

Journey of the Soul: Exploring Female Subjective Experiences Post-Umrah Pilgrimage

*Mishal Fatima¹

¹Department of Clinical Psychology, Shifa Tameer e Millat University, Pakistan

*Corresponding email: treasury.fatima@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The manuscript investigates the significant influence of the Umrah journey on the psychological well-being of the Muslim faithful. It analyzes the range of emotions pilgrims undergo, from the anxiety of planning to the profound spiritual awakening that they experience through Mecca's sacred rites. The research highlights the opportunities for self-improvement via the meaningful rituals of Tawaf and Sa'i, as well as the communal solidarity and connection cultivated through collective religious practices. This qualitative study delves into the subjective experiences of ten female participants, aged 25 to 35, following their completion of the Umrah pilgrimage. Utilizing snowball sampling techniques, participants were approached and interviewed face-to-face. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five key themes: Spiritual Renewal, Emotional Transformations, Sense of Community, Reflective Insights, and Integration into Daily Life. The findings underscore the significant impact of Umrah on participants' spiritual, emotional, and social well-being, highlighting the transformative potential of religious pilgrimages and providing valuable insights for individuals navigating their spiritual journeys.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted	19	02	2024
Received	04	05	2024
Accepted	21	10	2024
Published	04	11	2024

KEYWORDS

Subjective Experiences;
Ummrah; Spiritual Renewal;
Sense of Community;
Reflective Insights

INTRODUCTION

The journey to Mecca, known as Umrah, holds immense significance for millions of Muslims globally, extending beyond religious devotion to encompass a spiritual odyssey that transcends borders and cultures, enriching believers' connection with their faith and inner selves (Koenig, 2018; Zarina et al., 2019). Despite considerable attention paid to its physical and spiritual dimensions, the impact of Umrah pilgrimage on mental health remains an area ripe for exploration. While studies have extensively examined the psychological effects of religious practices, including pilgrimage experiences, understanding the specific influence of Umrah on mental well-being demands deeper scrutiny to grasp its nuanced nature and potential implications (Smith, 2018; Aziz & Sadique, 2020).

For many pilgrims, embarking on the journey to Mecca represents a pivotal life event characterized by a spectrum of emotions—from anticipation and excitement to apprehension and anxiety. The preparatory phase, involving meticulous planning, financial arrangements, and logistical considerations, often engenders stress and apprehension among pilgrims. Moreover, the journey itself, replete with physical demands, crowded spaces, and unfamiliar surroundings, may heighten feelings of discomfort, particularly for individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions (Ahmed & Hamid, 2021).

Nevertheless, amid these challenges, Umrah pilgrimage offers a unique opportunity for spiritual rejuvenation, self-reflection, and communion with the divine. Pilgrims frequently describe experiencing profound peace, fulfillment, and spiritual enlightenment during their time in Mecca, engaging in acts of worship, supplication, and introspection (Ghazzali & Nawawi, 2018). The collective participation in rituals alongside millions of fellow believers fosters a sense of unity, solidarity, and communal belonging, with profound implications for mental well-being (Kabir et al., 2022).

Additionally, the rituals associated with Umrah, such as Tawaf (circumambulation of the Kaaba) and Sa'i (walking between the hills of Safa and Marwa), carry deep symbolism and spiritual significance, providing pilgrims with a framework for personal growth and transformation. These sacred practices serve as grounding anchors amidst the whirlwind of emotions and experiences, offering pilgrims purpose, direction, and transcendence (Johnstone, 2019). Interactions with diverse individuals from varied backgrounds, cultures, and languages foster a sense of global community and interfaith solidarity, help to deal with feelings of isolation and loneliness—common contributors to improve the poor mental health (Haque & Aboul-Enein, 2020). Furthermore, the social dimension of Umrah pilgrimage plays a pivotal role in shaping mental health outcomes.

Moreover, the post-pilgrimage phase presents its own array of challenges and opportunities. Returning to everyday life after the profound Umrah experience may evoke a sense of dissonance and readjustment, as pilgrims integrate spiritual insights into their routines. Support from family, community, and religious leaders during this transition mitigates post-pilgrimage blues, facilitating smoother reintegration (Ali et al., 2021).

