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Original Article

A Review of Suicide in the Mirror of Islamic Hadiths and Traditions

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: *Suicide has always been one of the most important public health issues. Suicide rate is less in Islamic countries than other countries. Considering the role of hadiths and traditions in Islam in preventing suicide, the purpose of current study was to collect and review the Islamic hadiths about suicide.*

Materials and Methods: *This library-based study was started in May 2019. After consulting with scholars specializing in hadith and Islamic knowledge, the list of the most important Shiite books was prepared and then electronic format of these books were downloaded: "Kitab al-Kafi", "Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih", "Tahdhib al-Ahkam", "Al-Istibsar", "Osool Kafi", "Bahar-al-Anwar", "Tahzib Ol Ahkam", "Hagh Ol Yaghin", "Ghorar Ol Hekam & Dorar Ol Kalem", and "Man La Yahzaroh Ol Faghih". In the next step, the keywords including "self-murder", "suicide", and "killing" were searched in these books and subsequently, in the database of the "Shia Hadith Library" and the "Hadith Mizan Searcher". To find related articles, the Persian and English keywords including "Suicide", "Islam", "Hadith", and their combination were also searched in Google Scholar, PubMed, Magiran, SID, and Noormags. Finally, all hadiths with these keywords were screened, and after removing duplicates, the remaining hadiths were collected and reviewed.*

Results: *A total of 3705 hadiths were found, from which19 reliable hadiths about suicide from Prophet Muhammad and Imams were chosen. These hadiths were classified based on the concept into 3 categories, including the prohibition of suicide, the examples of suicide, and the consequences of suicide.*

Conclusion: *Suicide is an absolute forbidden act in Islam, which has destructive consequences. The religious hadiths in Islam could be effective in educating Muslims to prevent suicidal behaviors.*

Keywords
Suicide, Islam, Hadith, Education

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Introduction

Suicide is one of the most important psychological problems worldwide [1]. This phenomenon is almost unique to the human being, in which one deliberately and consciously decides to end his life [2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 800000 people die each year due to suicide [3]; and 10 to 20 suicide attempts occurr per each suicide [4].

Suicide has many long detrimental effects on the family and society [5-6]. For each suicide or attempted suicide, on average 5 people are affected by the severe and devastating psychological effects [7].

Since suicide is a unique phenomenon, scientists study various aspects of suicide such as psychological, social, cultural, economic, and health of this phenomenon. The main purpose of all these studies is to understand different aspects of suicide in order to prevent it [8].

Previous studies have shown that high levels of religiosity can decrease the risk of suicide [9]. Religion can reduce suicidal behavior by providing a network of social support, goal setting for life, self-esteem, and coping strategies in times of crisis [10]. Furthermore, religious educations are one of the most important aspects which have a great impact on prevention of suicide [11, 12]. This occurs since religious educations can explain how to deal with social, health, economic, and cultural problems in life [13, 14].

Rate of suicide varies across religions. Among various religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or Judaism, Muslims have lower rates of suicidal behavior [9]. Islam is one of the major and the last Abrahamic religion which is based on the worship of the One God. Islam was founded by Muhammad, the great Prophet of Islam. The miracle of the Prophet Muhammad is the holy Quran [15, 12]. Almost 24% of the world population are Muslims [16].

In Islam the word "suicide" has different meanings, for example, in a part of "Al-Kafi" book, it is stated, "Do not kill each other; do not kick out each other from the homeland. Do not deprive yourself of eternal life and happiness because you will be expelled from heaven, which is your permanent homeland." [17] Another example for suicide in Islam is self-murder (killing oneself, physical suicide), killing others, committing sins, fighting others, and self-harm [18].

A study conducted by Rezaeian showed that direct and indirect strategies have been mentioned to prevent suicide in the Quran [12]. In the direct strategy, suicide is boycotted in part of verse 29 of Sura Nisa: "Nor kill [or destroy] yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful". In the indirect strategy, Islam suggests selecting the correct ways when faced with problems such as poverty, mental illness, alcoholism and drug abuse, loneliness and social isolation that increase suicide rates [19].

