

CRITICAL REVIEW OF RELIGION IN COPING AGAINST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BY FORMER COVID-19 MUSLIM PATIENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT: The paper human needs can be categorised into two, namely physiological and psychological needs. The human physiological need refers to bodily health, whereas the internal need refers to the mental or spiritual aspect required for creating feelings of calmness in a person. When a need is not fulfilled, a crisis within a person emerges. Erikson opined that a person usually faces a problem caused by psychological or physiological aspects. The physical and psychological (internal) aspects of an individual should be simulated within a person until they are capable of facing a crisis. One type of crisis that influences the balance of the physical and psychological (internal) aspects is the situational crisis. A situational crisis occurs when a certain external element influences the psychological balance in an individual or the environment. For example, those suffering from COVID 19 are experiencing a situational crisis in the form of disruptions to the sufferer's physical and psychological (internal) states.

KEYWORDS: Religion, COVID-19 Pandemic, Former COVID-19 Muslim Patients, Malaysia

I. INTRODUCTION

Originating as a cluster of unexplained cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China, novel coronavirus disease – officially designated as COVID-19 by the World Health Organization – has reached the level of a pandemic, affecting countries all across the world. To date (May 1th, 2020), over 3,200,000 confirmed cases and 230,309 deaths attributable to this disease have been reported. In the wake of this global health crisis, stringent public health measures have been implemented to curtail the spread of COVID-19 (Adhikari et al., 2020). Widespread outbreaks of infectious disease, such as COVID-19, are associated with psychological distress and symptoms of mental illness (Bao et al., 2020). Psychiatrists across the world should be aware of these manifestations, their correlates, and strategies to manage them that encompass both the needs of specific populations (Yang et al., 2020) and the precautionary measures necessary to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Liu et al., 2020a). They should also be aware of lacunae in the existing literature, which may need to be filled in over time through more widespread clinical experience and research. In addition to various psychological problems like depression, anxiety, and panic disorder, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe threats to the lives and physical health of people around the globe (Battaglia, J., Coverdale, J., & Bushong, C. 1990; Qiu et al., 2020).

Muhammad Utsman Najati suggested that human needs can be categorised into two, namely physiological and psychological needs. The human physiological need refers to bodily health, whereas the internal need refers to the mental or spiritual aspect required for creating feelings of calmness in a person. When a need is not fulfilled, a crisis within a person emerges. Erikson opined that a person usually faces a problem caused by psychological or physiological aspects. The physical and psychological (internal) aspects of an individual should be simulated within a person until they are capable of facing a crisis.

One type of crisis that influences the balance of the physical and psychological (internal) aspects is the situational crisis. A situational crisis occurs when a certain external element influences the psychological balance in an individual or the environment. For example, those suffering from COVID 19 are experiencing a situational crisis in the form of disruptions to the sufferer's physical and psychological (internal) states. Studies have shown that there is a phenomenon whereby some COVID 19 patients have turned to religion as a way to overcome anxiety caused by the risk of this pandemic. Based on an interview with a former COVID 19 patient, the patient frequently experienced extreme depression and fear when undergoing treatment for COVID 19 in the hospital but still practised acts of worship, such as prayers, fasting during Ramadhan and zikir towards Allah SWT.

When a COVID 19 patient remembers God, then the patient will be able to accept the suffering. One of the stress-coping methods practised by patients recovering from COVID 19 is to break down the problem using the religious approach or religious coping method. Koenig had defined religious coping as the extent to which an individual applies confidence and religious rituals as a process to breakdown problems to prevent and alleviate negative psychological effects culminating from a situation. The religious coping aspect can be classified into two parts, namely positive religious coping and negative religious coping. According to Pargament, the religious coping approach can be applied by considering the religious coping indicators found in the religious coping dimension, which are finding meaning, ability to exercise self-control, having a close relationship with God (hablum minnallah), initiating social relationships (hablum minannas) and courage to implement changes in life.

