

THE MASJID AS A RESTORATIVE ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MASJID SULTAN HAJI AHMAD SHAH, IIUM

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ABSTRACT

While studies have been conducted on the restorative effects of monasteries and churches, limited research is available that investigates the restorative effects of a masjid or mosque. This study therefore focuses on the restorative effects that the Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah (SHAS) Masjid in IIUM has on its visitors. The study aims to answer four research questions namely, gender differences in the motivation of Masjid goers, areas of the Masjid that bring the most restorative effects, the restorative effects of the Masjid on mood outcome, and the relationship between motivation, activities, and mood of Masjid visitors. Analyses demonstrate four important results: (1) there is no statistically significant difference in gender on motivation for going to the Masjid; (2) the areas of the Masjid that give most restorative effect vary; (3) restorative effects are observed in terms of improvement in mood after visiting the Masjid; and (4) there is a significant relationship between the motivation, engaged activities, and the mood outcome among Masjid goers. Altogether, the results suggest that Masjid has restorative potential for enhancing spiritual needs as well as inducing positive changes in mood among its visitors.

Keywords: restorative effects; house of worship; Masjid; mood; behavioural mapping

INTRODUCTION

Much of the previous research on restorative environment had pointed out the preferences of the nature over the built environment for the restorative experience (Van de berg, Koole, & Wulp, 2003). However, there are some studies that resolved around the built environment like the monastery and church studies by Oullette, Kaplan, and Kaplan (2005) and Herzog, Ouellette, Rolens, and Koenigs (2009). In these studies, houses of worship are deemed to be a place to seek tranquillity and comfort in faith as well as to overcome mental fatigue.

Most of the houses of worship generally promote sociofugal environment whereby visitors or the devotees are more likely to isolate themselves from other visitors or devotees. One such example is the church design that tends to be directive where there is generally one entrance point to one hallway leading to the seats. The seating is directed in one way and not much room of circulation for people to mingle around, and at the same time had limited the types of activities of its visitor. However, this kind of design is not subjected to the architecture of *Masjid*

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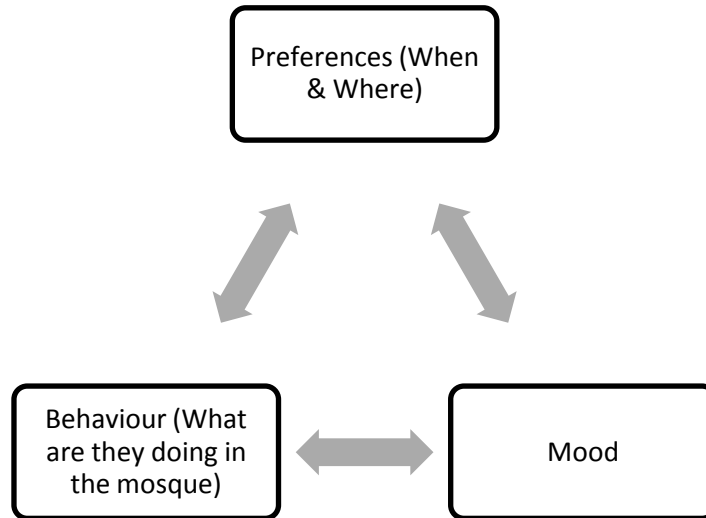
where usually there will be more than one entrance and the circulation is more open. *Masjid*'s design also tends to be sociopetal where we can find the visitors or devotees sitting in groups. Due to the differences in the architecture and the circulation that promoted from the designs, it is likely that restorative effects of *Masjids* would be fairly comparable, if not similar to, effects observed in other houses of worship.