This might explain why suicide rate is less in Islam than other religions. In addition to Quran, there are moral advices to humans in the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad and other Imams after him. Hadiths are also upheld and used as sources of the Islamic law and education. The religious studies have given attention to all aspects of human life, such as material, spiritual, social, cultural and philosophical aspects. To enjoy a prosperous life, the ways of living in both individual and social dimensions are clearly stated [12, 20]. Cognition and acquaintance with the concept of hadiths is also important due to their preventive effects on suicide. Considering the vital role of hadiths in Islam to prevent suicide, the purpose of this study was to collect and review the Islamic hadiths about suicide.

Methods

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This library-based study was started in May 2019. After consulting with scholars specializing in hadith and Islamic knowledge, a list of the most important and authoritative Shiite books on the subject of hadith was prepared. The Four Books, or the Four Principles (al-U□ūl al-Arba□ ah), is a Twelver Shia term referring to their 4 best-known hadith collections including "Kitab al-Kafi", "Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih", "Tahdhib al-Ahkam", and "Al-Istibsar" [21]. (Table 1)

Table 1. List of the four most important and authoritative Shiite books on the subject of hadith

Name	Collector	No. of hadiths
Kitab al-Kafi	Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni al-Razi	16,199
Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih	Muhammad ibn Babawayh	9,044
Tahdhib al-Ahkam	Shaykh Muhammad Tusi	13,590
Al-Istibsar	Shaykh Muhammad Tusi	5,511

Other authentic Shia books on the subject of hadiths are "Osool Kafi" [17], "Bahar-al-Anwar" [22], "Tahzib Ol Ahkam" [23], "Hagh Ol Yaghin" [24], "Ghorar Ol Hekam & Dorar Ol Kalem" [25], and "Man La Yahzaroh Ol Faghih" [26]. (Table 2)

Table 2. List of other authentic Shia books on the subject of hadith

Book title	Author	Century (AH)
Osool Kafi	Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni	Fourth
Bahar-al-Anwar	Mohammad-Baqer Majlesi	Eleventh
Hagh Ol Yaghin		
Tahzib Ol Ahkam	Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Hasan Tusi	Fourth&Fifth
Ghorar Ol Hekam&Dorar Ol Kalem	Abdul Wahed Amadi Tamimi	Sixth
Man La Yahzaroh Ol Faghih	Abu Ja□ far Muḥ ammad ibn □ Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi	Fourth

In the next step, the electronic formats of these books with their Persian translation were downloaded through the book sites: book market site (https://www.ghbook.ir) and our history library (https://pdf.tarikhema.org/). The Arabic and equal Persian keywords such as "self-murder", "suicide" and "killing" were searched in the electronic format of these books. The search found a handful of hadiths related to the subject. Subsequently, the database of the "Shia Hadith Library" (www.hadithlib.com) and the "Hadith Mizan Searcher" (mizn.hadith.net) were searched using the same keywords.

Furthermore, to find related articles, the Persian and English keywords including "Suicide", "Islam" and "Hadith" and their combination were searched in Google Scholar, PubMed, Magiran, SID, and Noormags.

At the end of the searching process, all hadiths containing the related keywords were screened (i.e. 3705 hadiths). Subsequently, by removing duplicates of hadiths and those with the theme of murder, the remaining hadiths were collected and reviewed. After checking their authenticity, the reliable hadiths from Prophet Muhammad and Imams (i.e. 19 hadiths) were

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classified based on their concept into 3 categories, including the prohibition of suicide, the examples of suicide, and the consequences of suicide.

Results

As previously mentioned, a total of 3705 hadiths were found; out of which, 19 reliable hadiths about suicide from Prophet Muhammad and Imams were selected. These hadiths were classified based on the concept into 3 categories, including the prohibition of suicide, the examples of suicide, and the consequences of suicide. In this section we present these hadiths in Table 3, and within the Discussion Section we further elaborate on these hadiths and discuss their applications in educating Muslims to prevent suicidal behaviors.