Based on the interviews, some COVID 19 patients had cried and complained when receiving treatment for COVID 19. However, there were also COVID 19 patients who were calm and forbearing when facing this pandemic although they were in pain but were steadfast in carrying out their religious worship activities, such as prayers, zikir and fasting. Several studies have agreed that the religious coping aspect is related to the seeking of internal strength when fighting the disease; they are suffering. For example, a study by Zwingmann on breast cancer patients in Germany showed that the religious coping element could help overcome the pressure and tension faced by these patients in Germany. Mahmoudi had studied students from the Islamic Azad University in Iran and found that there was a relationship between religious coping, health and complex psychological disorders. This shows that the confidence one has in religion plays an important role in prevention, decreasing negative emotions and psychological problems.

Hence, according to an Islamic perspective, as mentioned in the Al-Qur'an, Allah SWT advised that people with strong faith will be cured of mental disturbances through religion, as stated in Surah Yunus verse 57, meaning:

"O mankind, there has to come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers".

These studies show that the COVID 19 crisis can be overcome by applying the religious approach. This study, which applied the interview method on COVID 19 patients, intended to determine the effects of physical, psychological and religious disruptions as well as the practice of religious coping on COVID 19 patients quarantined for 14 days before being certified as COVID 19 positive and receiving treatment in hospitals. The interview sessions showed that the type of religious coping practised by COVID 19 patients in the Islamic context was in the form of performing acts of worship, such as prayers, zikir, fasting, invocation, reciting the al-Qur'an, voluntary charity and consolidating silaturahmi relations. These practices help enhance physical, psychological, social and spiritual health in an individual. This study had categorised religious coping practices in COVID 19 patients into two. First, the relationship with Allah SWT (hablun Min Allah), which is through the implementation of worship, such as prayers, zikir, fasting, invocation and reciting the al-Qur'an. Second, the relationship amongst humans (hablun min an-nas), which is to form silaturahmi relations, voluntary charity and safeguarding good relations amongst humans by recognising and respecting each other's rights.

The form of Religious Coping practices through relations with God (Hablun Minallah), from an Islamic perspective, is a vertical relationship that involves the implementation of worship, such as prayers, zikir, fasting, invocation and reciting the al-Qur'an, which are further elaborated as follows (Rahman, et al (2019, Salasiah et (2020); Nasrudin Subhi et al (2020).

II. RELIGIOUS COPING THROUGH PRAYERS

In a linguistic context, prayers mean invocation or appealing for something from God. From a fiqh perspective, prayers (solat) are a chain of salutations and acts, beginning with the takbir (Allāhu Akbar, which means God is [the] greatest) and ending with the salam, which indicates religious worship to Allah SWT. Prayers (solat) are an act of complete servitude of the soul to Allah SWT by feeling the supremacy, greatness, excellence and power of HIM from the physical and spiritual aspects. According to Mujib, worship in Islam comes in several types and forms, but worship that portrays the overall personality of a person is the prayer (solat). This is because prayers differentiate Muslims from the non-Muslims. Surah al-Israa' verse 78 instructs one to carry out prayers, as described below.

“Establish prayer at the decline of the sun [from its meridian] until the darkness of the night and [also] the Qur'an of dawn. Indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.”

Based on the interview with a former COVID 19 patient, the patient had practised religious coping in an Islamic context when receiving COVID 19 treatment, which was by performing prayers (solat). This is because prayers (solat) are a form of practising religious coping to overcome problems, as mentioned in QS. al-Baqarah, verse 153, meaning:

“O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient”.

Al Ghazali stated that performing prayers (solat) is a spiritual journey towards Allah SWT. In other words, prayers (solat) contain four fundamental meanings. First, to feel what it is like to be in front (washala) of Allah SWT. Second, developing a sense of relatedness (shilah) with Allah SWT physically and spiritually, such as the value of love amongst humans. Third, it refers to the appreciation, praise and respect for Allah SWT. Fourth, prayers (solat) contain the meaning of an invocation or appeal after a subject has conveyed the feeling of appreciation and praise to Allah SWT. Mujib explained that zikir and deep thoughts during prayers is the best meditation method. Besides having divine spiritual values, meditation during prayers (solat) also creates a harmonious balance between a person's body and soul beginning with the nerves, muscles, blood flow, breathing, digestion, lymphatic system, reproduction etc. Ari Wisono Adi found a significant positive relationship between performing prayers (solat) and anxiety. In other words, the more a person is disciplined and focused on performing prayers (solat), the lesser the level of anxiety.

