

SYNERGIZING ISLAMIC TEACHINGS AND MINDFULNESS PRACTICES IN THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

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Abstract. Mindfulness-based therapy has beneficial effects for individuals with health issues, especially in mental health. However, the potential benefits of mindfulness therapy integrated with Islamic values are unclear. This paper provides a scoping review of the effects of mindfulness practices integrated with Islamic values for individuals with a mental health issue. Materials and method: Five electronic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, MEDLINE, PubMed, and CINAHL) were searched for relevant published literature. Titles, abstracts, and full-text articles were screened for the selection of relevant papers. Results: This article described the potential promising benefits of mindfulness therapy integrated with Islamic values for individuals with a mental health issue. Conclusion: There is a scarcity of research on the effects of mindfulness practices integrated with Islamic values for individuals with mental health issues due to the limitation of the number and methodology of the relevant studies. This paper recommended further study to establish the content and efficacy of mindfulness practices integrated with Islamic values.

Keywords: *mindfulness, Islam, mental illness, Islamic Integrated Mindfulness Therapy*

Introduction

The empirical basis for mindfulness-based therapies has been established as there is consistent evidence in support of mindfulness for depression, pain conditions, smoking, and addictive disorders (Goldberg et al., 2018). For the past two decades, the number of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of mindfulness interventions has increased dramatically (Creswell, 2017). Mindfulness-based interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), mindfulness cognitive behavioral therapy (MBCT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) are viewed as integration between Buddhism and Western psychology even though many aspects of mindfulness-based therapy models also existed in the Islamic tradition and Sufi psychology (Isgandarova, 2019). From the Islamic perspective, mindfulness is defined as a practice involving God in each process (by remembering God) to help individuals consciously understand a condition or experience they face not as a coincidental but as an event created by God and sincerely accept the condition experienced to discover the intentions or targets and a way to solve problems with Islamic rules (Wiguna et al., 2018). According to Parrot, mindfulness in Islam is called al-muraqabah, a conscious state of comprehensive awareness of God and our inner states in relation to Him (Parrott, 2017). Integrating the religion-cultural worldviews into psychotherapeutic interventions can potentially strengthen the therapeutic alliance and help reduce drop-out rates from follow-up, which has proven clinically effective for patients (Thomas et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need

to investigate the effects of Islamic integrated mindfulness intervention as such intervention has not extensively practiced.

The purpose of this review is to identify the useful Islamic integrated mindfulness-based intervention compared to normal or no intervention that gives beneficial outcomes to mental health. This paper aims to perform a scoping review on the Islamic integrated mindfulness-based intervention to identify the current evidence on the usage of the intervention and explore the gaps in the literature that may assist future studies as well as systematic reviews.

Materials and Methods

Five electronic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, MEDLINE, PubMed, and CINAHL) were searched for relevant published literature from the inception of databases to December 2019. The research string used in the search were (Islamic OR Islam OR Muslim) AND (Mindfulness OR Muraqabah OR Tafakkur OR Tadabbur OR Sufi OR Prayer OR Salah OR Solah OR Salat OR Solat) AND (psychotherapy OR therapy OR treatment). Only full papers or dissertations written in English were considered. Due to the broad purpose of the scoping review, we included any research that focused on the effects of any Islamic-integrated mindfulness-based intervention on mental health, irrespective of the method of the study. Articles such as editorials, correspondences, commentaries, non-systematic reviews, and abstracts alone were excluded. The duplicates were removed after reviewing the search results. Independently, the titles, abstracts, as well as full-text articles were screened by two reviewers, and the papers that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. If there were disagreements, reviewers would discuss with each other and reach an agreement through the discussion. A flow chart of the selection of the studies is represented in *Figure 1*. The information of the studies, including publication details, method of the studies, population, outcome, results, and study limitations of each study were extracted and organized into a review table (*Table 1*). No prior protocol or registration was published regarding this scoping review.

Table 1. *The studies included in the review.*

N	A&Y	C	P	M	I	O	L
1	Gul and Jahangir (2019)	Pakistan	200 female participants	Trial design for efficient testing of two interventions in a sample by the 2 x 2 factorial designs	Sufi Meditation (SM) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme	SM is more effective in lowering anxiety as SM group has lower mean on Hamilton Anxiety Scale as compared to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme group with the mean difference is 18.88 which is statistically significant at $p < .001$.	Not available
2	Aslami et al. (2017)	Iran	The pregnant women in the 16th to 32nd weeks of pregnancy, 30 pregnant women with high anxiety level and 30 pregnant	Semi-experimental in the form of pretest-posttest using a control group.	Mindfulness Efficiency Based on Islamic-Spiritual Schemes and Group Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	Both interventions were effective in reducing mean of scores for anxiety and depression as compared to the control group. However, the effect of mindfulness based on spiritual- Islamic schemes was more. There was a significant difference between the mean scores of anxiety and depression in the two groups of mindfulness based on spiritual- Islamic	Small sample size Did not include a third arm of usual care to control the possibility of