Table 3. The reliable hadiths from Prophet Muhammad and Imams (i.e. 19 hadiths) classified based on their concept into 3 categories

Category	Hadith (its author)
1. Prohibition of suicide	There was a man before you live, he was hurt and he could not tolerate, so he took a knife and cut his hand, so he bled until he died, so God said: he hurried to kill himself, therefore, I forbade paradise for him. (Prophet Muhammad)
	A man carried out suicide with a spear, then the Messenger of Allah said: I do not pray for him. (Prophet Muhammad)
	No one should wish for death because of the injury that he has been suffered. (Prophet Muhammad)
	When preserving life is so important under the Islamic values, suicide is not acceptable at all. (Prophet Muhammad)
	A Muslim may be afflicted with any disasters or die because of any kind of deaths, but he will not carry out suicide. (Imam Baqir)
	Some of the biggest sins are as follows: i) Considering a Partner for God; ii) Disappointment of God's help; iii) Curse of parents; iv) suicide and killing others. (Imam Sadeq)
	Whoever encourages a suicide believer even with words, at the resurrection day appears in a way in which this message is written between his two eyes that he is disappointed with God's mercy. (Imam Sadeq)
2. Examples of suicide	Whoever eats soil is contributing to kill himself. (Imam Sadeq)
	Do not eat the soil because if you eat it and die you will be complicit in your murder (suicide). (Imam Sadeq)
	Everyone who eats soil and dies he has helped in his suicide. (Imam Sadeq)
	Do not kill yourself except that God intended (do not suicide). (Imam Sadeq)
	Eating soil is forbidden like eating carcass, blood, and pork, then avoid eating them. (Imam Reza)
	Whoever carries out suicide by iron, will enter into the hell forever, while the iron is in his hand and part of it is into his belly. The one who carries out suicide e.g. by eating toxic materials, will enter into the hell and stay there forever, while that toxic material is in his hand. The one also carries out suicide e.g. by jumping from the mountain, then he will be thrown into hell and he will stay there forever. (Prophet Muhammad)
3. The consequences of suicide	Whoever carries out suicide by eating poisonous food, he will be suffered by the same poison. (Prophet Muhammad)
	Who kills himself with something in this world is tormented by the same thing on the resurrection day. (Prophet Muhammad)
	Who suffocates himself, will suffocate himself in the hell, and who spears himself will be in the fire in the hell. (Prophet Muhammad)
	A person who kills himself by something shall be tormented in the hell. (Prophet Muhammad)
	Whoever tries to carry out suicide, he will be ended in the hell. (Imam Sadeq)
	Whoever carries out suicide by something, he will slaughter himself by the same thing in the hellfire. (Prophet Muhammad)

Discussion

Teachings in Islam have clear guidance for all aspects of life, including care for the family, sexual deviations,

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crime, racism, and suicide prevention [27]. Hadiths and traditions of Prophet Muhammad and Imams around the topic of suicide can be listed into three categories:

(A) Traditions and narratives expressing the prohibition of suicide [28-30].

(B) Hadiths and narratives demonstrating examples of suicide [31].

C) Traditions expressing the consequences of suicide in the Hereafter [32-34].

In what follows, we first elaborate on these hadiths and then discuss how to educate Muslims to prevent suicidal behaviors using these hadiths together with Quran verses.

Prohibition of suicide

God explicitly condemns suicide in verse 29 of Sura Nisa in Quran by saying, "Do not kill yourselves". This implies that it is obligatory to abandon suicide. Therefore, one can concludes that suicide is absolutely forbidden in Islam. Prophet Muhammad and Imams have also condemned this practice in their hadiths. For example, Prophet Muhammad says, "There was a man before you live, he was hurt and he could not tolerate, so he took a knife and cut his hand, so he bled until he died, so God said: he hurried to kill himself, therefore, I forbade paradise for him." [35] In another narration, Prophet Muhammad also was quoted as saying, "A man carried out suicide with a spear, then the Messenger of Allah said: I do not pray for him." [28]

