

The relationship between spiritual well-being and psychological distress among Muslims throughout COVID-19

Nurul Syazwani Mohd Noor¹, Hamizah Muhammad², Juliana Arifin¹, Che Zuina Ismail²

¹School of Finance & Banking, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia

²School of Economics, Finance, & Muamalat, Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Terengganu, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This is a conceptual paper of an ensuing study based on the literature review related to COVID-19 impact, spiritual well-being, and psychological distress. The impact of COVID-19 becomes more serious for those who face challenges in maintaining the stability of their lives financially and emotionally. It has become increasingly difficult for Muslims to worship in mosques during the previous movement control order (MCO) period. Academic research has less explored the impact of COVID-19 on the human lives in the context of the relationship between well-being status and psychological impact. Thus, this study aims to assess for coming examination whether spiritual well-being have significant relationship with psychological distress among Muslims in Terengganu, Malaysia. The paper went through analyzing the issues and concepts for the further research through several multidisciplinary literatures. The result of the study thus proposed conceptual framework and relevant propositions to be tested in the next study. This conceptual study means adding to the literature for researchers as a reference for their study. It also pertinent to policymakers who mapping mental health support mechanisms and schemes as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) to promote the healthy lifestyle for people as whole.

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Corresponding Author:

Hamizah Muhammad

School of Economics, Finance, & Muamalat, Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Cawangan Terengganu Kampus Dungun, Sura Hujung, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

Email: hamizahmuhammad@uitm.edu.my

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development results from healthy living and well-being at all ages. At a time when the world struggling towards achieving goal-3 sustainable development goals (SDGs), it also becomes a challenge to carry out the mission of sustaining a good mental health. In few years before, the newly identified infectious coronavirus caused by the virus of SARS-CoV-2 found in Wuhan, China and has rapidly transmitted within the country and around the world since December 2019 [1], [2]. This Coronavirus Disease 2019 then announced as COVID-19 by World Health Organization (WHO) most often cause flu-like symptoms, flu, or pneumonia. Global security in public health is also challenged when it also attacks more than the lungs and respiratory system [3]. Humans suffer, global economic stability is affected, and the livelihoods of billions of people around the world are affected by these systemic effects. As a result, the world is facing an unprecedented global health crisis. In dealing with mental health issues, the effect of COVID-19 is delineated as part of the important factors. Despite of the loss incurred by the firms and businesses due to the outbreak, the pandemic of COVID-19 has had an intense effect on health and well-being globally and there is an urgent need to understand the

psychological effects of the experience and stress of COVID-19 besides the physical health issue. The lockdown and quarantine enforcement imposed by the government may contribute more to the psychological impact such as depression, anxiety, and stress from COVID-19. The level of stress of been quarantine and staying at home may recorded to be the highest percentage as compared to stress from work and financial stress [4].

Although extensive academic research has explored the impact of COVID-19 on the human lives (such as [5]–[7], the impact has less been touched in the context of the relationship between well-being status and psychological impact except a study done by Cheah *et al.* [8] who stressed on investigating the changes in well-being before and throughout the movement control order (MCO) in Malaysia and its relationship with mental health status. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on the issues and framework for engaging with the psychological impact of COVID-19. Particularly this paper seeks to answer the following research objective, which is to propose conceptual framework of the relationship between spiritual well-being and psychological distress. It is hoped that, by providing the answers to these objectives, this paper can be carried out by another further research.

The formation of this paper as follows: the next segment highlights the key issues in related to the impact of COVID-19 among Muslims in Terengganu. The third sections then discuss an insight into the current view of COVID-19 impact which emphasizes on spiritual and psychological aspects. While the fourth section presents the conceptual framework development together with its relevant propositions. Hence, the fifth section is the final section which concludes the study and suggests potential future research.

2. MUSLIMS IN TERENGGANU STATE

Statistics released by the Terengganu State Economic Planning Unit (UPEN) through the Terengganu Basic Data Book 2017, the total Malay population in Terengganu as of 2017 is 1,155,700 people out of a total of 1,221,600 people. Generally, Malays are synonymous with Islam because 'Malay' in the Federal Constitution through Article 160 (2) details the definition of 'Malay' as someone who Muslim. Thus, it is clear that the vast majority of the population in Terengganu are Muslims, which is 94.6%.

