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The role of Islamic spirituality in overcoming depression: A literature review

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the role of Islamic spirituality in addressing depression, particularly among young people, through the practices of dhikr (remembrance of God), prayer, supplication, trust (tawakal), patience, and consent (privacy), which effectively reduce depressive symptoms. This research methodology uses a literature review with a descriptive analysis approach to analyze Islamic spiritual practices and their effectiveness in addressing depression among adolescents. Data were obtained from scientific journals, books, and academic publications that discussed the relationship between Islamic spirituality and mental health. The results of this literature review indicate that the higher a person's level of Islamic spirituality, the better their psychological well-being, including resilience to depression. Islamic psychology makes a vertical relationship with Allah SWT the primary foundation for protecting mental health, in line with Surah Ar-Ra'd/13:28, which states that only by remembering Allah can the heart be at peace. Therefore, the practice of dhikr provides peace of mind and soul, and prevents symptoms of depression.

Keywords: Islamic spirituality; depression; mental health

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1. INTRODUCTION

Depression is one of the most common and serious mental disorders worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately 4% of the global population is depressed, including 5.7% of adults, with a prevalence of 4.6% in men and 6.9% in women (WHO, 2024). Globally, an estimated 332 million people suffer from depression, making it a leading cause of disability and a significant contributor to the global burden of disease. Data show that depression is approximately 1.5 times more common in women than in men, with more than 10% of pregnant women and women who have just given birth experiencing depression.

The mental health condition in Indonesia is also concerning. According to the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (SKI), the prevalence of depression at the national level is 1.4%, which means that approximately 1 in 100 people aged 15 years and older is depressed. The highest rate is found in the young age group (15-24 years/Generation Z), reaching 2%, which shows the need for serious attention to adolescent mental health. Data from the 2018 Basic Health Research (Rskesdas) show that more than 12 million people over the age of 15 suffer from depression, with mental emotional disorders showing symptoms of depression and anxiety reaching 6.1% for the same age group. Alarmingly, only 12.7% of individuals with depression seek treatment, while 87.3% do not (Badan Kebijakan Pembangunan Kesehatan, 2024).

The impact of depression not only affects the mental well-being of individuals but also their quality of life and productivity and can even be fatal. The data show that 61% of teens who have been depressed in the past month have thought about ending their lives, with a 36 times higher risk than those who do not have depression. In 2021, an estimated 727,000 people died by suicide, making it the third highest cause of death among 15-29 years old (WHO, 2024).

In the treatment of depression, conventional approaches, such as psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy, have established a standard of treatment. However, a growing body of research shows that spirituality and religiosity in psychotherapy can provide more effective results, especially for patients who are religious (Bonelli et al., 2012). Islam, the religion with the second largest follower population in the world, which continues to grow, offers a comprehensive spiritual role for well-being and mental health. Islamic spirituality provides the highest purpose and meaning to human life.

Some Islamic psychologists have revealed that most Muslims do not fully accept and practice Western psychology because they believe in spiritual sources in the lives of Muslims themselves (Keshavarzi & Khan, 2021). Malik Badri, who is a psychologist, admitted that some of the patients failed to recover through psychiatry, drugs and other therapies. However, an increase in recovery was found when Malik Badri combined behavioral and cognitive therapy in Islamic teachings with spiritual sentiments (Badri, 2020). This shows that the spiritual role of Islam also has a positive impact on mental health.

Traditional Islamic spiritual practices such as dhikr (remembering Allah), Qur'an reading, prayer, and prayer have been used for centuries to treat various ailments, especially mental illnesses. Some studies have shown the effectiveness of Islam-based interventions in reducing depression and anxiety. Research from Malaysia shows that Islamic-based interventions that foster istighfar (asking for forgiveness from Allah) and dhikr (remembering Allah) can significantly reduce anxiety and depression (Saged et al., 2022). A study in Iran found that spiritually sensitive logotherapy can significantly reduce depression, anxiety, and stress in college students, with a large effect size ($F=56.8$, $p<0.001$). Research on dhikr therapy shows that dhikr is considered an effective way to combat depression in individuals, with studies showing a decrease in anxiety levels from 5.83 to 1.67 ($p=0.0003$) and depression levels from 9.67 to 4.67 ($p=0.003$) in the group receiving dhikr therapy (Anggun et al., 2021).

