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A Concept Paper: How Does Spirituality Affect Individual's Thought, Emotion, Behaviour, Mental and Physical Health?

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Spirituality can be understood through several approaches. Based on the Islamic perspective, spirituality is defined as the outcomes of faith in Allah including belief in infinite power, the perfection of Allah and belief in life after death, which create meaningful and purposeful human life situations. Spirituality leads to happiness, hope, comfort, and it leads to physical and mental health.

Objective: Therefore, this paper aims to discuss the effect of spirituality toward thought, emotion, behaviour, as well as mental and physical health.

Method: This paper employs library research. The authors study several literatures related to the topic of the paper.

Result: Spirituality helps people to be tough and cope with stress. It puts them in a good state of mental and physical health.

Conclusion: Spirituality affects positively toward people behaviour, emotion, and make them in good health and well-being. Integrating spirituality into public health policy can improve mental and physical well-being. Implementing spiritual interventions can promote holistic health improvement.

Keywords: Spirituality; Emotion; Mental; Physical; Health

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality can be understood through several approaches. Based on the Islamic perspective, spirituality is defined as the outcomes of faith in Allah including belief in infinite power, the perfection of Allah and belief in life after death, which create meaningful and purposeful human life situations. That situation leads to happiness, hope, contentment, confidence, comfort and welfare in this world and the hereafter. Spirituality can also be interpreted as an awareness that stems from intellectuality based on divine evidence of the origin of the universe, and an understanding of the purpose of human creation to worship and seek the pleasure of Allah. The results of that understanding are then shown by humans in all their good deeds such as humility, submission and trust (1). Prophet Ibrahim's spirituality for example, as narrated in the Quran:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“Say: ‘Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for Allah’, the Lord of the worlds” (6:162).

Through the humanistic approach, spirituality is described as the individual's notion of peace, purpose, and interconnectedness, containing beliefs about the meaning of life. It refers to the attitude of individuals seeking and expressing the meaning of life, and the way they experience their connectedness with moments, themselves, other people, nature, and whatever one considers to be ultimately sacred. In contrast to the Islamic perspective, spirituality in the aspect of humanity is independent of specific religious preferences that contain spirituality, but rather is based on what individuals experience in reality. Therefore, religion does not become a spiritual buffer point for a person who does not adhere to a religion (1).

Returning to the Islamic approach, spiritual advancement is greatly influenced by the reliance on Allah. It completes one's faith in Allah, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

“So put your trust in God (and rely on Him) alone if you are indeed believers” (5:23). Interestingly, reliance on Allah has also been proven as having cognitive, emotional, and behavioural impacts on humans (2). Spirituality is increasingly recognized as a significant social determinant of health. It encompasses aspects such as ultimate meaning, purpose, transcendence, and connectedness, which are highly valued by individuals and communities (3). Discussion about how spirituality affects Individual's thought, emotion, behaviour, as well as mental and physical health will be discussed further in this essay.

METHOD

The paper employs library research. Library research is a data collection method that involves studying and analyzing information from several resources. They include scientific articles, books, theories, and documents that are directly relevant to the research problem. In this method, primary data is gathered, which refers to original and firsthand information obtained directly from the source material within the library setting (4). The authors collect literature from journal articles, Al-Quran, and other scientific references from 2000 to 2024 to extract summaries pertaining to the topic discussed. The reference criteria are not outside the realm of Islamic psychology and mental health as well as Islamic studies, which are reviewed using the Islamic perspective method to break down the topic discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How does spirituality affect an individual's thought?

Thought or mind is cognitive work that every individual consciously runs every day when facing something. Spirituality directs the individual's mind to perceive that Allah is the sole determinant of daily events. Nothing can happen without the permission of Allah, both good and bad. For example, there are many toast sellers who sell side by side without fear of their wares losing competitiveness. They believe that Allah never misrepresents fortune, regardless of previous constraints, the recipient will surely accept it. If viewed from logic, having a trading competitor is definitely not profitable, because potential buyers have other options and there is a possibility of a decrease in sales. But again, spirituality gives a different essence. Spirituality develops cognitive schemes that prepare humans to witness that Allah is everywhere, and in all things. It directs the human mind to be able to believe in what Allah has promised, even though it seems outside of logic in general.

