

The impact of psychospiritual program on state of depression, anxiety and stress among female juvenile delinquents

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ABSTRACT

The participation of teenagers in inappropriate social actions is linked to the disregard for their mental health. This research was carried out to assess how a psychospiritual program impacts the reduction of depression, anxiety, and stress among delinquent adolescents. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, utilizing a single group for pretest-posttest evaluation. In this study, 36 delinquent adolescents who were females (N=36) and were enrolled in an Approved School in Terengganu, Malaysia, participated. The analysis was conducted through paired sample t-tests. The level of depression, anxiety, and stress before and after the psychospiritual program was assessed using the clinical scale for depression, anxiety, and stress (DASS-21). The results showed that the level of depression, anxiety and stress had decreased as much as 0.7619, 1.4643 and 0.7937 respectively after joining the program which was less than 0.05 ($p=0.000 \leq 0.05$). This implies that the psychospiritual program exerts a significant influence in reducing depression, anxiety, and stress levels among adolescent delinquents. As a result, it is prudent to explore the psychospiritual approach as a potential alternative to the conventional allopathic intervention for addressing depression, anxiety, and stress problems especially among female delinquent adolescents at approved schools who have similar criterion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical stage between childhood and adulthood [1]. The teenage years often entail a period of profound transformations and difficulties, as it is one of the periods when both physical and psychological changes accompanied by rapid mental developments take place [2]. Adolescence has been perceived as a stage during which individuals can be molded and guided towards their future selves. Any misstep during this pivotal period can potentially impede one's future opportunities. Consequently, one of the persistent societal issues that can jeopardize the future of adolescents is juvenile delinquency [3].

Delinquency is unacceptable behavior, and it has attracted public attention [4]. Delinquency can be in the form of minor misbehavior, ranging from minor infractions like violating school regulations, skipping

classes, smoking, and involving in acts of vandalism, to more serious offences such as theft, robbery, drug misuse, sexual assault, and illegal possession of weapons [5]. Delinquent adolescents are those who tend to face turbulent emotions which affect their behavior.

Through a literature review, it was found that the key concerns impacting these delinquent adolescents were identified revolve around mental health concerns, encompassing stress, anxiety, and depression. Adolescents also are more likely to have emotional and mental health issues such as depression, stress, anxiety, and aggression [6], [7]. A myriad of literature depicted that the involvement of adolescents in numerous social issues like drug abuse, bullies and theft were all caused by depression problems [8]–[13] anxiety problems [14]–[16] as well as stress problems faced by them [17]–[19] stated that the urge for adolescents to commit such antisocial behaviors is all due to the consequence of depression and anxiety experienced by them. The untreated depression, anxiety and stress are focused due to its negative impact on oneself and the surrounding society. Thus, an appropriate intervention should be given to develop quality of oneself.

The participation of Malaysian adolescents or juveniles in delinquent activities is not a recent occurrence. This circumstance is viewed as a swiftly proliferating symptom among adolescents, in parallel with the advancements of modernity and technology. As per information supplied by the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), the involvement of Malaysian adolescents in delinquent activities indicated a rise in incidents from 2015 to 2017, followed by a gradual decrease from 2018 to 2019. Nonetheless, the recorded figures remained at a notably elevated level. The statistical report from the RMP indicated that in 2016, there were 7,985 juvenile involvement cases in criminal activities, and this number continued to climb to 8,560 in 2017. The number then showed a slight decrease to 6,813 and 6,510 respectively in 2018 and 2019. The two categories of crimes that most committed by juveniles were property-related crimes and people-related crimes. However, the number of juveniles recorded for 2020 and 2021 drastically decreased which are 2,145 and 1,311 respectively. This might be due to COVID-19 during that time as the country having movement control order (MCO). Juvenile delinquents are defined as teenagers who are below the age of 18 [20] and commit violations of criminal law [21]. In Malaysia, as per the Prison Act 1995, a juvenile or young offender is described as "an inmate who is younger than 21 years of age" [22]. For this study, juvenile delinquents were 36 female juvenile delinquents from an Approved School in Terengganu. Despite there were several approved schools around the country, only approved school in Terengganu matched the criteria needed which were female delinquents and it placed the highest number of Malay inmates as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the respondents were selected by the authority based on their grade in the institution since they must join the intervention for certain period.

