

Physical Activity as Worship: An Islamic Perspective on Health and Fitness

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Abstract

Objectives:

This study aimed to examine the position of sport and physical activity within Islamic teachings and to explain the conditions under which physical exercise may be regarded as an act of worship. Particular attention was given to the Islamic concept of preserving the body as a trust (*amanah*) from Allah SWT and to the relationship between physical fitness, health, and Muslims' spiritual responsibilities.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a qualitative literature review approach. Data were obtained from relevant primary and secondary sources, including verses of the Holy Qur'an, Prophetic traditions (*Hadith*), the perspectives of classical and contemporary Islamic scholars, and scientific literature concerning sport, health, and physical fitness. The selected literature was analyzed thematically to identify Islamic principles related to physical activity and to interpret their implications for health, well-being, moral development, and religious practice.

Results: The findings indicate that Islam recognizes physical health and bodily strength as important components of a balanced and responsible life. Islamic teachings encourage Muslims to maintain their health, avoid harmful behavior, and engage in beneficial physical activities. Islamic traditions also refer to activities such as archery, horse riding, swimming, running, and wrestling as practices that may develop physical competence and preparedness. Beyond their physical benefits, sports can cultivate discipline, courage, perseverance, self-control, cooperation, and sportsmanship. Regular physical activity may also improve physical fitness, endurance, mental concentration, and functional capacity, thereby supporting Muslims in performing religious obligations and daily responsibilities more effectively.

Conclusions: Sport and physical activity may be regarded as acts of worship when they are undertaken with sincere intentions, provide lawful benefits, and are practiced in accordance with Islamic ethical principles. From an Islamic perspective, caring for physical health represents part of an individual's responsibility to preserve the body as an *amanah* from Allah SWT. Therefore, sport should not be understood merely as a recreational or worldly pursuit, but also as a means of promoting physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development while supporting the effective fulfillment of religious and social responsibilities.

Keywords: Islamic perspective; physical activity; worship; health; physical fitness



Introduction

Health and physical fitness are important aspects of human life that cannot be separated from the purpose of human creation as servants and caliphs on earth. Islam views the human body as a trust from Allah SWT that must be protected, cared for, and utilized for good. This is emphasized in numerous verses of the Quran, which instruct humans not to destroy themselves, maintain balance in life, and use the body for beneficial purposes (Nofriansyah, 2019) . This principle positions exercise not merely as a recreational activity or health necessity, but as an act of worship when performed with the right intention.

Advances in modern health science have shown that physical activity has a significant impact on improving health, including physiological, psychological, and social aspects. However, in the context of Muslim societies , exercise is often viewed as an activity separate from the spiritual dimension, even though Islam has encouraged its followers from the beginning to develop physical strength. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, *"A strong believer is more beloved to Allah than a weak believer."* (Yandi & Bara, 2023) , which suggests that physical strength has a virtuous value and is a means to increase good deeds. Thus, exercise is an important medium for maintaining physical strength as a primary asset in carrying out religious duties and social activities (Khaelani, 2021) .

Furthermore, various hadiths demonstrate that ³ the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) not only encouraged physical activity but also practiced it. Activities such as archery, horse riding, wrestling (musara'ah), and swimming are examples of recommended sports due to their health benefits, agility, and moral and strategic values (RS Salahudin & Satriawan, 2021) . Physical activity in Islam is inseparable from character development, such as courage, patience, honesty, discipline, and sportsmanship. These values are essential in developing a Muslim personality with a balance between physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being.

In the modern era, Muslims face various challenges of unhealthy lifestyles due to lack of physical activity and increasing sedentary lifestyles, which lead to various degenerative diseases. Global health reports indicate that lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, and obesity (Attansyah et al., 2023). In this context, Islamic values regarding health and exercise become highly relevant to be re-actualized. Islam not only encourages exercise but also provides a strong theological and ethical foundation regarding the importance of maintaining fitness as part of worship and a balanced life.

However, scientific studies examining exercise as an integral part of worship from an Islamic perspective are still relatively limited, particularly in conceptual approaches that link health, fitness, worship, and spirituality. Some studies emphasize the fiqh aspects of physical activity or merely its health benefits, without describing the holistic connection between the physical and worship (Ruhardi et al., 2021) . Therefore, a comprehensive study is needed that highlights the multidimensional position of exercise in Islam—theological, philosophical, health, and moral.

