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**THE NEEDS FOR PSYCHO SPIRITUAL COMPETENCIES FOR
DISASTER WORKERS IN MALAYSIA*****Keperluan Kecekapan Psiko-rohani Kepada Pekerja Bencana di Malaysia***

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Abstract

Natural Disaster such as big flood, earthquake, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, fire raze, landslide, and other kinds of disaster always occurred everywhere in the world. The role of disaster workers is crucial in saving the victims in a critical situation where the inner strength to confront the dangerous situation and comfort the victims is needed. This study examines whether the training content to disaster workers possess sufficient knowledge and skills to cater the physical needs, as well as the emotional turmoil and instability situation, occurred to the victims. The secondary data sought from library and website research, scholars' opinion from journals published and past research conducted. The psycho-spiritual competencies from the conventional and Islamic perspectives are highlighted. Differences in the two approaches were compared and evaluated. The finding shows that the disaster workers require both conventional and Islamic approaches of psycho-spiritual competencies to cater to the needs of disaster victims during the rescue process take place. Hence, Islamic psycho spiritual competencies contribute to the inner strength of the Muslim disaster workers as its emblem the soul and the spiritual heart *qalb* which correlated as the determinant factor of the well-being of the physical body of the human being.

Keywords: psycho spiritual, competencies, disaster workers.

Abstrak

Bencana Alam seperti banjir besar, gempa bumi, tsunami, letusan gunung berapi, rawa api, tanah runtuh, dan lain-lain bencana sentiasa berlaku di mana-mana di dunia ini. Peranan pekerja bencana adalah penting dalam menyelamatkan mangsa di mana kekuatan dalaman untuk menghadapi keadaan berbahaya dan memastikan keselamatan mangsa adalah diperlukan. Kajian ini meneliti keperluan latihan kecekapan psiko-rohani kepada pekerja bencana supaya mereka mempunyai pengetahuan dan kemahiran yang mencukupi untuk menjalankan aktiviti penyelamatan kepada mangsa. Data sekunder diperolehi dari penyelidikan perpustakaan dan laman web, pandangan ilmuan dari jurnal yang diterbitkan dan penyelidikan lepas yang dijalankan. Kecekapan psikologi-kerohanian dari perspektif konvensional dan Islam diketengahkan. Temuan menunjukkan bahawa pekerja bencana memerlukan kecekapan psiko-rohani konvensional dan Islam untuk kerja-kerja penyelamatan mangsa bencana. Ternyata kecekapan psiko-rohani Islam menyumbang kepada kekuatan dalaman pekerja bencana Islam sebagai lambang kekuatan jiwa dan *qalb* yang berkorelasi sebagai faktor penentu kesejahteraan fizikal manusia.

Kata kunci: psiko-rohani, kecekapan, pekerja bencana.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Drainage and Irrigation Department, a flood is the most common phenomenal disaster in Malaysia, which result in extreme loss yearly. The Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC, 2008) reported that the flood in 2007 was the costliest consequences indicating about 225 million (USD) losses in total, which affected 1,580,000 people in Malaysia. As a result of the persistent case of floods which hit the Malaysian community, disaster preparedness is a must. Disaster preparedness is an initiative that is purposely aimed to increase the readiness and knowledge among the team of disaster workers in Malaysia. The objective of disaster preparedness is to reduce the adverse effects of disasters through preparation, protection and equipment to the deal with emergencies situation (Dorasamy et al., 2018). Disaster preparedness is an ongoing process of assessment, planning, and training to prepare for a well-coordinated plan of action. Disaster preparedness includes measures to predict, prevent, and respond to disasters (Keeney, 2004).

The disaster workers typically stand from the official bodies such as the Malaysian Civil Defence, Royal Malaysian Police, Fire and Rescue Department, and others. Furthermore, in most cases, it also involved a large number of volunteers from the NGOs all over Malaysia. These first responders are responsible to react to all cases of emergency and disasters such as flash floods, landslide, collapsed building and

fallen trees. They are responsible for planning, organizing and monitoring the implementation of training, educational strategies, and awareness to the community in facing disaster in all places. In most cases, the physical hurt among disaster victims involves bodily injury, loss of their belonging, loss of shelter and others. Physically, the needs of victims to be swiftly identified by the disaster workers in providing shelter, food, cloth, required medication and other necessities. However, psychological impacts are more worrying and sensitive to tackle. In most cases, the disaster workers do not possess formal and systematic training and skills to provide psychological and spiritual know-how to ease off the psychological impacts. Whereas in the event of anxiety, the disaster workers are the first person who directly communicates with the disaster victims. Hence, this further enhances the needs of psycho-spiritual skills for them to help the victims in the traumatic condition.

