



RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL COPING USED BY STUDENT IN DEALING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

World Health Organization (WHO) has described the meaning of total well-being as balanced and functioning of human faculty encompassing physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Student sometime forget this important fact, thus they neglect some of the important elements of wellbeing. Most students can handle the transition to college easily using various coping mechanisms. There are many productive ways that have been suggested as coping strategies for students. This paper seeks to review how spiritual and religious coping strategies are used by Muslim 'Tahfiz' students in dealing with their academic and personal issues. The research used DASS and MRPI questionnaire to measure stress and anxiety level as well as religious and spiritual coping strategies. The results indicated that the student shows mild to low stress and anxiety level with high religious personality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Wortmann and Park (2012) posited that undergraduate or tertiary years are the time filled with life transitions often marked with a lot of loss and adjustment often faced by undergraduates. This statement was supported by Cohen (1997) that significant personal losses among young adult students may lead to personal grief, distress and religious or spiritual concerns. Pargament (2007)

insisted that over the past 30 years, researches in the area of psychology have proven that religion and spirituality are significant in developing human psychological functioning.

Several studies (Harrison *et al.*, 1997) prevailed that religious coping is proven to be crucial in contributing to the decrease in depressive symptoms, anxiety and even can increase a person's level of self-esteem and life satisfaction in the long run.

As most believers would resort to spiritual enlightenment activities, religious rituals such as prayers, meditation and reading sacred texts are reported to have lowered anxiety and depression and reduced the consequences of stressful life event, faced by the sufferers (William *et al.*, 1991). The use of spirituality and religious practice, according to Rosmarin *et al.* (2010), in the form of adaptive manner can be helpful to individual who have series of psychological distress. This is also synonymously mentioned by Krauss *et al.* (2005).

As many religion rose along human civilizations, Islam is one of a religion that emphasized as set of comprehensive rules as a way of life. The concept of *Ad-din* in Islam implies the sanctification of all daily living into worshipful acts that unify life consistent with *tawhidic* principles (oneness of Allah) of the divine unity. Al-Quran 4 : 125.

1. وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا

Who is better in religion than he who surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good (to men) and followeth the tradition of Abraham, the upright? Allah (Himself) chose Abraham for friend. (125).

The Islamic teaching and practice or Ad-Din should be able to make Muslim dynamic and moving forward. Progressing in their quest of self-purification, self-perspective through worship, ongoing acquisition of knowledge and performing selfless act.

Religious personality on the other hand is the manifestation of one's religious worldview in the righteous conduct (known as *amal soleh*). It is also related the particular way a person expresses his or her traits or adapts to various situations, as stated by Krauss *et al.* (2005). He added that the religious personality comprises of the person's behaviors, attitudes, motivations and emotions that help to define the measure of a Muslims' piousness according to Islamic teachings and commands (Krauss *et al.*, 2005). Having religious personality can also act as preventive measure against stress, anxiety and depression.

2. COPING STRATEGIES

Moos and Schaefer (1993) posited that coping is defined as behavioral or cognitive effort to manage a situation that is regarded as stressful in context. A person could use various ways to cope mentally, psychologically and even behaviorally with any stressful behavior. Person who developed strategies to reduce negative emotion that is associated with stressor is known as emotion – focused coping, as suggested by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). They added that a person who takes an active method by using direct approach to address the stressor is known as problem-focused coping. Whereas, in another point of view, a person who utilizes any religious act such as

praying or reading sacred text to address the stressor is known as religious coping (Pargament, 1990).

Self-regulation also can be used as one of religious coping. Self-regulation functions as the benchmark by which a person must bring him or herself to as the goal by altering their mind and behavior according to religious teaching. Religious person with high level of self-regulation are more likely to identify and set goals, monitor their own progress and adjust behavior accordingly, as Carver and Scheier (2001) wrote.

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In some other research, Toburen and Meiew (2010) found out that priming individual with God related words increased participants' persistence at performing a task, regardless of their level of religiosity. Bryant and Astin (2008) elaborated that previous studies showed that spiritual struggle is related to both negative and positive outcome including psychological distress, poorer physical health, lower self-esteem and negative mood but also a greater stress related growth, religious tolerance and spiritual growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2006) concluded a positive outlook: that stress related growth is a phenomenon that involves beneficial life changes, lesson learned and new understanding.