The position of exercise as part of worship in the Islamic perspective, based on a literature review of the Qur'an, hadith, the opinions of scholars, and modern scientific literature related to health and fitness. By providing an in-depth explanation of the concept of the body as a trust, the value of worship in exercise, and the relationship between physical activity and spiritual strengthening, this study is expected to enrich the scientific repertoire of Islamic education and holistic health, as well as provide inspiration for Muslims to integrate exercise into their daily lives as a form of devotion to Allah SWT.



The Concept of Worship in Islam. In Islamic terminology, worship is not only limited to mahdhah worship such as prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj, but includes all human activities intended to seek the pleasure of Allah SWT. Ibn Taimiyah defines worship as "everything that is loved and approved by Allah, whether in the form of words or deeds, visible or hidden" (S. Salahudin & Rusdin, 2020). This definition shows that daily activities that have beneficial value, including maintaining health through exercise, can have the value of worship.

The aspect of intention is the main factor in determining the value of an act of worship. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said, *"Indeed, deeds depend on their intentions."* (Khaelani, 2021) Thus, exercise that is done with the intention of maintaining the body's trust, increasing strength in carrying out worship, and avoiding harm will have spiritual value. Physical activity is no longer secular, but is part of obedience to Allah SWT (Maslani et al., 2023).

Islamic Views on Body and Health. Islam views the human body as a trust that must be properly safeguarded. In the Quran, the command to protect oneself is emphasized through the prohibition against throwing oneself into destruction (Surah Al-Baqarah: 195) (Attansyah et al., 2023). This verse has been interpreted by commentators as a call to avoid health-damaging behaviors, including a sedentary lifestyle, overeating, or neglecting physical fitness (Maslani et al., 2023).

Theologically, the body is given to humans to be used for worship and good deeds. Therefore, maintaining physical health is a manifestation of moral and spiritual responsibility. Contemporary scholars emphasize that health is not only related to physical aspects, but also mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects, so its maintenance must be carried out holistically (Fauziah & Dewi, 2021).

Furthermore, performing acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, Hajj, and jihad require physical strength. As emphasized in the hadith, a strong believer is more beloved to Allah than a weak believer (Khaelani, 2021). This hadith provides a normative basis that physical fitness is directly related to the quality of one's worship.

Sports in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith. Although the Quran does not explicitly mention the word *"sport"*, many verses contain concepts of physical activity, strength, agility, and dedication to work (Aulia et al., 2021). Verses such as Surah Al-Anfal, verse 60, encourage Muslims to cultivate strength (*qunwah*) in life. Scholars of interpretation relate this to physical, mental, and spiritual strength (MUHAMMAD, 2022).

The Prophet's hadiths provide direct examples of recommended exercise. Some of the physical activities exemplified by the Prophet, according to various authentic narrations, include: Swimming (as-sibāhah) – strengthening muscles, improving breathing, and developing courage; Archery (ar-ramy) – improving focus, agility, and mental fortitude; Horse riding (ar-rukūb) – training balance, courage, and physical readiness; and Wrestling (musara'ah) – the Prophet once wrestled Rukhanah and won the match (R. Ilyas, 2021).

In a social context, sports during the Prophet's time served as a means of character building, strengthening solidarity, and physical training for both worship and warfare. Values such as sportsmanship, courage, discipline, and honesty were emphasized in these activities (Amanda et al., 2023).

Therefore, sport in Islam is not only a physical activity, but also a moral and spiritual activity that has moral and worship dimensions.

The Concept of Physical Fitness in Islam. Physical fitness from an Islamic perspective is holistic, encompassing balance between body, mind and soul. Islam views humans as consisting of physical and spiritual elements, both of which must be protected. According to contemporary research, the concept of fitness in Islam includes:

Physical Fitness



Includes muscle strength, flexibility, cardio-respiratory endurance, and body coordination (Aufa et al., 2024) . Physical fitness supports the ability to perform daily worship such as prayer, fasting, and tawaf or sa'i during the Hajj.

Mental and Emotional Fitness

Exercise helps reduce stress, improve mood, and increase clarity of thought (Salahudin et al., 2023). A healthy mind makes it easier for someone to focus on worship.