Thus, when the Terengganu State Health Director, Datuk Dr. Kasemani Embong reported that the number of patients recorded at both the Community Mental Health Center (Mentari) at the Sultanah Nur Zahirah Hospital (HSNZ) here and Wakaf Tapai, Marang was a total of 2,144 people as at October 2021 in Terengganu, it is something crucial to worry about. She further reported that cases of depression and anxiety patients are detected higher now compared to the previous 10 years which were dominated by cases of schizophrenia and bipolar. Mental health issues are now a silent pandemic in society due to various factors including job loss, unemployment, divorce, domestic violence, abuse and others.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This article adheres to the quality reporting guidelines by the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) group. This is to ensure precision and translucency of reviews reporting. The review protocol consists of the following steps:

3.1. Literature identification

To perform this systematic literature review. The preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis guidelines were used [9]. This technique caters strategies for a detailed database search using selected search terms and a preset inclusion and exclusion indicator [10]. The systematic review of the articles that focused on "COVID-19", "PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT", and "CORONAVIRUS" was conducted by the authors. The online databases of PubMed and Scopus were searched from inception to 27 August 2022 resulting 155 related papers.

3.2. Screening and eligibility criteria

The screening process was subjected to eligibility criteria. These exclusion criteria (EC) were excluded from publications; EC1: studies published before 2019; EC2: publications in the form of book series, book chapters, in other languages; EC3: a publication that does not focus on psychological impact; and EC4: full text publication that does not able to access. The inclusion criterion (IC) was restricted to publications that included COVID-19, psychological impact, in English language and full text access. An analysis was conducted by reviewing each article's title, abstract, and keywords. After application of IC and EC, a total of 50 studies were identified.

4. AN INSIGHT INTO THE CURRENT VIEW OF COVID-19 IMPACT

There are present studies emphasizes on the direct effect of COVID-19 on economic and health. These impact, however, indirectly contribute to the psychological distress and spiritual well-being among all group of people. The COVID-19 outbreak is not only a new extra ordinary disease but also a systemic health crisis that affects every aspect of human life in all countries around the globe.

4.1. COVID-19

December 2019 was the date which COVID-19 was first reported in humans. It was detected in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province in China. Its on-going outbreak is the current global health threat. It is found highly transmissible through direct contact, droplets, and fomites [11]. Thus, COVID-19 was announced by WHO as a disease on 11th February 2020 and it then declared as a pandemic disease on 11th March, 2020 due to the new virus disseminating promptly throughout the countries around the world. In order to prevent further community spread, the lockdown and mass quarantine were executed by authorities in the effort to decrease COVID-19 transmission. For instance, MCO was imposed by Malaysian Government which involved the closure of all educational institutions, the international border, as well as business premises. During that period, any mass gathering was restrained. Only food, health, telecommunication, and transportation services were allowed to operate as they are essential services providers [12].

This worldwide pandemic restricts economic activity and poses a dreadful risk to everyone. Higher poverty rate and unemployment, altered education sectors, lower oil prices and gross domestic products (GDPs), changes in the nature of duty as well as heightened risks to health care worker are among the effects of COVID-19 on socio-economic [7]. Not only that, it also affects energy sector when there is a depletion in motility and a change in the nature of work, thus residential energy demand become high. Lockdown imposed around the globe even worsen the industrial and commercial energy demand as well as waste generation due to movement restrictions. In fact, the restrictions have placed people predominantly at home which results to the unhealthy lifestyle and indirectly contribute to the mental health issue.

The interpersonal and community interactions turn out to be severely affected due to social distancing measures and isolation of the COVID-19 virus. These social relationships, reciprocation and relationships have been important in our lives since human existence. Thus, definitely it is a stressful state of anxiety, mental disorders, loneliness, health hazards, depression, and many other issues which impact the life of the individual and the mutual society as a whole if such connection was missing [5]. The COVID-19 give impact to all groups of people includes children, expected mother, workers, students, healthcare workers, and patients.

4.2. Spiritual well-being and psychological distress

Most of the recent studies discussed the impact of COVID-19 from the direct views of economic and health. We deviate the current impact of COVID-19 studies by looking into the spiritual well-being and psychological distress. Further, Alsukah *et al.* [13] concluded that the COVID-19 outbreak gives rise to public health issues and substitute in peoples' behaviours and psychological distress. The pandemic cause multiple effects with reference to acknowledgement of the disease due to effects on human behaviour, cognition, and emotions. All groups are psychologically affected when going through this period of pandemic.

As with other countries worldwide, COVID-19 impact and lockdown contribute to severe psychological consequences among individual in Bangladesh when the rampancy rate of depression and suicidal ideation related to COVID-19 was recorded as 33% and 5%, accordingly [14]. A higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress has been identified amidst college students [15]. Further, the pilot cross-sectional study among home-quarantined Bangladeshi students conducted by Khan *et al.* [16] found there is significant association between stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms during pandemic with the element of scare of contagion, financial unstability, insufficient food reserve, zero of physical activity, and restricted or no recreational undertaking. Nearly one-fourth of students experienced moderate to severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in Saudi Arabia during the early days of the pandemic [17], [18] and it is found that medical students are highly worried about being infected with COVID-19 [19]. This shows that the impact of COVID-19 is indirectly undermine human psychology. Not only that, the impact is even worst to the maternal psychological well-being when [12] found among expectant mothers in Malaysia when the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, their prevalence of psychological distress was relatively low. However, it is then found to be increased over time.

