

Intervention for Behavioral Change in Funeral Ceremonies in Islamic Republic Of Iran

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Abstract

Background: Large-scale funeral ceremonies are commonplace among Iranians and start from the time of person's death till the fortieth day and anniversary. These traditional ceremonies cause a lot of psychological, economical and unnecessary problems for the bereaved family. This interventional research aims to change the behavior and the way in which the funeral ceremonies are held to remove the unnecessary problems associated with them.

Methods: In this interventional study, the behavioral intervention continued for six months with the cooperation of Friday prayer Imams and other responsible parties. Data were collected using the questionnaires before and after intervention and were analyzed by SPSS.

Results: Some behavioral changes after the intervention were reported. A reduction was seen in the mean number of someone else's house used as a venue for the funeral ceremonies, of fabric writing installations, of meals given in the funeral ceremonies, and of the individuals present at these meals and involved in the process. An increase was observed in the number of flower arrangements. The mean difference in all the studied variables before and after intervention was statistically significant ($P < 0.005$).

Conclusions: Conducting conferences, distributing pamphlets, educational programs for the public will change the quality and type of funeral ceremonies. Similar program is recommended for other parts of Iran with similar cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Intervention; Behavioral change; Funeral ceremonies

Introduction

Funeral ceremonies are commonplace in Iranians and start from death till the fortieth day and anniversary [1]. These ceremonies may cause a lot of psychological, economical and unnecessary problems for the bereaved family [2]. There is a small but growing literature on culturally determined expenses of social conventions and celebrations, especially for births, weddings and funerals, and the outcomes such expenditure has on the poor in developing countries [3-7].

Farokh Shahr, a city in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province, southwest Iran, is located 10 km east of the province's capital, Shahrekord; it is neighbored by Isfahan from north, by Kiar County from south, by Shahrekord from west and by Boroujen from east. This historical city with the population of 40000 individuals has a great potential for development due to the high level of knowledge and the availability of infrastructures. "The development team of Farokh Shahr" was established in 2004 as a cultural, social and scientific organization in order to follow sustainable and multidimensional development with full support of the public and the Islamic city council. It consists of ten work teams and 1300 members. The development team of Farokh Shahr was then

renamed as "Institute for Research on Health Promotion" after "Center for development Research at Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences" agreed to cooperate with it.

Funeral ceremonies are commonplace in Farokh Shahr and the costs of these ceremonies have created a lot of economical problems; the minimum cost, irrespective of other indirect costs, is approximately 7000000 Rials. The social problems due to this incorrect behavior, along with other unnecessary marginal issues, encouraged researchers to carry out an interventional research to change the people's behavior with regards to funeral ceremonies. No similar study has been yet conducted in Iran [8,9].

Aims

The main aim of this study is to determine the effect of the public's intervention on changing their own behavior with regards to the funeral ceremonies in the population of study. Determination and comparison of the public's behavior before and after the intervention are secondary aims. The practical aim was to reduce the costs and prevent the time wastage due to the lengthy funeral ceremonies. The research questions are as follows:

1. How long did the ceremonies last before and after the intervention?
2. How much did the ceremonies cost before and after the intervention?
3. How much were the public satisfied with the ceremonies before and after intervention?

Methods

This interventional study was conducted to change people's behavior in al fatiha recital ceremony. The study population consisted of all households with at least one family member deceased during 2005, 2006 and 2014 and holding al fatiha recital ceremony in Farokh shahr. Twenty seven participants before the intervention and 31 after the intervention in 2005 and 2006, and 30 in 2014 were studied to investigate the behavioral change in al fatiha recital ceremony in Farokh shahr population. The participants were randomly enrolled. To collect the data, a questionnaire with confirmed validity and reliability was used. The questionnaire included the items regarding age, gender, occupation, education, the date at death, the reason for death, the type of the ceremonies held, (funeral, the third and seventh day, the second and third week, the fortieth day and anniversary), the locations used for ceremonies (mosque, Hussainiah, personal home and neighbors' home), and the total number of days and costs spent for various ceremonies (funeral, burial, meal serving, information, transportation, fabric writing and wreath donation, costs for renting the locations), the number of days family members

were engaged in holding the ceremonies, the number of people involved in holding ceremonies, the number of meals and people served in the ceremonies and the bereaved family satisfaction with ceremonies, costs, and consequences.

Firstly, 27 participants were studied by the questionnaire within the last three months of 2005. Then, the interventions for change in the behaviors were developed and trained with cooperation of development team members, officials, mosques Imams and Farrokh Shahr Friday Prayer Imam, and through conferences, pamphlets, etc. Then, 31 participants were studied in 2006 and 30 participants were studied in 2014 by the initially administered questionnaire. The data were analyzed by SPSS using descriptive statistics.