Table 1. Inmates by female approved school 2019

Approved school	Total Inmates
Sungai Lereh	25
Miri	6
Marang	46

Despite a decrease in reported cases, the quantity of cases should not be underestimated, particularly given that unreported cases were not accounted for in this statistic. Frequently, juvenile delinquency is often overlooked as merely troublesome adolescent behavior until it escalates into more severe criminal activities [6]. Moreover, when we examine the statistics, it becomes evident that Malay adolescents constitute the largest group of juvenile delinquents. In the Malaysian context, 'Malay' typically refers to individuals who are Muslim, and it is disheartening to witness Muslim youths engaging in such conduct. If this issue persists, it may lead to a squandering of human potential, considering that teenagers make up a substantial segment of our young population, they are a crucial demographic in the process of preparing to assume the role of future leaders of the nation.

An examination of the literature revealed that the foremost issues among delinquent adolescents pertain to mental health, encompassing factors such as stress, anxiety, and depression [7]–[9], [14], [15]. Treating depression can give benefits by reducing the depression level and consequently overcoming the social problems among adolescents [23]. Thus, looking at this study, since the respondents are Muslims, the researcher are looking to test the effectiveness of spiritual-based interventions as prior studies have found that spiritual beliefs or religious practices can aid in addressing depression among adolescents [23]–[25].

In this context, "psycho-spiritual" refers to an approach that integrates counseling with spiritual elements as part of interventions. This approach aims to influence not only the emotional quotient but also the spiritual quotient, intelligence quotient, and psychomotor abilities of the participants. The intervention module created for this study comprises four sub-modules: heart literacy therapy, purpose of life, meaning of excellence in life, and positive attitude determinants of success. Thus, the primary objective of this study was to assess

the impact of the psychospiritual program on reducing depression, anxiety, and stress levels among delinquent adolescents in correction and rehabilitation centers.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

In this study, a single-group quasi-experimental pretest and posttest design was employed. This design was chosen because it enables the comparison of research-dependent variables (depression, anxiety, and stress) both before and after the program [26], [27]. The same dependent variable is measured in one group of participants before (pretest) and after (posttest) a treatment is administered. Thus, this method allowing for an assessment of the intervention's effects. If the pretest and posttest scores differ significantly, then the difference may be attributed to the independent variable.

2.2. Research sample

Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, where the researcher deliberately selects individuals and place to be studied [27]. This technique is used to identify individuals or cases that are rich in study information [28]. The research sample was comprised of 36 delinquent adolescents from an approved school in Terengganu, as it matched the criteria needed which were female delinquents and it placed the highest number of Malay inmates. The participants were chosen by the institution's authorities based on their current state of wellbeing, as they were required to participate in the intervention for a specified duration. The quantity of participants was not a concern, as [27] suggests that the research experiment should include no fewer than 15 individuals in each group.

3.3. Research instrument

The instrument of the study consists of the demographic profiles and the clinical scale for depression, anxiety and stress (DASS-21). The demographic section collects information of race, religion, age, marital status, and educational background while DASS-21 which is developed by Lovibond [29] is to measure the level of depression, anxiety, and stress among the research participants. Since the respondents of the study are Malay, the DASS instrument has undergone a process of back-to-back translation to ensure the suitability of it. This scale contains 21 items with internal consistency coefficient scales was 78.

The DASS-21 consists of three subscales, each containing seven items: depression (DASS 21-D), anxiety (DASS 21-A), and stress (DASS 21-S). Respondents rate each item on a 10-point Likert scale, with options ranging from 1 ("did not apply to me at all") to 10 ("applied to me very much"). To compute the DASS score, the scores for each item are summed, and the average value is calculated. A higher average DASS score indicates a greater level of depression, anxiety, and stress, while a lower score indicates the opposite.

3.4. Research procedures

Before participating in the program, all respondents were required to complete the DASS-21 survey as a pre-data measure. The psychospiritual program was conducted weekly for three months and incorporated components related to emotional fitness and psychomotor skills. Each session had a duration of 3 hours. The researchers employed the ADDIE Model approach to develop the intervention module, as proposed by Rosset (1987). The ADDIE model is a term used to describe a systematic approach to the development of teaching modules. There are five levels of the ADDIE model; i) Analysis (Analysis); ii) Design (Design); iii) Development (Development); iv) Implementation (Implementation); and v) Evaluation (Evaluation). Throughout the sessions from intervention module, various psychospiritual approaches were employed to introduce skills for managing depression, anxiety, and stress. These approaches integrated elements related to the spiritual quotient (SQ), intelligence quotient (IQ), emotional quotient (EQ), and psychomotor skills. Table 2 provides a summary of the sessions:

3.5. Data analysis

The gathered data were subsequently processed using SPSS software version 20, employing paired t-test. The paired t-test assesses the mean differences between two measurements obtained from either the same individual, object, or associated units. These measurements, often referred to as 'paired,' could pertain to data collected at two distinct time points (e.g., before and after a specific intervention has been implemented). Thus, in this research, the paired t-test analysis is to ascertain variations in the mean scores of depressions, anxiety, and stress between the pretest and posttest assessments.

