

Spiritual Elements in Counseling Process: Counselors' Perspective

Yusni Mohamad Yusop (Ph.D), Nur Diyanah Mohd Saleh, Dr
Wan Norhayati Wan Othman (Ph.D), & Dr Zaida Nor Zainudin
(Ph.D)

Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Educational Studies,
University Putra Malaysia
Email: yusni_my@upm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i3/19329>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i3/19329

Published Online: 29 September, 2023

Abstract

This study aims to identify the application of spiritual elements by counselors when conducting counseling sessions. The study sample consisted of 132 respondents who were counselors in one of the state under the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE). The study results show that the percentage of counselors who use spiritual elements is 84.4% while those who do not use spiritual elements in counseling sessions is 14.4%. The study also found that spiritual elements are widely used in the intervention and action phase compared to building relationships, exploration, identifying problems, and termination. A total of 91.8% of those who responded agreed to use spiritual elements in counseling sessions compared to 8.3% who did not agree to use them. The study also found that 90.1% of respondents thought that spiritual elements should be present in counseling sessions compared to 9.8% who stated that there was no need to use spiritual elements in counseling sessions. The study suggests that future studies gather views from counselors across Malaysia and identify significant relationships between spiritual elements and related variables in determining the effectiveness of counseling for clients.

Keywords: Spiritual, Spiritual Element, Counseling Process, Counselor, Counseling Phase

Introduction

In present world, people experienced a numbers of challenging events in life. This is due to the urbanization and modernization that are hitting almost everywhere, and the fact that modernization is associated with lifestyle changes that may put a strain on the populace (Latifah, 2016). Noh Amit and colleagues (2017) claim that psychological factors can influence how people perform on both a societal and an individual level. An individual's perspective on life and how to face and navigate it properly will also be impacted by this issue, in addition to their health. In order to have a better adjustment, individuals always searching the best approach that may support them better such as counseling, therapy or consulting with numerous techniques, include practice the spiritual elements.

Spirituality is usually associated with spirit and soul (Sapora & Ruhaya, 2012). Spiritual carries a deep meaning and is said to be something sacred in the soul. It is also associated with the search for purpose, meaning and value in life. However, Walsh (1998) states that spirituality is internal and perfect which can be linked to other events. In other words, spirituality is a summation of values, beliefs, experiences, directions and efforts towards something bigger and more meaningful than oneself. According to Blando (2006), the spiritual focus is the relationship with other people which involves three components, namely the relationship with someone, the feeling of loving and pitying others and the desire to contribute goodness to others. Spiritual can help individuals explore their sense of meaning and purpose in life, providing clarity and direction in their personal and spiritual growth. It addresses the whole person, taking into account their spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs, promoting a sense of holistic well-being. Since spiritual offers various benefits to individuals in seeking support and guidance thru their spiritual and emotional aspects, spiritual counseling can assist individuals in processing and healing emotional wounds, traumas, and unresolved issues by integrating spiritual practices and beliefs into the healing process (Goolam, 2021).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of spiritual counseling may vary depending on the client's needs, beliefs, and the skill and approach of the counselor. People seeking spiritual counseling may want to choose a qualified and experienced counselor who aligns with their spiritual beliefs and values. spiritual counseling can be complementary to other forms of counseling or therapy when addressing specific mental health issues or psychological challenges.

In counseling, spiritual elements are applied to rationalize the client based on pure values to form a more harmonious life. This is because the various issues that people face are caused not only by their external circumstances but also by their spiritual circumstances, particularly those concerning the heart and emotions. (Salasiah, 2010). An emphasis on spiritual aspects of counseling will help to resolve client issues. (Badri, 1997). Counseling from a spiritual perspective is usually related to religion. A religiously based counseling approach has a connection with spiritual elements in helping clients solve all of their problems.

Based on these considerations, applying spiritual elements is essential in coping with the challenge and era of modernization. Imam al-Ghazali believed that humans are integrated with the aspects of soul, spirit and physical body, which interact to make human life complete and ideal. Unbalanced of spiritual and physical conditions in humans will affect their lives (Mohd Nor Saper, 2019). The application of Islamic spiritual elements has a positive impact on helping relationships because, according to Dunkel (2011) and Masoumeh (2018), individuals' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions are examined in spiritual and religious counseling. The cognitive dimension seeks the client's meaning, concept, life purpose, and important values. Meanwhile, the emotional dimension addresses variables such as hope, interest, and support for the recovery process, whereas the behavioral dimension addresses religious beliefs. Early Muslim scholars, according to Malik Badri in his book "Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study," had already focused on internal cognitions through contemplation of God and His Creations, along with self-examination and reflection based on the Quran and Hadith, indicating that this was a powerful force towards transformation in mind and behavior. Turning to God during trials, then, may assist Muslim patients in finding meaning and purpose in hardship as a manifestation of God's love for them by imprinting these faith-centered beliefs and behavior (Sabki et.al, 2019).

Applying the spiritual practices not only can benefit individuals who have dilemmas, but also the one who search the peace, satisfaction and meaningful of life. Basically both counselors and clients can benefit the spiritual elements in counseling process. This writing is companionate another conception of applying spiritual elements in counseling. The article explores counselors' perspectives on the use of spiritual elements in counseling sessions, as a potential aid to clients who are struggling with various issues in contemporary life.

Research Objective

In general, this study aims to:

- a. Examine the counselor's agreement to include spiritual elements in the counseling session.
- b. Determine the number of counselors who have used spiritual elements in counseling sessions.
- c. Determine the stage at which spiritual elements are used in counseling sessions.
- d. Examine counselors' perspectives on the importance of incorporating spiritual elements into counseling sessions.

