abadi & Naseri, 2009). Hojat, (1983) points out that all human beings

are afraid of being alone. Loneliness includes worry, feelings of rejection, alienation, and the inability to create, maintain, and continue appropriate relationships. People who feel lonely, sometimes their mental experiences become so intense that they can hardly think about anything (Booth, 2000). In order to achieve peace and inner security, it is necessary for a person to feel that he always has someone who can ask for help and be supported by him when needed and with confidence without fear of rejection. This assurance causes security and self-confidence, and people who have such a reliable source feel less insecure (Eslaminasab, 1994). Since a person's relationship with God is a safe relationship without fear of rejection, a person will never feel alone with God.

Many scientific findings have emphasized the role of religion as one of the factors in providing mental and physical health, such as the research conducted by Koenig and found that when praying, The release of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine (hormones that are produced in the adrenal gland in response to stress) is stopped and the body's defense system is strengthened, which makes the person calm down (Koenig, 2009; quoted by Rafiee, 2011), or the research done by Yang and Mao (2007) and found that moving away from religion and breaking the relationship with God and wrong thoughts can cause and aggravate mental disorders in a person (Mousavi Lotfi, Gholmarzai, Raisi, Hazratmanesh, 2010), it can be said that the impact of religious values and beliefs on people's mental health and well-being has been investigated in various researches.

The majority of studies have reported statistically significant relationships between religious participation and better mental health, more social support, or less drug abuse (Cohen and Koenig, 2004). Neeleman, Halpern, Leon and Lewis (1997), in a large cross-cultural study they conducted, found that the more religious people are, the less likely they are to commit suicide. Of the 15 studies reviewed in the field of the relationship between religious beliefs, hope or optimism, 12 studies reported a significant positive relationship and two studies did not include any relationship. No study showed that religious people were less optimistic than non-religious people (Koenig, 2001).

In a research conducted by Fatemi, Rezaei, Givari, Hoseini (2006) regarding the effect of prayer on the spiritual health of cancer patients, the results of their findings showed that there is a significant relationship between prayer and the spiritual health of patients. When spiritual health is seriously compromised, a person may experience mental disorders, such as feeling lonely, depressed, and losing meaning in life (O'brien, 1998, cited in the same). Patients whose spiritual health is strengthened can effectively adapt to their illness and even pass the last stages of their illness well (Lin, Bauer, 2003, cited in the same).

In a research conducted by Myers (2000) under the title Friendships and Beliefs of Happy People, the results showed that religious belief has an effect on reducing feelings of loneliness and increasing hope. Considering the

importance of religion in mental health and the role of reducing the feeling of loneliness and life expectancy in mental health and considering that Etekaf provides conditions for people with spiritual baggage and firm belief, faith and hope continue their lives and prepare themselves against terrible events and jihad in the way of God and always see themselves in the presence of God, the question arises whether Etekaf which is a mixture of prayer, supplication, prayer, fasting and being alone with God, does it have an effect on the feeling of loneliness and hope for life in the motakef students of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz? And is there a difference between the motakef students and others who did not participate in the Etekaf?

## Research Methodology

The study adopted descriptive design with a causal-comparative research. In this method, a group that has a special characteristic (experiment) is compared with a group that does not have that characteristic (control). Based on this plan, the life expectancy and feeling of loneliness have been compared in the motakef and non-motakef students.

### Sampling Method

One hundred (100) students with between 18 to 40 years were randomly selected. Selection method was convenience. The statistical population of this research was the students of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz in the 2020-2021 academic session. 50 students who had participated in the Etekaf and 50 students who had not participated in the Etekaf were selected from among them using random sampling. The number of males and females in the two groups was similar. The average age of the sample was 23.6 and its standard deviation was 3.1. Russell's loneliness and Snyder's life expectancy questionnaires were given to the people of the control group and the experimental group, and finally the completed questionnaires were analyzed.

### Research Instruments

- i. The Russell Loneliness Questionnaire (UCLA): It was created by Russell, Peplau and Curtona (1980), which includes 20 questions with four choices, 10 negative sentences and 10 positive sentences. In this questionnaire, it is never (score: 1), rarely (score: 2), sometimes (score: 3) and always (score: 4), but some questions in the questionnaire are scored in reverse. The range of scores is between 20 (minimum) and 80 (maximum). Therefore, the average score is 50. A score higher than the average indicates a greater intensity of loneliness. The reliability of this test was reported to be 0.78 in the new revised version (Russell, Peplau and Curtona, 1980). The reliability of the test by the test-retest method by Russell,

Peplau and Ferguson (1978, cited by Russell et al., 1980) was reported 0.89. This scale was translated by Shokrkon and Mirdrikvand (2007) and was used after preliminary implementation and corrections (cited by Asgari, Heydari, Naderi, Marashian, Naqipour, and Zamiri, 2008). The reliability of this questionnaire in this research was 0.92.

- ii. Snyder's Life Expectancy Questionnaire: This questionnaire was created in 1991 by Snyder and et al. to measure hope, which has 12 statements and is implemented as a self-assessment. Among these phrases, 4 phrases are used to measure operative thinking, 4 phrases are used to measure strategic thinking, and 4 are deviant phrases. It takes 2 to 5 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Questions 2, 9, 10, 12 are related to factor thinking, questions 1, 4, 6, 8 are related to strategic thinking, and questions 3, 5, 7, 11 are related to deviant expressions. A score of 4 is given to the completely correct option, 3 to some extent, 2 to a certain extent, and 1 to the completely incorrect option. Since deviant expressions, i.e. 4 questions out of 12 questions are not given a score, the range of changes of this questionnaire is between 8 and 32, and a higher score indicates more hope. Many researches support the reliability and validity of this questionnaire as a hope measurement scale. In a study, the total internal consistency was 0.74 to 0.84 and the test-retest reliability was 0.80 (Snyder, 1995). In this research, the reliability of the life expectancy questionnaire was 0.73.