The problem arises whether the training content to the disaster worker is comprehensive enough for them to possess enough knowledge and skills for them to be able to help the disaster victims not only to cater the physical hurt/needs but as well as the emotional turmoil and instability situation occurred to the victims. In this relation, the first responder to the victims is always the disaster workers. Are they trained to handle the needs of the victims in both physical and psychological help? Even whenever the victims arrived at the temporary transfer shelter, they are always being treated in urgency for their physical needs by the disaster workers, but there are no specific skills possessed by them to cater the internal psycho-spiritual problem faced by the victims.

From the observation, report and literature given, it proofed that the disaster workers training is most focus on the technical, medical, survival aspects only. However, there are lacking on other important aspects of spiritual and psychological skills that highly in need in such a trial situation. Hence, it is a high time for Malaysia, to integrate comprehensive competencies for disaster workers not only with the health and survivor training but as well as the psycho-spiritual training to accommodate the instant essential psychological therapy and spiritual strength to the disaster victims and at the same time to look on the Islamic perspectives of the psycho-spiritual needs and competencies.

DEFINING PSYCHO SPIRITUAL COMPETENCIES

The term psycho derives from the word psychology which refers to the scientific study of behaviour and mind, as well as feeling and emotions. According to the American Psychological Association [APA] (2018), psychology is a study of the mind, how it works, and how it affects behaviour. The study embraces all aspects of human experiences. From the negative aspect, however, the word psycho always

being related to the person that has an unstable mind, confuse, lost or in a state of need help. Merriam Webster (2018) define psycho as a person having or showing a severely disordered or abnormal state of mind which is abnormal or deviant.

Nevertheless, in this study, the focus of the discussion does not mainly refer to the term psycho itself but referring to the state of combination for both psycho/psychology and spirituality. Hence the state of psychology refers here is more on the condition of the human mind and behaviour. Mischel (2018) enhanced that psychology is a scientific discipline that studies mental states and processes and behaviour in humans and other animals which combined the sciences of mind, brain, and social behaviour. Spirituality is an aspect of human lives that are often neglected in the contemporary psychological discussion as mind and body were considered as separate entities. However, many mental health practitioners are now observing the interconnectedness between the physical aspect of mind and body with spirituality (Kilpatrick, 2006). Spirituality is an essential aspect of human lives which focuses on the purpose of life, improving wisdom and willpower, attaining closer relationship with the Divinity and the universe. It also refers to the elimination of the illusion or wrong idea derived from senses, feelings and thoughts where spiritual journey reflects an individual path in exploring the higher and lower selves (Mardiyah, 2016).

Koenig, King and Carson (2012) enhanced that spirituality is intimately connected to the supernatural, the mystical, and organized religion, although also extends beyond organized religion (and begins before it). Spirituality includes both a search for the transcendent and the discovery of the transcendent. It involves travelling along the path that leads from non-consideration to questioning non-believer or believer. If belief, then ultimately how devotion and surrender took place. Thus, they define spirituality is very similar to religion and there is clearly overlap hence interchangeably used terms religion/spirituality to mention the same thing. In other perspectives, Zinnbauer et al., (1997) noted that the rise of secularism had distinguished between religion and spirituality. Religion is regarded as focuses on the beliefs, emotions, practices, and relationships of individuals concerning a higher power or divine being. It also guides on how religiousness serves in the life of the individual while spirituality is commonly regarded as an individual phenomenon and identified with such things as personal transcendence, supra-conscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996).

On the other hand, psycho-spiritual is a field of study that focuses on psychology and spiritual experience. It is an essence of the study of consciousness which concern with psychological and spiritual practices, discipline and experiences (Martin, 2018). Competence means the ability to do something successfully and

efficiently. It is the quality or state of being capable (Merriam Webster, 2018). It is also referred to as an essential skill that is needed to perform a task or a job. Competence can also be described as a demonstration of individual characteristics that enable the performance of a job by acquiring specific required skills and knowledge essential for the set of duties. Hence, psycho-spiritual competency is an ability or essential skill of understanding psychological and spiritual experiences and practices in providing emotional help and support to those in dire need of help. In regards to the disaster workers, do the competencies in psycho-spiritual are essential? Does it help the victims more in acute condition? Mainly whenever dealt with unexpected situation and condition? Moreover, how do Islamic psycho spiritual competencies impacted the victims in dire needs situation?