From several studies that have been conducted, the combination of the Qur'an and psychology in society has not been fully believed by the public, and there is still little research linking the two. Spiritual approaches to mental health are often viewed as unscientific. Therefore, this study discusses the role of Islamic spirituality in overcoming depression.

2. METHOD

This research is a literature review (*library research*) with a descriptive analysis approach to analyze various practices of Islamic spirituality and their effectiveness in overcoming depression. Data were obtained from scientific journals, books, and academic publications that discussed the relationship between Islamic spirituality and mental health, especially depression. The analysis was carried out by identifying and categorizing the research findings to uncover the mechanisms and effectiveness of Islamic interventionism in reducing depression symptoms.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Definition of Spirituality in Islam

According to the language, 'spirituality' comes from the word 'spirit' which means soul ([Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2003](#)). Some argue that the word spirit etymologically comes from the Latin 'spiritus' which means spirit, soul, self-awareness, disembodied form, breath of life, and life. Spirituality can also be interpreted as spiritual things. Therefore, spirituality can be interpreted as something that is tied to the ability to arouse the spirit, for example, how a person really pays attention to and shows the soul or spirit in organizing life on this earth. In addition, it refers to a truly noble and noble social order ([Yahya, 2022](#)).

Spirituality in Islam is a complex and multidimensional concept that differs from the understanding of spirituality in Western traditions. From an Islamic perspective, spirituality is defined as the result of faith in Allah, which includes belief in infinite power, the perfection of God, and the belief in life after death, which creates a meaningful and purposeful situation in human life ([Aisyahrani et al., 2024](#)).

According to Dr. Khalid Hussain, spirituality in Islam is defined as the presence of a relationship with Allah that affects an individual's self-esteem, sense of meaning, and their relationship with others. This definition emphasizes that Islamic spirituality is not only a subjective personal experience but also has an important social dimension.

The term spirituality can also be defined as a human experience in general from a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality ([Zastrow, 1999](#)). In contrast to the Western conceptualization that often separates spirituality and relativity, Islam has no concept of spirituality unless viewed in the light of religion or Islamic law. Islamic spirituality emerged from the religion itself, which is primarily derived from the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition known as Hadith, and is taken as a source of guidance for Muslims in every aspect of life.

One of the fundamental verses that explains the dimension of spirituality in Islam is found in QS. Adz. Dhariyat/51:56:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَنَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Translation:

"I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me"

This verse is the theological basis for understanding Islamic spirituality, which emphasizes that the purpose of human creation is to worship Allah SWT. The word "يَعْبُدُونَ" which comes from the root word 'abada,' has a broad meaning, not limited to formal worship rituals alone, but covering all dimensions of human life oriented to obedience and servitude to the Creator ([Al-Qurthubi, 2006](#)).

Spirituality in Islam is more than just a feeling. It is true knowledge of the source of the spirit, a sincere search for Him, a persistent connection with Him, and a commitment to love Him and remain on His path until we meet Him. Thus, Islamic spirituality is a life journey that involves growth, and commitment to the Creator ([WhyIslam, 2023](#)).

The spirit is like a spiritual world whose dimensions feel vast, untouchable, and far away. It is in this place that the spirit functions as a container or wrapper for secret things. In Sufism, the spirit is

esoteric (bathniah) and spiritual. Through esotericism, spirituality flows from various religions (Nasr, 2003). Originally, spiritualism was not a religious matter. It is more like a worldly question that arises from social changes. Social and psychological tensions arise during this process of change. These tensions give rise to various life uncertainties, called anomie, at both the individual and group levels. This is because the old values that are embraced are starting to be replaced, while the new grip to achieve serenity in life is not clear in its form and nature (Agustiawan, 2017).

