

Spiritual Practices of Female Cancer Patients Towards Well-being in Lives

Amalan Kerohanian Pesakit Kanser Wanita ke Arah Kesejahteraan Hidup

A'DAWIYAH ISMAIL

ABSTRACT

There are various types of cancer experienced by women, for example breast, ovarian colon and cervical. Female cancer patients would often be in grief and anxiousness thinking about the risks of the illness and in looking for the appropriate practices in treating their emotions as well as their physique. This paper examines the spiritual practices of 20 patients with cancer at the National Cancer Society Malaysia. The design of this study is quantitative. The data were descriptively analysed based on the frequency, percentage and mean. The findings of the study show that the respondents' spiritual practices are at a high level of mean such as giving charity (3.81), seeking forgiveness from Allah the Almighty (3.81), reciting the Quran and its translation (3.75) and remembrance of Allah (3.75). The spiritual practices performed by the cancer patients help to stabilise their emotions and reduce their physical pain. The spiritual practices also help them to persevere in facing life in a good way towards achieving well-being in their lives apart from continuing with the modern treatments as recommended by the doctors, as well as to be consistent in practising the spiritual practices as proposed by Islam in order to gain emotional and mental health remedies.

Keyword: Spiritual; practices; cancer; patients; emotional stability

ABSTRAK

Pelbagai jenis kanser yang dialami oleh golongan wanita seperti kanser payudara, ovari, kolon dan serviks. Pesakit kanser wanita menghadapi kesedihan, bimbang dan kerisauan memikirkan tentang risiko penyakit dan mencari amalan yang bersesuaian untuk merawat emosi dan fizikal. Kertas kerja ini mengkaji amalan kerohanian 20 orang pesakit kanser di Persatuan Kebangsaan Kanser Malaysia. Reka bentuk kajian ini adalah kuantitatif. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif berdasarkan kekerapan, peratus dan min. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan amalan kerohanian responden berada pada tahap min yang tinggi seperti suka bersedekah (3.81), mohon keampunan kepada Allah SWT (3.81), membaca al-Quran dan terjemahan (3.75) dan berzikir (3.75). Amalan kerohanian yang dilakukan pesakit kanser membantu menstabilkan emosi, mengurangkan kesakitan fizikal, lebih tabah mengharungi kehidupan dengan cara yang baik ke arah mencapai kesejahteraan hidup. Pesakit dinasihat meneruskan rawatan moden, konsisten melakukan amalan kerohanian menurut Islam untuk mendapat banyak kebaikan, kesejahteraan emosi dan mental.

Kata kunci: Amalan; kerohanian; pesakit; kanser; kestabilan emosi

INTRODUCTION

The word cancer is normally used by the general public as compared to the medical practitioners. This word has an emotional connotation and generally refers to malignant tumors. This is because, tumors can become cancerous or malignant (Siti Aishah Md. Ali 2013). Cancer is a type of disease associated with the imbalance of cell replication and cell response in the body. Normally, these cells will increase (replicate) according to the rules to enable for the body to develop and grow, and to recover or heal after sustaining an injury. However, sometimes these cells would replicate abnormally, hence causing for their abnormal growth, which is also known as tumors. Non-cancerous tumors do not spread to other parts of the body or to other organs. Cancer, on the other hand,

is made up of cells that if are not treated may spread to other parts of the body. Cancerous cells can spread to other organs causing systemic complications. In this paper, reference is made to cancer, which is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Cancer is a type of disease that is also faced by women around the world, and it is one of the health challenges in life. Normally, women would experience breast cancer and this disease is on the rise, especially in developing countries. In the West, breast cancer risk is estimated to occur with a ratio of 1:9 women over their lifetime (Harris, Pinder & O'Malley 2006). In Malaysia, the most common type of cancer experienced by women is breast cancer (31.3%), followed by cervical cancer (10.6%), colorectal or colon cancer (9.9%), ovarian cancer (4.3%), leukemia (3.7%), and lung cancer (pulmonary carcinoma) (3.6%) (Lim, Rampal &

Halimah 2008). Munirah et al. (2011) found that 53.9% of the patients are over 50 years old and that most of them are Malays (59.0%). Therefore, it is appropriate for this article to focus on Malay Muslim women who should accordingly adopt spiritual practices as a step in treating their emotional and physical well-being. Spirituality is essentially interwoven with religious thoughts and activities (Cheraghi MA. et al. 2005).