Results

In 2014, mean age of the deceased individuals was 65.13 ± 24.60 (range; 8-97) years. 18 (60%) individuals were men. For occupation, 4 (13.3%) individuals were farmer, 8 (26.7%) worked in private sector, 11 (36.7%) were housewives, 5 (16.7%) were retired, and 1 (3.3%) was civil servant. For education, 14 (46.7%) individuals were illiterate, 7 (23.3%) had primary and guidance education, 6 (20%) had diploma, 1 (3.3%) had associate degree, and 1 (3.3%) had BS/BA. The majority of patients ($n = 7$) died in Farvardin and Shahrivar. The majority of deaths was due to stroke (30%) followed by old age (%26.7) and cancer (%23/3). The rate of the changes after intervention is as follows: mean rate of use of others' homes decreased from 14 (51%) individuals prior to intervention (total number: 27) to 5 (16%) after intervention (total number: 31) during 2005-2006. In 2014, this rate was derived 9 (30%) individuals (total number: 30). For fabric writing installations, before the intervention, 21 (77.7%) and after intervention 1 (0.3%) had fabric writing installations during 2005-2006. In 2014, 24 (80%) individuals had fabric writing installation. Donation of wreath before the intervention done by 24 (88.8%) individuals and by 31(100%) after the intervention during 2005-2006. In 2014, donation of wreath was done by 27 (90%) individuals. The mean number of meals served before the intervention and after the intervention was respectively 8 and 4 in 2006. In 2014 the mean number of meals was derived eight. The mean number of served guests was 506 before the intervention and 245 after the

intervention during 2005-2006. In 2014 the mean number of meals was derived 371. The mean number of individuals involved in holding the ceremony was 130 before the intervention and 82 after the intervention during 2005-2006 (Table 1), and 19 in 2014. In 2005, the mean cost was estimated approximately 14,077,708 rials, in 2006 approximately 8,146,479 rials and in 2014 approximately 66.6 million rials (Table 2). For the satisfaction with the cost in the bereaved families, in 2005, 36.8% were satisfied, 24.6% partially satisfied, 5.3% had no idea, 24.6% were dissatisfied and 8.8% were partially dissatisfied. In 2006, 26.3% were satisfied, 36.6% partially satisfied, 10.5% had no idea, 19.3% were dissatisfied and 5.3% were partially dissatisfied. In 2014, 53.3% were satisfied, 10% partially satisfied and 23.3% dissatisfied. In 2014, 13.3% ($n = 4$) held burial and seventh day, 26.7% ($n = 8$) burial, seventh and fortieth day, 23.3% ($n = 7$) funeral, seventh day, second week, third week and fortieth day and 20% ($n = 6$) burial, third and seventh day, second week, third week and the fortieth day. For the place for the ceremony, 6.7% ($n = 2$) of individuals held the ceremony only in their own home, 60% ($n = 18$) in the mosque and their home, 3.3% ($n = 1$) in the mosque, Hussainiah and their home, and 30% ($n = 9$) in mosque, their home and neighbors' home.

Discussion

One of the valuable and perhaps unique customs among Iranians is commemoration of the dead. In the past decades, recitation of al fatiha ceremony was held for seven days, which was easy to be attended by the public due to the cultural constructs of society, small population, and hence little mortality. But gradually, 7-day ceremony of al fatiha recitation including the day of the funeral was reduced to three days due to cultural constructs, new problems and lack of time.

In our study, in 2014 the majority attended only the funeral, seventh and fortieth day ceremonies. Also, the number of people served at these ceremonies reduced compared to before the intervention and hence the costs expended for them fell and the respondents were more satisfied with the costs expended for the deceased, as compared with the past. After the interventions, the majority of individuals held the ceremonies only in the mosque and their own homes. However, wreath donation and fabric writings

	Before intervention			After intervention			P value
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
Use of someone else's house as venue for the funeral ceremonies	14	4.64	2.79	5	2.8	2.95	0.228
Number of fabric writings	21	32.38	23.41	10			
Number of meals served in funeral ceremonies	27	8.15	1.56	31	4.48	1.36	0.004
Number of people present for meals	27	506.6	258.7	31	245	103.6	0.000
The number of people involved in the process of the ceremony.	27	130.7	96.57	31	82.32	59.83	0.007
Number of flower arrangements and signs for charity (orphans in particular)	24	36.46	27.86	31	34.67	30.29	0.824
The number of days spent on the ceremony	27	6.07	0.675	31	4.48	3.11	0.012

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of studied variables before and after intervention.

	Before intervention		After intervention		P value
	average	SD	average	SD	
Cost of obituary and invitation cards	771153.8	1097376.2	324193.5	873860.3	0.001
Cost of <i>Quran</i> recitation	692142.9	289870.4	628000	446766.1	0.53
Cost of meals	11488846	6339403.3	6045000	3304603.6	0.000
Travel expenses	392326	733240	671428.6	988210.9	0.88
Other costs	392326	527571.2	507857	484602.6	0.2
Total cost	2746317.3	8626651	8146479	2746317.3	0.000

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of costs of al-Fatiha recital ceremony before and after intervention.

were not reduced after the interventions and the individuals continued to follow the custom of donating wreath and having fabric writings installed.

Since previous and current requirements are fundamentally different, then addressing some issues is important, including staggering costs of the funeral and memorial ceremony, the seventh day, the fortieth day, and anniversary, wasting many hours, and being lavish in preparing meals.

Conclusions

The results clearly show that conferences, pamphlets and educational programs for the public will change the quality and type of funeral ceremonies. The same program could be recommended for other cities in Iran with similar cultural backgrounds. Therefore, some measures should, with good will, be taken to update this good practice so as not to waste material and spiritual capital and to find a solution to this public concern while commemorating the deceased ones as best as possible. Then, it is recommended to hold funeral and burial, as in the past, with respect, but to reduce the days of recitation of al fatiha ceremony. Also, the ceremonies of the seventh day, fortieth day and anniversary are suggested to be attended and held only by first degree relatives. Installing placards, banners and printed fabrics of condolence should be practiced only by the deceased's family. It should be born in mind that we should not expect that this tradition which has long been established in our country to change overnight, because it necessitates public consensus and intention.

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