Abu Bakar Yalwa (2017) stated that three positive influences are accruing from performing prayers (solat), such as spiritual and mental tranquillity as well as prevention of prohibited acts and characteristics such as being impatient and frequently complaining. Further explanation of the wisdom of performing prayers (solat) is as follows:

1) Prayers (solat) provide a peaceful mind and soul, which is a form of zikir to Allah SWT. This is based on the exhortations of Allah SWT in Surah Tha-Ha verse 14:

“Indeed, I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance”.

2) Prayers prevent a person from carrying out despicable and prohibited acts. This is based on the exhortations of Allah SWT in Surah al-Ankabut verse 45:

“Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do”.

3) Prayers prevent a person from complaining and being impatient. This is based on the exhortations of Allah SWT QS. al-Ma'arij verse 19-22, meaning:

“Indeed, mankind was created anxious. When evil touches him, he becomes impatient. And when good touches him, he is withholding [of it]. Except the observers of prayer”

A Muslim who prays (solat) is called a mushalli. According to Mujib, mushalli is part of an individual's personality that emerges after performing prayers consistently, orderly and with full concentration until the individual receives the blessing for what he has prayed for. Doufesh et al. () found that the prostrating (sujud) posture during prayers (solat) produces alpha waves in the brain, which is similar to the state of the brain when a person is relaxing. Hence, prayers (solat) can be a religious coping method used for reducing stress levels in COVID 19 patients.

A study by the Biocybernaut Institute found that increasing alpha waves can reduce stress and anxiety as well as strengthening the body's immune system when fighting COVID 19. Madjid stated that prayers (solat) that are performed correctly and devoutly affect the formation of a soul free from anxiety when facing the challenges in

life. The effect of prayers (solat) on humans produces a strong conviction and a calm mind that is lasting, willing and blessed by Allah SWT in the course of facing the difficulties in life.

III. COPING RELIGIOUS THROUGH ZIKIR

According to Al-Galal, S. A. Y (2017), zikir is the mentioning of the 99 names of Allah SWT ('asmā' u llāhi l-ḥusnā) and remembrance of Allah SWT in every situation. Zikir intends to form a relationship that binds the subject's soul with Allah SWT until a feeling of love emerges towards Allah SWT, which is monitored by HIM. Komaruddin Hidayat stated that when one is appreciative, performs the zikir and contemplates about Allah SWT regarding the HIS supremacy and love. Then there will be a positive feeling about the beauty of HIS creations.

Zikir and devout worshipping is a process that internalises the noble features of Allah SWT in a person. Mubarak stated that zikir is a level of awareness about Allah SWT, which makes zikir the most powerful mental activity when connecting subjects to their Creator in a spiritual manner. Sajari opined that performing zikir in the name of Allah SWT could be done secretly (sirr), silently (khafi) or loudly (jahr), which can be performed individually or in a group, either verbally (bi al-lisan) or silently (bi alqalb).

According to Najati, D. (1985); Nurul Alieya et al, 2018; , Allah SWT had instructed pious and faithful subjects to always perform the zikir to reap the benefits in life. This is mentioned in QS. al-Ahzab verse 41-43:

"O you who have believed, remember Allah with much remembrance. And exalt Him morning and afternoon, It is He who confers blessing upon you, and His angels [ask Him to do so] that He may bring you out from darkness into the light. And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful."

Also, Oz suggested that the Virtues of Allah SWT (Zat Allah) or spiritual confidence can provide calmness in a dire situation. According to Islam, remembering or thinking of Allah SWT (zikir) leads to a tranquil or composed person void of any anxiety. This is based on the exhortation by Allah SWT in QS. al-Ra'd verse 28, meaning:

"Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."