The example just now is in line with Islamic teachings that encourage Muslims to always think positively towards Allah in every situation and believe that every difficulty must be accompanied by ease. Allah said in the Qur'an:

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۖ إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“For indeed, with hardship (will be) ease. Indeed, with hardship (will be) ease” (94:5-6). Spirituality encourages humans to have full faith or belief in the wisdom behind everything that afflicts them. Therefore, the

individual's thoughts will be well structured because they have such a scheme. This makes humans able to think clearly even in very rough conditions (3).

The psycho-spiritual state of mind motivates individuals to stay connected to strong intellectual powers and provides them with reasoning abilities based on valid sources namely the Qur'an and Hadith. The human mind transcends the multiplicity of objects and causes, as well as observes the unity of intellectual forces that govern all events in the world through the gate of spirituality (2). As an illustration, a Muslim will be careful in his life by staying away from sins and multiplying his acts of worship because he really believes that there is life after death that will judge all his behaviour during his lifetime. But for atheists, they have a different concept of thought, they do not believe that there is life after death, so that throughout their life they continue to pursue the life satisfaction and happiness they want without worrying about the consequences in the hereafter.

Spirituality has also been identified to have influence in changing positive perception (4). The procedure is by giving an understanding of life where it is reinterpreted according to what is meaningful to the individual (5). Take for example failure in a test, maybe this is interpreted to be a disaster for some people, but people who have good spirituality will interpret it as the best destiny from Allah which is probably because of that he can know his weaknesses and become a better person in the future. This intelligence provides humans with great power in order to survive in life and to distinguish between bad and good. In fact, not only distinguishing, but also seeing the positive side that may exist. That is how spirituality influences an individual's thought and directs it to achieve the ultimate life success (4). As justified by Allah in the Qur'an:

وَتَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ○ فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ○ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّاهَا ○ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا

By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; And its enlightenment as to its wickedness and its righteous; Truly he succeeds that purifies it; And he fails that corrupts it!" (91:7-10).

Based on the results of the study, it is known that spirituality influences an individual's mind. There was a significant positive correlation between certain aspects of spirituality, specifically self-discovery, environmental awareness, relationships and positive suicidal ideation. In contrast, these aspects showed significant negative correlations with negative suicidal ideation. This suggests that spirituality may influence the way individuals think about life and death (22).

How does spirituality affect an individual's emotion?

Emotion is a very non-objective aspect because humans cannot control their appearance when expressing thoughts and cannot be measured by medical devices or the like. Spirituality, which in fact is an invisible but powerful aspect, is very influential in the realm of emotions. Humans physically cannot regulate the emergence of an emotion, but on the contrary, spirituality is the most influential thing as a basic reference in the process of forming one's emotions. It regulates emotions based on the inner vibrations felt by the individual. For example, when listening to spiritual stories about Prophet Muhammad SAW who in the hereafter will be the only person who will care for his people when everyone is busy with their respective affairs; sparking feelings of affection, admiration, and a strong innate motivation to continue doing good deeds as he demonstrated. Such feelings cannot be experienced by individuals who do not have the frequency of spirituality based on Islamic teachings.

Muslims find that Allah is completely sufficient to protect them. Therefore, Muslims acquire readiness and proclivity to place their trust in Allah. A study by Bonab & Koohsar (2) reported that individuals who had a higher reliance on Allah had a higher feeling of self-worth. In a more recent study also found a positive relationship between reliance on Allah and the quality of attachment to Allah. So, the more the individual depends on Allah, the better the attachment to Allah, and the better the emotional stability within. Spirituality brings a positive impact to human emotion and can keep humans in tranquil state (4). It is in accordance with Islamic teachings which encourages Muslims to keep their worship, especially prayers (solat) in order to maintain individual emotional stability, even in the worst situations. This one is revealed by Allah in the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

"O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient" (2:153).

