

# Reduction in the Rate of Interpersonal Violence during the Holy Month of Ramadan

Dear Editor,

Fasting is proclaimed through Islam and is an obligation for Muslims. Catholics, Jews and Orthodox Christians also fast, although their obligation differs from Muslims' fasting.<sup>1</sup> In Islam the fasting month of Ramadan is one of the holiest annual events. In this month, Muslims abstain from eating and drinking from dawn to sunset to express their gratitude to God. During Ramadan, all wrongdoings are strictly prohibited. Envy, anger and hostility towards others violate the principles of fasting and are consciously avoided. Fasting people are recommended to be forgiving. To increase the likelihood of the fast being accepted by God, people are also required to solve their interpersonal conflicts.

The medical aspects of Ramadan have been investigated extensively,<sup>2,3</sup> but to the best of our knowledge, medico-legal and public health aspects have not so far been explored. Herein, we determined the rate of interpersonal violence during the holy month of Ramadan as compared to other months.

Within the current legal system in Iran, victims of interpersonal violence resulting in injury can file legal proceedings against the perpetrator through the police or court. The police or court judges refer the injured parties to the local medico-legal centers (MLCs) for clinical forensic medical examination. The Legal Medicine Organization (LMO) of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based in the capital, Tehran, and maintains a database of records from MLCs of all clients who obtain injury certification after violence.<sup>4</sup>

In this cross-sectional study, the number of all clients who applied for violence-related injury certification to the MLCs of Tehran province during the holy month of Ramadan and its preceding and succeeding months from 1997 to 2003 was extracted from the Statistics Division of the LMO. The Poisson rates were compared to assess the significance of differences, showed that the mean rate of the number of these clients during the month of Ramadan was significantly lower (at the 5% level,  $z=2.4$  and  $2.5$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) than that of other months.

Although violence is multifactorial in etiology, it will break out when the balance between impulses and internal control collapses.<sup>5</sup> Any set of conditions that enhance aggressive impulses in the context of diminished control may produce violent acts. Most adults who commit aggressive and violent acts are likely to do so against those whom they know.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it seems that in most instances, violence follows a period of increasing tension and conflicts between the parties concerned. It is to be expected that circumstances reducing such conditions, should lower the rate of violence.

The increasing rate of violence in the months preceding or succeeding Ramadan may be explained by people returning to their usual lifestyle and, subsequently, fading away of the inhibitory factors that lessens the aggressive behaviors created by Ramadan.

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