The feeling which some cancer patients are not able to hide is in facing numerous types of negative feelings. The patients have their own way of behaving or reacting when they know that they have cancer. However, some still find it difficult to accept the feelings of grief, anger, anxiety, fear and despair. Studies have found that cancer patients would feel embarrassed and inferior, to become socially and emotionally detached and withdrawn, sad and also depressed (Hasanah Che Ismail 2011). This causes their emotions to be unstable. Cancer patients also often face various psychological disorders due to the changes in their lives which include health problems, financial problems or the problem in getting the support from their immediate family members (Mohd. Rushdan Md Noor 2008.). Cancer patients do not only face an illness that involves their physical being, but they also have to deal with psychological pressure, which therefore requires for the spiritual aspect in treating themselves towards their well-being (Sankhe 2017). Some cancer patients on the other hand, would accept their condition positively, such as by showing patience, fortitude, calmness and emotional strength. For Muslim patients who have faith in the religion, cancer is accepted as a type of health test or challenge in their lives. They have faith in *qada'* and *qadar*, which means the divine decree and predestination of Allah, they try to seek for treatment for their disease and they also place their trust in Allah for their recovery after going for the treatments. When a patient believes in God's mercy and in the goodness of the ordeals as being stipulated or determined by Him, he will thus feel that Allah the Almighty is indeed most fair (Hasanah Che Ismail 2011). The patients are convinced that there are wisdom and goodness behind the health challenge and will strive to treat the disease in a modern way at the hospital by meeting specialist doctors, and by meeting counsellors for counseling, and a number of patients would also resort to spiritual practices such as performing prayers, making supplications, giving out charity, reciting the Quran, performing qiamullail and others in treating their restless souls.

The purpose of adopting the spiritual practices is to restore their emotions, to stabilise their mental as well as physical health, to strengthen their spirituality by engaging in the worship of Allah the Almighty, and to continue with their daily activities. Some of the patients believe that their cancer will be healed by adopting positive values, which include the practise of spiritual practices. According to Abdul Rahman Mahmood (2017), spirituality according to Islam is the purification of the soul. Spiritual practices on the other hand, is the activities performed by a Muslim based on the practices as commanded by Allah SWT in the Qur'an, and also according to the practices performed by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Abdul Rahman Mahmood (2017) stated that spiritual practices are physical practices which are prescribed as part of the religious rules, such as compulsory and voluntary prayers whereby these practices help to strengthen and enhance the spiritual well-being of an individual. This will therefore make a patient to be consistent in looking after his manners and etiquette as a Muslim. Spiritual practices that are in line with Islamic law provide many health benefits in Muslim life, by helping to stabilise the emotions and feelings of female cancer patients. Only quality prayers can help a person to attain peace in his life (Salasiah Hanin Hamjah 2016). Many cancer patients, goaded by the ambiguity of their future, rely on religious beliefs – as a power and hope source – and can cope with their fear and loneliness during their illness (Surbone 2009).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is quantitative based on the design of a survey study. The collection of research data among 20 respondents was made based on the questionnaires distributed at the National Cancer Society Malaysia Kuala Lumpur. The study sample was selected using the simple random method. The data obtained were descriptively analysed based on frequency, percentage and mean. The Alpha Cronbach item for the cancer patients' spiritual practices is high, which is 0.96. The respondents' background in terms of the highest age range is between 51 to 60 years old, with 13 individuals. A total of 13 respondents are married, 3 are still single, 2 are divorced while another 2 are widowed. The highest type of cancer experienced by the respondents is breast cancer with a total of 14 respondents, followed by 2 with ovarian cancer, another 2 with colorectal or colon

cancer and the remaining 2 are with other types of cancer. A total of 19 respondents (95%) are first-time cancer patients while only one (5%) respondent is a recurrent cancer patient.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Previous researchers have mostly paid close attention to cancer-related studies such as the causes of cancer, the emotional well-being of cancer patients, and also the prevention and treatment of the disease from the perspective of modern medicine. Table number 1 shows an analyses spiritual practices which are among the most important aspects for Muslim cancer patients in helping to ward off their negative emotions, apart from providing them with the encouragement, determination and motivation in continuing to live well with other people.