The hectic life of being a student uses up a lot of energy. Even planning the day requires an immense of energy through thinking, organising, and decision making. As the day starts, attention is needed for the students to focus on lectures, assignments, discussions, and other related activities. By the end of the day, students usually find themselves tired and listless. Some would feel stressed and even burnout. To cope with this problem, the majority of students resort to nap, eat, drink coffee, or simply rest in order to restore their energy and attention. However, some others choose to spend some time in a place where they can have the restorative experience. Within the International Islamic University Malaysia, it can be observed that many people would visit the *Masjid* not only to pray but also to take a break. However, little attention has been given to the study of the *Masjid* as a potential restorative environment for its visitors. So, the question arises - why do many people choose the *Masjid* as a place to rest?

The current study therefore aims to investigate whether the *Masjid* in the university serves as a source of a restorative environment for its visitors. Using Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) approach on restorative components, which include components such as 'Other Worlds and the Concept of Extend', 'Fascination', and 'Action and Compatibility', this study seeks to explore the preferences of the visitors in terms of which part of the *Masjid* they like to access the most, the behaviour performed while they are in this place, and whether there are changes in moods after visiting the *Masjid*. Figure 1.0 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study. It is also the aims of the study to address four research questions:

- (1) are there any gender differences in the motivations of *Masjid* goers?
- (2) which areas of the *Masjid* that probes the most restorative effect?
- (3) what are the restorative effects that *Masjid* has on its goers?, and
- (4) is there any relationship between the motivation, engaged activities and mood outcome of *Masjid* goers?

Figure 1.0
Conceptual framework of the study



METHOD

Participants

Participants of this study were 100 *Masjid* goers of Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah (SHAS) *Masjid* at the International Islamic University Malaysia, Gombak. The participants were from different Kulliyahs such as Economics, Engineering and Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences. In this study, 50 males and 50 females were recruited, with their age ranging from 21 to 40 years old.

Study location

IIUM *Masjid* is located at the centre of IIUM Gombak Campus. It is surrounded by Kulliyah and Administration buildings and due to that, it become a good point of rendezvous and meeting. The location itself is strategic and easily accessible. The function of the *Masjid* is not confined to religious rituals such as praying and reciting the Quran - it is also used as a resting place and a venue to conduct classes and discussions. The *Masjid* is most active during lunch time around 1.00 p.m. as it coincides with *Zuhr* prayer. It is assumed that the *Masjid* plays an important role as

a venue to rest and retreat from classes or office work. Due to this assumption, we believe that the *Masjid* possesses the quality of 'extend' (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) thus strengthening our choice in choosing it as the study location.

According to the Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), having a sense of being away involves one to escape from any unwanted distraction in the surrounding and distancing themselves from their usual work and any reminders of it. There is some significant truth in it, however, in this study it was found that being away may not necessarily means otherwise. Instead, it can be deduced that being away here means isolating oneself from any social activities and invest in alone time. Thus, this explains the choice of activities engage among *Masjid* goers which are personal in nature (*muhassabah*, asking help or forgiveness from Allah or recite the *Qur'an*). This can be seen related in the study with the mood outcome posed by *Masjid* goers, which lead to high effective functioning with regard to emotions and decision making.

The decoration and the design of the *Masjid* are also very attractive in terms of its aesthetic. The component of the design is also very functional. For example, the stained glass and open wall make use of the natural light to illuminate the main prayer hall. The architecture itself promotes good ventilation and makes use of stack effects to regulate the temperature in the *Masjid*. Both of the aesthetical values and functional design made the *Masjid* a comfortable building for its users. The aesthetic and functional aspects of the *Masjid* can therefore be related to the aspect of fascination which can be explained from the changes of the mood of its visitors.

The visitors of the *Masjid* usually go there to perform religious activities like praying and reciting the *Qur'an*. However, there are some who go to the *Masjid* to study and take a power nap. Their decision in choosing the *Masjid* as a resting place could be caused by their perception that the *Masjid* is comfortable and peaceful. We believe these choices were not random acts of the visitors but rather purposeful. In this study, these actions will be studied as components of behaviours in the attempts to investigate the restorative effects provided by the *Masjid*.

