

## **The Effect of Prayer on Mental and Physical Health: A Psychoneuroimmunology Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Prayer has been an important activity for many people since ancient times, a strong belief in it can affect mental and physical health. This article takes data from several literatures using a qualitative analytical descriptive approach. This article also discusses several discussions about psychoneuroimmunology, prayer, and the influence of prayer on mental and physical health. From the results of the analysis, researchers concluded that prayer has a lot of influence on mental and physical health.

**Keyword:** Mental Physical Health; Prayer; Psychoneuroimmunology

### **Introduction**

From the past until now, everyone will not be separated from the word prayer. Prayer is a form of request from a servant to his God, it can also be called a request for what is desired, hope for what is expected, worship or praise (Mudak, 2017). The fulfillment of prayer is everyone's hope and prayer is also a religious or spiritual experience that is owned by a human being. People who pray expect something from God that they cannot see with the naked eye but they still believe in it. In addition, many people believe that prayer has the power to influence reality and outcomes in everyday life. However, in the scientific realm, questions about the effectiveness of prayer and the mechanisms behind it are still interesting topics and spark debate. This prayer activity makes psychologists interested in various questions about how a person's thoughts and behavior are related to prayer activities (Komalasari, 2019: 427). This also makes researchers curious whether it is true that prayer can affect various things, especially health, both physical and mental health.

The field of psychoneuroimmunology studies the mind, nervous system, and immune system, and their effects on physical health (Rosyanti et al., 2017: 79). In a research study conducted by Rebecca Marina and Dr. Felici revealed that prayer has a positive effect on physical health, especially on blood cells. They used the EFT Potential tool and Darkfield Microscope,

finding differences in the condition of blood cells when praying more positively compared to normal conditions. This shows that emotions and prayers have a significant effect on human blood health, which directly impacts overall health in the human body (Amalia et al., 2022: 47).

This study is based on several main theories. First, there is the psychoneuroimmunology theory (PNI). This theory studies the relationship between the mind, nervous system, and immune system, and the influence of thoughts and emotions on physical health (Khalifah & Lutfiah, 2010). Prayer is a spiritual activity that reduces stress and increases positive emotional conditions which then affect the immune system. In addition, the theory of religious coping states that prayer functions as a strong coping mechanism in dealing with life stressors. Where with prayer a person can feel hope and emotional support that strengthens a person's mental resilience.

There are several previous studies that have explored the influence of prayer on health. First, according to Rebecca Marina and Dr. Felici found that prayer has a positive influence on the condition of blood cells, as evidenced by using a Darkfield Microscope. Second, according to Rosyanti et al., (2017) in the field of psychoneuroimmunology showed that prayer can affect the interaction between the mind and the immune system, which can indirectly improve physical and mental health.

Both studies show that prayer has a positive effect on physical health. However, there are differences between the two studies, where Marina and Felici focus more on direct physiological effects through blood cell conditions, while Rosyanti et al. focus on the complex interaction between the mind and the immune system. From the explanation above, researchers are curious about the effect of prayer on mental health, then the effect of prayer on physical health, and the mechanisms behind the effect of prayer on mental and physical health.

This study examines various literature on the effects of prayer on mental and physical health. From a study conducted by Revai (2018 : 87-88) it shows that prayer and other religious activities can improve psychological well-being and reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, decreased pain, etc. Then Sofia Rhosma Dewi (2016: 233) emphasized that participation in prayer activities is positively correlated with better physical health and can affect a person's lifespan. In addition, psychoneuroimmunology theory explains how thoughts and emotions resulting from prayer activities can affect the nervous and immune systems. Research by Rosyanti et al., (2017) supports this theory with empirical evidence showing that meditation and prayer can improve immune system function.

After reviewing various studies, this literature review, the main problem that will be discussed is to identify the effect of prayer on health, both mental and physical. The formulation of the problem in this study is

how prayer affects mental and physical health from a psychoneuroimmunology perspective. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the effect of prayer on mental health, to identify and analyze the effect of prayer on physical health, and to understand the potential mechanisms behind the effect of prayer on health. Every study must have benefits both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study is expected to have implications for benefits and uses as a review of science. Practically, this study is expected to have benefits and uses as knowledge regarding the effect of prayer on health, both mental and physical.

### **Research Methods**

The research method used is qualitative research with a descriptive analytical approach. Data collection is carried out by collecting data in the form of journals, books, and other data related to the discussion.

### **Result and Discussion**

This study collects data from various literature that examines the effect of prayer on mental and physical health. Some of the literature studies obtained include Rebecca Marina and Dr. Felici (2022): Finding that prayer has a positive effect on blood cell conditions, as measured using a Darkfield Microscope; Rosyanti et al., (2017): Showing that spiritual activities such as prayer can affect the nervous and immune systems, improving physical and mental health; Kamal et al., (2023): Stating that religious practices, including prayer, can improve psychological well-being and reduce symptoms of depression; Kosalina (2018): Showing that participation in religious activities is correlated with better physical health and longevity.

