

Handling Panic Attacks in Abu Zaid Al-Balkhi's Mental Health Review

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Abstract : Mental health is one of the issues that has long been studied by Islamic civilization. As one of the early originators of mental health studies, al-Balkhi has contributed a lot through the book *Mashalih al Abdan wa al Anfus*. Panic and panic attacks are themes that appear quite often in the lives of modern people. According to data collected by Epidemiological studies, cases of panic disorder (PD) reach a range of 1.4 to 4.1% of the adult population. While panic attacks (PA) are in 14.4% of the population in countries that have high incomes. In addition, when compared to men, women have a higher potential of about 3-6% to suffer from the disorder. This research uses a library research method by collecting print and digital references and analyzing them with content analysis. According to al-Balkhi, panic, and panic attacks are interrelated conditions and are chronic forms of fear and anxiety. However, close or actual events are the most powerful drivers in triggering the disorder. Attempts to find meaning in events and redirect irrational thoughts towards something more rational are common themes in al-Balkhi's psychotherapy.

Keywords: : *al-Balkhi, panic attacks, mental health, psychotherapy.*

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1. Introduction

Anxiety and fear often envelop the lives of individuals, then these two concepts are then likened by many thinkers to fog. The fog here can be interpreted as a terrifying condition for traditional people, because they think that there is an unattainable horror in it. It is this shadow of ignorance that then produces various kinds of interpretations. One of them is the fear of different conditions, both oxygen levels and other threatening variables. Fear of this vague aspect then produces anxiety, and in its development will produce a fairly serious condition if it is at an excessive level (Al-Balkhi, 2023).

Then, if anxiety and fear are present in extreme forms according to al-Balkhi (2023), it will lead to a panic attack. Where panic attacks can come at any time, whether there are

triggering factors or not which are usually latency. In addition, this attack is also an unwanted condition, and can give rise to various lingering fears of similar conditions in the future. This can then affect various aspects of daily life, which are usually expressed in the form of behavior. Panic attacks also cannot be categorized as a condition, if they are triggered by various side effects of the use of medical drugs and other medical conditions (Brown et al., 2015).

Panic attack in Kurniawan et al. (2022), is a syndrome that arises from anxiety that often results in mental disorders. These disorders usually don't last long may last for a few minutes (rarely for long enough to hours), with occasional frequency in a week or even more intense than that. In some cases, panic attacks are usually present related to situational triggers such as driving a vehicle, traveling or activities that have the potential to cause an attack, this phenomenon is then called a conditional panic attack (cued panic attack).

However, if the panic attack is related to a stimulus at a not too strong level, then this incident can be categorized as a panic attack triggered by a situation. Situational panic attacks do not have such a strong relationship with the triggering factors, but stimuli also have a role in triggering panic attacks. In addition, panic attacks often also appear in relatively calm situations such as during meditation, exercise, relaxation and other calming conditions. This incident is then better known as uncued attacks (Barlow et al., 2020).

Epidemiological studies report that the prevalence of panic disorder (PD) is in the range of between 1.4 and 4.1% in the general adult population. Meanwhile, panic attack (PA) disorders without panic disorder life time (PD) have a higher population level. World Mental Health reports that the prevalence of panic attacks (PA only) in high-income countries reaches 14.4% (Olaya et al., 2018).

In line with that, research conducted by Aryati & Fr (2020), found that the prevalence of Panic-disorder (PD) is in the range of 1-4% population, while Panic attacks are in the range of 3-6%. When juxtaposed with men, women tend to have a higher level of disorders believed in the range of 3-6%. In line with that, the range of development also has an influence on the level of disorders, this is supported by research conducted by Olaya et al (2018), which found that there was a decrease in the rate of panic attack disorder (PA) and panic disorder (PD) along with increasing age.

Etiologically, panic disorder and panic attacks can be caused by various triggering factors such as; 1). Biological factors, from various modern studies carried out, it was found that panic disorder is related to abnormalities in brain structure and function. In addition, it was also found that there was an increase in sympathetic nerve activity. Some neurotransmitters that experience functional impairments include Gamma Aminobutyric Acid (GABA), Epinephrine, and Serotonin. 2). Genetic factors, the first generation of people with panic disorder have a 4 to 6 times greater risk of developing the same disorder. 3) Psycho-social factors, psychological and social factors have a considerable influence on the individual. So that the tendency to decrease in disturbances is very possible. This phenomenon is closely related to various (behavioral) conditions, traumatic experiences, unconscious repression and bodily responses in responding to problems (Yaunin, 2012).

