Dani Fadillah_Strengthening spiritual and cultural approaches in managing mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Letter to the Editor

Strengthening spiritual and cultural approaches in managing mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Editor(s):

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's mental health worldwide. The outbreak and its associated consequences have created a perfect storm of stressors and challenges that can lead to a range of emotional and psychological responses. The uncertainty surrounding the virus, its transmission, and the long-term implications have caused widespread anxiety and fear (Newlove-Delgado et al., 2023). Fear of getting infected, fear of losing loved ones, or fear of financial instability has been common during this period. It's essential to recognise the impact of the pandemic on mental health and take proactive steps to maintain well-being.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the globe, becoming a complex issue that cuts across medical, psychological, social, and cultural domains. Many people experienced severe depression during the pandemic until they chose to end their lives by committing suicide (Huang et al., 2022). Suicides during the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to a wide variety of factors, from an overwhelming sense of hopelessness about the world's future (as seen by the steadily rising COVID-19 curve) to an individual's isolation as a result of being quarantined (Furlong & Finnie, 2020). This problem cannot be left alone; during the pandemic we focused too much on strict health protocols so that people were not exposed to disease. But in the end, people lost their lives, not because of the pandemic, but of the depression they experience. Unfortunately, those who experience depression amid COVID-19 pandemic are not only adults but also teenagers of school age (Bozzola et al., 2022; Catling et al., 2022). For these teenagers, the factor that causes them to experience depression during the pandemic comes from social media (Ngien & Jiang, 2022). They may not feel lonely because they are interested in surfing in the virtual world, but the information that they receive in that virtual world is known to be inaccurate, and it negatively impacts their mental health.

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic may have subsided at this point, and people may be able to feel more at ease, a solution to this problem needs to be discovered because we do not know what will occur in the future. We do not know what kind of global situation will develop and possibly lead to widespread depression like the one brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to this point, we believe that neither modern medicine nor surgery can treat anxiety. However, spiritual and cultural approaches can help humans overcome anxiety and depression. Therefore, we are interested in the manuscript written by Biswas and Jijina (2022). They found that people managed to overcome mental problems and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic with a spiritual approach. Interestingly, Biswas and Jinina did not limit themselves to collecting data from people of a single faith or ethnicity, but included people from various backgrounds and beliefs. The findings indicate that people of all faiths will be able to handle the pandemic with composure if they regularly engage in spiritual practices.

For many individuals, religious observance and spirituality can play a significant role in helping to strengthen mental resilience especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging in religious rituals, prayers, or meditation can offer a sense of comfort and hope during times of stress and uncertainty. These practices may help individuals cope with anxiety, fear, and grief associated with the pandemic. Many religious texts and teachings offer guidance on coping with challenges, forgiveness, letting go of worries, and finding inner peace (Cho et al., 2023). In situations where individuals may feel helpless or out of control, faith and religious beliefs can provide a sense of agency and control over their lives.

Strengthening spiritual and cultural approaches in managing mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for several reasons. First, the pandemic has caused an increase in stress, anxiety, and depression, which can impact mental health significantly. Second, traditional approaches to mental health, such as medication and psychotherapy, may not be readily available to everyone during the pandemic. Third, spiritual and cultural approaches to mental health can help individuals connect with their community, which can be especially important during times of isolation and social distancing. This spiritual approach cannot be underestimated, and even modern scientific medicine goes hand in hand with religious and spiritual aspects in providing medical services. This is evidenced by the fact that numerous hospitals have used a spiritual approach to help their patients cope with the anxiety brought on by the massive spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Akanni et al., 2021). This is necessary because physical treatment cannot be effective if patients' mental health is still filled with excessive fear. Furthermore, the patient's health condition declined, not because of the virus that infected them with the disease, but because of their anxiety.

It's important to note that the impact of religious observance on mental health can vary depending on an individual's beliefs, culture, and personal experiences. While some may find comfort and strength through religious practices, others may seek support from different sources, such as family, friends, or mental health professionals. Ultimately, the pandemic has highlighted the significance of mental health and well-being, and individuals should find the support and coping mechanisms that resonate with them personally. For those who find solace in their faith and religious observance, leaning into their beliefs and practices can be a valuable tool in navigating the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the future, the world may face a situation requiring humans to keep their distance and isolate themselves from other humans, like the COVID-19 pandemic. In that case, all of us, especially those in authority, such as international organisations (WHO, for example) and national governments and local governments in a country, should not only provide health protocol appeals and education from a medical point of view but also provides advice and spiritual education for the community. To practice spiritual qualities, we can do it at home, but if we have to go to a house of worship to get a religious touch from a certain clergy, then regional quarantine is no longer a barrier for people to get religious enlightenment in order to improve their spiritual quality. Religious leaders and clergy have facilitated the congregation with online facilities and this method is considered effective (Martyr, 2022). Strengthening spiritual and cultural approaches to managing mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic is important for promoting holistic and culturally sensitive mental health care. By incorporating these approaches into mental health treatment, practitioners can provide more comprehensive care that addresses the unique needs of diverse individuals and communities.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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