THE NEEDS AND RELEVANCE OF PSYCHO SPIRITUALITY COMPETENCIES IN DISASTER

Psycho-spiritual competence in helping victims experiencing disaster and tragedy is the language of helpers in providing care and help. When a spiritual element is considered an essential aspect of total mental health, recognition of psycho-spiritual competencies is a necessity. The disaster management team should be prepared with skills and training in providing spiritual care to deal with the intangible effects of disaster (Jose, 2010). The need for psycho-spiritual skills in disaster workers is obvious. Looking at the various condition faced by disaster victims, they must get a little bit of small help from the beginning. In a common disaster situation, the victims usually keep questioning; why did God do this? Questioning justice and meaning - Feeling far from previously held beliefs - Feeling a need to be cleansed - Feeling (all the emotions of grief, including rage) despair, hopelessness, guilt and shame - Closing one's self off from loved ones - Wondering about life and death. This mostly happens to anyone that suffers a disaster situation since their traumatic experience makes them in a complicated situation. Onyango (2011) stressed that spirituality is an inner resource that helps a person cope. The best that humanitarian aid workers can do is to work with local religious leaders to provide spiritual counselling and guidance in a culturally appropriate way and to help the person to reconnect with their deity for answers that may not be readily provided anywhere else.

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONCEPT OF PSYCHO SPIRITUALITY COMPETENCIES AND APPROACHES

The characteristics of psycho-spiritual approaches include the recognition of body, mind and soul. Life is considered a journey with the attachment of religion and belief system. The paradigm also involves matters that are transcendence, mysticism, accessing the source of knowledge, inspiration and virtue. The dimension of human existence includes an interconnected aspect of physical, biological,

psychological, and spiritual. The spiritual realm is conceived as the ultimate source and goal of life and energy (The Scientific and Medical Network, 2015). Besides emotional, ethical, and cultural competencies, professional psycho-spiritual competencies are required to provide better and effective care management in disastrous situations. Recent findings on nurses' training and professional course, for instance, stated that acquiring additional professional competencies and upgrading academic curriculum that caters the needs and situations of victims are vital to deal with unpredictable challenges during a disaster.

The qualitative study among 35 nurses in Iran highlights that comprehensive and useful care can only be achieved when care providers are familiar with the disaster scene and needs of victims (Bahrami, Aliakbari & Aein, 2014). The insights of traumatic experiences gained from the victims offer the first responders' information to improve their psychological states of helplessness, loss of personal control and doubts about their relationship with the environment and beliefs system. Therefore, skills and training that incorporate psycho-spiritual approaches provide disaster team to create appropriate caring and helping strategies (Benson et al., 2016). In the advanced country such as Australia, US, Europe and UK, psychological skills and training to the disaster workers were given such great attention for decades.

The skills and training modules to the workers and volunteers involved high-quality training in skills for psychology recovery. In Australia, for example, Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) is a brief skills-based approach to assist community members to better cope after a disaster or other tragedy. The program seeks to recruit, train and support competent SPR trainers; provide systematic, high-quality training in SPR skills for practitioners; improve the confidence of a large number of practitioners to use SPR; and encourage practitioners' use of SPR with community members (Wade et al., 2015). On the other hand, Jackson et al., 2004; Qureshri et al., 2005; Zohar, 2010; stressed that their awareness of the hazards greatly influences the willingness and ability for disaster workers to comply with safe work practices, the existence of a safety plan and availability of personal protective equipment, the culture of the responding and affected organizations, and the peculiarities of the incident itself. Therefore, in this relation, Reissman, Kowalski-Trakoler & Katz (2011) opined that the approach to interventions that preserve or enhance disaster resilience for workers must be tailored to suit the practical approach of organization, the anticipated disaster scenario, and the training and experience of the workers themselves. This effort requires systematic analysis and evaluation as part of intervention planning where it requires a combination of expertise in public health, occupational health and safety, and behavioural and psychological practice framework.

ISLAMIC PSYCHO SPIRITUALITY COMPETENCIES AND APPROACHES

In Islam, psycho-spiritual aspects of human nature can be explained through four elements; ruh (spirit), qalb (heart), aql (intellect) and nafs (soul). Ruh is a manifestation of a Divine existence in the human body, while qalb is a spiritual entity of heart that revolves around feelings, intuitions and emotions. Aql refers to a cognitive dimension which helps human think and understands the truth and meaning of life. Nafs circles around self which may be ranked from mediocre (satanic self) to better (angelic self) continuum (Ahmad & Hassan, 2015). Islamic spirituality is defined as the presence of a relationship with Allah that affects the individual's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others and nature (Nasr, 1997). An individual's relationship with Allah is the point of Islamic spirituality. At the heart of the human-divine relationship is divine love (Bonab, Miner & Proctor, 2013). Allah was always with His prophets and His servants. In turn, the prophets sought always to serve Allah, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) saying:

“Surely, my prayer and my devotion, my life, and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. He has no partner, and this is what I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims” (Surah al-an'am:162-163).

