



The Role of Islamic Psychospiritual in Building Self-Resilience of Cancer Caregivers

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Abstract: The global community is increasingly recognizing the integration of health science with religion and spirituality. In Malaysia, the field of Islamic psychospiritual science, which combines psychology with spirituality and Islamic teachings, has garnered significant research attention, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by cancer caregivers. These caregivers, often referred to as “hidden patients,” experience a range of difficulties including physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and financial burdens that adversely affect their quality of life. However, society tends to prioritize the health and well-being of the patients over that of the caregivers. In reality, caregivers place the needs of the patients above their own in all aspects. Spiritual, religious, and emotional distress are prevalent concerns for both patients and caregivers during the crisis of cancer, which is often associated with mortality. Hence, the objective of this article is to explore the role of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in supporting cancer caregivers, specifically in addressing their spiritual, religious, and emotional well-being. The data collection process utilizes library methods based on key findings from previous studies, while data analysis is conducted using a thematic analysis approach. The findings of this study indicate that religious aspects emphasized in Islamic psychospiritual disciplines can enhance caregivers' resilience in effectively managing various cancer-related challenges, thereby improving their overall quality of life. Hence, the significance of the spiritual and religious dimension, which acts as a protective factor, should not be disregarded. Lastly, this article proposes the provision of spiritual and religious educational materials within medical settings as valuable resources for cancer caregivers to reinforce their own well-being.

Keywords: *Cancer caregivers; Islamic psychospiritual; Protective factors; Resiliency*

Introduction

Spirituality and religion are known to play a significant role in helping individuals navigate life's challenges, maintain well-being, and improve their quality of life. Extensive research conducted in both Western countries (Huang, TL., 2016) and within the Muslim community has consistently demonstrated that spirituality and religion serve as primary sources of hope for individuals, playing a preventive and healing role in mental illnesses while promoting overall individual health. The spiritual element, inherent within human beings as a divine gift from Allah SWT, holds a specific purpose. This spiritual dimension acts as a catalyst, motivating individuals to adhere to Allah SWT's commands and distance

themselves from His prohibitions, firmly grounded in faith in the Day of Judgment (Mujib, A., 2019).

Furthermore, the spiritual or soulful element, which possesses divine qualities, holds influence over an individual's mental well-being, desires, and emotions (Mohamad, MA. & Abdullah, MFIL., 2020). Therefore, individuals must attend to the spiritual and religious aspects of their lives, serving as internal protective factors when confronting life's challenges. Conversely, neglecting the innate and spiritual needs of the soul can lead to spiritual distress and existential confusion. Weakness in spiritual or soulful strength during crises, such as cancer, can have adverse effects on an individual's spiritual and emotional well-being.

While advancements in medical technology have enabled many cancer patients to recover, cancer continues to be associated with spiritual, religious, and emotional distress, primarily due to its association with mortality. Not only do patients experience such distress, but their close family members also undergo psychological trauma when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, particularly when the diagnosis is delayed and the disease has already reached an advanced stage. According to Kübler-Ross (2014) in her book "Death & Dying: What the Dying have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and their Own Families," individuals experiencing grief progress through stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Navigating these stages requires wisdom to effectively cope with the crisis.

In the context of caregiving, the multifaceted burden of caring for cancer patients also contributes to spiritual, religious, and emotional distress. Caregivers, often referred to as the "hidden patients," commonly experience challenges related to physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and financial aspects, which can significantly impact their quality of life. Therefore, caregivers require comprehensive support and assistance to maintain their own well-being and sustain their caregiving role. Knowledge and application of positive coping mechanisms are crucial for caregivers of cancer patients to preserve their health, restore balance, and enhance their physical, mental, and spiritual resilience.

This study seeks to explore the significance of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in empowering caregivers of cancer patients and fostering their resilience to effectively address the challenges associated with cancer care. By incorporating Islamic principles and teachings, caregivers can find solace, guidance, and strength in their faith, ultimately improving their overall well-being. The inclusion of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge can offer a unique perspective in addressing the spiritual and emotional needs of caregivers. The contemplation of *maqamat*, a concept rooted in Sufism, provides caregivers with a framework for self-reflection, self-renewal, and spiritual growth. By embracing this approach, caregivers can enhance their resilience, cope with the pressures of caregiving, and find inner peace amidst the difficulties they encounter. By recognizing the importance of spirituality and religion in the lives of caregivers, this article aims to shed light on the transformative power of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge. It seeks to emphasize the significance of incorporating spiritual practices and teachings into caregiving approaches, acknowledging the profound impact these elements can have on caregivers' well-being and their ability to provide effective care to cancer patients.