Table 1 shows the results of the study on the cancer patients' spiritual practices. The type of spiritual practice adopted by the respondents with the highest score is to give out charity with the purpose of cleansing their possessions and increasing their

livelihood with 20 respondents (mean = 3.81). The act of charity leads to Allah's blessings on a person's possessions, and thus helps to increase Allah's bounty in his livelihood. This is supported by the findings of the study whereby charity does not only free oneself from hell but is also a factor in overcoming fear and sadness, and in attaining peace in life (Zaharuddin 2014).

Another type of spiritual practice adopted by the respondents is by making supplications to Allah for His love and blessings, and also for His forgiveness, as well as making supplications so that He would grant them the feeling that His help is near. Both practices show the highest mean of 3.81 (mean = 3.81). This shows that their hopefulness in gaining the mercy of Allah SWT is very high. Supplications that are repeatedly performed can have a strong effect on the healing of a disease (Iskandar 2015). Supplication is also one of the spiritual sources which requires patience and individual confidence in asking for something from Allah the Almighty.

The respondents also recite the Quran and its translation in order to provide peace for their souls

TABLE 1. Spiritual practices of cancer patients

No	Item of Spiritual Practice	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I recite the Quran in order to provide peace to my soul.	0 0.0	0 0.0	5 25.0	15 75.0	3.69	.479
2	I perform the <i>zikr</i> in remembering Allah.	0 0.0	0 0.0	4 20.0	16 80.0	3.75	.447
3	I perform the obligatory prayers 5 times a day to strengthen my faith.	0 0.0	1 5.0	4 20.0	15 75.0	3.75	.447
4	I perform the non-obligatory (voluntary) prayers to increase my faith.	0 0.0	1 5.0	5 25.0	13 65.0	3.69	.479
5	I perform <i>qiamullail</i> to train myself to be devoted in worshipping Allah.	0 0.0	4 20.0	8 40.0	8 40.0	3.31	.704
6	I read the translation of the Quran for peace of mind.	0 0.0	1 5.0	5 25.0	14 70.0	3.75	.447
7	I recite religious verses (<i>istighfar</i>) to seek for Allah's forgiveness in order to reduce the feeling of pain.	0 0.0	0 0.0	6 30.0	14 70.0	3.63	.500
8	I perform self-reflection in improving my life in order to become a better person.	0 0.0	0 0.0	5 25.0	15 75.0	3.75	.447
9	I give out charity to cleanse my property and increase Allah's bounty of my livelihood.	0 0.0	0 0.0	4 20.0	16 80.0	3.81	.403
10	I perform non-obligatory (voluntary) fasting to inculcate self-perseverance in facing the trials in life.	0 0.0	3 15.0	6 30.0	11 55.0	3.50	.632
11	I ask for Allah's forgiveness and pardon and His love and blessings.	0 0.0	0 15.0	3 85.0	17	3.81	.403
12	I make supplications to help me feel that Allah's help is near.	0 0.0	0 0.0	3 15.0	17 85.0	3.81	.403

Source: 2017 Questionnaire

(mean = 3.69) and to attain peace of mind (mean = 3.75). Apart from that, the recitation of the Quran and its translation help to control the patients' emotions so that they will not become depressed and will remain calm in any circumstance (Lokman 2013). This is in accordance with the findings of the study where the cancer patients concur that reciting the Quran and its translation give them peace of mind.