Al-Balkhi as one of the early generations of Islamic thinkers has contributed a lot of his work, one of which is in the field of physical and mental health. According to him, the problem of fear, anxiety to panic attacks is a mental disorder caused by psychic energy that experiences a surge and decrease, or in his language it is something that easily experiences an increase and decrease. Furthermore, al-Balkhi also mentioned that panic attacks can be

experienced by anyone, but usually this condition will not appear if the individual is still in the stage of worrying about his or her fear (Al-Balkhi, 2023).

Al-Balkhi's contribution to mental health issues is a legacy of the golden age of Islam, which must be perpetuated and redeveloped in the modern era. The basic thinking of the positive cognitive and psychological approach that he built in the book *Mashalih al Abdan wa al Anfus* (food of the body and soul) is the intellectual property of Islamic civilization which is packaged in language that is quite light, simple, and applicative. But of course, it leaves a lot of room for further study so that it can be applicable to the demands of the times.

Mental health problems, such as panic attacks and panic attacks, are still relevant if applied in modern civilization. Al-Balkhi's thought in the field of mental health is a breath of fresh air in modern Islamic civilization that is arid of Islamic psychotherapy. Therefore, research based on Islamic psychotherapy is needed to explore historical heritage and develop it in the future.

This paper was made using the library research method, where in its preparation various literature references were used both in primary and secondary form. Referral collection is carried out through various places, both print and digital, through related portals. Meanwhile, the analysis carried out is content analysis, to find out the various content contents of references which are then processed into a finished work.

2. Research Results

Panic Attacks in the Perspective of Modern Psychology

The root of the word panic comes from the word "pan" which refers to one of the Greek gods who lived in the mountains and forests and had behavior that was difficult to predict (absurd). While in the historical view, panic disorder in modern western scientific principles was introduced by Jacob Mendes Dacota (1833-1900), who discovered heart attack-like symptoms in many American Civil War soldiers. These symptoms include psychological and somatic symptoms that are very disturbing (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

Panic attacks are a symptom that is present in people's lives. The prevalence of this disorder is estimated to cover 1-4% of the population. While in the case of panic attacks it reaches the range of 3-6%. In general, panic can be categorized into several basic types, believed panic disorder and panic attacks. Panic disorder is a condition that can be characterized by the appearance of one or two unwanted panic attacks. These attacks are usually triggered by ambiguous stimuli, where the stimuli present are often not a big problem for the general individual (Aryati & Fr, 2020).

There are two general views that can be used in looking at this disorder, in the physical-biological view panic disorder can be caused by a disease that can then trigger symptoms to appear. As is the case with the left valve closure syndrome of the heart which results in heart palpitations. Psychologically, panic disorder is often associated with agoraphobia with the fear-to-fear hypothesis. Such a concept is so twisted and often causes vicious circles that bind each other and result in very disturbing conditions (Kurniawan et al., 2022).

Second, a panic attack is a condition that occurs spontaneously and is often difficult to explain in a series of symptoms that are not worn, such as difficulty breathing, nausea, chest pain, heart palpitations, feeling choking and choking, cold sweats, dizziness, trembling and feeling extreme anxiety or tremors and then as if to die. King et al, in Zainuri and Wulandari (2020), found that as many as 40% of adults will occasionally experience panic attacks, especially during times of heightened tension. In the general population, panic attacks are a very disturbing but common condition, but if these panic attacks are present and triggered by

specific stimuli and result in behavioral changes for at least one month, then the individual can be diagnosed with panic disorder (American Psychiatric Association & Association, 2013).