In Spain, a survey for longitudinal analysis on 4,724 responses shows during the COVID-19 lockdown, a transitory expands of anxiety, stress, and depression scores were recorded. Age and physical affair were among factors seemed to have a predominant effect on the progression of psychological signs [20]. Statistically, about 36% of the general respondents in Spain are recorded moderate to severe psychological effect, mild to severe levels of anxiety (25%), depressive signs (41%), and felt stressed (41%) throughout the early stage of COVID-19 pandemic [21]. Restrictions and uncertainty during the confinement period psychologically worsen the impact in individuals especially those who already live with a psychiatric illness.

Patients with mental illness are reported significantly more anxiety and depression symptoms during the lockdown when compared to community control in Spain [22]. Those who did not adjust well to the affairs during the early stage of lockdown have had a negative psychological impact [23].

Similar with the case in Italy, during a quarantine period, there is a reduction in invasive behavior and personal resistance among young adults, apart from an increasing in anxiety/depression and aggressive action [24]. It is proven by the fact that the level of anxiety is tripled during the first stage of lockdown. About 30% of males and 41% of females are admitted having grievous levels of depression in relation to the pre-pandemic period in Italy [25]. Although it is important for public health, lockdown, and isolation have caused post-traumatic depression, anxiety, and stress symptom in the country. Beyond 43% of respondents endured from the prompt effect of the lockdown and respondents who still reported any anxiety and depression at the end of the lockdown are about 32% [26]. Italian school-aged children also psychologically affected by the pandemic. The increasing in psychological difficulties expected by the boredom, different in sleep quality, as well as the mothers' psychological difficulties. They are less incline to keep daily practice or to monitor the movement of time [27]. Not to left behind undergraduate students in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna experienced hassle in completing the thesis during the COVID-19 [28]. 6.5% of them manifest signs related to high levels of anxiety [29]. Another dental student from different universities in Saudi Arabia also shows the presence of elevated levels of anxiety, stress, and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic [30].

While in Philippines, the survey reveals that about quarter of participants' experienced moderate-to-severe anxiety and one-sixth experienced moderate-to-severe depression and psychological effect at the early phase of the pandemic [31]. Even the distinct group of healthcare workers are having varied mental health issues [22], [23], [24]–[33] during the early phase of pandemic with the doctors experienced the highest level of anxiety according to the case in India [34]. This followed by the physicians and nurses working in general hospitals in Belgium who also psychologically affected during the pandemic [35]. The nurses in one of the hospitals in Ethiopia, however recorded 69.6%, 55.3%, and 20.5% of the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress, respectively which are considered as high level of psychological impact [36]. Besides experiencing depression, anxiety, and stress, they also commit with inadequate sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic [37].

It is trusted to be worse than that during the third stage of lockdown. While most of the countries consider the lockdown during COVID-19 as the best way to reduce the virus transmission, the consequent of the order resulting to an immediate psychological impact. It can be seen through an immediate psychological impact among people in selected areas of Vadodara City. Most of them have moderate and severe stress with the percentage of 73.2% and 22%, accordingly [38]. The same thing reported in Chinese population when [39] who also assessed immediate psychological impact and found that there are negative emotions such as depression and anxiety, escalated sensitivity to social risks as well as lowered happiness and life satisfaction. Similarly, Paulino *et al.* [40] have explored the instantaneous psychological impact on the general community in Portugal and found that depression (11.7%), anxiety (16.9%), and stress (5.6%) which means as moderate to severe score. From the results, it shows that the diseases outbreak increasingly affects the affect the daily life of the person as well as their mental health including stress state. Even though the quarantine and lockdown are good to restrict the virus transmission, but the mental health of people across all age group appears to have affected in a very significant manner due to extended lockdown [41].

People living in Kuwait also experienced depression and psychological distress due to the pandemic-related limitation [42]. Another finding in China, a call for urgent and extensive examination of mental health demand of the population for early diagnosis and deterrence of psychiatric problem indicating a significant psychological effect of COVID-19 and lockdown on regular people living in Hubei, China [43]. It is believed the situation get tougher for those who are working. The analysis from a research conducted towards oral health care workers (OHCWs) in Wuhan China found associations between anxiety and stress due to COVID-19, and the willingness to work during the pandemic; participants who are unwilling or unsure are more anxious and stressed than those who are willing [44]. While in Argentina, considerable depressive and anxious signs were visible between 5 and 7 days after the lockdown upon more than a third of the studied sample ($n=10,053$) [45].