Literature Reviews

According to the APA Psychology Dictionary, resilience is the ability to adapt to difficult or challenging life experiences, particularly through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. Factors contributing to the development of an individual's resilience include their perception and interaction with their environment, the availability and quality of social support, and effective stress coping strategies. Psychological studies have shown that an individual's resilience can be trained and developed over time.

Research by Spattuzi et al. (2018) has shown that an individual's spiritual/religious strength is highly effective in improving mental and physical health and preventing caregiver-related diseases. Therefore, the concept of contemplation of the concepts and theories of *maqamat* in Sufism, as recommended in Islamic psychospiritual treatment, can be applied by caregivers of cancer patients as an alternative approach to address their spiritual/religious and emotional pressures.

A study conducted by Dwidiyanti et al. (2022) examined the impact of Islamic spiritual mindfulness on religiosity and resilience in adolescents. The intervention group exhibited a significant increase in mean values of religiosity (mean difference of 3.94, p -value = 0.001, effect size of 0.56) and resilience (mean difference of 0.21, p -value = 0.003, effect size of 0.46) after the intervention. The control group, however, did not show significant changes in religiosity (mean difference of 0.070, p -value = 0.070) and resilience (mean difference of 0.57, p -value = 0.220). These findings suggest that Islamic spiritual mindfulness is highly effective in enhancing religiosity and resilience among adolescents. Therefore, implementing Islamic spiritual mindfulness is recommended to promote better mental health in this population.

Similarly, the study conducted by Bukhori et al. (2022) investigated the influence of self-efficacy, social support, and religiosity on resilience, and how these factors collectively affect subjective well-being. The results indicated that religiosity, social support, and self-efficacy significantly influenced resilience, which, in turn, directly affected subjective well-being. The relationship between self-efficacy, social support, self-religion, and subjective well-being was partially mediated by resilience. These findings have practical implications for Islamic guidance and counseling, highlighting the importance of utilizing religion as a means to foster resilience and perceive difficulties as opportunities for personal growth.

Furthermore, Makhsin et al. (2019) conducted a study using the Scale Medium Youth Appreciation of Islamic Education (SPPIP-M) to assess religiosity levels, and the Resilience Scale (SDT) to measure resilience levels among students. This quantitative case study involved 40 students in both control and treatment groups. The results demonstrated that the treatment group, utilizing the Journal of Self-Hisbah Reflection, experienced positive changes in religiosity and resilience levels. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the Journal of Self-Hisbah Reflection as an intervention tool for nurturing religious and resilience development in school-aged teenagers. Collectively, these previous studies provide substantial evidence for the positive impact of Islamic interventions on religiosity and resilience among adolescents. They emphasize the significance of incorporating Islamic practices and teachings in promoting mental well-being and personal growth.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the significance of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in empowering caregivers of cancer patients and fostering their resilience. The data collection process utilizes library methods based on key findings from previous studies, while data analysis is conducted using a thematic analysis approach. This qualitative study used four main keywords, namely cancer caregivers, Islamic psychospiritual, *maqamat*, and resilience, to search for literary highlights. The majority of search results, consisting of journal articles, books, and theses, were analyzed based on the scope and objective of the study, which focuses on the role of religious-based teaching and practices in building and enhancing cancer caregivers resilience. Based on thematic analysis of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge, an appropriate Islamic psychotherapeutic approach to encountering grief among cancer caregivers has been drafted for further evaluation in the next study.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the role of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in supporting caregivers of cancer patients. The results will be presented in a comprehensive and organized manner, providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of caregivers and highlighting the significance of spirituality and religion in their well-being. The implications of the findings will be discussed, emphasizing the importance of integrating Islamic psychospiritual knowledge into caregiving approaches to enhance resilience and promote holistic care for cancer patients and their caregivers.

Results and Discussion

The primary tips for caregivers to cope with stress and sadness involve intending to care for the patient as a religious obligation and looking at the caregiving role from a positive perspective by seeking the advantages of being a caregiver from an Islamic perspective. For example, they can recognize themselves and strengthen their relationship with Allah SWT, the patient, and concerned individuals in the surrounding. Furthermore, according to Spattuzi et al. (2018), caregiving responsibilities can also provide a more positive meaning or purpose in life. This is because the sincerity in caring for the patient and deep appreciation of the adversity of cancer among loved ones can bring peace and happiness to the caregiver, enabling them to establish good mental health.

In the effort to build resilience in cancer caregivers (refer to Figure 1), the recommended therapy during the denial phase is repentance (*taubah*). Al-Makki and several Sufi scholars discussed the *maqam* (spiritual station) of repentance as the first station in a seeker's journey towards the path of Allah SWT, and *taubah nasuha* means surrendering and sincerity to Allah SWT in matters of obedience and avoiding His prohibitions (Syed Muhsin, SB. & Sa'ari, CZ., 2015). Therefore, for caregivers who are still denying the reality, they should turn to Allah SWT, realizing the essence of servitude that will always be tested in this world and have faith in the divine decree (*qada'* and *qadar*). Through repentance and self-reflection, caregivers will be able to see the wisdom behind these trials. From an Islamic perspective, one of the wisdoms of a severe life test like cancer is that it becomes a stepping stone for a servant to draw closer to Allah SWT, and the experienced sadness acts as an expiation for past sins.