In an effort to handle panic disorders, panic attacks, and agoraphobia, modern scientific studies present two approaches, both through psychopharmaceutical therapy and psychotherapy. Treatment efforts using psychopharmaceuticals, such as benzodiazepines, are believed to be able to relieve acute anxiety and quickly control panic disorders. This is in line with the research conducted by Amri (2012), who found that alprazolam classified as a high-potency benzodiazepine has a good level of effectiveness in overcoming panic disorder. If done in a relatively short period of time, about eight weeks. The second action is carried out using psychotherapy, there are quite a number of approaches that can be used to overcome panic disorder and panic attacks, one of which is by using relaxation, cognitive reconstruction as well as mindfulness and anxiety first aid (Nurul et al., 2021), (Lestari, 2014), (Sari et al., 2021).

2.2 Biographers Abu Zaid al-Balkhi

Ahmad ibn Sahl (235-332 H) atau yang lebih dikenal dengan Abu Zaid al-Balkhi merupakan one of the generalists who lived in the golden era of Islam, precisely in the Abbasid caliphate. But at the same time 247-334 AH was also a difficult period, where the Abbasid dynasty was experiencing various problems. Shakir explained that that era was a dark period like the Abbasid dynasty, where the Thuluni dynasty attacked from the west, the Saffarid dynasty invaded from the east, while the Roman empire besieged from the south and various fears arose from the south of Iraq, due to the rebellion carried out by Ali bin Muhammad (Zanj's rebellion)". During this period, al-Balkhi spent a lot of his time going to the city of Baghdad and returning to Balkhi as his hometown (Al-Balkhi, 2023).

If we talk about the biography of al-Balkhi, then Yaqut al-Hamawi's work should be an important reference to see it in depth. Al-Balkhi was born in Balkhi or what is now known as Afghanistan precisely in the village of Syamistitiyan which is located near the Gharbanki river. Al-Balkhi was born to a father who worked as a teacher, so it is very possible for al-Balkhi to get early learning from him. Unfortunately Yaqut does not explain in detail al-Balkhi's childhood. As a teenager, al-Balkhi traveled to Iraq in search of knowledge. In some notes, it is said that in his youth al-Balkhi was quite exposed to various contradictory theological and philosophical doctrines.

Yaqut said that al-Balkhi's youth was a period when he was lost on the straight path. Which sometimes al-Balkhi believes in Shia while on other occasions also adheres to astrology and law. The confusion of thinking that he experienced when he was young made him get a lot of slanted news as an atheist and Shi'a. However, this news did not last long, the news of this bird was dismissed with his decision to hold fast to Imam Ash'ari. This assertiveness is further corroborated by Yaqut's writings which say that al-Balkhi had good faith, by not being complacent in making decisions based on astrological predictions

As one of the early generations, al-Balkhi also learned directly from al-Kindi. So it is not surprising that many of his thoughts were also influenced by various kinds of Greek thought. Along the way, al-Balkhi produced quite a lot of works in various fields including geography, ethics, sociology, politics, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, biography, theology, philosophy, etc. Mentioned by Muhammad ibn Ishaaq, al-Balkhi actually had more than 55 works in various disciplines. In addition, Mahmud Misri also mentioned that al-Balkhi has around 64 works (Musfichin, 2019). Which is thus not surprising if Abu Hayyan gave him the title of Imam Jahizah of the city of Khurasan.

But unfortunately most of these works were not found, one of his works that can still be enjoyed to this day is the book *Mashalih al Abdan wa al Anfus*. The book is divided into two parts, with the first part consisting of fourteen chapters that discuss various tips for maintaining physical health (unfortunately this is not very relevant to the current world of medicine and needs further study). Second, it consists of eight chapters that discuss various mental disorders and the efforts made to overcome them (Istikhari, 2021).

2.3. Concept of Mental Health

The concept of mental health is an issue that has been widely discussed by mental health experts today. Unfortunately, there are still quite a few people who take mental health problems for granted. When juxtaposed with physical illnesses, psychological disorders are more often ignored. However, mental illness is not a less threatening, especially in the midst of the Covid 19 crisis that has occurred in recent years (Ridlo, 2020). The combination of biological and psychological disorders can be a driver of such acute self-turmoil. It is estimated that there are 1 billion people living with mental disorders, of which three million people die every year due to threatening alcohol use and one person dies every second by suicide (Saxena, 2016).