#### **1. Definition of Prayer**

Prayer comes from the root word "وعد" which means a tendency or desire expressed through sound and words (Nurjanah & Juhrocin, 2017). In terms of language, prayer is defined as the act of inviting, seducing, pleading, expressing, asking (Istiqomah, 2019), egging, calling, and praising (Sambas & Sukayat, 2007). In terminology, prayer is the act of getting closer to Allah SWT, with all one's soul and body to express requests and ask for help for everything that is expected (Siska, 2021). Prayer is a form of a servant's great need for Allah SWT. to go through everything in his life. Prayer also functions as a medium to bring a servant closer to his God, namely Allah. According to Ibn Arabi, prayer is a form of communication interaction between a servant and Allah to eliminate all his sins and cleanse polytheism in him. Sufism experts added that prayer is an effort to serve Allah SWT, recognize human weaknesses, hopes, and generosity, and a form of obedience to Him (Jannati & Hamandia, 2022). From these various definitions, it can be concluded that prayer is a form of communication with

Allah SWT. which includes requests, hopes, and devotion, as well as a sign of human dependence on Allah SWT. By praying, humans show that they only hope and fear Allah SWT.

## **2. Mental and Physical Health**

The origin of the word health is "healthy" which is absorbed from Arabic, namely *suhhah* which means not sick, healthy, safe. As for KBBI, healthy is a good condition of the entire individual's body and its parts that are free from pain (Pusat Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2008). Law No. 23 of 1992 states that healthy is a condition where a person has physical (bodily), soul (spiritual), and social well-being and can carry out all activities productively when socializing and his economic condition is also good.

It can be concluded that physical health is a condition in which an individual has psychological and social development that can carry out all of his activities normally, which condition is caused by not experiencing any disorders either in terms of physical or function. While mental health is a condition in which an individual is able to develop both physically, cognitively, and emotionally optimally and this development goes hand in hand with the conditions or circumstances of other people.

Almost the same as the statement above, there are several experts who can explain the meaning of health, including: According to WHO (World Health Organization, 1947) healthy is a condition of improving spiritual or mental, physical or physical, reason or mindset, social, and not only to eliminate disease but before being hit by disease or after. And for healthy humans are humans who are free from the word disability, illness, good stamina, happy physically and mentally, prosperous in their social life, and in a body condition that can do all activities (Fathiah et al., 2024). According to White (1977) healthy is a person who when examined by a medical, the person does not have any complaints or symptoms related to disease or abnormalities (Rizki et al., 2024).

Mental health is one aspect that can affect a person's activities. When someone experiences a mental disorder or disorder, any activity will be hampered. So this aspect is very important to maintain. This health is important because mental health is closely related to feelings, thoughts, intuition, cognition, five senses, behavior and so on. According to Yusuf (2011) in his book entitled "Mental Hygiene" it is stated that a person's mental health is closely related to how a person views himself and others, as well as how the person considers or evaluates and makes all decisions when facing various problems, situations and so on (Fakhriyani, 2019: 10).

According to Daradjat (1988) mental health is the formation of harmony or balance between one soul function and another, a person's ability to face and solve problems, and feel happiness and have a positive

view of themselves. He also emphasized that mentally healthy individuals are free from mental disorders such as neurotic and psychotic. According to H.C. Witherington, mental health involves knowledge and principles from various fields such as psychology, medicine, psychiatry, biology, sociology, and religion, and aims to improve spiritual health. Jalaluddin (2015) added that mentally healthy people are those who feel calm, peaceful, safe, and peaceful spiritually (Fakhriyani, 2019: 10).

WHO defines mental health as a condition in which an individual is well-being, aware of his/her potential, able to cope with all pressures in his/her daily life, work productively, and able to work together with others in his/her activities and community. The definition of health according to WHO includes physical, mental, and social well-being without disease or weakness (Treaties 1946) (Fakhriyani, 2019: 11). Thus, mental health is a condition that allows for the optimal development of all aspects of a person (physical, intellectual, emotional) and in harmony with others, and is able to interact with the environment positively. Mental health also includes good adjustment to the environment to avoid mental disorders.

### **3. Psychoneuroimmunology**

Psychoneuroimmunology is the study of the relationship between the nervous system and the immune system, and the relationship between behavior and health. This field integrates several disciplines such as psychology, medicine which discusses psychology, neurology, immune science, endocrine science which affects all activities both physical and psychological, and behavior, with a primary focus on the immune system and mental responses to stress, depression, anxiety and the like (Loftis et al., 2010).

