

## The Role of Religiosity and Spiritual Practices as Solutions in Managing Stress



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### Abstract

*Personal problem that originated from family, financial and work place affairs can be main contributors to stressful life. The way people handle it depends to the stress retention level and the way they managing the stress. Hence, to experience and having stress is considered normal to every human. However in some cases stress become too pressurize, uncontrollable and damaging. This paper is to highlight how the researching into Islamic views and practice able to materialize the Islamic way in managing stress. The roles of religiosity no doubt play an important factor in stress solution. Therefore, the focal point of discussions throughout this paper are fortifies on belief and religiosity which proven as substantial remedy in Islam. Further emphasis will be given on the role of prayer (solat) for Muslim and how does it impact on helping to cope with the stressful condition.*

*Keywords: managing stress, religiosity factors, role of prayer*

### Introduction

Allah test human being in this life through pressure in various forms and attempts. As a Muslim, this pressure should be handled prudently so that it can increase a person's patience and faith. It is a test of faith from God and also to eliminate minor sins in life as a servant of God, which human being could not escape from making mistakes. Therefore, the pressure can be considered as one of the attribute in the nature of human life in this world. However, if stress is handled positively, it bring the benefits to individuals vice versa if it handled in negative way, it will become as negative aspect to one's life and a damaging factor. Sometimes the stressful crisis grows out of hand and there is no longer solution to the situation. Therefore, stress is damaging one's life if not properly managed

and controlled and this situation should be hindered and avoided. Hence, in Islam every Muslim is encouraged to practice prayer and do'a and reciting the Quran at all time to strengthen their soul in order to overcome stress. And the most important, Muslim should be strongly patient at all time in facing the tribulations and this can be done by remembering Allah (zikr-at all time) that Allah is the only God and within His blessing, everything is possible to happen. Thus, it is important for the Muslim to have a strong faith in Allah for whatever reason and whatever happened in their lives. Nevertheless, the way people handle stress depends to their stress retention level and their life style. People who do not handle changing life circumstances well may be particularly vulnerable to the slightest frustration or pressure (Butcher et al., 2008). Therefore it is important for everyone to understand that stress is manageable and to manage stress well means able to manage all other life affairs well and would contribute to overall balance and happiness of life. And the ability to withstand stress without becoming seriously impaired is called stress tolerance. Hence this level of stress tolerance need to be controlled and managed as to create a balance human being with a balance capacity in doing decision making, managing financial affairs, and becoming a good worker in organization.

### **Role of Religion and Spiritual Practices in Managing Stress**

Religion being defined by Western and Muslim scholars as a belief system to help human being living in a well organized manner where in this regard McDaniel & Burnett (1990) stated it is "A belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set forth by God". While Koenig et al. (2000) expressed their opinion about religion as "An organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power or ultimate truth/reality), and to foster an understanding of one's relation and responsibility to others in living together in a community". And Johnson (2000) interpreted religion as "A social arrangement designed to provide a shared, collective way of dealing with the unknown and un-knowable aspects of human life, with the mysteries of life, death and the different dilemmas that arise in the process of making moral decisions". The panel of experts for NIHR's scientific study of spirituality and health took these elements to be their primary criterion and common denominator for both spirituality and religion (NIHR, 1998) where they stated that:

*"Both spirituality and religion involve the subjective feeling, thoughts and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term "search" refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain or transform. The term "sacred" refers to a divine being or Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual".*

This proved that all human basically has a 'belief' towards the 'superior' and 'sacred' power of God.

In relation to this, the religious people will have interaction to their worship place such as mosque, temple or church where these becomes the center of their social support system where they earn their internal strength and peacefulness. The act of worshipping God can be classified as a form of meditation in which by meditate as minimum of twenty minutes can lower down high blood pressure, calm down anxiety and help people deal with stress. As stated by Koenig et al. (1999), that religion helps people cope involves the rituals and rites that help people feel better about personal weaknesses, failures, or feelings of inadequacy. Rojas and Kleiner (2001) also mentioned that one of the most important techniques for controlling the level of stress is meditation. It is a state of mind reaching harmony between oneself and the universe and the benefits of meditation go beyond controlling the level of stress to achieving a healthy living.