While quantitative inquiries have furnished valuable data concerning the demographics and behavioral aspects of Umrah pilgrims, they frequently overlook the multifaceted subjective experiences intertwined with this pilgrimage. By employing qualitative methodologies such as interviews, this investigation endeavors to plumb the depths of individuals' lived experiences, emotions, and reflections post-Umrah. It can offer invaluable insights into the emotional, psychological, and spiritual ramifications of Umrah on individuals' lives. Such elucidation can contribute to a deeper comprehension of the transformative potential inherent in religious pilgrimages, offer insights to shape religious tourism practices, and provide guidance for individuals navigating their spiritual pathways.

METHODS

The qualitative research design was used to explore the deep understanding about the subjective psychological and emotional experiences of female's adult who have performed Ummrah. This study recruited ten female participants aged between 25 and 35, who had recently finalized the Umrah pilgrimage. Including women's voices in religious and spiritual studies fosters inclusivity and ensures their experiences are recognized and valued. Moreover, the lack of literature on this demographic underscores the importance of exploring the unique perspectives of women, especially those aged 25 to 35, in their spiritual journeys and practices such as Umrah. Snowball sampling served as the method for participant selection, initiating with initial participants who were approached and subsequently requested to refer other eligible individuals. Participants for this study were recruited via community outreach and social media flyers, focusing on women who had recently completed the Umrah

pilgrimage. Eligibility criteria required participants to have returned from Umrah within the past six months to ensure their experiences were current and relevant. Ethical approval was secured from the university's Institutional Ethical Committee, ensuring adherence to ethical standards for research with human subjects. This included obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and providing the right to withdraw from the study at any time, thus ensuring the protection and respect of all participants.

Upon establishing initial contact, arrangements were made for interview sessions, considering the convenience of the participants. Each participant was individually contacted, and a mutually agreed upon date and time for the interview were arranged. Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant, highlighting their voluntary involvement in the study and their right to withdraw at any point without repercussion. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained throughout the study. Participants were assured that their responses would be anonymized and solely utilized for research purposes. They were also briefed on the measures implemented to safeguard the security and confidentiality of their personal information. Semi-structured interviews was used as the primary mode of data collection. An interview guide was formulated based on pertinent literature examples of few questions are "Could you describe your Umrah experience what would it be? Why?", "What emotions did you experience during and immediately after completing the pilgrimage?", "What were your expectations before embarking on the pilgrimage?" and "Can you walk me through your experience of performing Tawaf and Sa'i? How did you feel during these rituals? " etc. The guide encompassed open-ended inquiries aimed at eliciting comprehensive narratives of the participants' experiences subsequent to completing Umrah. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure precise documentation of their responses. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, allowing ample time for participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences in detail.

Data analysis

After initially reviewing the data, we conducted thematic analysis to uncover the key themes arising from participants' experiences after completing Umrah. This method involved systematically examining the interview transcripts to pinpoint recurring patterns, ideas, and meanings. The recorded interviews were transcribed to extract the initial coding. These initial codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories based on their conceptual similarities. By repeatedly reviewing and comparing coded segments across all transcripts, we began to identify overarching themes that captured common aspects of participants' experiences. The themes identified, such as Spiritual Renewal, Emotional Transformations, Sense of Community, Reflective Insights, and Integration into Daily Life, were determined through careful consideration of the coded data and their alignment with our research goals. Each theme represented a distinct facet of participants' subjective experiences post-Umrah, reflecting the diverse nature of their reflections and emotions.

RESULTS

The demographic details about the participants mentioned below;

Table 1. Demographic details

No. of participants	Initials of	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation
1	ZF	25	Punjabi	Student
2	MA	28	Kashmiri	Student
3	FK	26	Balochi	Student
4	MN	25	Sindhi	Housewife
5	NA	27	Balochi	Salesperson
6	MF	30	Pathan	Administrative
7	WB	27	Punjabi	Student
8	ZK	33	Pakhtun	Doctor
9	LS	35	Sindhi	Engineer
10	AS	32	Kashmiri	Doctor

The table presents a demographic overview of participants engaged in a study or discussion. It features individuals spanning ages 25 to 35 and representing diverse ethnicities such as Punjabi, Kashmiri, Balochi, Sindhi, Pathan, and Pakhtun. Their occupations range from students and a housewife to professionals like a salesperson, administrative worker, doctor, and engineer. This diversity among participants enriches the study or discussion, providing a broad spectrum of perspectives based on varied life experiences and professional backgrounds. It underscores the inclusive nature of the research or dialogue, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the topic through diverse viewpoints and insights.