Prophet Muhammad also advised his followers not to wish for death. He says, "No one should wish for death because of the injury that he has been suffered." [36] Furthermore, self-preservation and no self-harm are so important in Islam that according to Quran eating pork and dead animals are permissible in the emergencies, or if fasting is exhausting in Ramadan for Muslims they are allowed to break it any time [28]. As a result, Prophet Muhammad says "When preserving life is so important under the Islamic values, suicide is not acceptable at all." [37, 18]

Imam Baqir also states, "A Muslim may be afflicted with any disasters or die because of any kind of deaths, but he will not carry out suicide'' [38]. Imam Sadeq says, "Some of the biggest sins are as follows: i) Considering a partner for God; ii) Disappointment of God's help; iii) Curse of parents; iv) Suicide and killing others [26]. Imam Sadeq also says, "Whoever encourages a suicide believer even with words, at the resurrection day appears in a way in which this message is written between his two eyes that he is disappointed with God's mercy." [29]

It is clear that Prophet Muhammad and Imams advised to stop suicide, so to highlight the evil of the act, Prophet Muhammad did not pray for the person that killed himself [39]. Therefore, Under the Islamic Sharia, suicide is amongst the worst actions and the will of the person after suicide is not accepted [40]. Even from the perspective of Islam and the Imams, cooperating with a person who carries out suicide results in divine retribution.

Examples of suicide

Imam Sadeq quoted from Imam Ali that, "Whoever eats soil is contributing to kill himself". Imam Sadeq further quoted from Imam Ali as saying, "Do not eat the soil because if you eat it and die you will be complicit in your murder (suicide)." Also, Imam Sadeq quoted Prophet Muhammad as saying, "Everyone who eats soil and dies he has helped in his suicide." Imam Reza also states, "Eating soil is forbidden like eating carcass, blood, and pork, then avoid eating them." [31] Unauthorized conflict with others is one of the examples of suicide, Sheikh Tabarsi quoted Imam Sadeq as saying, "Do not kill yourself except that God intended (do not suicide)." [41]

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The above divine guidelines indicate that eating the soil and unauthorized conflicts have been considered as the signs of suicides. Therefore, according to hadiths and traditions, eating anything harmful to human beings or any unauthorized conflicts are forbidden; and deliberately doing such acts are signs of suicide.

Moreover, these hadiths are also related to suicide attempts. The results of a study entitled "Prohibition of suicide from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence" points out that suicide is a prohibited act and some acts equal to suicide in Islam are: self-murder (killing oneself), killing others, committing sins, fighting with others, and self-harm [18].

The consequences of suicide

Suicide has severe individual, family, and social consequences [5, 6]. Each individual who carries out suicide according to religious hadiths are bound to suffer severe and painful punishments in the other world. Prophet Muhammad says, "Whoever carries out suicide by iron, will enter into the hell forever, while the iron is in his hand and part of it is into his belly. The one who carries out suicide e.g. by eating toxic materials, will enter into the hell and stay there forever, while that toxic material is in his hand. The one also carries out suicide e.g. by jumping from the mountain, then he will be thrown into hell and he will stay there forever." [32]

He says in another narration, "Whoever carries out suicide by eating poisonous food, he will be suffered by the same poison"; and "Whoever carries out suicide by something, he will slaughter himself by the same thing in the hellfire." [34] He declares, "Who kills himself with something in this world is tormented by the same thing on the resurrection day." [30] He says in another narrative, "Who suffocates himself, will suffocate himself in the hell, and who spears himself will be in the fire in the hell." [42] In another similar narration the Prophet Muhammad states, "A person who kills himself by something shall be tormented in the hell." [43] Finally, Imam Sadeq says: "Whoever tries to carry out suicide, he will be ended in the hell.'' [44]

Therefore, Islam has considered suicide to be an unforgivable sin [28, 45, 18, 46], and as per the narrations, the destination of the suicidal person is in the hell. Suicide is also a profane act in other religions, including Zoroastrianism [47]; Judaism [48- 49, 50-51]; and Christianity [52-53, 12]. Even in the past centuries, Christians were not allowed to bury the corpse of the person who carried out suicide in the church land.