Materials

The materials used in this study were the floor plan or the layout of the second floor of the *Masjid* that was used to document the activities or behaviours of the *Masjid* goers at the level 2 of the SHAS *Masjid*. Each of the activities was documented on the behaviours mapping data collection form that consist of sex, age, and activities that have been

characterised into eight categories. These include (1) Resting, (2) Discussion, (3) *Halaqah*, (4) *Salat*, (5) *Qur'an*, (6) Chatting, (7) Surfing the internet, and (8) Others.

A set of questionnaire was also used to investigate the restorative effects of the *Masjid*. This questionnaire contains four sections, which include the motivation of the *Masjid* goers, the mood experience before coming to the *Masjid*, the activity performed, and the mood after going out of the place. All responses were recorded by using 5-point Likert-scale that consists of "not at all", "slightly", "somewhat", "definitely" and "very much".

Procedure

Data were collected at the second floor of the SHAS *Masjid*, which covers male and female areas. There were two steps of conducting this study. First, the researchers set a day to do behaviour mapping by observing the activities of the *Masjid* goers during its active period (i.e. from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.). The observation was conducted by using naturalistic observation. The male area is divided into five small areas and was observed by five different researchers. Meanwhile, the female area is divided into three small areas. The activities of the *Masjid* goers were recorded on the floor plan, and then every activity of the *Masjid* goers were recorded on a behaviour mapping data collection form. The second step of the study was conducting the survey on the next day at the same peak period. The researchers obtained the informed consent through verbal agreement and the questionnaires were given randomly to the *Masjid* goers.

RESULTS

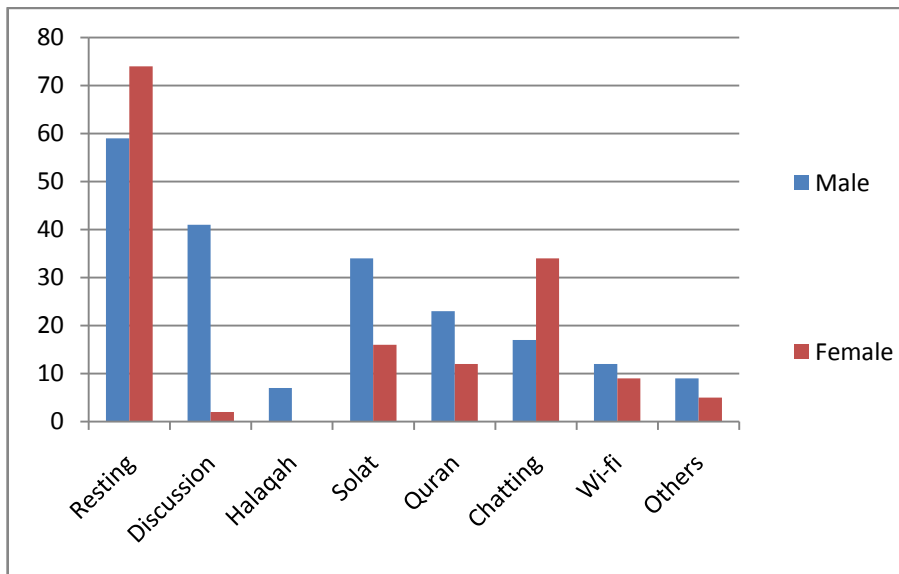
An independent sample *t*-test analysis was conducted to test the first research question i.e. whether there is a significant gender difference in the motivation to go to the *Masjid*. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between male ($M = 64.56$; $SD = 8.28$) and female ($M = 67.20$, $SD = 8.64$) visitors in terms of their motivation ($t(98) = -1.56$, $p = 0.122$).