## Results

The findings related to descriptive statistics and descriptive analysis are presented in the following tables.

**Table 1:** Number, mean and standard deviation of dependent variables

Statistical Indexes			Variables	Groups
Standard Deviation	Mean	Number		
1/14	34/04	50	Loneliness	Motakef
0/14	26/8	50	Life Expectancy	
1/14	49/5	50	Loneliness	Non-Motakef
0/41	21/9	50	Life Expectancy	

**Table 2:** The results of MANOVA on the average scores of the subjects of the two groups in the variables of life expectancy and loneliness

Significance Level	F	Error df	Hypothesis df	Amount	Tests
0/000	65/074	95/000	2/000	0/578	Pillai's Trace
0/000	65/074	95/000	2/000	0/422	Wilks' Lambda
0/000	65/074	95/000	2/000	1/370	Hotelling's Trace
0/000	65/074	95/000	2/000	1/370	Roy's Largest Root

**Table 3:** The results of MANOVA in the text on the average scores of life expectancy and loneliness

Significance Level	F	Mean Square	df	Sum of Squares	Variable
0/000	70/640	610/090	1	610/090	Life Expectancy
0/000	91/636	5990/760	1	5990/760	Loneliness

From Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of the subjects in the variable of loneliness for motakef students are respectively 34.04 and 1.14, the mean and standard deviation of the subjects in the variable of life expectancy for motakef students. They are respectively: 26.8 and 0.41, the mean and standard deviation of the subjects in the loneliness variable for non-motakef students are

respectively: 49.5 and 1.14 as well as the mean and standard deviation of the subjects in the variable of life expectancy for non-motakef students are respectively: 21.9 and 0.41. The comparison of motakef students and non-motakef student's groups in statistical indicators shows that the average scores of feeling Loneliness of motakef students is lower than non-motakef students and their

average life expectancy scores are higher than non-motakef students.

Based on the contents of Table 2, the difference between motakef students and non-motakef students in the four tests of Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace and Roy's Largest Root are significant in terms of life expectancy and loneliness at the 0.05 level.

Based on the contents of Table 3, it can be seen that the value of F related to life expectancy is 70.640 and significant ( $P < 0.000$ ). Therefore, there is a significant difference between the two groups in terms of life expectancy. Also, as can be seen in Table 3, the F value related to the loneliness variable is equal to 91.636 and significant ( $P < 0.000$ ). Based on this, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the two groups in terms of loneliness.

## Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of Etekef on the feeling of loneliness and life expectancy of students. Regarding the effect of Etekef on life expectancy and feeling of loneliness among motakef students and non-motakef students, the difference between the two groups was significant. The result that prayer and religion, which can be seen in the spiritual ritual of retreat, causes positive changes in life expectancy and feelings of loneliness, is in line with the research of Yang and Mao (2007), Neelman, Halpern, Leon and Lewes (1997), Rafiee (2011), Fatemi, Rezaei, Givari, Hoseini (2006) and Myers (2000) who have shown the effect of prayer and religion on life expectancy and loneliness.

It seems that religious beliefs and behaviors have a positive effect on making life meaningful. Behaviors such as trust in God, worship, pilgrimage, Etekef, etc. can cause hope and a positive attitude, peace, hope for God's help in difficult life situations, a feeling of happiness and a feeling of belonging to a high source in a person (Yang and Mao, 2007), on the other hand, the factors that cause these feelings can create a condition in a person that when he feels alone, he is confident that there is a wonderful source in the world of creation that can help him whenever who wants to rely on him and ask him for help.

The result of this research shows that according to the spiritual dimension of human beings and investment to strengthen this human dimension, it is possible to get rid of many mental and physical diseases, as the results of the mentioned researches have shown. According to the Islamic ideology, prayer and Etekef are the remembrance of God and it calms the hearts, and the existing attitudes in maintaining these duties somehow help in maintaining mental health and increasing hope for life and reducing People's feelings of loneliness are effective.

God, worship, gathering in a group and asking for help from a first being can cause inner peace of a person by creating hope and encouraging positive attitudes. Believing that there is a God, who controls the situations and watches over the worshippers, greatly reduces the anxiety related to

the situation. So that most believers describe their relationship with God as a relationship with a very close friend and they believe that the effect of uncontrollable situations can be controlled by relying on God. On the other hand, it seems that having meaning and purpose in life, feeling of belonging to a great source, hoping for God's help in difficult life situations, having social support, spiritual support, etc. are all sources by which religious people, always consider themselves under the protection of a great patron and never see themselves alone and have a hopeful view of the future, and in this way, they are ready to endure any stressful events in life.

Also, by creating a relationship with God and praying, man can get rid of internal and external troubles, and as a result, he does not suffer from mental complications, and through prayer and prayer, he increases his limited strength by appealing to an unlimited source such as the power of God. When he prays, he connects himself to the endless driving force that connects creation and the whole universe, and remembering problems and recounting them is not only effective in emotional states, but also has an effect on physical qualities and causes recovery. The feeling that a person can express his desires, shortcomings and restlessness to the God Almighty through prayer brings peace.

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