Therefore it is obvious that there exist a strong relationship between meditation and spiritual renewal since meditate help the process of spiritual renewal and relief the stressful emotion in oneself. In relation to this, Antai-Otong (2001) added that spiritual renewal is an integral part of stress management because it provides a sense of purpose, hope, and meaning in life. These activities bring stress management techniques to a full circle and offer a reprieve from the daily distress of workplace and financial situations. Hence, a person's religious belief has an important bearing on his personality and his outlook in life. By putting the trust in God, a believer minimizes the stress on himself by reducing his responsibility and power to totally in control of his failure and miserable. There is always God to turn to and share all the pain and despondent.

Hence, Asmah Bee (2004) pointed out that religion has been acknowledged as a tool to overcome issues related to health, happiness of live and even reducing social problems, where many of today's psychologist and counselors (especially the Muslim) began to look at religion and other spiritual dimensions as a tool to enhance the happiness in human lives. In this instant, Islam teaches its believer that everything on this earth own by Allah swt. Ulwan (1998) point out that all Muslim have to keep undivided faith that Allah is All Just as mentioned in Surah Isra, verse 30 which means:

*"The Lord gives abundantly to whom He wills, as well as it narrows to whom He pleases".*

Also in Surah Mulk verse 21 which mean

*"who will give you sustenance if He (God) grant resistant?"*

Those two verses attest that Allah is the only one who will grant or hold sustenance and He gave to those who seeking with justice. Al Qardawi (1987) emphasizes how faith can

vanquishes selfish feeling. These feelings make people racing to seize profit and wealth not only for this world but for the hereafter world. Therein the strength of spiritual faith will prevent Muslims from being greedy since greed and desire would destroy the faith and human would put the worldly fortune as their destiny.

### Islamic Views on Managing Stress

According to Mohd and Hamdan (2006), stress as regards to Islamic perspective, is natural to human lives. Stress is capable of giving positive and negative impacts depending on how a person is controlling, managing and handling the stress. The greater the stress someone is facing, the more benefits is bestowed by Allah. In this notion Muhammad (1992), explain that human being always facing disturbance and emotional unbalance especially whenever there is conflicting interest occurs. Quran clearly stated the stress conditions and factors and the example of how previous generation facing stress. It stated about the natural biological creation of human being which consist of the nervous system and chemical elements which strongly influences the feeling, mental and physical of human being. Allah stated in Surah al-Anbiya', verse 37 meaning

*“Man was created of haste. I will show you My signs, so do not impatiently urge Me”.*

And Surah al-Ma'arij, verse 19-24 meaning

*“Indeed, mankind was created anxious: When evil touches him, impatient. And when good touches him, withholding (of it), except the observers of prayer; those who are constant in their prayer and those within whose wealth is a known right”.*

Those verses clarifies the fact that Allah created human being with a hasty nature and restless in reaction to the sensitivity and the nervous system of the body. Those sensitivity are portrays through emotional behavior which response upon the influence of internal and external factors and surroundings. In a different attempt, Abu Hurairah (r) said

*“The Prophet (peace be upon him) remarked, ‘The example of a believer is like a fresh tender plant; from whichever direction the wind blows, it bends the plant. But when the wind dies down, it straightens up again. (Similarly a believer is tested by afflictions to strengthen his faith and heart, and he remains patient and firm). And an evil person is like a pine tree which remains hard and stiff until Allah breaks it whenever He wills.”*

In short, the Quranic verses and hadith from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) contains reminder for Muslim as to bear the life, its constraint and challenges and belief upon the reward will be given to those who have patient and submit to the will of Allah.

In light of the Quranic verses and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) tradition, Islam sees solution to the stressful situation are indeed bound within the verses reminded from Allah and delivered through the messages by His messenger.

*“O mankind! There has come to you a direction from you Lord, and a healing for (the disease in your) heart, and for those who believe a guidance, and mercy” (Surah Yunus, verse 57).*

Indisputable, Quran itself is a medicine to manage stress and other conflicting situation. This has been emphasized by Shahid Athar (2007) where he stated that the echo of sound in the Quran has a medical effect to those its readers. The recitation of Quran or listening to the Quranic verses has a wholesome effect on the body, heart and mind. Its impact thoroughly where, the letter ‘alif’ echoes to the heart and latter ‘ya’ echoes in the pineal gland in the brain. Dr. Ahmed El Kadi of Akbar Clinic, at Panama City, Florida, conducted and has published the effects of listening to the Quranic recitation on physiological parameters i.e. the heart rate, the blood pressure and the muscle tension and reported improvement in all, irrespective of whether the listener is a Muslim or a non- Muslim, Arab or non-Arab (Shahid Athar, 2007). Obviously it can be hypothesized that those who can understand and enjoy the recitation, with a belief in it as word of God, will get maximum benefit physically, mentally and spiritually. Hence the purpose of Quran is not to be rigid and dogmatic, but to guide humans in finding solutions to heal body, mind and soul. It focused on applying solutions based on *iman*, spiritual precepts, knowledge and understanding.