According to Al-Domi, M. M. (2015) the verse above in Surah al-Ra'd means that when a person remembers Allah SWT by performing the zikir, he will then be calm and at peace because when one is used to zikir, one's whole body will start to zikir as well. When a behaviour is followed by zikir from the heart (dzikir qalbi), then, indirectly, this will move the whole body to think about Allah SWT in every situation.

Based on an interview with a former COVID 19 patient, it was revealed that one type of religious coping associated with the challenges of facing COVID 19 is to perform the zikir in the name of Allah SWT (Muhd Najib, et al 2020; Kamarudin Salleh et al, 2020). According to this study, remembering Allah SWT through the zikir method is the basis for enhancing a person's behaviour using the values of faith. This is because of the beautiful wordings in the zikir, such as Subhanallah, Alhamdulillah, Allahuakbar and Astaghfirullahalazim. When the zikir is performed with true feelings, it indirectly has positive effects on the person's psychology. According to Achmad Mubarak, psychologically, the linguistic aspect plays a crucial role in enhancing a person's behaviour. Language has a "remote control" effect in manoeuvring a person to exhibit various emotional states, such as to laugh, feel sad, cry, be motivated etc. Ismail et al (2018; Jaffary Awang et al (2020); Salasiah Hanin et al (2020) also stated that religious practices such as worshipping Allah SWT through istiqamah, performing zikir during the five obligatory prayer sessions, seeking forgiveness and offering prayers could bring a person closer to Allah SWT. The person will feel obligated, willing as well as feel calm and at peace.

IV. RELIGIOUS COPING THROUGH FASTING

According to Kahel, A.D., (2013); Ab Rahman, Z et al (2019; Ahmad Zaki et al (2020), fasting from an etymological aspect means abstaining from something, either from the physical or non-physical aspects. From a terminology aspect, fasting refers to the practice of abstaining from food, drink and sexual activity, which is observed from dawn to nightfall. Fasting also means to refrain from doing something that can destroy the innate nature of humans (al Galal et al (2016, 2017); Abu Bakar (2016); Ahmed M. Abbas et al (2016). Based on an interview with a former COVID 19 patient, the interviewee stated that one of the religious coping methods in the COVID 19 pandemic recovery process is to carry out fasting. According to this interviewee, he had performed fasting during Ramadhan when undergoing treatment for COVID 19 in the hospital. According to medical experts in Malaysia, COVID 19 patients are allowed to fast during the holy month of Ramadhan. Still, if their blood and bodily fluid flow, as well as the immune system, is disrupted, then they are allowed to break their fast.

According to McAuliffe, J. D., (2002) who is a nutritionist and digestive health expert at the University of Virginia, chronic disease patients should manage their diet, which is an important component in enhancing health. A well-managed diet plan can treat a patient's digestive system by providing a balanced meal that has the potential to alleviate the pain suffered by a critically ill patient. Based on studies by Norashibah et al (2018) it was found that a patient with a chronic illness can undergo a diet plan that offers a complete diet, which controls the quantity and nutritional content of food required by the body. Hence, the practice of fasting and its function in the diet management plan advocated by Mitchell, (2001) and Ismail et al (2019) can be suggested to critical care patients.

V. CONCLUSION

The wide use of the religion in studies of multiple environments shows its effectiveness in explaining intention and behaviour in multiple environments. However, research on community compliance in COVID 19 disease is still lacking. Thus, this study attempts to explore a different phenomenon and environment using religiosity aspect. This study will use the variables of religiosity in affecting intentions towards community compliance in the unique COVID 19 environment. The variable of intention will also be examined to investigate its correlation with the behaviour of community compliance in COVID 19 disease. Due to time constraints, this is a conceptual study without empirical proof. Thompson, M. P (1997), Tobin, D. L et al (1998), Koole et al (2009) and A. Vishkin, Y. Bigman and M. Tamir (2014) had strongly emphasised that the religious approach is significant in rejuvenating a patient's mental health and a psychological healing system for illnesses.

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