Prayers will surely bring peace in emotions. Consisting inner strength (al-himmah) that gives full attention and focus on Allah including internalizing the significance of every single action (3). Most importantly, the opportunity to interact personally with the Creator is given to humans through prayers. This sacred opportunity may be used by individuals to pour out all hidden and suppressed feelings, until all the accumulated burden feels lifted (6). Human logic is incapable of measuring how a ritual of worship such as prayer can have such strength. However, even though it cannot be measured with certain measurements, the inner strength can be deeply absorbed and felt.

Real-world examples have also been reported by several studies which state that the correlation between emotion and spirituality plays an important role in students' life as reinforcement for individuals in handling their feelings, which then leads to their success in the field of education (4). Exams are very stressful for students.

However, it is precisely from here that the rise in spirituality can be identified, because students relatively increase their worship during examinations, such as midnight prayers, reading the Qur'an and so on. This was done to reduce feelings of excessive fear of the tests that will be undertaken, as well as to ask for help from Allah so that everything can run smoothly. Without worship, a situation like this would be very heavy. Even some cases of suicide were committed by students with low spirituality who were dissatisfied with the results of their grades and the pressure from their surroundings, they were hopeless and did not have the strength to handle their emotions at that time (7).

The level of spirituality can influence a person's capacity to manage stress and distress, thereby improving their mental health functioning. In other words, a person's high level of spirituality indicates that there is an increased capacity for emotion regulation (indicated by reduced emotion regulation difficulties). Spirituality appears to be a powerful catalyst for the transformation of emotion processing difficulties that are thought to underline most emotion-based disorders, including mood, anxiety and eating disorders (16).

Spirituality is also considered as an adaptive egression in order to foster daily problem solving. It encourages the human ability to creatively plan questions about life as well as search for answers wisely. Hence, spirituality values will hold someone back from being fierce and rude to the possibility of doing fatal things while mad. This implementation can also help parents to train their emotions when responding to their children, so that there will be a good emotional relationship between the two parties (8). Indeed, resentment is a natural thing that appears in the human heart. However, the response to how individuals respond to it is different. There are types of people who get angry easily when there are a few problems, such as when they experience differences of opinion with others. Here spirituality takes a role in directing individuals to control their emotions.

How does spirituality affect an individual's behaviour?

Al-Ghazzali (9) mentioned in his literature that spirituality through reliance on Allah has been used by Muslims as a coping strategy to deal with challenging life events since centuries ago. For example, the story of a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Bilal Bin Rabah, who was tortured by his employer by being hit by a very large rock in the scorching sun. His behaviour was truly praiseworthy, he did not give up at all and continued to adhere to his Islamic religion even though he had to endure such torture. This is the effect of Bilal's extraordinary spirituality regarding his reliance on Allah. Bilal believed that Allah knows everything that happens and will definitely provide the best help. Bilal continued to say "Ahadun Ahad" a holy sentence that praised Allah. In the end, it was his employer who couldn't respond to Bilal's consistency, and finally he was released from the torment. This is an easily observable component of behaviour as a result of spirituality that contributes to building individual plans through permissible and lawful actions (2).

Another usage of reliance on Allah as a coping strategy in challenging situations was also stated by Ghobary et al. (10). The survey reported that university students used reliance on Allah in a variety of challenging situations including social, economic, health, and so forth. The students who learned Islamic subjects, knew that Islam taught us to treat other people as our brothers and sisters. Accordingly, the students can adapt well in college life and get along with others better. They held fast to the believe that every Muslim is a brother of every other Muslim (4). As Allah revealed in the Qur'an:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

"The believers are nothing else than brothers. So, make reconciliation between your brothers, and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy" (49:10).