In Islam, an important solution in avoiding stressful life is by coping it with patient and prayer. This has been stated in the Quran surah Al-Baqarah, verse 153.

*“O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient”. Muslim are advised to be consistent in their prayers and be confident that Allah is ever forgiven to all as affirmed by Surah Nuh, verse 10 means “And said, ‘Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver”.*

This has been emphasized by Rizal (2009) where according to the studies conducted, during a prayer a person’s prostration position will affect the electro encephalogram by moderating the electrical waves in the brain from nine to twelve waves per second and this position placed that person on alpha waves, where he will be more calm, serene and restful. And this position proof to be a total submission to the power of God, where none other

power above the power of Allah swt. Simultaneously, Islam encourages human being to help each other in developing potential and solving problems since in Islam each Muslim are like brothers to one another. Therefore, Muslims supposed to adopt wisdom approach in ensuring successfulness in building strong relationship and brotherhood by helping other fellow Muslim in difficulties as acknowledged in Surah An-Nahl, verse 125 means

*“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided”.*

This in fact has been further noted by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through his hadith means ‘Good deeds for your brother is your guidance to those who lost guide’. (Reported by Abu Dzar) In brief, every human being will be tested by Allah swt in various way as to their capabilities. Human who have strong faith will be succeed otherwise for those who have weaker faith should be helped, supported and guided to the right path and toward the blessing of Allah swt. For those who are willing to help others in hardships and troubles will be given a great reward by Allah in the hereafter as mentioned by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him),

*‘Whoever cooling eyes of a believer (remove hardships), Allah will cooling his eyes on the Day of Judgment’.*

In a state of depression a believer on the other hand is advised to increase *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) so that the mind will focus on patient and Allah’s guidance as verified in Surah Ar-Ra’d, verse 27-28 means

*“And those who disbelieved say, “Why has a sign not been sent down to him from his Lord?” Say, [O Muhammad], “Indeed, Allah leaves astray whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him] and “Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured”.*

In hadith narrated by Abdullah ibn Abbas, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said ‘If anyone continually asks pardon, Allah will appoint for him a way out of every distress, and a relief from every anxiety, and will provide for him from where he did not reckon’. From this hadith it is proven that Muslim are encourage at all time to recites do’a, to seek the help from Allah in facing whatever situations since with the do’a its help individual feel stronger bond with the Creator as highlighted by Mohd Nasir (2004) that do’a can give a sense of optimism in the mind of a person because it represents hope and projects positivity and a constant praying to God may facilitate the development of a positive psychology in a person’s mind. A hadith from prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) mentioned that

‘the prayer of a sick person will not be rejected by Allah swt, until he or she is cured from their illnessess’.

## Conclusion

Definitely Muslims believe that religion is a fundamental source in resolving conflict, in development and unity of the *ummah* as a whole. Muslim therapeutic model which give emphasis to religiosity approaches based on Islamic principles purely based on the holy Quran and the Sunnah as main guidance. In fact, by exploring the Quran, the *Seerah (historical)* of the Prophet and his traditions, as well as the biographies of the Prophet’s companions, will provide detailed instructions and teachings on implementing Islamic counseling process in the daily life. In essence, stress affects everyone and must be managed effectively to reduce its chronic and deleterious effects to the whole life system. The hasty and restless nature of human being could be cope with the recitation of Quranic verses, prayer, patient, helping and supporting each other, and practice Dhikr (remembrance Allah), without doubt would able to give solution in managing stress. In this circumstances Islam is compatible with the nature of human beings. Therefore, every command and prohibition of God is for the good and happiness of human life in this world and hereafter. For the survival of goodness in self, family, society and country thus the culture of advice, enjoin to goodness and forbid evil must be inculcated and implemented. Even though Muslim has to encounter stress as part of tribulation in life hence by being patient means willing with the certainty prearranged by Allah and with prayer human being always seeking the protection and guidance from Allah in whatever difficulties and situation. In all consciences, the total submission should only be to God Allah swt. For that reason, most importantly, a Muslim must have trust in Allah s.w.t. and regards all trials come from Allah s.w.t. in order to get rewarded in the Hereafterworld. It is clearly stated in Surah At-Taghabun, verse 11 means

*“No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah; He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things”.*

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