In addition to that, one's involvement with the virus and the perceived stress related to COVID-19 were the factors of how the mental health issues may be inflamed [46]. The experiences are associated to an expanded of anxiety and depression. Among American adults, these factors have had an impact to the depression and anxiety. Nevertheless, education level is found to exercise a major role in reducing the fear of losing job and hence, contribute to less stress among individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. While research conducted on Healthcare Providers in Obstetrics in Italy found that individual factor like stressful experience related to COVID-19 and exhaustion; interpersonal factor like lower family support; and organizational factor such as lowered perception of protection by personal protective equipment are among the considerations in dealing with the pandemic that may lead to psychological distress [47]. Similar findings reported by Passavanti *et al.* [48] whereby in this research, the levels of anxiety, depression and stress, including the risks of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are elevated than midpoint half of the study sample from

multiple countries i.e. Ecuador, Australia, Iran, China, Italy, the United States and Norway. The seriousness of these problems remarkably relies on kind of outdoor undertakings, gender, eventual presence of infected acquaintances, features of their homes, income, and so on.

In terms of relationship between spiritual well-being and psychological distress, a study by Zammitti *et al.* [49] found that adults during the lockdown period, the Italian's afraid of COVID-19 fully mediates the relationship between psychological distress and spiritual well-being caused by a traumatic life event in terms of perception of PTSD symptoms. Thus, religious clerics may educate people more relating to such psychological impacts in the wake of COVID-19 [50].

In assumptions, psychological impact can be seen as having relationship with human well-being. Previous study discovered that a person of spiritual well-being would tend to react to stressful situations with less distress than a person who endorsed little or no spiritual well-being [51]. Psychosocial predictors such as higher age, gender (men), unemployment, socioeconomic status, and positive attitudes toward isolation procedure may consider as factors to predict well-being [52].

This conceptual paper seeks to establish the connection between spiritual well-being and psychological distress. There is a positive influence of spiritual well-being on psychological distress among Muslims in Terengganu. Therefore, the study proposed the conceptual framework in Figure 1.

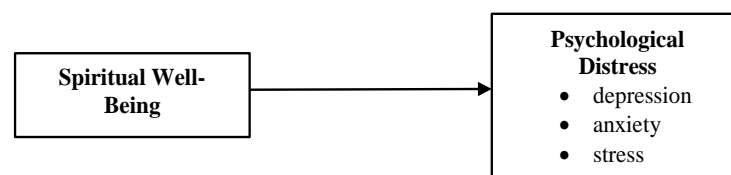


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this is a conceptual paper of an ensuing study based on the literature review related to COVID-19 impact, spiritual well-being, and psychological distress. As discussed earlier, the aim of this study was to assess for coming examination whether spiritual well-being have significant relationship with psychological distress among Muslims in Terengganu, Malaysia. The paper went through analyzing the issues and concepts for the further research through several multidisciplinary literatures. To recall, despite extensive academic research has explored the impact of COVID-19 on the human lives, the impact has less been touched in the context of the relationship between well-being status and psychological impact except one study who stressed on investigating the changes in well-being before and throughout the movement control order (MCO) in Malaysia and its relationship with mental health status. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on the issues and framework for engaging with the psychological impact of COVID-19. Particularly the result of the study thus proposed conceptual framework and relevant propositions to be tested in the next study. The results provide an approach to the research of the connection between spiritual well-being and psychological distress among Muslims particularly in Terengganu State, Malaysia context. To continue with the empirical study, exploration to a broader collection of literatures needs to be done to gain intuitive information. Even though a conceptual paper, it is expected that the struggle helps contribute to complete literatures for the reference of intellectuals as well as a notable effect to the policy makers upon fully completion of the research.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Nurul Syazwani Mohd Noor    is a senior lecturer at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia in Islamic finance, risk and social finance. She obtained her bachelor's degree (Hons.) in Actuarial Science, Master of Science in Management (Finance and Banking), and Ph.D in Islamic Civilization (Islamic Finance). She can be contacted at email: waniesyaz@gmail.com.






Hamizah Muhammad    is a Senior Lecturer at the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS) Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu Branch, Malaysia in Sharia and Law, Muamalat and Psycho-spiritual. Her Bachelor's Degree in the field of Sharia and Law, a Master's Degree in the field of Sharia and a Ph.D in the field of Social Studies. She can be contacted at email: hamizahmuhammad@uitm.edu.my.



Juliana Arifin    is a Senior Lecturer at Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia. She obtained her PhD and master's degree in Management from UniSZA, while her bachelor's degree in business and administration specialization in Insurance was from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. She can be contacted at email: julianaarifin@unisza.edu.my.



Che Zuina Ismail    is an Associate Professor at the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS) Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu Branch, Malaysia. She obtained a Bachelor's Degree in the field of Sharia and Law, a Master's Degree in the field of Preaching and Leadership and a Ph.D in the field of Law and Administration. She can be contacted at email: chezu270@uitm.edu.my.