The role of spirituality as a means for human reflection in determining their behaviour is very significant. Spirituality makes Muslims always rely on Allah whenever problems arise. In dealing with family disputes for example, the main solution that is trusted and used by Muslims is to depend on Allah's will, even though physically using all available external means such as by undergoing family counselling to solve the problem. Here the divine relationship between God and servant is intertwined, mediated by the concerning problem. The interaction between divine and individuals in everyday life is also considered to have active relations viewed by the implications of the spiritual viewpoint just now (2). The results of the study revealed that there is a significant negative correlation between spirituality and health risk behaviors in adolescents. This indicates that as spirituality increases, the likelihood of engaging in health risk behaviors decreases. The study concludes that spiritual intelligence and spiritual personality serve as significant protective factors against adolescent health risk behaviors (17).

Apart from being seen as a means of solving problems, spirituality also encourages individuals to be able to maintain their good behaviour both when alone and in a crowd. It refers to an Islamic concept called "Ihsan". Ihsan has a broad and deep meaning, it is one of the many words in Arabic that cannot be translated into just one English word. The meaning of Ihsan can be understood through the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad which reads:

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

“(Ihsan is) to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then indeed He sees you” (Narrated by Muslim). It can be interpreted from this hadith that Ihsan means to do all things well, in the best possible manner, to achieve excellence, to aim at beauty and perfection (11). Such spirituality value will have a tremendous impact for humans, if it is practiced in earnest.

Spiritual values can significantly influence employees' ethical behavior, with fostering spirituality shown to improve ethical practices in the workplace (18). According to Sharma (2020), it is known that spirituality can affect self-efficacy, work motivation, productivity, problem-solving orientation, and ability to cope with stress at work (19).

How does spirituality affect an individual's mental and physical health?

According to Islamic teachings, spirituality is one of the dimensions of health. Islamic teachings claimed that increased spirituality stems from religious understanding, which can relieve the person from a feeling of emptiness, guide to find the wisdom meaning of illness, and foster the ability to face the problems caused by the illness. Spirituality affects the mental and physical health of individuals from within by orienting belief systems. It is not conditioned by environmental boundaries, nor by socio-political conditions of the society (2). It refers more to a divine relationship that brings out the strength to be resurrected or at least by alleviating the pain.

Spiritual coping methods have been found to be a better predictor for the maintenance of individual's health (2). This is due to the solid perception towards Allah on His accessibility, availability, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Equipped with confidence in the responsiveness of Allah in times of crisis and need. The following is a verse of the Quran about Allah as the Supreme Healer:

وَإِذَا مَرَضْتُ فَبِهِ يَشْفِينِ

“And when I am ill, it is He who cures me” (26:80). Individuals can obtain inner strength that supports their mental and physical health because of their surrender to Allah's power based on a set of assumptions about the qualities of Allah's supremacy, and His omnipresence to always provide help to His servants (2).

Regardless, individuals may experience hopelessness when confronted with chronic physical illness. Hopelessness can lead to mental breakdown. Desperation at God's mercy and thus have the possibility of committing suicide is a mortal sin. Therefore, spirituality is very important to direct individuals towards the path that is blessed by Allah. Spirituality diminishes pain catastrophizing and increases meaningfulness and purpose in life. These approaches may allow sufferers with chronic illness to overcome some of the negative problems associated with the illness (12). There is much spirituality guidance on health as reported by Marzband et al. (1) from a survey regarding the Qur'an. One of the verses is about Allah introducing the Qur'an as a cure for the believers:

وَ نُنزِّل مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا بُو شِفَاءً وَ رَحْمَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۗ وَ لَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا

“And We send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers, but it does not increase the wrongdoers except in loss” (17:82).

Moving on to the examples of cases. Stress is a body's response to physical, mental, or emotional pressure. Stress causes chemical changes in the body that can raise blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar levels. It may also lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, anger, or depression. What is often encountered might be work-related. It is an imbalance between work-related demand and individual capacity. If not appropriately handled, it may adversely affect individual mental and physical health (13).