			women with high depression.			scheme (P<0.001) and the group of cognitive behavioural therapy with each other (P<0.001) and with the control group(P<0.001).	placebo effects
3	Munif et al. (2019)	Indonesia	36 students of bachelor of nursing who are Muslim and experienced stress in working on their thesis.	Pre-post quasi-experimental design with a control group.	Islamic Spiritual Mindfulness	The mean of stress level of students in the intervention group significantly reduce from 20.6±2.97 to 11.4±5.81 after the intervention as compared to the control group (decreased from 19.7±2.82 to 17.8±5.01) with a p-value of 0.001 from the t-test obtained. The effect size was medium with the value of 0.59.	Small sample size Unable to control several confounding factors

Note: No.=Number; A&Y=Author & Year; C=Country; P=Population; M=Method; I=Intervention; O=Outcome; L=Limitation.

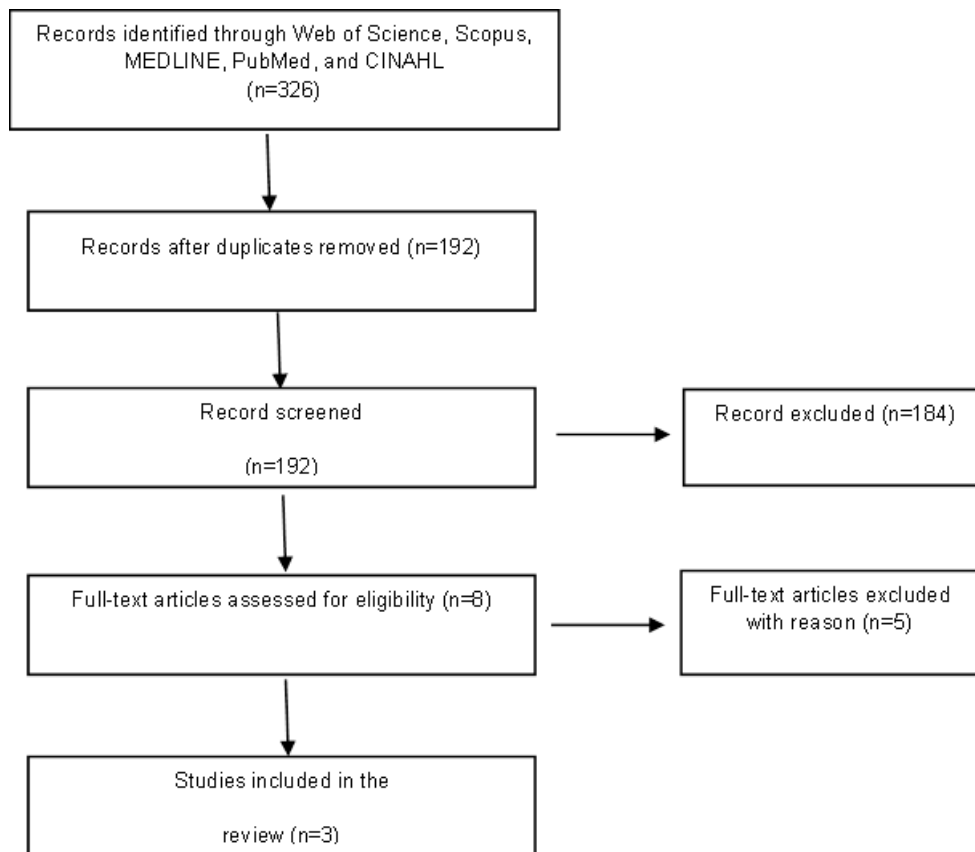


Figure 1. Flow diagram for screening result.

Results and Discussion

The initial electronic searches retrieved a total of 326 articles. After removing duplicates, 192 articles were screened by titles, abstracts, and full texts. Only three studies met the criteria. These studies were published after 2017 and undertaken in Pakistan, Iran, and Indonesia. The studies' designs used are a quantitative method and pre-post comparisons. The three studies focused on teaching mindfulness incorporated with Islamic teaching. Two of the studies focus on females and anxiety (Gul and

Jahangir, 2019). One of the studies measures the level of depression apart from anxiety level (Aslami et al., 2017). Another study measures the stress level among Nursing students (Munif et al., 2019).