Spiritual Fitness

The intention, patience, and self-control cultivated through exercise are part of spiritual fitness. Physical activity can strengthen one's relationship with God, especially when intended as a way of safeguarding the physical trust (Aditya & Mukti, 2024).

Thus, sport is a means of strengthening the three main dimensions of human development. Islam integrates physical fitness and worship into a mutually supportive whole.

Materials and Methods

This research uses a literature study method (library research) which aims to examine in depth various scientific sources related to the relationship between sport, health, and the concept of worship in Islam. This approach was chosen because the topic being studied is conceptual-theological in nature and requires a comprehensive understanding from various scientific perspectives, both religion and modern health.

Types and Approaches of Research

This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive-analytical approach. The descriptive approach is used to describe the Islamic perspective on physical activity, while the analytical approach is used to assess the relationship between exercise and aspects of worship, physical, mental, and spiritual health (Abdussamad, 2022) .

Data source

The data sources for this research consist of two categories:

Primary Sources

Al-Qur'an verses relating to health, physical strength and body protection (for example QS. Al-Baqarah: 195; QS. Al-Anfal: 60) (Yusuf, 2021) .

Authentic hadiths that describe physical activities exemplified by the Prophet, such as archery, horse riding, swimming, and wrestling (Muhsin & Nurbayani, 2020)

Data collection technique

Data collection techniques were carried out through document searches, including: Identification of themes and keywords such as *Islam* , *sports* , *fitness* , *worship* , *physical health* , *sports hadith* , and *body mandates* , Literature searches in scientific journal databases (Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, and ResearchGate), Analysis of the works of classical scholars such as *Riyadbus Shalihin* and *Shabih Muslim* to refer to sports practices during the time of the Prophet and Study of contemporary Islamic health books and Islamic worship jurisprudence (Pahleviannur et al., 2022) .

Results

Sport as a Manifestation of Body Care in Islam

The literature review shows that Islam places great emphasis on maintaining the body as a trust from Allah SWT. This protection is reflected in the commandment not to throw oneself into destruction (Aulia et al., 2021) , which implicitly instructs Muslims to avoid lifestyles that damage health. Physical activity is one way to maintain optimal bodily function. Contemporary scholars argue that exercise not only promotes physical health but also supports optimal worship (R. Ilyas, 2021) .

Several sources suggest that a strong body is better able to perform religious duties, such as prayer devoutly, fasting consistently, and performing the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages effectively (Prasetyo et al., 2023) . Therefore, exercise is a form of human



devotion to upholding God's trust. This demonstrates the direct connection between physical activity and a Muslim's spirituality.

Sports Activities Recommended by the Prophet Muhammad SAW

The results of the study of the hadith show that the Prophet Muhammad actively encouraged and carried out various sports activities. These activities are not only aimed at physical health, but also have educational and spiritual value.

Swim

Swimming improves muscle strength, coordination, and breathing. The Hadith recommends teaching children to swim because it offers both health benefits and agility (Salahudin et al., 2023).

Archery

The Prophet said that archery is a rewarding activity as long as one does not neglect one's obligations (Kholilah, 2023). Archery trains focus, composure, and mental fortitude.

Horse riding

Horse riding trains speed, agility and courage. During the time of the Prophet, horse riding was used for mobility and defense, so it was a physical exercise with strategic value.

Wrestling (Musara'ah)

Some narrations mention that the Prophet once wrestled with Rukhanah and defeated her. This shows that sports such as wrestling are permitted as long as they do not cause harm and are carried out with good manners and sportsmanship.

This study shows that the sports carried out by the Prophet not only made the body healthy, but also functioned as character building such as courage, patience, sportsmanship, and honesty. This shows that sport in Islam is not merely physical, but has moral and social dimensions.

Sports as a Means of Building Muslim Character

Sports have a significant role in shaping a person's character. A person's spirituality is not only built through ritual worship, but also through physical activities that require discipline, hard work, and self-control. In the Islamic context, character (morals) is the core of perfect faith (Salahudin et al., 2023).

Sports help shape character through :

Discipline

Every sport has rules and techniques that must be followed. This discipline trains self-control and consistency. In Islam, discipline is part of noble character (Muhasibi et al., 2024).

Sportsmanship and Honesty

Sports teach how to accept victory and defeat fairly. Islam places great emphasis on honesty and justice in all aspects of life.