Healthy and sick conditions are a continuum, where the concepts of healthy and sick are difficult to distinguish clearly. The boundaries between normal and pathological are also the same, but if further observation is made, this can encourage efforts to improve optimal mental health. So that this kind of activity is not only concerned with the problem of curing diseases, but also with improving the optimal level of individual health (Dewi, 2012).

According to the World Health Organization (2022), mental health is a condition where individuals have mental well-being and are able to realize their abilities, overcome normal pressures in daily life, and can actualize themselves in people's lives productively and beneficially. In addition, the WHO (World Health Organisations) also provides several indications of mental health conditions, one of which is the ability to relate to others, help each other, and even foster feelings of love between others. So that the concept of mental health on the one hand also prioritizes business values, efforts, struggles and creates the potential to love and cherish others.

One of the Islamic thinkers who was born in the golden era of Islam who is allegedly the early enforcer of mental health is al-Balkhi. Al-Balkhi has indirectly claimed himself to be the first doctor of the era, who introduced the importance of maintaining mental health. In his book *Mashalih al Abdan wa al Anfus* (food of the body and soul), al-Balkhi has developed many concepts of physical health. Considering that the psychic or mentality problem is so widespread, al-Balkhi limits himself to something that is easy to experience increase and decrease. As well as negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, panic and negative self-talk (OCD).

Mental health in al-Balkhi's view is a reciprocal thing (*Isyimbak*) between body and soul. Thus, it can be said that mental health is a balance between the physical-biological and the mental-psychic that exists within the self. These two aspects are internal and external, although in some of his discussions al-Balkhi emphasized that there is no psychic disturbance that is not caused by the involvement of the senses (visual and auditory) (Al-Balhi, 2005). This view is slightly different from the concept introduced by Ibn Sina, where the human potential of "intellect" is the main driver while the body is a tool or servant for intellect (Sina, 2023).

Efforts to maintain health are something that must be continuously pursued in order to achieve self-actualization. Al-Balkhi gave several tips in maintaining mental health, including

the ability to analyze one's ability to receive stimuli both internal and external. There are two points of view here in dealing with problems, where people with a strong mentality will tend to see stimulation as a challenge to be faced. Others who have a weak mentality will tend to give up easily and experience disturbances in processing stimuli.

Thus, understanding the condition of oneself is very necessary to see the individual's ability to receive stimuli. Al-Balkhi also emphasized that the individual's ability to analyze character, the limits of his strength and the level of his resilience in responding to problems, will make the individual better in responding and placing emotions. Then al-Balkhi also formulated two approaches in maintaining mental health that are preventive. Believe in efforts to manage pressure from outside and within, as well as add a lot of knowledge both internal and external. This is in line with his view that the most potent medicine is science (Al-Balkhi, 2023).

Knowledge in al-Balkhi's view has a central role in maintaining mental health. Where according to him, mental illness is caused by ignorance, especially in matters of affairs. Efforts to control the negative thoughts that arise can only be done with increased knowledge. This is supported by his opinion that knowledge is a precondition before mental health. This characteristic can be found in the forms of psychotherapy it offers, which tend to be close to cognitive therapy.

As has been mentioned above, ignorance is an initial bridge to mental disorders. Where this ignorance leads to issues that develop in society, which will then make individuals be directed to something that society wants and begin to lose their independence. Independence here does not arise from emptiness, but from self-knowledge and the environment. Meanwhile, emptiness is not interpreted as absolute but usually comes from a misunderstanding of oneself and one's environment (Istikhari, 2021).

Furthermore, al-Balkhi sees mental health as something that must be worked on. It is not just stopping at the healing aspect or achieving mere mental health. But further, al-Balkhi's concept of mental health aims to form individuals who can enjoy absolute happiness in the world (Al-Balkhi, 2023).

Panic Attack and Coping Efforts in Abu Zaid al-Balkhi's View, as the early originator of mental health studies in the Islamic world, has laid many foundations in the study of mental health in the modern era. One of the sub-studies that is still considered relevant is a series of theories and methods that are presented regarding the problem of panic and panic attacks that often infect modern individuals. Al-Balkhi sees panic attacks as a condition that arises from fear and anxiety in their acute form, resulting in panic attacks.