Generally, all studies demonstrated a clear aim of the research as well as interesting findings. All studies are experimental studies with varied methodologies. Small sample sizes and a lack of consideration of confounders are noted in these studies, except for the Sufi Meditation study. The studies also examined a variety of Islamic integrated mindfulness approaches, such as Sufi Meditation, Mindfulness-based on Islamic spiritual schemes, and Islamic Spiritual Mindfulness. The interventions ranged from 5 days to 8 weeks in duration, with a total of 296 participants. The studies do not include participants who are already diagnosed with mental illness. Research tools used in these studies were Beck anxiety and depression questionnaires, the Hamilton Anxiety Scale, and DASS 42 (Depression Anxiety Stress Scales). Only 1 of the three studies reported the involvement of meditation. Meanwhile, another study focused on Zikr and prayer. The most straightforward intervention is SM, which only requires visualizing the name of Allah with a rare eye movement and writing the name on the heart with an index figure. This intervention only required a short duration per session as compared to other interventions. One of the studies did not compare with standard psychotherapy or method, but the other two compared with CBT and mindfulness intervention. The studies did not mention the usage of any medication in the interventions. Moreover, the studies also did not describe the presence of the therapist as part of the study or mention the condition after mindfulness had failed or long-term effects after cessation of the intervention.

Overall, the studies reported positive effects of Islamic-integrated mindfulness interventions. Mindfulness was helpful for Muslims for mental health. However, whether it is more beneficial for Muslims with a better understanding of mindfulness and religion was not explored in the studies. Besides, mindfulness training was found to improve mental health and wellbeing. Nevertheless, whether it is useful in mental disorders cannot be concluded from these studies. For the last decade, the use of mindfulness-based intervention for a variety of psychological, somatic, and interpersonal problems has increased dramatically (Mirdal, 2012). Physically, a study of how the two facets of mindfulness impact health behaviors found that practicing mindfulness can enhance or increase multiple behaviors related to health, like getting regular health check-ups, being physically active, using seat belts, and avoiding nicotine and alcohol (Jacobs et al., 2016). It can also improve cardiovascular health through a lower incidence of smoking, more physical activity, and a healthier body mass index (Loucks et al., 2015). Mindfulness has been positively linked with lower blood pressure, especially when the practitioner is skilled in nonjudgment and nonreactivity (Tomfohr et al., 2015). Lastly, researchers found that mindfulness helped participants lose weight, improve their eating behaviors and attitudes, and decrease depression and anxiety (Rogers et al., 2017).

Mindfulness is defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Though there is a universal agreement concerning the involvement of sustained attention to the current moment, there is no consensus on how mindfulness should be defined as a broad range of discrepancies exists between the proposed definitions and a clear operational definition of the concept of mindfulness (Chiesa and Malinowski, 2011). According to Parrot, Mindfulness is the virtue of muraqabah, which is a state of consistent full

knowledge that Allah is aware of him or her, inwardly and outwardly, and vigilant self-awareness in one’s relationship with Allah in heart, mind, and body (Parrott, 2017). He highlighted the concept of Muraqabah, according to Muslim scholars (Table 2). Apart from awareness of Allah’s existence, the awareness of the present moment is also involved with death, judgment day, and good deeds (Alkusayer, 2018). Through muraqabah, internally, a person applies watchfulness over their heart while being aware of God’s watchfulness over them (Assar, 2017). This is a fundamental principle needed by Muslims while doing prayers to create a connection between self and God. Interestingly, the persons who regularly pray with mindfulness have better mental health than those who regularly pray without mindfulness (Ijaz et al., 2017).

Table 2. *The meaning of Muraqabah.*

No	Name	Definition	References
1.	Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tuwayjirī	The constant knowledge of the servant and conviction in the supervision of the Truth, glory be to Him, over one’s outward and inward states	Al-Tuwayjirī (2006)
2.	Al-Murta’ish	Observation of one’s innermost being, to be aware of the hidden with every moment and utterance.	Qushayri (2015)
3.	Sheikh ‘Abd al-Qadr al-Jilani	Realization in four aspects: 1. Knowledge of Allah Almighty. 2. Knowledge of the enemy of Allah, Iblis (Satan). 3. Knowledge of your soul’s capacity to suggest evil. 4. Knowledge of deeds to be done for the sake of Allah.	al-Jalani (1995)

