



DISORDERED EATING AMONG MUSLIM MEN

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On behalf of co-authors:

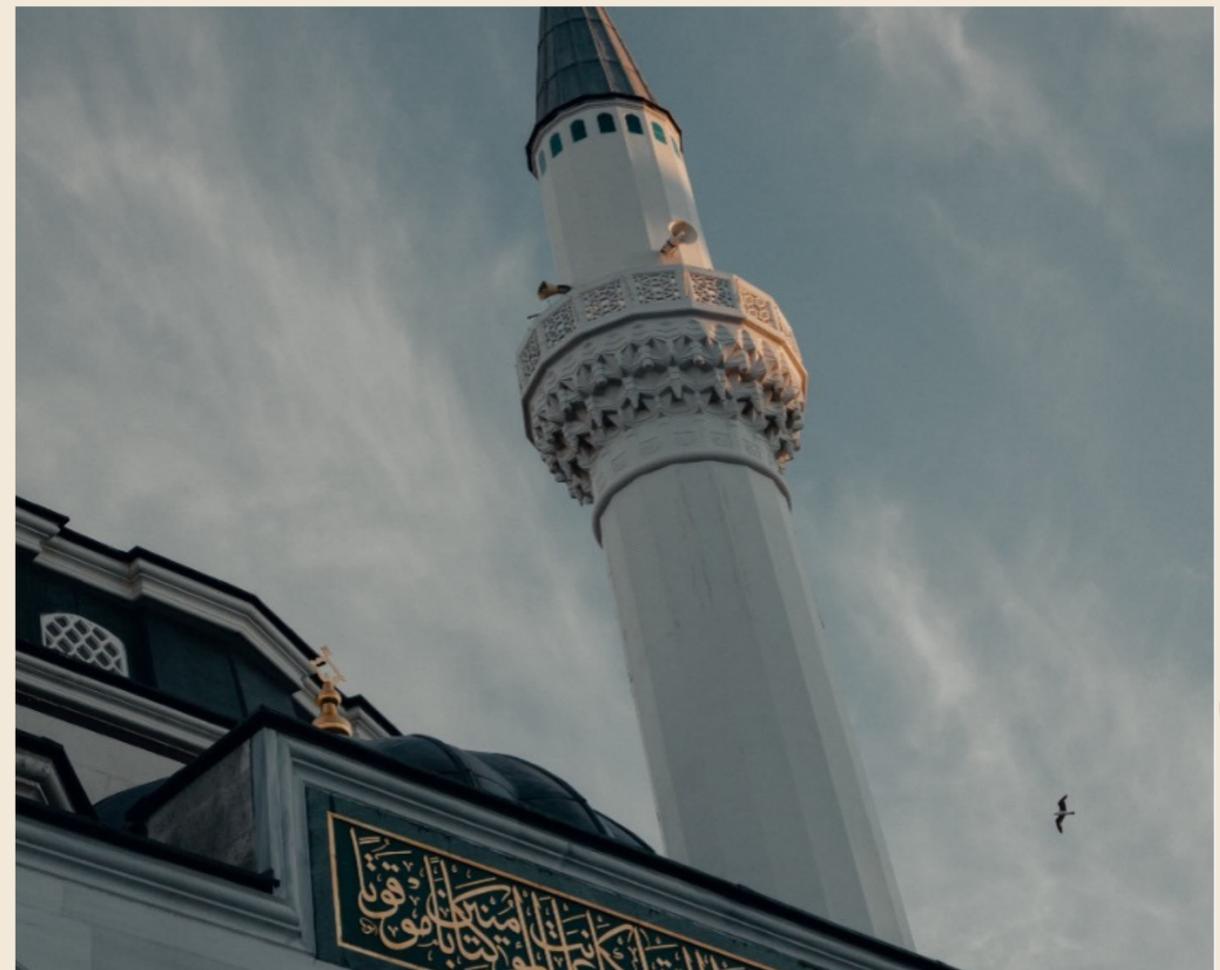
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What is Ramadan?

9th Month of the Islamic calendar - lasts between 29 and 30 days, and observed by Muslims globally

Fasting in Ramadan focuses on deep spirituality, prayer, charity and community

When fasting, Muslims abstain from eating or drinking anything from sunrise to dusk



Research background

Anecdotal accounts suggest a negative impact of Ramadan on eating behaviors and body image.

Quantitative research indicate no harmful effects of Ramadan on disordered eating (Duzceker et al., 2019; Akgul et al., 2014; Chia et al., 2018; Erol, et al., 2008).

However, recent qualitative research suggests that Ramadan is used as a mechanism to control eating behaviours among Muslim women (Hasan et al., 2021).



Study aims

No research has focused on the impact of fasting on Muslim men's relationship with food and their body image, as well as the impact of fasting on mental health.

This research aimed to qualitatively explore the experiences of young adult Muslim men living in the UK to understand their:

- **Motivations for fasting** in Ramadan
- **Body image** and **eating behaviours**
- and **Mental health**

..... before, during and after Ramadan.