Table 2. Summary of the Sessions

No of Session	Name of session	Objectives of session
Session 1	Introductory session	The program was delivered, emphasizing the significance of anger management, and the participants were organized into groups.
Session 2-4	The focus of awareness therapy	To help the respondents to feel godly awareness and purification of the soul. Respondents were able to distinguish between 'knowing' and 'being aware', the four dimensions of human view and seeing life through the lens of the heart.
Session 5-7	Purpose of life session	To reflect upon their beginnings, the reason for their existence, and the path they are destined to tread as emissaries of Allah SWT in both this life and the hereafter.
Session 8-9	The meaning of successful session	To prompt participants to consider their personal definition of success and what it signifies to them.
Session 10-11	The positive attitude session	The intention was to familiarize participants with the significance of positive attitudes and how they can impact their levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The objective was to assist group members in recognizing that depression, anxiety, and stress are not indicative of positive attitudes.
Session 12	Closing Session	To provide a recap of the earlier sessions and elucidate the impact of these sessions on their levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Descriptive analysis: frequency and percentage distribution of participant profiles in the study

Table 3 presented below illustrates the demographic characteristics of the participants. Based on the analysis, most of the respondents' ages were ranged from 15 to 17 years old and single. All of them were Muslim Malay and they are equal in upper secondary and lower secondary school.

Table 3. Demographic profiles of the respondents

Item	Respondent	Frequency	%
Race	Malay	36	100
Religion	Islam	36	100
Age	21 years old and above	0	0
	18-20 years old	6	16.7
	15-17 years old	30	83.3
Marital Status	Single	33	91.7
Education	Married	2	5.6
	Divorced	1	2.8
	University	0	0
	High school	15	41.7
	Middle school	16	44.4
	Primary school	3	8.3
	Informal education	2	5.6

3.1.2. Descriptive analysis: mean differences in level of depression, anxiety and stress of respondents

Table 4 displayed below depicts the differences in mean scores between the pretest and posttest of the participants. It clearly indicates a significant (2-tailed) p-value of less than 0.05 ($p=0.000 \leq 0.05$). Consequently, the mean differences in depression, anxiety, and stress levels between the pretest and posttest were statistically significant. This signifies a noteworthy reduction in the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among teenage delinquents, with total mean differences amounting to 0.7619, 1.4643, and 0.7937, respectively, after their participation in the psycho-spiritual program. The decline in these levels underscores the effectiveness of the program, which incorporates a variety of approaches, including spiritual elements and expressive art therapy, in addressing depression, anxiety, and stress among delinquent adolescents.

Table 4. Paired t-test analysis and mean score differences for pretest and posttest

	Mean difference	Paired differences		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean score	
		95% confidence interval of the difference					Pre	Post
		Lower	Upper					
Depression	0.7619	0.1325	1.3913	2.458	35	0.019	3.941	3.179
Anxiety	1.4643	0.7562	2.1723	4.198	35	0.000	5.639	4.175
Stress	0.7937	0.0173	1.5699	2.075	35	0.045	4.992	4.198

3.2. Discussion

As discussed earlier, indeed modules or interventions in the treatment of delinquent adolescents have been implemented by various approach. For example, the role of the family [30], programs in schools [31], art therapy of expressive music recording [32], as well as cognitive-behavioral approaches [33]. All these interventions resulted in positive effect to the psychological issues among delinquents in those studies. However, as regard to this research, it is to assess the effectiveness of psychospiritual interventions towards Muslims juvenile delinquents. The research outcomes confirm a notable reduction in the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among the study participants. Following their engagement in the psychospiritual art therapy program, the participants' depression, anxiety, and stress levels experienced a noticeable decrease. Prior research studies have also established that spiritual beliefs or religious practices can be beneficial in addressing depression among adolescents [24], [25], [34], [35]. Likewise, another research by Villani *et al.* [36] discovered that religion and spirituality are two of the healing sources that give strengths specifically to individuals in critical situations.