In the attempt to answer which area of the *Masjid* that gives the most restorative effects, the researchers have employed the behavioural mapping method. It is observed that there are differences in the type of behaviour preferred between male and female goers. Results show that both males and females are inclined toward resting in the *Masjid* as this

act scored the highest (Males = 59; Females = 74) during the observation. Discussion held in the *Masjid* ranked second for male goers followed by performing *Salat*, and reading the *Qur'an* with a total 23 goers. Completing assignments and conducting *Halaqah* was the bottom two activities that male goers are frequently involved while they are in the *Masjid*. On the other hand, for the females, chatting with friends scored second (n = 34), followed by *Salat* (n = 16), reading the *Qur'an* (n = 12), surfing the internet (n = 9), others (playing/talking on the phone) (n = 5), and discussion (n = 2). See Figure 2.0 for the histogram of the activities recorded in the *Masjid*.

Despite the fact that female and male areas are segregated in the *Masjid*, the physical aspects of areas with regard to the activities conducted in that area by both genders is the same. *Masjid* goers usually prefer to rest in areas with walls or pillars, while praying and reading the Quran are mostly done in the front section of the designated areas. Discussions are usually conducted in spacious area around the *Masjid* with approximately four to five people in a group.

Figure 2.0
Histogram of activities in the *Masjid* according to gender



In answering the third research question on the restorative effects of the *Masjid* on its goers, a paired-sample *t*-test was conducted to measure the mood of the *Masjid* goers before their visit and after their visit

to the *Masjid*. It was found that, there was a significant difference in the scores of the mood of the *Masjid* goers before their visit ($M = 33.26$; $SD = 6.76$) and after their visit ($M = 156.82$; $SD = 19.52$); $t(90) = -62.80$, $p < .01$, suggesting the mood of *Masjid* goers improved after their visit. Table 1.0 reporting the mean difference for the result.

Table 1.0
Paired-sample *t*-test for the mood of the *Masjid* goers before and after their visit

Source	df	M	SD	t
Mood before the visit	90	-123.56	18.778	-62.80
Mood after the visit				

$p \leq .01$

The results of the paired-sample *t*-test was further examined by looking at the mean of the moods of the *Masjid* goers. Results demonstrate that all three restorative effects have significant difference on the *Masjid* goers as all three clusters of mood have shown high mean scores. These mood clusters include effective functioning, peace, and ability to focus. In particular, effective functioning scored highest ($M = 19.86$; $SD = 3.61$), followed by peace ($M = 17.02$; $SD = 2.60$), and ability to focus ($M = 16.82$; $SD = 4.32$). See Table 2.0 below.

Table 2.0
The mean score of the mood after visiting the *Masjid* according to clusters

	Effective Functioning	Peace	Ability to Focus
Male			
Mean	19.36	16.96	16.46
Std. Deviation	3.56	2.52	4.50
Female			
Mean	20.36	17.08	17.18
Std. Deviation	3.64	2.69	4.15

With regard to the score between clusters in each variables, the finding shows that in motivation, being away score highest with (20.93)

followed by spirituality motive with 20.87. While for the activities that are mostly engaged among *Masjid* goers shows that personal ritual scores highest with 12.09, and this is followed by communal ritual with 11.57 mean score. On the other hand, the post-mood that scored the highest was effective functioning with 19.86, followed by peace with 17.02. This result suggests that there is restorative effect of the *Masjid* on its visitor in a way that the visit restores the effective functioning.

Finally, to answer the research question on the relationship between the motivations, engaged activities, and the mood outcome of *Masjid* goers, a correlational analysis was conducted. The result shows that correlation is significant between all three variables tested; correlation between *mood after the visit* with *engaged activities* ($r = .75$; $p < .01$); *engaged activities* in the *Masjid* correlates with the *motivation* ($r = 0.56$; $p < .01$); while correlation of *motivation* with *mood after the visit* scored 0.89 ($p < .01$). Table 3.0 below shows the relationship between the three variables. These results suggest that all of the variables tested are positively and significantly correlated with each other.