Although there are some negative religious and spiritual coping reported in previous research, there are still many studies showed a more positive effect of religious and spiritual coping. This paper, for instance have the intention of investigating whether Muslim religious personality traits have any effect in students' stress, anxiety and maybe depression level that they are facing.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopted a quantitative study approach by distributing two sets of questionnaire to the sample. The first questionnaire is the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and used by the Ministry of Health after being translated to Malay language by Ramli *et al.* (2007). The survey has 21 items and it was designed to measure three different constructs which are depression, stress and anxiety with seven items for each construct. The scale adopts a four point Likert's type survey with 0 as 'never' and 3 as 'happen all the time'.

The second survey is Muslim Religious Personality Inventory (MRPI) developed by Krauss *et al.* (2005). MRPI consist of 12 items on a scale of five with 1 being as 'strongly disagree' and 5 as 'strongly agree'. The MRPI was developed to measure the Islamic worldview and religious personality. Under the two sub-dimensions, MRPI measures the concept of faith in the creator and all the unseen and the Islamic personality as an individual, member of a society and adherence to religious rituals according to Islamic teaching.

5. SAMPLE POPULATION

The sample chosen were 21 *Tahfiz Engineering students at foundation level. 'Tahfiz' means they are trained to be Quranic scholars and able to memorize the verses for teachings and

exemplary religious activities. The sample consisted of all male Foundation level students who were doing both Tahfiz and Engineering studies offered in UNITEN. The students were chosen based on their background as Tahfiz (or the person who memorize the Holy Quran). However, at the time of the research being conducted, no female student was enrolled yet. Their strong religious background was chosen in a hope that it would be reflected significantly in the Muslim Religious Personality and their spiritual coping strategies.

6. FINDINGS

After comparing the mean score, the entire sample showed a minimum and low level of stress (mean: 1.06), anxiety (mean: 0.75) and depression (0.88). The results showed that the participant did not experience acute stress, severe anxiety or depression. MRPI mean score correlation with the DASS score with an overall mean score of 4.44.

From the data, there was a weak negative correlation between stress($r: -.38$), anxiety ($r: -.05$) and depression ($r: -.23$) with religious personality. It is however can be used as an inference indicator that the higher, the religious personality, the lower the stress, anxiety and depression level.

7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results showed that the participants do portray good religious personality by inculcating a lot of faith in the Creator as their sole saviour. This was due to their background as the 'Huffaz' or Quran scholars and the religious training that they have gone through even before enrolling in UNITEN. The MRPI score also indicated that the participants did perform the basic religious rituals and the combination of both faith and ritual have been used to managed stress, anxiety and depression that they may have experienced. This was the religious coping strategies used by the participant identified in this research.

The concept of putting a divine entity as something important in person life is supported by [Pargament \(2007\)](#), where he stated that sanctification is the process of where life is perceived as having divine or sacred character and is significant. Every single act and behaviour in executing daily routine can be sanctified or considered as holy or unholy actions thus it guides a person mind and behaviour. [Watterson and Giesler \(2012\)](#) were adamant that religious people posed higher level self-control thus they are more able to persist in difficult tasks and life situation, which suggests that prevention from becoming stressed, anxious or depressed is better than managing them as mentioned earlier. The idea and practice in a particular religious beliefs, institutions and rituals are deemed very effective as a preventive method against negative subversions.

8. FUTURE RECOMMENDATION

This research however is limited to the sample in UNITEN specifically male, Foundation level Tahfiz student. Since the sample was from a solid Islamic background, adopting the religious personality may have become natural to them. Therefore, further explorations should be conducted on non-religious background students encompassing the various years of studies and incorporating

both genders for comparative studies. Other religious coping strategies such as praying, fasting reciting Al-Quran and giving charity should also be studied scientifically on the tendency of becoming an alternative coping techniques. It is hoped that more research should be conducted in this subject matter as it has vast potential to heal many human psychological concerns.

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