Research by Fariza (14) has found two forms of implementing spiritual approaches: through social and personal support. Social support comes from the experts who can guide the sufferer to build spiritual strength. In terms of personal support, spirituality can be cultivated through the approach of self-purification (tazkiyah al-nafs), the application of praiseworthy (mahmudah) qualities such as patience, gratitude, trust (tawakkal) in Allah, and so forth. Research results reported that applying spiritual practices such as fostering contentment with Allah's providence, keeping proper worship (ibadah), purifying the heart from bad traits, having faith in Allah's help, purifying the intention to work as worship (ibadah), and establishing night vigil prayers (qiyam al-lail) was helpful to manage and alleviate the stress.

Another research by Charkhabi et al. (8) reported that spirituality has been proven as an effective intervention to decrease interpersonal sensitivity, somatization, obsessive-compulsive, depression, anxiety, aggression, phobic, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. It is able to decrease psychological disasters and to improve the quality of mental health. Spirituality has been identified as a protective factor against mental and physical illness. Even Hai et al. (15) found evidence of the efficacy of spiritual interventions in helping people with substance use problems related to alcohol and drug abuse, although substance use disorders (SUDs) are already known as serious public health problems. Santos, et.al (2023) found that spirituality plays an important role in mental health, offering various benefits that contribute to a person's overall quality of life and resilience in the face of illness. spirituality has a positive impact on mental health, reducing depression and promoting recovery from illness. It also provides comfort, well-being, security, meaning, and strength (20). Hence, Ismail and Karimah in 2023 revealed many positive

correlations between high levels of spirituality and lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Spirituality and religiosity guide individuals to use them as positive coping mechanisms. In addition, the results of identifying the relationship between spirituality, religiosity, and individual health behaviors found that those with strong spirituality and religiosity tend to exhibit better health behaviors, such as lower alcohol consumption (21).

According to Sepideh (2021), the effectiveness of spirituality as a coping mechanism is often influenced by cultural beliefs and practices. In a study on COVID-19, the results highlighted those spiritual systems can impact constructively or destructively on coping during a crisis, depending on the cultural context (23). Moreover, in non-religious contexts, individuals may adopt spiritual coping strategies without genuine belief, as seen in college students who used spiritual coping despite not identifying as spiritual (24).

CONCLUSION

Individuals with high spiritual qualities become more resistant to the daily hassles and stressors of life that are ongoing. They become more centralized and deeply connected to other people, beings, nature, and the divine. Their behaviour becomes consistent with their cognitive schema and emotional state. Which therefore leads to a positive influence on mental and physical health. The findings show that issues related to cognitive, emotional, behavioral, mental and physical health may be overcome by spiritual approaches.

Spirituality develops cognitive schemes that direct the human mind to be able to have positive perceptions regarding all the decrees of Allah. It motivates individuals to stay connected to strong intellectual powers and provides them with reasoning abilities based on valid sources, the Qur'an and Hadith. In the emotional aspect, spirituality takes a role in directing individuals to control their emotions based on the inner vibrations that stem from divinity. Hence, spirituality values will hold someone back from being fierce and rude to the possibility of doing fatal things while mad.

Related to the behaviour, spirituality has been used by Muslims as a coping strategy to deal with challenging life events. The role of spirituality as a means for human reflection in determining their behaviour is very significant. Spirituality makes Muslims always rely on Allah whenever problems arise and encourages them to be able to maintain their good behaviour both when alone or in a crowd. Spirituality, that illness affects the mental and physical health of individuals by orienting their belief systems, also has been identified as a protective factor against mental and physical illness. This is rooted from the solid perception of the supremacy and responsiveness of Allah when His servants are in crisis and need. Thus, all the human problems can be solved by staying on the right track by continuing to seek the pleasure of the Creator and avoiding committing sins which might aggravate spirituality.

Integrating spirituality into public health policy can improve mental and physical well-being. Implementing spiritual interventions can promote holistic health improvement.

SUGGESTION

The role of spirituality in all aspects of life is necessary to influence a person's emotions, behavior and health. Positive spirituality is important in coping mechanisms. People should pay attention more to spiritual aspect in their life to enhance their resilience toward stress and improve their health.

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