The significant features of mindfulness are increased awareness of internal and external states of experiences, being aware in the current moment, refraining from evaluating or judging experiences, openness to sit with all emotional and physical experiences, either negative or positive experiences, approaching internal and external experiences with compassion and increasing awareness consciously and with thoughtful intention (Dutton, 2008). How mindfulness works is through the concurrent cultivation of three components of mindfulness: intention, attention, and attitude (IAA), which smooth a shift in perception known as re-perceiving (Shapiro et al., 2006). Ideally, mindfulness-based interventions share the founding principle of mindfulness, which is not just the ability to stay focused but the phenomenon that can liberate the mind through insight and deeply encourage healthy mental states (Cullen, 2011). Thus, there is a need to integrate the concept of mindfulness in Islam into daily practices. However, there are some challenges in addressing theoretical models and Islamic-based interventions that need to be established further to give clinicians solid tools to work with Muslim clients (Haque et al., 2016). Importantly, the role of psychotherapists towards patients is to support spiritual motivation and strengthen the patient’s self-confidence (Yaacob, 2013). Spirituality serves as a shaping force in an individual’s life, warranting a primary focus and priority (Sudi et al., 2019). The practice used in the therapy should be based on accepting that many religious, spiritual, and ethnic clients believe that God is their fundamental values and meaning to life, the central part of understanding themselves, as well as being part of the answer for their worldly problems (Sayeed and Prakash, 2013). Because of that, it would be beneficial for clinicians to understand that Islam is considered a lifestyle and it influences their thinking, the relationships among themselves, and their code of life (Carter and Rashidi, 2003). Hence, with this in mind, it is useful to make mindfulness as part of spiritual practice. Spiritual practices differ from traditional religious practices and rituals. Spiritual practices are often on individual basis which strengthen the connection of the individuals with the Divine.

Spiritual practices can include private practices, expression of feelings, and finding ultimate meaning and values in life. Private practices are individual preferred activities that strengthen one's spirits and give energy to the soul. These private practices can be in the form of seclusion or meditation, such as mindfulness using awareness and attention toward remembrance of Allah in the spiritual heart. The spiritual heart is an important component of a Muslim's soul. When the Quran speaks of the spiritual heart or *al-qalb*, it encompasses more than the physical heart that the spiritual heart resides in. Therefore, the physical heart can be regarded as the point of interaction between the human body and the spiritual *qalb* (Ansari, 1992). Hence, it is as important to care for the physical heart as it is to care for the spiritual heart. Apart from that, Islamic psychotherapy is a psychological interventional procedure that aims to heal psychological and emotional distress, as well as spiritual distress that is based on the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the practice of the past Islamic scholars (Abdullah et al., 2013). It also can be deduced as a procedure for treating diseases that contain physical, mental, spiritual, and character (Sham, 2015). The Islamic approach to psychotherapy emphasizes the importance of polishing the spiritual heart, and the Prophet s.a.w gave the following advice for polishing the spiritual heart as mentioned in authentic Hadith from Imam Ahmad: "*There is a polish for everything that takes away rust and the polish for the heart is the remembrance of Allah*". Hence, mindfulness can be a helpful method in achieving full awareness during the remembrance of Allah through dhikr, contemplation, and reflection for spiritual growth and guidance from the Divine. It is not simply a recommended character trait but rather the realization of the supreme character trait, spiritual excellence (*al-ihsan*). As the Prophet defined in the famous *hadith* of Gabriel, spiritual excellence "is to worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He certainly sees you" (Bukhārī, 2002).

This is the first review of Islamic integrated mindfulness. The main finding is that there is a lack of research on this topic because of the conflict and limitations of integrating religion into psychotherapy itself. Moreover, small sample sizes and a lack of consideration of confounders are noted among these studies. Nevertheless, more research to demonstrate how the concept of Islamic integrated mindfulness is required as the research in this area is still limited. Thus, further intervention is needed to establish the effectiveness of Islamic-integrated mindfulness interventions in various populations, especially people with mental illness, and examine the methods for practitioners in delivering the Islamic-integrated mindfulness interventions. Moreover, further intervention is also needed to explore the most robust predictor and likelihood to continue using Islamic integrated mindfulness in daily life as well as the implications related to the challenge of the delivery of mindfulness interventions in the Muslim population.

Conclusion

This review described the potential promising benefits of mindfulness therapy integrated with Islamic values for individuals with mental health distress. However, research on the effects of mindfulness practices combined with Islamic values for individuals with a variety of health issues is scarce due to the limited number and methodology of the relevant studies. Thus, further research is suggested to establish the content and efficacy of mindfulness practices integrated with Islamic values based on

the Qur'an and Hadith in accordance with the Sunni scholars. Therefore, it can be utilized not only for Muslims but also for non-Muslims.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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