

# THE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN PEOPLE LIVING WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER IN MALAYSIA

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# STUDY BACKGROUND

## *Definition of Religious-spirituality*

- A subset of deeply religious people who have dedicated their lives to the service of their religion and to their fellow humans, and whose lives exemplify the teachings of their faith traditions (Koenig, 2008, p.349).

## *Malaysian context of religious-spirituality*

- Religion guide individuals' decisions concerning how they conduct their lives (Md.Yusoff, 2011).

## *In bipolar disorder (BD): literature review*

- Religion play role in managing bipolar symptoms (Cruz et al., 2010).
- Little attention paid to how service users with BD maintain their spiritual aspects (Pesut et al., 2011).
- Difficult to draw real conclusions of the interplay between religion and mental health due to methodological limitations (Granqvist, 2014)

# MATERIALS AND METHODS

## *A qualitative study*

*One to one indepth interview  
with semi-structured topic guide*

*25 people diagnosed with BD as  
participants*

*All participants met the inclusion criteria as follow; 1) adults over 18  
year old who were 2) diagnosed with bipolar disorder by psychiatrist,  
3) able to speak in Malay or English, 4) not presented with severe  
symptoms, 5) and had a religious affiliation.*

*Involve two psychiatric  
outpatients in Kuala Lumpur,  
Malaysia*

*-Ethical clearance obtained from Medical Research Ethic Committee (MREC)*

*-audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.*

*-Thematic analysis approach in analysing data*



# CONT...

The interview guide covers the topic on coping and source of strength, and view on community networking

Examples of question asked include, 'How do you draw your strength', 'How does these affect your life', 'Tell me about your view on religion and God', and 'religious practices that you do and why'.

# RESEARCHER'S LENS: ADOPT BOURDIEU'S CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS HABITUS

Religion

- The exercise of religio-cultural norms and practices.
- The symbolic interpretation of meaning, e.g. prayer brings peace of mind.

Symbolic  
meaning

- To explain the mental health benefits as the outcome of religious faith and practices as appraised by individuals

# ***RESULT: 'MAINTAINING A POSITIVE SENSE OF SELF'***

## *Example of excerpt*

- *I pray five times a day. These are my weapons. People with bipolar disorder have to remember Allah and the Prophet Muhammad a lot. Then, only then, can they be better. I can feel that. (Asiaah; I; 6: 8-11)*

## *Summary*

- *A positive sense of self-betterment, tranquility, a sense of self-control over their bipolar disorder or emotions*
- *Expression of reliance, trust and submission to God.*
- *A sense of improvement in religiosity in terms of their relationships with co-religionists.*

# DISCUSSION

- The participants viewing religion as one of the attributes of their psychological coping strategy.
- Religious practices produce spiritual intelligence with emotional recognition, where the feeling of peacefulness is a form of emotional quotient (EQ) (Karimipour et al., 2015).
- From a psychological perspective, people learn to anticipate emotional outcomes and behave so as to pursue the emotions they prefer (Baumeister et al., 2007).
- Nonetheless, the concept of religious habitus helps this study to understand the possible trajectory of religious-spirituality through daily religious practices in relation to mental health recovery of participants.



# IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

*This study invites others to focus on the dynamic role played by religious society for the benefit of people with mental health problems. Within the Bourdieu's lens, this study reinstates:*

- the supportive role played by religious members as essential in reinforcing their religious faith in God.*

*This study acknowledges the need to consider the non-religious attribute to spirituality with regard to the expression of positive emotions and emotional regulation.*

# **LIMITATION**

*The current study limits the attributes of religion to spirituality to religious population.*

*Not suited to the secularist and atheist population elsewhere.*

*However, scholars can still confidently use the term spirituality, as long as they focus on the interpretation of the habitus according to the social construct of the population of interest.*

# CONCLUSION

*As in the case of living with BD in Malaysia, this study favorably highlights the empirical evidence on benefits of mental health through:*

- *Religious lens*
- *The role of religious agency*



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**THANK YOU**