



Health Concepts Regarding Arbaeen's Foot-Pilgrimage

Hamid Reza Rasouli¹, Fathollah Ahmadpour¹, Hadi Khoshmohabat^{1,*} and Mohsen Abbasi Farajzadeh^{2,**}

¹Trauma Research Center, Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

²Marine Medicine Research Center, Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

*Corresponding author: Trauma Research Center, Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Email: khoshmohabat@yahoo.com

**Corresponding author: Marine Medicine Research Center, Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Email: mohsen10_fam@yahoo.com

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Dear Editor,

Arbaeen's foot-pilgrimage is a unique annual mass gathering pilgrimage of about 20 million Shia Muslims worldwide. This foot-pilgrimage is a mourning ceremony for the tragedy of Imam Hussein who is one of the members of Prophet's household in Islam (1). This tragic ceremony is related to the heroic movement of Imam Hossein and his followers who were martyred for the revival of Islam. This foot-pilgrimage can be considered as one of the largest religious gatherings in the world in which a non-homogeneous population from various countries travels 80 km from Najaf to Karbala on 20th Safar Anno Hegirae. The Marja (source of emulation) and Shi'a scholars believe the historical basis of this event is the arrival of the captives and Imam Hossein' followers to Karbala for the burial of the Imam's severed head.

Unfortunately, Iraq has experienced massive damages due to several wars and terrorist attacks in the past few decades. Therefore, reconstruction of infrastructures of this country could promote better services to pilgrims during Arbaeen's foot-pilgrimage. As some health problems such as the epidemic of infectious diseases, human stampede, lack of proper transport system, inappropriate habitation, lack of specialist' physician, improper health system, terrorist threats, climate changes, etc. may arise leading to potentially dangerous infectious diseases and human stampedes calling for immediate consideration of health systems (2, 3).

Injuries due to stampede are notable in pilgrimages. For a practical example, the 2015 Hajj stampede caused at least 2431 deaths (3). Even though there has not been a single reported severe stampede and trauma accident in Arbaeen's foot-pilgrimage, a real dilemma warrants specific consideration and challenges for healthcare providers. Preemptive crisis preparation can help in the inhibition of

any untoward events.

Mass gatherings such as Arbaeen's foot-pilgrimage have complicated public health challenges that can be modified through health and disaster management organizations of specialists from neighboring countries including of healthcare professionals and specialist's physicians. Pilgrims should be instructed in essential preventive methods associated with infectious diseases and human stampedes. Furthermore, the preparation of the ceremonies throughout Arbaeen's foot-pilgrimage and crowd management can decrease these accidents. Applying various digital programs and monitoring can recognize missing pilgrims, update their locations, and inform their group guides to further prevent health problems. Various types of Tele-medicines can more improve treatment service for pilgrims or any crisis. Developing triage systems and using a rescue helicopter can reduce potential morbidity and mortality. It is suggested that healthcare workers from neighboring countries work in coordination with the health team and government of Iraq.

Footnotes

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