Patience and Perseverance

Physical exercise requires patience. In the Quran, patience is a key characteristic of a pious person. Therefore, exercise can be a means of spiritual training.

Cooperation and Brotherhood

Team sports such as soccer, volleyball, or traditional competitions instill the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and brotherhood (Rusdin et al., 2022). These values align with the principles of Islamic brotherhood. This finding confirms that sport is a practical way to instill character values that are part of the integration of faith and morals.

Mental Health in Islam

Modern health literature confirms that exercise improves cardio-respiratory fitness, strengthens muscles, and reduces the risk of chronic disease. From an Islamic



perspective, physical health is essential for supporting the quality of worship and the productivity of good deeds (Meo, 2019) .

Physical Benefits

Exercise increases endurance, prevents obesity, and maintains the health of vital organs. Healthy individuals are better able to perform physical worship optimally, such as prayer, fasting, and the pilgrimage.

Mental and Emotional Benefits

Exercise has been proven to reduce stress, increase endorphin hormones, and maintain emotional stability. Mental calmness is very important for the solemnity of worship.

Social Benefits

Sports are often played in groups, improving social relationships, building empathy, and strengthening brotherhood among Muslims (Mahisarani, 2022) . Thus, sports provide multidimensional benefits that are highly relevant to the goals of Muslim life .

Intention and Ethics of Sports in Islam

The results of the study also show that the worship value of an activity, including sports, is determined by intention (Rusdin et al., 2022) . The intentions of exercise in Islam include : maintaining bodily health as a mandate, strengthening oneself for worship, improving quality of life and productivity, and avoiding disease and harm. Islam also stipulates sports ethics, such as not causing danger (*la darar wa la dirar*), not exposing one's private parts, avoiding excessive indulgence, maintaining interaction etiquette, and not neglecting religious obligations (Y. Ilyas, 2017) . By paying attention to this ethic, sport becomes a legitimate, healthy and worship-worthy activity.

Synthesis of Discussion

The overall results show that: Sports are a means of maintaining the body's trust and avoiding destruction, the Prophet Muhammad SAW provided a real example in sports activities, Sports form a strong, disciplined, and noble Muslim character, There is a close relationship between sports and the quality of worship, and with the right intention, sports become an activity that has worship value and provides holistic benefits.

This study emphasizes that sport in Islam is not a secular activity, but rather part of a system of worship that is integrated with health and spirituality .

Table 1. Summary of Analyzed Literature

No	Author/Year	Types of research	Focus of Study	Key Findings
1	Author A (2021)	Literature Review	Sports in an Islamic perspective	Exercise is part of efforts to maintain health which is recommended in Islam.
2	Author B (2022)	Cross-sectional	Physical activity and Muslim health	Regular physical activity improves physical health and quality of life.
3	Author C (2022)	Systematic Review	Physical activity and mental health	Exercise can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.
4	Author D (2023)	Qualitative	Islamic values in sports	Sports shape the character of discipline, sportsmanship, and responsibility.
5	Author E (2023)	Literature Review	Sports ethics in Islam	The implementation of sports must pay attention to intentions, manners, and sharia provisions.



6	Author F (2024)	Experimental	Physical exercise and fitness	Regular exercise improves endurance and cardiovascular function.
7	Author G (2024)	Mixed Methods	Islamic value- based physical education	Integration of Islamic values improves the character and motivation of students.
8	Author H (2025)	Narrative Review	Sports as worship	Sport is worth worship if it is done with the right intentions and in accordance with the Shari'a.

Source: Results of literature synthesis analyzed by the author (2026).

Alternative (for the synthesis results section)

Table 2. Synthesis of Literature Review Findings

Aspect	Synthesis Results
Islamic Perspective	Exercise is part of the effort to maintain the trust given by Allah SWT to the body.
Physical Benefits	Improve fitness, muscle strength, endurance, and prevent degenerative diseases.
Mental Benefits	Reduce stress, increase focus, and improve psychological health.
Spiritual Benefits	Supporting the quality of worship through a healthy body and correct intentions.
Character Building	Instilling discipline, sportsmanship, responsibility, cooperation and patience.
Sports Ethics	Maintaining modesty, avoiding doping, not neglecting worship, and upholding sportsmanship.
Implications	Sports need to be integrated into education and character development based on Islamic values.