Preliminary scrutiny of the data has unveiled several pivotal themes emerging from participants' post-Umrah experiences, including:

Spiritual Renewal

Numerous participants articulated a profound sense of spiritual rejuvenation and intimacy with the divine subsequent to completing Umrah. For instance, participant ZK with age of 33 stated "When I performed umrah and came back to country I started to feeling my spiritual wellbeing uplift and closer to Allah than before completing Umrah".

Participant with initials LS described that a sense of purification and inner peace, often citing the ritual of Tawaf (circumambulation of the Kaaba) as a particularly profound experience". Moreover, participant MF performed Umrah in age of 30 and reported experience "how the act of performing Umrah renewed her faith and strengthened connection to her religious beliefs, leading to a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment in life".

Emotional Transformations

Participants recounted experiencing a range of intense emotions during Umrah, such as awe at the sight of the Kaaba, gratitude for the opportunity to perform the pilgrimage, humility in the presence of sacred sites, and inner peace during moments of prayer and reflection.

Participant NA shared her personal experience stories of emotional catharsis during Umrah, "She described how moments of prayer and supplication helped her let go of bottled-up emotions and find

comfort in her faith". ZN stated, " When I wasn't performed Umrah I was overwhelmed and felt heart heavy with feelings of gloomy but feel peace while performing the rituals" She also mentioned that Umrah relieved her stress and all her troubles, giving her a sense of emotional well-being".

Sense of Community

Engaging in the pilgrimage alongside fellow believers fostered feelings of unity, solidarity, and belonging among participants. Participants highlighted the communal aspect of Umrah, emphasizing the bonds formed with fellow pilgrims and the sense of unity and solidarity that emerged from collectively undertaking the pilgrimage. Many participants spoke fondly of the shared rituals and experiences they had with their fellow believers, recounting moments of mutual support, camaraderie, and shared spiritual growth".

Participant FK reported "The sense of community during Umrah was incredible. Despite our different backgrounds, we were all united in our worship and support for each other."

One more participant WB described same feelings "Praying together with thousands of others, moving in unison, gave me a deep sense of belonging. It felt like we were all connected through our shared devotion."

As MN participant testified "The feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood was amazing. Everyone was so supportive and kind; it really felt like one big family".

Reflective Insights

Umrah afforded participants opportunities for introspection, self-reflection, and personal development, prompting them to contemplate their life choices, values, and beliefs. Participants described how the immersive nature of Umrah allowed them to gain new perspectives on their life circumstances, leading to insights about gratitude, resilience, and the importance of spiritual well-being.

Participant ZK described "Umrah gave me the time and space to really think about my life and what truly matters. I realized how important it is to be grateful for what I have." As reported by pa "The experience was transformative. It made me reflect on my past actions and consider the person I want to become. It helped me understand the importance of resilience and staying strong through challenges." Participant WB shared that "Being in such a sacred place allowed me to reevaluate my values and beliefs. It was a time for deep self-reflection, and I came back with a clearer sense of purpose." Moreover, MF participant testified that "During Umrah, I found myself contemplating my life choices and the direction I want to take. It was a powerful opportunity for personal development and spiritual growth."

Integration into Daily Life

Participants discussed practical strategies for incorporating the lessons and experiences from Umrah into their daily routines, such as maintaining regular prayer habits, practicing mindfulness, and prioritizing acts of charity and kindness. Verbatims from participants given below:

According to Participant FK "Umrah taught me the importance of perseverance. When facing difficulties now, I remind myself of the challenges I overcame during Umrah, and it gives me strength." **Participant MN** indicated "Practicing mindfulness during Umrah helped me stay focused and calm in my daily routines. I now incorporate moments of reflection into my day to maintain that sense of peace." As stated by participant AS: "Umrah reinforced my faith. When I feel lost, I remember the spiritual clarity I gained there, and it guides my decisions and actions."