Educating Muslims to prevent suicidal behaviors using hadiths and Quran verses

Islam offers valuable lessons on suicide prevention through hadiths and Quran verses. One would be able to fit these lessons into three levels of prevention, i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary [54]. For primary prevention, lessons may include those verses, hadiths, and narratives that aimed at reducing and eliminating the risk factors associated with suicide. The second level of suicide prevention highlights the role of religious scholars and clerics in detecting the most at risk people for carrying out the suicidal behavior [55-57]. The tertiary level of prevention includes recommendations in support, sympathy, and compassion for friends and relatives of those who carry out suicide.

Given the importance and vital role of primary prevention of suicidal behavior, in the final part of the article, we only focus on how to educate Muslims to primarily prevent suicidal behaviors using hadiths and Quran verses. As previously mentioned, the first level of suicide prevention may include those verses, hadiths, and narratives that points to the reduction and elimination of risk factors associated with suicide. Among vast arrays of suicide risk factors, we will only focus on depression and anxiety; alcohol consumption; and socio-economic factors and discuss how hadiths and

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Quran verses are able to prevent these risk factors of suicide among Muslims [58].

Depression and anxiety disorders are independent risk factors for suicide attempts [59, 60]. The word depression in the Quran has been used widely in connection with grief. Moreover, depression has also been expressed with words such as grief in the hadiths [61]. In verse 35, Sura "Araf", God says, "Children of Adam, when messengers come to you from among yourselves, conveying My messages to you, then all who are mindful of Me and live righteously don't need to fear not will they grieve." [37] In this verse, faith and self-behavior correction are cited as two main ways to reduce and treat depression from the Quran's perspective. It is also stated in part of one of Imam Ali's testament, "Depart from depression and sorrow with the power of patience and certainty." [62] Nowadays, scientific studies have also found positive effects of Islamic education on treatment of depression. The results of a study by Shojaei et al. (2014) indicated that religious care of patients with depression was more effective than the control group without such religious care [63].

Similarly, alcohol use is associated with suicide behavior. Intoxicated people are more likely to attempt suicide using more lethal methods [64]. Religion beliefs are associated with lower levels of alcohol abuse [65]. In several verses in the Quran, drinking alcohol is forbidden. In verse 90, Sura "Maaida", God says, "O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed." [37] A man also asked Imam Sadeq, "Which one is the worse? Drinking alcohol or stopping to pray?" Imam said, "Drinking alcohol is worse than stopping to pray. Since, by drinking alcohol one does not recognize his dear God". [22] In the United States, at least one-quarter of suicides are linked to drinking alcohol. In a cross-sectional study, the researchers concluded that there was a significant linear relationship between per capita alcohol consumption (beer type) in different countries and suicide rates in both men and women [66].

Finally, socio-economic factors, especially income inequality, have important roles in increasing the suicide rate [67]. The studies show that poverty is associated with suicide rates, with 75% of suicide occurring in the low and middle-income countries [68].

On the subject of poverty, God says in the Quran, "The Evil one threatens you with poverty and bids you to conduct unseemly."[37] Imam Ali says to his son, Imam Hassan Mujtaba about the consequences of poverty: "My child, who suffers from poverty has four traits: weakness in certainty, deficiency in reason, weakness in religion, and inferiority." [69] Religion can alleviate poverty in the community by affecting economic problems such as usury, bribery, and extortion. It can also indirectly prevent suicide by strengthening social capital [58, 70, 54].

Conclusion

Suicide is an absolute forbidden act in Islam, which has destructive consequences. According to the results of the present study, hadiths and traditions of Islamic religion about suicide can be classified into three categories which includes those prohibiting suicide, explaining the forms of suicide and the consequences of suicide. The religious hadiths in Islam could be effective in preventing suicide.

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Conflicts of interest

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this study.

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