In this research, during the sessions conducted, A diverse range of psychospiritual methods that incorporated aspects of the spiritual quotient (SQ), intelligence quotient (IQ), emotional quotient (EQ), and psychomotor skills were employed to address issues related to depression, anxiety, and stress. Some of the activities included were remembrance of Allah SWT, methods of prayers, purification of the soul (*tazkiyyah al-nafs*) with the guidance of the *Qur'an al-Karim* and supplication to Allah SWT. All these techniques are in line with other research as one of the alternative platforms that can be used in dealing with depression [37]; [38]. As a Muslim, Islam which emphasizes the question of spirituality has suggested one of the most effective ways to treat it is by performing the obligatory *ibadah* in Islam which is the *ibadah* of prayer that needs to be done diligently, earnestly, sincerely and *khusyu'*. The advantages of people who perform such prayers with high discipline have been clearly stated in the Qur'an.

Additionally, religion and spirituality both serve as significant protective factors for adolescents in deterring delinquent behavior. For instance, a study conducted by Salas-Wright *et al.* [39] examined a community sample comprising 290 high-risk and gang-involved adolescents (aged 11-17 years) and young adults (aged 18-25 years) in San Salvador, El Salvador. This research explored the connections between religious coping, spirituality, and delinquency, ultimately revealing that spirituality and religious coping are influential protective factors for Salvadoran youth against engaging in negative behaviors. Likewise, research conducted by Chadwick *et al.* [40] has presented compelling evidence highlighting the pivotal role of religion in the lives of Latter-day Saints (LDS) teenagers, particularly in relation to their involvement in delinquency and other antisocial activities. The findings indicate that LDS teenagers who exhibit stronger religiosity, as demonstrated by their acceptance of Christian and LDS beliefs, attendance at Church meetings, personal prayer and scripture reading, and sincere efforts to live their faith, are significantly less prone to delinquent behavior compared to non-LDS teenagers. Furthermore, LDS high school students with the highest level of engagement in their religious community exhibited the lowest rates of delinquency and immoral conduct. Consequently, it is evident that knowledge and religious teachings play a vital role in deterring teenagers from engaging in negative delinquent behaviors. However, it is worth noting that the mentioned studies did not specify any religious belief or denomination.

Hence, when assessing the importance of these research findings, it becomes clear that the incorporation of psychospiritual elements plays a pivotal role in mitigating depression levels in distressed adolescents. As posited by Skrzypińska [41], the absence of robust spiritual components renders the physical capabilities of human beings devoid of intrinsic value. This is because, physically, humans are comprised of various earthly elements, while their spiritual essence operates under the divine order and will of Allah (SWT). Consequently, the amalgamation of these elements within individuals aligns with the core objective of human existence—to wholeheartedly dedicate oneself to Allah (SWT) by adhering to Islamic principles, which encompass a complete way of life from birth to death, culminating in the meeting of humans with their Creator in the afterlife.

This assertion is akin to the hypothesis put forth by Mustapha [42], which emphasizes the paramount importance of a religious approach. According to this perspective, teenagers who hold dear their religious morals and principles are less inclined to engage in delinquent activities, as their strong sense of self-control serves as a deterrent. This, in turn, indirectly prevents these troubled adolescents from continually descending into a cycle of negative social behaviors. Similarly, in [43], the author contends that viewing self-control as a valuable resource influenced by internal factors, coupled with the experience of depressive symptoms, can diminish self-control, and subsequently elevate delinquency. Remarkably, when self-control is factored in, the link between depression, anxiety, stress, and delinquency diminishes. In brief, the overarching conclusion drawn from much of the research is that various expressions and components of spirituality prove beneficial in reducing depressive symptoms and/or enhancing overall well-being.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the surge in adolescent misconduct demands the collective attention of all stakeholders. Failure to address this rise in adolescent misbehavior could result in lasting detrimental effects on the adolescents themselves. Undoubtedly, the implementation of a psychospiritual approach plays a pivotal role in diminishing depression, anxiety, and stress levels among these delinquent adolescents, ultimately discouraging their continued engagement in delinquent behaviors. It is imperative to maintain the continuity of the psychospiritual program to provide ongoing support to adolescents involved in delinquent activities. Properly shaping personalities during adolescence can cultivate a valuable human resource for a stable and prosperous future.

A primary limitation of this study pertains to the absence of a control group. Furthermore, the evaluation of the psychospiritual program's impact on reducing depression, anxiety, and stress levels among delinquent adolescents relied solely on pretest and posttest assessments without follow-up measurements. Consequently, the long-term efficacy of this intervention remains unknown. Therefore, it is recommended that future research employ a longitudinal study design, as the human development process encompasses an extended timeframe.

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