Table 3.0
Bivariate correlation among mood after the visit, engaged activities, and motivation

Variable	1	2	3
1. Mood after the visit	-	0.75**	0.89**
2. Engaged Activities	0.75**	-	0.56**
3. Motivation	0.89**	0.56**	-

Correlation marked with asterisks (**) are significant at $p \leq .01$

DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the IIUM *Masjid* have the restorative effect towards its goers. Results show that there is no significance difference between genders in the motivation for going to the *Masjid*. This is due to both gender score high in resting activity as compared to other activities. Perhaps one of the factors that contribute to this result is the timing of this study. This research was conducted during peak hour which is from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. During this time, most of the *Masjid* goers used the *Masjid* as a place to rest for a while after a hectic schedule. The majority of the *Masjid* goers were either taking power nap or just resting in order to rejuvenate themselves for the

next activity of the day. This can be the explanation for the research question on type of restorative effect that the *Masjid* has on its visitors-restores the effective functioning.

Studies have shown that taking power nap in mid-afternoon has some impact on mood, performance, and neuronal activities. Indirectly, this activity has positive effects upon the maintenance of the daytime vigilance level (Hayashi, Watanabe, & Hori, 1999). Islam also highlight about the importance of power nap or *qaylullah* in man's daily life. It is the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad to take a nap or rest during mid-day or when the sun is at its peak. It is normally taken before *Zuhr* prayer. Quran also mentioned in 30:23 that says "*And among His Signs is the sleep that ye take by night and by day and the quest that ye (make for livelihood) out of His Bounty: verily in that are signs for those who hearken*". Thus, it shows that Islam emphasises on the importance of *qaylullah* in order for man to have a better quality of life.

The findings of the behavioural mapping activity demonstrate that most of the visitors engage in resting at areas that comprises of walls, corners, and pillars. These components can, to some extent, create a sense of territorial and privacy on its occupants. The *Masjid* becomes a choice for resting as the layout has a good stack effect and good natural ventilation due to it open walls and high ceilings. Not only the high ceiling creates a pleasing ambiance but it also primes the thought of freedom to its occupants (Meyer-Levy & Zhu, 2007), which help in the sense of being away. The usage of the stained glass in the skylight helps to control the amount of light coming into the *Masjid* during the late afternoon, making illumination not too dimmed for reading yet not too bright to hurts the eyes.

Finally, the results point out that there is a significant relationship between motivation, activities engaged, and the mood after visiting the *Masjid*. The major motives in visiting the *Masjid* in this study are being away and spirituality. This differs with findings found in both Oullette and Herzog's research whereby spirituality acts as the main motive to visit houses of worship. A possible explanation for the difference of the findings could be due to the IIUM campus environment that surrounds the *Masjid*. It can be inferred that the quest of being away is interrelated with the activities engaged (personal rituals) and mood experience before coming to the *Masjid*.

Islam teaches one to be in moderation at everything, aiming to create equilibrium so that one is always at peace with self, the universe, and God. These personal preferred rituals can also be explained in terms of individual setting at the time the study was being conducted. In an

educational setting as IIUM, many students prefer to be alone at this short period of time (an hour break/ lunch break). This helps to restore their energy before proceeding to class right after that. Besides that, the environment of the setting can also play a role. Being the students of IIUM, the policy of the university requires students to be equipped with Islamic knowledge. Thus, it is expected to see the choice of activities preferred by students seems very personal with recitation of *Qur'an*, *dhzikr* (remembrance of Allah) and making *du'a* (asking forgiveness and guidance from Allah).

Although the findings add on to our understanding of the nature and effects of *Masjid* as a restorative environment, one limitation is observed. This limitation relates to time constraint. More time is needed in conducting the behavioural mapping activity and survey in order to obtain more reliable result. This can be done by collecting data for several days in order to obtain more participants and make the findings more reliable.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking all results together, this study shows that the SHAS *Masjid* in IIUM does have restorative effects on *Masjid* goers. The results also support the conceptual model, which suggests that there is a correlation between the three variables which are the motives, the engaged activities, as well as the mood outcome.

It is hoped that the present study will provide an initial empirical foundation from which future research in this area can flourish, particularly on the restorative effects of *Masjids*. It is also suggested that the findings of the present study are examined in future work, perhaps in a wider range of mosque settings.

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