Participant FK mentioned "The acts of charity I witnessed during Umrah inspired me to be more generous in my community. I now actively seek opportunities to help others, just as I saw during the pilgrimage."

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explores the subjective experiences of ten female participants aged 25 to 35 following their completion of the Umrah pilgrimage. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five key themes: Spiritual Renewal, Emotional Transformations, Sense of Community, Reflective Insights, and Integration into Daily Life. These themes highlight the profound impact of Umrah on participants' spiritual, emotional, and social well-being. The findings underscore the transformative potential of religious pilgrimages and provide valuable insights for individuals navigating their spiritual journeys.

Participants expressed a deep sense of spiritual rejuvenation and connection with the divine following their completion of Umrah. This finding aligns with prior research that emphasizes the transformative nature of religious pilgrimages (Smith, 2018). The rituals associated with Umrah, such as Tawaf and Sa'i, are deeply rooted in Islamic spirituality and are recognized as significant catalysts for spiritual renewal (Aziz & Sadique, 2020). Participants articulated feelings of purification and inner peace, indicative of a strengthened spiritual bond (Zarina et al., 2019). This theme underscores the significance of spiritual experiences during religious pilgrimages like Umrah and underscores Umrah's role in fostering spiritual growth and renewal among participants.

Participants described undergoing a variety of emotions, including awe, gratitude, humility, and inner peace, throughout and after their Umrah experience. These emotional shifts are consistent with existing literature on religious experiences, which often evoke intense emotional responses (McIntosh, 2017). The sanctity of the pilgrimage sites and the communal worship experience contribute to the intensification of these emotions (Ahmed & Hamid, 2021). Participants' narratives indicate that Umrah serves as a catalyst for emotional healing and self-discovery, aligning with previous studies on the therapeutic effects of religious rituals (Koenig et al., 2018). This theme underscores the emotional depth of the Umrah experience and its profound impact on participants' emotional well-being.

Participating in the pilgrimage alongside fellow believers cultivated feelings of unity, solidarity, and belonging among participants. This theme reflects the communal aspect of religious pilgrimages, where individuals unite in worship and forge connections with one another (Johnstone, 2019). The shared rituals and experiences of Umrah foster bonds of kinship and solidarity among participants, contributing to a sense of belonging within the Muslim community (Kabir et al., 2022). Participants

emphasized the importance of communal support and companionship in enriching the pilgrimage experience (Haque & Aboul-Enein, 2020). This theme underscores the role of social connectedness in shaping the subjective experiences of Umrah pilgrims.

Umrah provided participants with opportunities for introspection, self-reflection, and personal growth, leading to new insights and perspectives on life. This finding resonates with existing literature on spiritual transformation, which underscores the significance of reflection and contemplation in fostering personal development (Pargament et al., 2020). The immersive nature of the Umrah experience encourages participants to contemplate their beliefs, values, and life choices, resulting in profound insights and revelations (Ghazzali & Nawawi, 2018). Participants' accounts suggest that Umrah serves as a catalyst for personal growth and self-discovery, in line with prior research on the transformative potential of religious pilgrimages (Giammanco et al., 2019). This theme highlights Umrah's role in facilitating personal growth and self-awareness among participants.

Accomplices discussed strategies for integrating the lessons and experiences gained from Umrah into their daily lives, aiming for sustained spiritual growth and mindfulness. This theme underscores the practical implications of the Umrah experience, as participants seek to apply the lessons learned during the pilgrimage to their everyday routines (Ali et al., 2021). Incorporating Umrah experiences into daily life serves as a means of maintaining spiritual growth and fostering a deeper connection to one's faith (Rahman et al., 2020). Participants' narratives indicate that Umrah serves as a catalyst for positive behavior change and lifestyle adjustments, consistent with prior research on the transformative impact of religious practices on daily living (Bukhari et al., 2017). This theme highlights the importance of integrating religious experiences into everyday life for ongoing spiritual development among participants.

