

Quality of life and Pilgrimage: An exploratory study into the impact of a Pilgrimage to Lourdes on pilgrim quality of life

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Background

- Lourdes, France, is a major pilgrimage site for Roman Catholics.
- There have been many reports of cures in Lourdes and it has been suggested that Lourdes itself has a unique atmosphere of healing.
- Evidence indicates the multifaceted, diverse nature of Lourdes provides this healing environment and benefits are through a collective shared-identity, mass gatherings, spiritual healing, social interaction and inexplicable cures.
- The impact of pilgrimage to Lourdes on quality of life (QOL) has not yet been measured.

Aim

This study aims to measure the impact of pilgrimage to Lourdes on physically and mentally ill pilgrims' QOL and perceptions of wellbeing.

Methods

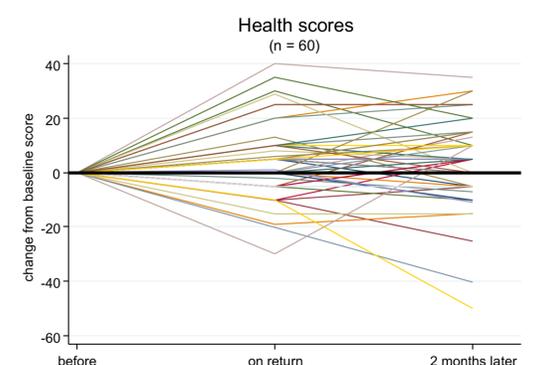
- The standardised Euro-QoL EQ-5D-5L questionnaire was used to assess responses of pilgrims before (Q1), immediately after (Q2), and 2 months after (Q3) return from pilgrimage to Lourdes.
- Information was gathered on the aspects of pilgrimage that pilgrims felt most impacted their QOL.
- Results were analysed using the paired t-test.

Results

- 93 patients responded to Q1, 71 to Q2 and 64 to Q3.
- Health scores of pilgrims showed statistically significant improvement on Q2 ($P=0.04$), although this was not sustained in Q3 ($P=0.18$).
- QOL scores did not show a significant trend in Q2 or Q3.
- Despite this, 68% reported their self-rated QOL as 'Much better' or 'better' on Q2 (54.6% on Q3), 28% the same (35.9%) and 2.8% worse (6%).
- Factors identified as having most significant impact on QOL were 'spiritual and religious aspects' of pilgrimage, 'a sense of togetherness' and 'spiritual healing'.



Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, France



	Before	On return	2 months later
Average score	72.8	76.3	75.4
Maximum score	100	100	100
Minimum score	35	35	35
Average change	-	3.5	2.7
P-value (paired t-test)	-	0.04	0.18

Conclusions

This study showed that pilgrimage to Lourdes does impact on and improve health scores and self-reported QOL of pilgrims.

Though QOL scores did not show significant change, 68 % reported QOL was better or much better after return from Lourdes and this was sustained at 54.6% at 2 months.

The factors that influenced this improvement most were the spiritual and religious aspects of pilgrimage, a sense of togetherness and spiritual healing.