Discussion

The results of the literature review show that Islam views health as an inseparable part of the objectives of sharia (*maqāṣ id al-syarī'ah*), especially in protecting the soul (*hifz al-nafs*) and protecting the mind (*hifz al-'aql*). From this perspective, sport is not just a physical activity aimed at improving fitness, but is a form of effort by a Muslim to maintain the body's trust given by Allah SWT. A healthy body is the main capital in carrying out various forms of worship, working productively, and carrying out the function as a caliph on earth. Therefore, the concept of health in Islam is holistic because it integrates physical, spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions.

The findings of this study are in line with various studies showing that regular physical activity provides significant benefits in improving the quality of health. Exercise can improve cardiovascular function, muscle strength, endurance, metabolic balance, and reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, obesity, and heart disease. From an Islamic perspective, these benefits are not only seen as biological advantages, but also as a form of gratitude for the blessings of health bestowed by Allah SWT. Thus, maintaining fitness through exercise is a real implementation of human responsibility in maintaining health as a mandate.

In addition to physical benefits, research results also show that exercise has a major contribution to mental and emotional health. Physical activity has been shown to reduce stress levels, anxiety, and symptoms of depression, while improving concentration, sleep quality, and psychological well-being. A good psychological condition influences the



quality of worship because mentally healthy individuals tend to have better abilities in maintaining devotion, patience, and consistency in carrying out various religious obligations. Thus, sport becomes a means of supporting the creation of a balance between physical health and spiritual peace.

This study also confirms that the Prophet Muhammad SAW set an example regarding the importance of physical activity in daily life. Various hadiths explain recommendations for activities such as swimming, archery, horse riding, walking, running, and wrestling. These activities not only aim to improve physical strength but also cultivate³ courage, agility, discipline, resilience, and readiness to face life's various challenges. The Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) exemplifies that exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle, taught since the early days of Islamic civilization and remains relevant for modern society.

In terms of character development, sports play a strategic role in instilling moral values aligned with Islamic teachings. Various sports activities teach honesty, discipline, responsibility, sportsmanship, cooperation, mutual respect, and the ability to control emotions in the face of victory or defeat. These values are part of the noble character that is the primary goal of Islamic education. Therefore, sports can be seen as an effective medium for character education because these values are practiced directly in various real situations.

The aspect that differentiates sport from an Islamic perspective from the health approach in general is the emphasis on intention (*niyyah*). In Islam, every permissible activity can have the value of worship if it is carried out with sincere intentions for Allah SWT and provides benefit. Therefore, exercise done to maintain health so that you can worship better, increase productivity, and strengthen your ability to carry out your mandate as caliph will gain spiritual value. On the other hand, if sport is done for pride, to neglect religious obligations, or to cause harm to oneself or others, then the value of the worship is reduced or even lost. This shows that the spiritual dimension is the main foundation in interpreting sports activities according to Islam.

Besides intention, the implementation of sports must also pay attention to ethics and sharia boundaries. Principles such as maintaining modesty, avoiding behavior that endangers oneself or others, upholding honesty in competition, avoiding gambling (*maysir*), not using prohibited substances such as doping, and not neglecting religious obligations are important aspects that must be considered. Thus, sport not only produces achievements and fitness, but also reflects the implementation of Islamic ethical values in daily life.

19 Conclusions

Based on the results of the literature review, it can be concluded that sport has an important position in Islam and can be considered an act of worship if it is carried out with the right intentions and in accordance with sharia principles. This study shows that Islamic teachings encourage its followers to maintain physical health through physical activity as a form of preserving the trust from Allah SWT and as a means of improving the quality of worship. In addition to providing benefits for physical²⁶ health, exercise also contributes to mental, emotional, and social health, and forms positive character traits such as discipline, sportsmanship, patience, responsibility, and cooperation. Thus, exercise is not only understood as a recreational or fitness activity, but also as part of the practice⁸ of Islamic values that support the creation of holistic well-being. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for educational institutions, families, and communities in integrating exercise as part of character education and fostering a healthy lifestyle based on Islamic values. Further research is recommended to empirically examine the relationship between sports activities, religiosity, and holistic well-being in various Muslim community groups.



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Conflict of Interest

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