The mutual relationship between the Divine and human beings is thus regarded as an important Islamic value within Muslim spirituality, as stated by the Prophet:

“God, ever mighty and majestic is He, says, “I am present in my servant's thought of Me, and I am with him when he remembers me.” If he approaches Me by a hand's breath, I draw near to him by an arm's length, and if he draws near to Me by an arm's length, I draw to him by a fathom. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running” Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim (Ibn Arabi, 2004).

Religious rituals are integral to Islamic spirituality as they provide a means to demonstrate and maintain a relationship with Allah (Bonab et al., 2013). Further, they are an outward expression of the believer's desire to maintain closeness to Allah SWT, especially during times of psycho-spiritual or physical threat. Besides, the relationship with others is considered part of the relationship with the Divine. Loving others, giving unconditional positive regard to others, and altruistic acts are examples of religious virtues that demonstrate an individual's deep and sincere relationship with Allah. According to Islamic literature, spirituality in Islamic theology is based on knowledge and faith in God (Damad, 2011). Therefore, faith in God is a prerequisite for the realization of Islamic spirituality. In this case, God s.w.t warns about the importance of taking lessons from misfortune and testing as many

people who do not know what to do after being overwhelmed by several disasters, Allah s.w.t said:

“Do they not see that they are tried every year once or twice but then they do not repent nor do they remember?”(At-taubah:126)

People who have low spirituality will not be able to take lessons and understand anything well. Al-Tabari (2000) stated that individuals whose souls are littered with nifāq disease would not be able to see the truth and the positive value of a trial or trial. The tests that they have in the form of hunger, disaster, and other calamities will not make them repent to Allah. The verse also explains that the meaning of yuftanūn in the context of psychology means traumatic attacks. The verse explains how to deal with trauma by taking the values of the trauma. The sentence wa lā hum yatashakkarūn indicates that many people are incapable of taking values by trying to learn over and over the occurrence of trauma that affects them. Apart from taking lessons, another technique to overcome trauma based on this verse is to do self-reflection. It can contemplate the mistakes that have been made. Therefore Allah s.w.t says that lā yatūbūn, which means that many people are traumatized but do not contemplate and reflect on themselves and realize their mistakes. Al-Shaukani (n.d.) in the interpretation of this letter, explains that the test of kindness that Allah gives to man aims to know whether the person is grateful. The disadvantages test given by God to a person is to know whether the person is to be patient. All the actions performed on the test are only returned to God.

HOW ISLAMIC PSYCHO SPIRITUALITY COMPETENCIES ABLE TO HELP MORE?

Indeed, the psycho-spiritual approach in Islam has been influential in treatments associated with well-being and happiness. Religion has become the source of strength and inner tranquillity for man. Al-Ghazali has elaborated the importance of soul or the inner dimension of human as equal to the development of physical growth. Therefore, one should not disregard the significance of Islamic-psycho spiritual competencies or approaches in helping patients to recover and to regain strength. Moreover, the human being is created by Allah with faculties including rational (aqal), physical body (jasad), soul (ruh), nafs (desire) and heart (qalb) (al-Ghazali, 1998). Muslim scholars talk very much on achieving balance out of these faculties and at the end reach happiness.

Nik Yaacob (2013:182) implies cognitive therapy and spiritual belief as instrumental in the healing process. It is ‘a type of psychotherapy that aims to help patient or client to overcome difficulties by identifying and changing dysfunctional thinking, behaviour, and emotional responses’. Many studies also have suggested that the Islamic approach has been instrumental ‘as a therapeutic tool in counselling

intervention and psychotherapy' (Nik Yaacob, 2013:182). Malik Badri has once espoused that 'the mixing of gradual behavioural training with a spiritual and Islamic cognitive approach is an innovation of early Muslim doctors and scholars like al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina and al-Kindi' (Badri, 1998). It is a technique used to appeal one's iman and religious sentiments. It is also interesting to note that Islamic psycho spirituality is competent to help man to overcome fear or emotional instability because Islam provides man with a worldview.