Meanwhile, from an Islamic perspective, Allama Mirsa Ali Al-Qadhi (as quoted by Dr. H.M. Ruslan) explained that spirituality is an inner journey to a higher degree. This process is achieved through spiritual practice (riyadah) and strict self-control so that a servant's focus remains on Allah to achieve eternal happiness (Audah, 1985). In line with this, Nasr emphasized that spirituality is closely related to the spiritual realm and closeness to the Divine, which includes inner integrity and the essence of truth. Meanwhile, Ibn 'Arabi views spirituality as the optimization of all spiritual potentials based on the rules of sharia in understanding reality, both visible (empirical) and hidden (spiritual).

Another opinion states that spirituality in Islam focuses more on purifying one's inner being and then manifesting these positive inner changes in daily life through ritual worship or ethical behavior. Islam teaches that Allah has instilled in all people a tendency to have faith, enjoy meaningful relationships with Allah, and live a life of good. This tendency is called fitrah. Fitrah can only be fully satisfied when one discovers the true revelation of Allah and the teachings of His prophets. As explained in QS. Ar-Rum/30:30:

فَاقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلَّدِينِ حَيْثُّا قَطَرَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الَّذِينَ الْقَيْمَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Translation:

"So, turn your face straight to the religion (Islam according to) the nature (of) Allah who has created man according to that (fitrah). There is no change in Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most people do not know."

The concept of fitrah in the above verse Ar-Rum shows that spirituality is an inherent dimension in humans. The word fitrah "فَطْرَة" etymologically means creation or original event, which refers to the natural conditions and innate tendency of humans to know and worship Allah SWT. This verse emphasizes that every human being is born with a holy spiritual potential and inclined to monotheism (Ibn Katsir, 2000).

According to ibn Katsir in his commentary, the fitrah referred to in this verse is the straight religion of Islam, which is the recognition of the oneness of Allah and his position with Him. Fitrah is the original nature of human beings that are influenced by external factors, so spirituality in Islam is understood as an effort to return to the purity of the fitrah through the process of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) Islamic spirituality thus includes three main dimensions, namely cognitive awareness (*ma'rifah*), effective experience (*dzaqq*), and behavioral manifestation (*charity*).

3.2. Definition of Depression

The word "depression" has various nuances of meaning. Most of us have felt sad or upset, faced a life full of problems, felt disappointment, loss, and frustration, which often led to unhappiness and despair. Even so, in general, these feelings are normal and are a response that works and is easy to overcome.

The term depression is used to refer to a type of disorder whose main manifestation is a feeling of sadness. This condition not only affects the emotional aspect, but also includes psychological complications, physical (somatic) complaints, and psychomotor inhibitions that last for a certain period of time (Siregar, 2016).

Sometimes we feel hopelessness without a clear cause, or a mood that does not correspond to the circumstances, and no effort seems to eliminate that feeling. Depression generally occurs when the stress a person is experiencing does not go away, and is often related to a dramatic event that has just occurred, such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a valuable job. This kind of depression is a disease that requires medical treatment. In other words, depression becomes a problem when it appears for no

apparent reason or persists long after the triggering stress has disappeared or resolved. For example when a person grieves the loss of a loved one, it is a normal reaction if it occurs in the early weeks of the loss. However, it is called depression if deep grief lasts for a long time after the loss.

Depression is a mood disorder that includes feelings of helplessness, deep despair, and loss of vitality in life. Symptoms of the sufferer include concentration disorders, tense mental states, and the risk of self-destructive behavior or self-harm. *The American Psychiatric Association* defines depression as a serious medical condition that affects a person's feelings, way of thinking, and acting, leading to a decreased ability to function at work as well as at home (American Psychiatric, 2020). This definition emphasizes that depression is not just an ordinary sadness or character weakness, but rather a medical condition that requires professional intervention.