In his view, panic or panic attacks can be categorized into two types of ambivalent. On the one hand, panic is a natural thing and is an innate potential. On the other hand, panic is also a condition that can be influenced or triggered by a certain stimulus. In this second perspective, panic attacks can be carried out with psychotherapy because they are constructive and not innate (Al-Balkhi, 2023).

Panic is an extreme form of fear. Fear usually arises from something that threatens and will occur in the near future, such as chronic diseases, or natural disasters. However, panic will only occur if it takes place actually or will occur soon, just as the fear of death will not become a panic if it is not accompanied by chronic health problems or other conditions.

There are many fears that individuals have, but if they are still in a frightening level of fear, it will not lead to panic and panic attacks. There are many variables that can trigger panic attacks, but the actual event is the primary cause that to a certain extent makes the individual change his behavior before it actually occurs. This is in line with the thinking of modern health

experts, who in the enforcement of their diagnosis use a similar condition. That panic disorder or panic attacks can be established if there is a change in the behavior of the individual (American Psychiatric Association & Association, 2013).

To overcome this, al-Balkhi provides some tips that are quite simple and prioritizes positive cognitive and psychological approaches. This can be seen from several approaches that he introduced, with many highlighting cognitive values to suppress various irrational thoughts that arise from both internal and external factors. By suppressing irrational thinking with knowledge, the self will begin to be able to take more rational actions. Al-Balkhi is quite serious in discussing knowledge as a very effective medicine in curing diseases, because according to him many disorders arise due to a lack or misunderstanding of something.

Other efforts that can be made (psycho-therapy) to overcome panic disorder include distracting the wrong understanding of the fear. Where every fear experienced by an individual must be more frightening, if the fear has not really happened. The concept of fear by many thinkers is likened to a fog that covers a certain space, which in the view of traditional society is so frightening and threatening. The fear of uncertainty in the fog makes individuals anxious and panicked. But when the individual has entered and does not find a fundamental difference from the conditions outside, then the fear and anxiety will gradually disappear.

Second, by taking many lessons from a group of people who were struck by a disaster and being able to overcome it. It is believed that by making cognitive considerations of conditions outside of oneself, it will make individuals get a place for reflection (discovery of events) and insights. Third, namely by developing themselves that basically humans are able to overcome the panic that exists in them and prevent them wisely.

In addition, developing angry emotions can also be used as an effort to overcome panic. By developing self-confidence and boasting about it, individuals can escape the grip of misfortune due to fear and panic. Meanwhile, it further develops the notion that panic is a stupid act where the concept (panic) is something owned by people who do not understand the essence of something.

3. Conclusion

Panic attacks are closely related to panic disorder, where individuals with panic disorder will usually begin with several episodes of panic attacks. There are two etiologies in panic disorder, the first is caused by physical-biological factors such as in the case of left valve closure syndrome of the heart, which results in heart palpitations. Second, it is influenced by mental-psychic factors as in the case of agoraphobia with the fear-to-fear hypothesis. Pharmacology and psychotherapy are common choices that are often used in dealing with panic disorders and panic attacks.

Al-Balkhi as the early originator of mental health studies in the Islamic world, has contributed a lot of knowledge legacy. This can be seen from one of his works *Mashalih al Abdan wa al Anfus*, which discusses the concepts of physical and psychological health and their connections. Despite being included in the classics, al-Balkhi's thought is still relevant today. Even some of the concepts he introduced, received theoretical support from modern psychology as well as the positive and cognitive psychology streams.

The concept of mental health in al-Balkhi thought has quite a lot in common with modern thought. Where every aspect of mental health is something that must be pursued and preventive. So that the concept of treatment does not only boil down to curing a mere disease, but rather to improving the quality of life. Al-Balkhi placed knowledge in a central position, where knowledge was included in the category of the most potent medicine.

The approach with the discovery of meaning in an event, self-transformation, and cognitive efforts became a common theme in psychotherapy introduced by al-Balkhi. Fear and anxiety present in an acute form are the initial causes of panic attacks. However, the threatening events that occur actually become the primary factor in panic attacks. Panic attacks will not appear when the individual is still in a state of fear.

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