One of the diseases related to psychoneuroimmunology is Depression (Major Depressive Disorder, MDD). Depression is a condition that affects a person emotionally, physically, the way they think, and the way they behave. MDD is a major mental illness globally, with a high prevalence in both inpatients and outpatients. Although there are many effective treatments, only a small proportion of sufferers receive adequate therapy. The three main mechanisms that affect depression-related biomarkers are neurotransmitter signals, the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) axis, and the immune system. Cytokines, which are signaling molecules in the immune system, can affect psychological and physiological conditions. Increased cytokines can cause behaviors similar to depression. Cytokines also interact with the central nervous system, and increased cytokines in the brains of depressed patients indicate different regulation of pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines (Loftis et al., 2010: 80).

Penggunaan aplikasi *references*, baik fasilitas internal maupun fasilitas eksternal komputer, sebagaimana telah disinggung di atas, praktis akan

membentuk daftar referensi (daftar Pustaka) yang dapat dilihat di bagian referensi template ini dan sekaligus menjadi ketentuan yang ditetapkan untuk Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin ini.

#### **4. The Effect of Prayer on Mental Health**

The results of the analysis show that prayer can activate the body's relaxation response, reduce stress hormones such as cortisol, and produce feelings of calm.. Kamal et al., (2023) found that people who always pray regularly experience lower stress levels compared to people who rarely pray. By praying, it can prevent various mental health problems associated with chronic stress, such as anxiety and depression.

Prayer can foster a sense of hope and optimism in a person towards their God and by praying can also reduce feelings of loneliness. From Kosalina's research (2018) it shows that prayer can be positively correlated with better emotional well-being. Where when someone prays it can calm the person who is praying, because by praying it can foster a feeling that there is someone up there who is listening and will answer the prayer which can relieve anxiety, then when someone after praying, the person can feel that if their prayer is not answered then it will be replaced with something better.

Prayer serves as an effective coping mechanism in dealing with difficult or stressful situations. Psychologist Komalasari (2019) noted that prayer can help individuals express their feelings, seek spiritual support, and find inner peace, which is very important in dealing with life stressors. As previously stated, by praying a person will not worry too much about things that are beyond their control. The explanation above shows that prayer can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Prayer can also divert the mind from daily worries and provide a feeling of calm and hope for the future.

#### **5. The Effect of Prayer on Physical Health**

The results of the analysis above show that prayer has a positive effect on the condition of blood cells. Finding that the condition of blood cells is better when praying compared to normal conditions, which shows that emotions and prayers have a significant effect on human blood health (Amalia et al., 2022). Then as stated by Rosyanti et al. (2017), shows that prayer can improve the function of the immune system. Where by praying the mind, nervous system, and immune system can improve overall physical health. As previously stated, when praying, a person will think positively about the problems they face, so that it can affect the nervous system and immune system, and with this physical health can improve.

There is also research related to physical health, the research was conducted by Krucoff et al. (2001). In the study showed that when patients were prayed for by others their blood pressure decreased and their health

outcomes improved. Almost the same as the research conducted by Krucoff, Byrd (1988) found that when patients who received intersessional prayer while they were in the cardiac intensive care unit showed significant improvements in their clinical conditions compared to the control group who did not receive prayer. From the statement above shows that it turns out that the influence of prayer on physical health is very much and many other researchers have studied this.

## **6. The Mechanism Behind the Effect of Prayer**

The results of the analysis above show that prayer can affect the interaction between the mind, nervous system, and immune system. This is supported by the theory of psychoneuroimmunology which supports that positive thoughts and emotions, obtained through prayer, can increase the body's immune response and reduce stress hormone levels. Praying can also provide emotional and spiritual support, which helps individuals cope with the pressure and stress of life. And this also leads to improved mental and physical health.

Usually people who are calm have positive and calming energy. With this calmness, stress hormones are reduced, which then increases the immune system in the body. Then people who pray will usually also feel encouragement from outside or spiritual support that raises a person's hopes, which greatly affects the stress pressure experienced. The more someone feels confident in God's help, the lower the level of pressure or stress they experience.

## **Conclusion**

Research shows that prayer not only serves as a spiritual medium, but also has real benefits for mental and physical health. By praying, individuals can cope with life's stress, find inner peace, and improve emotional and physical well-being. The mechanisms behind this influence are supported by psychoneuroimmunology theory and the concept of religious coping, which explain how prayer can help cope with stress and strengthen overall health. This study is expected to be an initial step to educate the public about the real benefits of prayer. The weakness of this study is that it only explains using a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach. Therefore, the author recommends further research using a case study approach to obtain a more comprehensive discussion.

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