According to Kusumanto, depression is a condition of sadness that is psychopathological. This condition is characterized by the appearance of deep feelings of sadness, decreased interest in various things, reduced interest in life, and decreased energy levels. This decrease causes sufferers to easily feel tired even though they only do light activities, and overall there is a reduction in doing various activities. Depression can appear as a single symptom or a group of events that appear simultaneously (Basuki, 2015).

Based on this definition, it can be concluded that depression is a painful psychological experience, in which a person feels deep despair and sadness. This condition is usually accompanied by a slowdown in bodily functions, with varying severity ranging from mild depression to a very severe condition of total helplessness. This emotional disorder is also characterized by the loss of the ability to feel happiness, as well as the appearance of other symptoms such as sleep pattern disturbances and reduced appetite.

3.3. The Role of Islamic Spirituality in Overcoming Depression

Spirituality has a very significant role in overcoming depression, both from the conceptual aspects of theory and empirical evidence. Based on a comprehensive review of various literature and research, it was found that Islamic spirituality not only functions as a complement to conventional therapy, but can also be used as an effective primary approach in treating depression.

Islamic spirituality in the perspective of mental health has a broad and holistic scope. Islamic psychology views the human soul as a complex structure, consisting of four main components, namely *qalb* (heart), *nafs* (soul), *spirit* (spirit), *aql* (intellect). These four elements must be in harmony to maintain one's mental health (Akib et al., 2021). When balance is disturbed, both due to external and internal factors, it can trigger mental health disorders including depression. The Islamic spirituality expressed by Dasti and Sitwat includes eight fundamental aspects, namely: (1) the search for divinity, meaning, and purpose in life; (2) *Belief*, (3) Islamic Practices; (4) Reading and reflection of the Qur'an; (5) Religious Rituals; (6) Islamic molarity and ethics; (7) Relationship with others (ukhwah); and (8) Spiritual experiences. These eight aspects are highly interconnected and make a significant contribution to an individual's mental health. Research shows that the higher the level of Islamic spirituality a person, the better the level of psychological well-being, including in terms of resistance to depression (Rachmaningtyas, 2022).

This is different from the approach of Western psychology which is secular in nature, Islamic psychology makes a vertical relationship with its God Allah SWT as the main foundation in protecting its inner health in this case its mental health. This concept is considered in line with the words of Allah SWT contained in QS. Ar-Ra'd/13:28 which reads:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُ الْأُفْلُوبُ

Translation:

"(That is) those who believe and their hearts become at peace in the remembrance of Allah. Remember, that only by remembering Allah will the heart always be at peace.

The verse explains the virtues of faith and dhikr which will give peace of mind and soul, eliminate anxiety and lead to happiness, because only by remembering Allah will the heart become peaceful. This verse hints that mental well-being can be achieved through a deep spiritual approach.

The character of the soul always wants to get closer to Allah SWT and always wants to know Allah SWT. Abandoning the teachings of God means that he has committed a deviation from his character, and this can be a source of mental disorders (psychic). The cause of neglecting Allah SWT can be due to when the mind is ineffective and weak in controlling his lust and anger, so that his orgasm and anger control his intellect. It can trigger mental disorders to become depression (Zaini, 2015).

Performing the worship commanded by Allah SWT to His servants, both prayer, fasting, hajj, and zakat, can actually cleanse and clear the soul that suffers from mental disorders from anxiety to depression. The words of Allah SWT in Qs. Az-Zumat/39:22 which reads:

أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْقَسِيْةِ فَلَوْبُهُمْ مِنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

Translation:

"So, is the person whose heart is opened by Allah to (accept) Islam, and then receives light from his Lord (the same as the one whose heart is petrified)? Woe to those whose hearts are petrified from remembering Allah. They are in manifest error."

The above verse explains that woe to those who deviate and neglect the commands of Allah SWT, they are aware of it, but as if they do not care about remembering Allah SWT, in the verse it is considered that their hearts have petrified, meaning a condition in which the heart becomes difficult to accept the truth, caused by immorality, pride, disobedience, or sadness that lingers to denounce the destiny and power of Allah SWT.