To deal with the anger phase, patience (*sabar*) is the suitable therapy. In a cancer crisis, caregivers may potentially become angry with God because their loved ones are suffering from cancer, and they may also be angry with themselves for being late in detecting

cancer symptoms and failing to take better care of the patient. Caregivers may also direct their anger towards their environment and the people around them who they perceive as the cause of the cancer. Therefore, the steps for practicing patience during anger can involve remaining silent, reciting ta'awwuz (A'uzubillah min al-shaitan al-rajim), changing body positions, and performing ablution (Ajruji, M., 2019). These practical and easy steps can help caregivers calm down, think rationally, and avoid negative consequences of anger while preventing them from complaining about the trial. Patience can motivate caregivers to sincerely care for the patient and expect rewards only from Allah SWT. Patience also serves as an indicator of individual mental health because it helps someone to control themselves well when facing unfavorable circumstances. Therefore, patient caregivers will have firmness of heart, avoiding feelings of anger, anxiety, and confusion. The quality of patience also educates individuals to behave in a controlled and positive manner (Syed Muhsin, SB., 2018), always be optimistic, and not despair in the mercy of Allah SWT (Najati, MU., 2003). The positive and optimistic attitude of caregivers is significant in enhancing the motivation of patients in their care.

During the bargaining phase, the recommended therapy for caregivers is to increase the remembrance of "hauqalah" (*La haula wala quwwata illa billah*). In this phase, caregivers will try to deal with sadness or hope to avoid experiencing such sadness using suitable methods. The remembrance of "hauqalah" can eliminate sadness when recited with full confidence that Allah SWT is Mighty and nothing can harm or weaken oneself, including that sadness. The remembrance of "hauqalah" also reminds us of the fact that everything that happens is under the will and power of Allah SWT, human weaknesses, and the complete dependence of a servant on Allah SWT al-Ghaniy. Truly, only by remembering Allah SWT, the heart will find tranquility (Surah al-Ra'd: 28).

Furthermore, to overcome depression, the therapy that can be applied is gratitude. This is because depression occurs due to the loss of the patient's health or the loss of a cancer patient who is extremely valuable to the caregiver. Losing one blessing should not cause a person to forget the remaining blessings that still exist. By expressing gratitude, cancer caregivers will always be aware that Allah SWT always bestows blessings and it is impossible for Him to oppress His servants. Therefore, to maintain a sense of gratitude within oneself and avoid prolonged gloominess, caregivers are encouraged to consistently express gratitude and record every appreciated thing in a gratitude journal. Moreover, the concise and powerful expression of gratitude, "Alhamdulillah," can provide emotional and spiritual tranquility (Ilias, MZ., 2018), helping caregivers to dispel their depression.

Lastly, in the acceptance phase, the suitable therapy is reliance on Allah (tawakkul) and contentment (reda). The discussion on reliance on Allah, patience, and contentment cannot be separated as they are interconnected. Tawakkul means striving earnestly and surrendering the outcomes of those efforts to Allah SWT. Therefore, caregivers should strive to strengthen their resilience and seek success in overcoming the cancer crisis rather than solely resigning or surrendering to the situation. After relying on Allah, caregivers need to accept the fate of the cancer disease by nurturing their souls to see this trial as an event containing various wisdoms (Syed Muhsin, SB., 2018). The reality is that the attribute of contentment is not easily obtained and achieved except by those who possess a profound understanding of servitude (Syed Abdul Rahman, SMH., 2006). In conclusion, all the mentioned spiritual stations require the presence of a sincere heart and a sense of true

servitude to cope with each phase of sadness. Only with the permission and power of Allah SWT, all problems, grief, and anxiety will be resolved.