It is the worldview of God and his creations that motivates a man to make a suitable change in his behaviour or mind. Some studies in the West have also shown that prayers and spiritual belief can be useful to alleviate stress and depression. For instance, Dossey (1997) has opined that spiritual belief and its consequent behaviour such as feeling empathy, caring, compassion towards others provide the initial stage of healing. Besides that, Koenig (2007) also affirms that religious and spiritual orientations of individuals and communities are mutually crucial that they should be taken seriously in social services for disaster victims. Benson et al., (2016:1372) and several other scholars also suggest that 'victims might find solace by strengthening their religious and spiritual commitment, or by returning to abandoned spiritual and religious values and practices'.

FINDINGS: THE COMPARISON OF ISLAMIC AND CONVENTIONAL COMPETENCIES IN PSYCHO SPIRITUALITY

Koenig (2012) acknowledged that research examining religion, spirituality, and health had been rapidly expanding, and most of it is occurring outside the field of psychiatry. It has been published in journals from a wide range of disciplines, including those in medicine, nursing, physical and occupational therapy, social work, public health, sociology, psychology, religion, spirituality, pastoral care, chaplain, population studies, and even in economics and law journals. It resulted in an extensive research literature that is scattered throughout the medical, social, and behavioural sciences. Although several scholars in the West have been sceptical on ethical and psycho-spiritual approaches in helping therapy, Benson et al. (2016) have been optimistic about the competency of this approach.

The study has listed several underlying approaches taken by social workers from different countries which consist of the following attempts of;

- i. Use or recommend religious or spiritual books or writing.
- ii. Pray privately for a client.
- iii. Pray with a client.
- iv. Meditate privately to prepare for seeing a client.
- v. Meditate with a client.
- vi. Use religious language or concepts.

- vii. Use non-secretarian spiritual language or concepts.
- viii. Recommend participation in a religious or spiritual support system or activity.
- ix. Touch client for healing purposes.
- x. Help clients develop religious and spiritual rituals as a clinical intervention.
- xi. Participate in a client’s religious or spiritual rituals as practice intervention.
- xii. Encourage the client to do regular religious or spiritual self-reflective diary keeping or journal keeping.

However, in Islam, the inner dimension of man, i.e. the soul is cardinal for the development of physical growth. This is to say that the soul and the spiritual heart qalb becomes the determinant factor of the physical body well-being. This is correlated with the hadith of the Prophet SAW that; “truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh, and when it is corrupt, the body is corrupt, when it sounds the body is sound. Indeed it is qalb”. Therefore, much of the Islamic psycho-spiritual approaches focus on nurturing the heart, the soul, the nafs through performing religious practices such as zikr (remembrance God) and prayers (Khalid, 2008). Whereas, if the soul or the heart is sick, it is due to the imbalance of psychological disorder caused by anger, sadness, madness, anxiety, devastation, greediness, and feeling hopeless (Said Hawa, n.d.). Several relevant studies have further clarified that prayer plays a vital role in the therapeutic and healing process.

Therefore, the first approach that Islamic psycho-spiritual competencies should address the importance of performing and relate oneself with the quality of his or her prayer. “Prayer is relaxing and highly spiritual and contemplative ritual which at times takes the faithful into a divine journey of tranquillity and closeness to God” stated Nik Yaacob (2013:185). Besides that, some studies on Islamic psycho-spirituality also suggest that cognitive therapy should take a role in helping victims of a natural disaster. Since the man in Islam represents a rational being, it is a therapy that helps the victims to think about how to cope with the problem. If his mind is religiously oriented, it helps tremendously in building his worldview.

CONCLUSION

The current development in psycho-spiritual in Western or conventional approaches shows that there exist favourite trends in using it as an option to other approaches of physical, material and technical methods in helping the disaster victims. Hence the disaster workers need to learn proper approaches to equip themselves with the psycho-spiritual skills to enhance the rescue mission physical and mentally safe. It helps the process of emotionally healing, put the victims in more stable condition with spiritual belief, empathy, caring, and compassion towards others. While, Islamic psycho-spiritual approaches are in various ranges from developing skills to identify distorted thinking, to modify beliefs and changing behaviour, as well as

relating to others in different ways. It is a Divine relationship with the Creator, Allah SWT, the Most healing, the Most gracious, a relationship with Allah that affects the individual's self-meaning and connectedness with a human being and the world. Islamic psycho spirituality is published from the stronghold on an Islamic worldview, and it is the worldview of God and his creations that motivates a man to make a suitable change in his behaviour or mind which is sufficient to alleviate the feeling of despair, sadness, lost and uncertain. It motivates a human being to put the effort to struggle to achieve for success in this world and hereafter-world, even-though facing tribulations in life.

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