A person who experiences a psychological condition or depressive disorder, of course, one thing they want to get is to get peace of mind. When the heart reaches calmness, a person's mind, body and behavior will also become calmer so that their feelings will also be able to do pleasant deeds, think positively and the heart will be calmer in facing conditions that give someone sadness (Mustoha, 2024).

Theodore J. Chamberlain and Christopher A. Hall, in their book entitled *Realized Religion*, revealed that there are several reasons why religion is good for health, namely first, religion can provide certain moral lessons that prohibit or prohibit actions that are not good for the individual. For example, Christianity and Islam prohibit their people from consuming alcohol, drugs (drugs), and extramarital promiscuity (Chamberlain, 2000). Second, religion provides social support to its fellow people, third, religion provides people with goals, meaning, and a framework of thinking in life. For example, in Islam it is found in QS. Adz. Dhariyat/51:56 which states "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me", the verse clearly states that humans were created in this world by Allah SWT solely to worship Him, it can make a person understand the purpose for which they were created and their life can be more directed. Fourth, religion provides answers to religious questions such as why there is evil and disease, what happens when death so that it provides solutions when anxiety strikes because it is effective in dealing with the pressures of human life (Pujiastuti, 2021).

Fundamental concepts in Islam such as tawakal, patience, and ridha can function as a *cognitive framework* that can help individuals in dealing with the pressures of life. Tawakal or also known as surrendering to Allah is a concept that has a very effective effect in dealing with depressive disorders. Tawakal is the attitude of leaning on the final result to Allah SWT after making maximum efforts, not just surrendering without effort. Research shows that individuals with high levels of tawakal have lower levels of stress. A higher tawakal score is comparable to a lower stress and depression score, and vice versa. Tawakal helps individuals not to get caught up in overthinking and excessive anxiety about the future which is one of the triggers for depression (Iskandar et.al., 2018).

Patience is a fundamental value in Islam that plays an important role in mental resilience and psychological well-being. The patient psychotherapy model in the perspective of Islamic psychology consists of five main stages, namely: self-monitoring, identification of triggers and mindsets, relaxation techniques using dhikr and prayer, strengthening spirituality through understanding the wisdom behind

each test, and evaluation and strengthening patience. Patience in the context of Islam is not just about refraining from complaining, but how to be determined in accepting all destiny and decrees from Allah SWT (Miskahuddin, 2020).

The concept of ridha or acceptance of Allah's destiny is the highest stage in the health of Islamic spirituality. Ridha helps individuals not to get caught up in deep regret about the past or excessive anxiety about the future, which is a major characteristic of depression.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on an in-depth literature review, it can be concluded that Islamic spirituality plays a vital and significant role in efforts to overcome depression. Depression as a widespread and serious mental health problem, often requires a holistic approach. In this context, Islamic spirituality offers more than just support but also provides a comprehensive philosophical and practical framework.

Basic concepts such as *qalb*, *nafs*, *rub*, and *aql* in Islamic psychology show that mental health is manifested from the harmony of the elements of the soul. When this balance is disturbed, Islamic spirituality is present as a balance. Practices such as dhikr (remembering Allah), reciting the Qur'an, and prayer, as evidenced by various studies, are effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. Furthermore, Islamic teachings that focus on tawakal (surrender), patience (perseverance), and ridha (acceptance of destiny) serve as powerful cognitive coping mechanisms, helping individuals cope with life's stresses and preventing them from getting caught up in excessive anxiety or regret in the past.

This research highlights that Islamic spirituality with its emphasis on vertical relationship with the Creator and the maintenance of *fitrah* (man's innate tendency to Tawheed), provides essential meaning and purpose in life. Thus, the role of Islamic integration in the treatment of depression is not only complementary, but can be an effective primary approach, offering sustained peace of mind and mind.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

Not Applicable

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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Notes on Contributors

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