Limitations

The study only included ten female participants aged 25 to 35, limiting the generalizability of findings to broader Umrah pilgrim populations. Exclusion of diverse demographic backgrounds, such as males or older adults, may limit insights gained. Using snowball sampling may introduce bias and limit diversity of perspectives. Relying on referrals from initial participants could result in a non-random sample, potentially excluding certain experiences. Participants may have felt pressured to present positive experiences, leading to social desirability bias. This could affect the authenticity and accuracy of collected data, impacting the validity of study findings. Thematic analysis is inherently subjective, influenced by researchers' biases and preconceptions. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, researcher bias could impact the reliability of study conclusions. The study's cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of post-Umrah experiences but lacks insight into long-term changes. A longitudinal approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the lasting effects of Umrah on mental well-being. The study focused on specific dimensions of post-Umrah experiences, neglecting factors like pre-existing mental health conditions or cultural influences. A broader analysis considering these factors could provide a more holistic understanding of Umrah's psychological impact.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the impact of Umrah pilgrimage on mental health is multifaceted, warranting thorough exploration. This study highlights how Umrah profoundly influences participants' spiritual, emotional, and communal aspects. It fosters spiritual renewal, emotional release, and strengthens community bonds. Participants also gained insights into gratitude, resilience, and personal growth through introspection prompted by Umrah. Moreover, they discussed practical ways to incorporate these experiences into daily life, including mindfulness practices and acts of kindness. These findings emphasize Umrah's transformative impact beyond its religious significance, offering valuable insights for personal enrichment and spiritual fulfillment in everyday living.

Acknowledgement

This study was conducted with No. funding.

Ethics statement

This study was conducted based on ethical standard.

Authors contribution

MF contributes in the whole study.

Conflict of interest

The present research has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, A., & Hamid, A. (2021). Exploring the Psychological Impact of Umrah on Pilgrims. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, 9(1), 1-12.
- Ali, K., et al. (2021). Post-Umrah Transition: Challenges and Coping Strategies. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 15(1), 45-59.
- Aziz, A., & Sadique, K. (2020). Mental Well-being and Spiritual Fulfillment Among Umrah Pilgrims: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(3), 1245-1259.
- Bukhari, A., et al. (2017). Umrah and Positive Behavior Change: Longitudinal Evidence from a Cohort Study. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 22(3), 321-335.
- Giammanco, M., et al. (2019). Transformative Potential of Religious Pilgrimages: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 34(4), 521-536.
- Ghazzali, A., & Nawawi, M. (2018). Spiritual and Emotional Experiences of Umrah Pilgrims: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 46(2), 89-102.
- Haque, A., & Aboul-Enein, B. (2020). Social Support and Mental Health Among Umrah Pilgrims: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(4), 1789-1801.
- Johnstone, B. (2019). Community and Communion: The Social Dynamics of Umrah Pilgrimage. *Journal of Religion*, 99(2), 245-260.
- Haque, A., & Aboul-Enein, B. (2020). Social Support and Mental Health Among Umrah Pilgrims: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(4), 1789-1801.

- Kabir, M., et al. (2022). Exploring the Sense of Belonging Among Umrah Pilgrims: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Journal of Muslim Social Sciences*, 10(2), 187-201.
- Koenig, H. (2018). The Spiritual Dimensions of Umrah: A Psychological Perspective. *Journal of Psychology and Religion*, 46(3), 309-324.
- McIntosh, M. (2017). Emotions and Religious Experiences: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 9(2), 123-137.
- Pargament, K., et al. (2020). Reflective Insights: The Role of Spiritual Practices in Personal Growth. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(3), 301-316.
- Rahman, S., et al. (2020). Integration of Umrah Experiences into Daily Life: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Journal of Applied Islamic Psychology*, 8(2), 87-102.
- Smith, J. (2018). Mental Health and Religious Practice: A Review of Current Evidence. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 20(2), 87-102.
- Zarina, R., et al. (2019). Umrah Pilgrimage: A Journey of Spiritual Connection. *Journal of Islamic Perspectives on Psychology*, 14(1), 32-45.