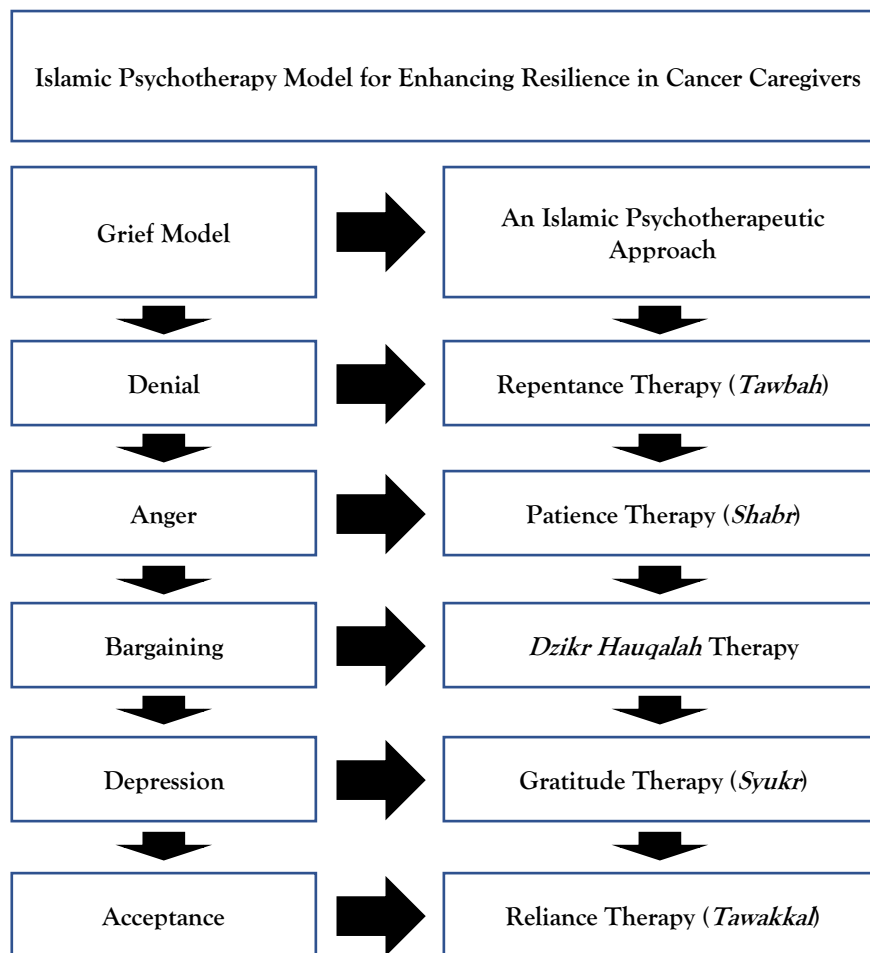


Fig. 1. Islamic Psychotherapy Model

Discussions

The findings of this study shed light on the significance of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in empowering caregivers of cancer patients and fostering their resilience. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, several key themes emerged, highlighting the role of spirituality and religion in caregivers' well-being and their ability to provide effective care.

Firstly, the study revealed that spirituality and religion serve as primary sources of hope for caregivers, enabling them to navigate the challenges associated with cancer care. Caregivers acknowledged the divine element within themselves and found solace, guidance, and strength in their faith. Islamic principles and teachings offered a unique perspective, providing caregivers with a framework for self-reflection, self-renewal, and spiritual growth.

Secondly, the study emphasized the importance of incorporating spiritual practices and teachings into caregiving approaches. The contemplation of *maqamat*, a concept rooted in Sufism, emerged as a powerful tool for caregivers to find inner peace amidst the difficulties they encounter. By embracing this approach, caregivers were able to enhance their resilience and effectively cope with the pressures of caregiving.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted the multifaceted burden faced by caregivers and the impact it has on their well-being. Caregivers commonly experienced physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and financial challenges, which significantly affected their quality of life. However, the study revealed that knowledge and application of positive coping mechanisms, informed by Islamic psychospiritual knowledge, were crucial in preserving caregivers' health, restoring balance, and enhancing their overall resilience.

Overall, the study demonstrated that the integration of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in caregiving practices has transformative power. It empowers caregivers, enhances their well-being, and enables them to provide effective care to cancer patients. The findings underscored the need for healthcare providers and support groups to recognize the importance of spirituality and religion in caregivers' lives and to incorporate these elements into comprehensive care approaches.

These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the significance of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge in supporting caregivers of cancer patients. They provide insights into the experiences and perspectives of caregivers, demonstrating the positive impact of spirituality and religion on their well-being. The findings have practical implications for healthcare professionals, suggesting the integration of Islamic psychospiritual knowledge into caregiving practices to optimize the support and care provided to caregivers and ultimately improve outcomes for cancer patients.

Conclusion

The integration of spiritual and religious elements, specifically the *maqamat* (spiritual stations) in Sufism, can be utilized as a constructive coping mechanism within Islamic Psychospiritual Therapy. This approach holds significant potential for augmenting the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental resilience of caregivers. Islamic psychospiritual therapy emphasizes the importance of caregivers reconnecting with their inherent religious nature and cultivating a monotheistic perspective towards Allah SWT. Such an approach has demonstrated the capacity to effectively alleviate and even prevent emotional and spiritual distress experienced by caregivers. Additionally, this article proposes the inclusion of spiritual and religious educational materials within medical centers, serving as a valuable self-reinforcement resource for caregivers of cancer patients.

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