Method

- 10 men (M age = 26 years, SD = 3.2) living in the UK
 - 3 Bangladeshi, 3 Punjabi, 4 Pakistani
- Online semi-structured interviews (M time = 40 mins)
- Interviews at three timepoints:
 - Before Ramadan
 - End of Ramadan
 - 4-6 weeks after Ramadan
 - 50% had video on during interviews
- Thematic analysis on interview transcripts



Themes and subthemes

Multifaceted motivations for fasting	An effort to maintain control	The contradiction of worsening and improving mental health
Expectations to fast	Control and restriction of food	Decline of mental health
Connection with community	Productivity at work	Improvement of mental health
Good opportunity to 're-set' eating behaviours	Cycle of guilt and accomplishment	

Multifaceted motivations for fasting

Expectations to fast	<p><i>"But if I openly don't fast...my parents would be really angry with me. Even though I am 27 years of age. But they would still be angry with me. My friends would most likely make fun of me...like...you know how ...insulting goes...so yeah...that would happen. I am expected to fast...not just by myself but by people around me as well (S, 27, T1)"</i></p>
Connection with identify and community	<p><i>"But I kind of became very distant from my identity..as a Muslim...and a couple of years ago I became more in touch with it..in a spiritual sense..in a community sense...and then it became ..well that's something that's tied up with that (O, 26, T1)."</i></p>
Good opportunity to 're-set' eating behaviours	<p><i>"Another by-product of fasting is health as well..another health related...just being able to detox from just eating itself. It is...so rejuvenating. The fact that right now...I haven't eaten in ..roughly 8 hours or so..maybe a bit longer..I feel so light (A, 26, T1)"</i></p> <p><i>"So..at the end of this month hopefully...I want to get into a routine that allows me to manage my weight a little bit..to get a workout routine done..to make sure I am eating properly..by the end of this month hopefully...I'll be able to do either of these things (M, 26, T2)."</i></p> <p><i>"Because I was empty stomach for pretty much the whole day...I wasn't feeling bloated at all throughout the day. So that was nice in terms of feeling light. That made me feel positive about myself...it was a positive motivation as well. (A, 26, T3)."</i></p> <p><i>"I went to a gathering recently. They said that looked good... so I guess by that...by that logic...it looks like I am doing something well" (A; 26, T3).</i></p>

An effort to maintain control

Control and restriction of food	<p><i>"So I didn't drink any sugary drinks...any drinks such as Tang or any sherbet..any sort of those drinks I didn't drink that. I only stuck to water. So I knew that even I ate a bit more than I was planning to, it wouldn't affect me..or it wouldn't affect my weight as much. So I ..did..decrease my food intake a bit but it wasn't as much as I was planning to. But in the end I ...had more fruits and more watery fruit...(S, 27, T2)"</i></p> <p><i>"I'd kind of used it (Ramadan) as a spring board again in to trying to lose the weight. So, I kept up a schedule of intermittent fasting after, with the same hours as Ramadan, so I well, not rigidly but I don't eat during the day and I then eat from dinner onwards typically, although I have water & coffee & whatever."</i></p>
Productivity at work	<p><i>"Actually think it boosted it (productivity). You see..at that moment where I thought about food I'm like 'ok let's get back to work'...so..for me personally it actually boosted my productivity. Because I use work as a means of concentrating. As a means of...um..like a remedy sort of thing so that really helps. But at the same time aswell...the fact that I'm not eating, the fact that I'm not snacking or drinking water...freed up my time (A, 26, T3)."</i></p>
Cycle of guilt and accomplishment	<p><i>"I start to feel guilty like...'I shouldn't have done that...I started such a good routine... sure you fall of the wagon a little bit but you get back on it and you start moving forward...but that hasn't happened ...so..I do feel...whenever I treat myself with a cheat meal or anything like that...I start to feel guilty (S, 27, T2)."</i></p> <p><i>"...have fallen back into the same habits of...ordering food from ...uh..places that aren't too healthy &..I keep...its kind of a like a conflict that keeps happening in my head . Its like ...'it's the weekend I want to treat myself' or if I've worked hard I want to treat myself..but then at the same time, when I do treat myself, I start to feel guilty. like...'I shouldn't have done that'...I started such a good routine...M, 26, T3)"</i></p>

The contradiction of worsening and improving mental health

Decline of mental health	<p><i>"so...the freedom is..amazing..it feels really good..but um...at the back of my mind I'm still like..'this freedom is not good for me...I need to workout'...so that's how it feels (M, T3)."</i></p> <p><i>"I would say it (mental health) has been deteriorating...and I am not saying it has all to do with Ramadan...of course there are external factors...but if I keep those aside...there has been an impact...because...so if I compartmentalise..'ok I've noticed my mental health declining' ..If I keep the other external factors aside ...I would say that after Ramadan, bec I've started eating more & gained weight.. I would say there has been some negative affect of Ramadan...bec of over-eating... (S, T3)</i></p>
Improvement of mental health	<p><i>"I found that...I think over the last couple of months, because I've been die- I've been not dieting, but calorie restricting & I've been exercising.. Umm, my body image has improved..."</i></p>

Summary and implications

- Familial obligation and connection with identity were strong motivators to fast, but weight loss and body change were also key influences becoming stronger over time (and reinforced by others' compliments)
- Strong efforts to maintain control over type and quantity of food being eaten, also accompanied by anxiety about losing control; which often led to cycles of guilt and accomplishment
- Worse mental health due to continued preoccupation with food and weight, accompanied by fear about maintaining restrictive eating patterns following Ramadan.
 - Others experienced improved mental health due to body changes and better body image (unaware of their own pathological eating behaviours)
- **Suggests the need for support for Muslim men (during and after Ramadan), and to target cultural norms and stigma in Muslim communities, related to mental health and body image concerns.**



THANK YOU!

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