Besides that, cancer patients also make *zikr*, which is the remembrance of Allah either silently or verbally, as a continuous spiritual practice as an intermediary to continue remembering Allah SWT in their lives, where the mean for this aspect is 3.75. *Zikr* is a method which has positive effect on the human soul by bringing oneself back to Allah the Almighty in every thing that the person does (Mohd. Saiful & Siti Aisyah 2014).

Apart from that, the respondents also perform the obligatory prayer five times a day to strengthen their faith (mean = 3.75). This shows that the cancer patients ensure that the feeling of servitude and obedience towards Allah is always maintained by constantly observing their faith and belief in Him. The prayers performed by an individual is a sign of his gratitude towards the countless bounty of Allah SWT. Some of the benefits of praying for a patient is that it can help in the treatment of physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses, hence developing the immune system in fighting against the illnesses. The results of the study show that the bio-therapy done through the method of praying performed by patients, including the cancer patients, improves their level of health.

The respondents would also perform self-reflection in improving their lives so that they would become better people (mean = 3.75). Self-reflection is crucial to be performed by cancer patients to ensure that they are always protected from vile actions that violate the Islamic law and regulations and to make them believe that they are always in the care and affection of Allah.

The respondents perform non-obligatory (voluntary) prayers to increase their faith (mean = 3.69). They also perform *qiamullail*, which is spending the night or part of it in performing acts of worship such as praying, reciting the Quran and remembering Allah (*zikr*), to persevere in performing the acts of worship (mean = 3.31). It is recommended for sick people to wake up at three-quarter of the night to perform *qiamullail* and perform the voluntary prayers such as *tahajjud* and *witir* as part of their physical and spiritual healing

process and in enhancing their immunity towards the disease (Noor Azura 2014). *Qiamullail* is able to draw a person closer to Allah the Almighty, eliminate sins and expel diseases from the body (Mahmudin Abdullah 2011).

The act of reciting religious verses (*istighfar*) to seek for Allah's forgiveness is performed by the respondents in order to reduce their suffering of pain (mean = 3.63). This action is done by asking for Allah's forgiveness for one's mistakes, done either towards Allah Himself or towards other human beings (Abdul Halim el-Muhammady 2008). Performing *istighfar* will alleviate the trials faced by the cancer patients.

Besides that, the respondents perform non-obligatory (voluntary) fasting to inculcate perseverance in facing the trials and tribulations in their lives (mean = 3.50). This shows that they are aware that fasting is a form of self-defence in training them to persevere in every trial and in preventing them from doing anything that could be harmful to themselves. Fasting can train people to develop a patient soul and to educate people to always be vigilant in their actions because of Allah SWT (Said Hawwa 2005).

The spiritual practices performed by the respondents are very useful in helping them to deal with chronic pain such as cancer. The fact is, spiritual practices are very important and are inseparable from the life of a Muslim. The adoption of spiritual practices can bring numerous benefits such as in treating the emotions of patients who are facing health problems by bringing them closer to the Creator and by placing total submission in Him with the hope for the best rewards from Allah SWT.

CONCLUSION

The lives of cancer patients who adopt spiritual practices are greatly benefited in the sense that they experience an enhanced life and increased emotional stability. The spiritual practices performed by the cancer patients refer to the commands of Allah in helping the patients to attain a peaceful life, to be strong and patient, to be free of worries and anger, and to not experience prolonged grief. Cancer patients who adopt spiritual practices in their lives would also bring themselves back to their Creator and accept the fact that the calamity which has befallen on them is one of the tests from Allah and is a sign of His love towards them. Spiritual practices have a beneficial effect on the lives of cancer patients

by helping to stabilise their emotions to be at a normal level. Besides that, the patients are able to live life as usual with the people around them. In conclusion, spiritual practices are inseparable from the lives of Muslims because they are required by humans in order to achieve the true meaning of well-being beside their God.

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- A'dawiyah Ismail
 Pusat Kesejahteraan Insan dan Komuniti
 Fakulti Pengajian Islam
 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
 43600 Bangi, Selangor.
 Malaysia
 ada@ukm.edu.my