Research Questions

Below are research questions

- a. What is the significance of counselors' agreement to include spiritual elements in the counseling session?
- b. How many counselors have incorporated spiritual elements into their counseling sessions?
- c. In which stage of the counseling sessions is the use of spiritual elements used?
- d. What is the counselor's take on the significance of incorporating spiritual elements into counseling sessions?

Literature Review

Counseling is a profession that deals with welfare, growth, and assisting those who are less functioning in daily life. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA, 1997), the counseling profession is related to mental health, psychological and human development principles through cognitive, intervention, strategy, development and pathology. Referring to the Malaysian Counselor Act (1998), counseling is a systematic process in helping relationships based on psychological principles implemented by registered counselors according to the counseling ethics code to achieve holistic change, progress and adjustment. The counseling approach in Malaysia is based entirely on counseling practices from the United States. However, Muslim Malays make up the majority of the population of Malaysia. As a result, it was discovered that there are multicultural challenges in the Muslim community, particularly in relation to spiritual components such as practices and theories that are different from local values and culture involving matters of faith, social, laws and education in the Muslim community. In the context of Malaysia, several studies focus on the importance of Islam in counseling. Among them is the study of Dini Farhana, Zuria, Salleh, & Mohd Rushdan (2017). In their study, it was stated that counseling is a profession related to all aspects of individual development, including spiritual values and religious beliefs.

For most people, religion and spirituality are interchangeable to the point of being easily confused. The meaning of spirituality is a broad and elusive idea that depends on the worldview of the individual. In accordance with Oxhandler & Giardina (2018), spirituality is a

personal quest to discover one's connection to the divine or transcendent as well as the answers to life's fundamental questions of meaning and purpose. It may or may not be a result of the expansion of religious practices and the emergence of society.

The term Christian Counseling describes a variety of counseling practices. Christian counseling can be defined as secular psychotherapy with a theological bent. Nouthetic counseling bases all mental health solutions entirely on the Bible. But even until the 1990s, there was still a clear line between "Christian counseling" and "biblical counseling." Biblical counselors tended to avoid any use of contemporary psychological theory and some science, but Christian counselors integrated components of secular psychology that are consistent with a Christian perspective. The relationship between the two groups has improved over the past 10 years; biblical counselors now occasionally go and speak at conferences for Christian counselors and are much more accepting of psychopharmacological therapies for mental illnesses (Richard Mars, 2014).

Meanwhile, Islamic counseling, as defined by Khairunnas Rajab (2015), is the process of a counselor assisting individuals and groups by providing guidance and advice in order for the client to make their own choices to fulfill their goals. In the context of Islamic counseling, the client's decision should not contradict and should be based on Qur'anic teachings, hadith, and the prophet's sunnah scholarly consensus. Humans are weak and can make conscious and open decisions about themselves, but not outside of God's pleasure. Islamic counseling covers a broader range of issues related to a person's faith, such as aspects of divinity, the afterlife, sin, reward, hell, doomsday, and so on. This counseling method, according to Islamic teachings, is a fundamental practice that must be used in human relationships. The practice of giving advice and avoiding actions that contradict Islamic teachings is the foundation of Islamic education. Besides, according to H. Hamdani Bakar Adz-Dzaki, Islamic counseling is the activity of giving advice, lessons, and guidelines to people who ask for guidance (counselees) with regard to how a counselee should be able to nurture the potential of mind, psyche, his faith, and belief and be able to overcome challenges and live a life properly and appropriately independently with the paradigm of the Qur'an and As-Sunnah. Islamic guidance and counseling have a fundamental tenet that is based on Islamic teachings (Abdurrahman et.al, 2021).

Jewish Counseling is a counselor and psychotherapist who practices contemporary secular beliefs that are modified to suit the culture and religion of the Jewish client. Some Jewish counselors rely on Jewish history, including the holocaust, and anti-Semitism to help such clients understand traumatic experiences (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2012).

Additionally, Buddhist Counseling is a Buddhist therapy that tries to apply the teachings of Eastern Buddhism in sessions. This method and form of counseling are practiced on three pillars of training and thinking: attention, self-cultivation, and meditation. People typically only consider mindfulness practices when discussing Buddhist psychotherapy or counseling techniques. There are more counseling modalities found in Buddhism, such as instruction-based counseling, that can be used in contemporary psychotherapy. These modalities include progressive talk (*Anupubbikath*), special talk, and others. Instructions, recommendations, guidance, ideas, and other forms of therapy that are given to clients are examples of counseling through instruction (Ankaching Marma, 2012).

Studies on spiritual counseling or Islamic counseling in Malaysia are growing. Norazlina's (2015) study aims to identify the nature of current practice and the level of recognition of Islamic Counseling in Malaysia. This qualitative research uses data consisting of semi-structured interviews with 30 informants. The results show that the majority of Christian

counselors agree that Islamic counseling is recognized in Malaysia, while Muslim counselors stated that Islamic counseling is only recognized by the Muslim populace, but not by the government.

Salasiah Hanin (2012) conducted a study to determine the significance of using worship in counseling and the implications for clients. Survey research was used to collect data from clients in this study. The distribution of a set of questionnaires was made to 30 clients who were chosen using convenience sampling. The research questionnaire data was then analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Based on the study's findings, worship has four implications for clients, including the ability to control their conduct, find peace of mind, regulate their emotions, and become more devoted to worship.

In addition, a study on the validity and reliability of the I-Sc (Islamic Spiritual Counseling) Module on Students with Behavioral Problems was conducted by Md. Noor, Nurul Ain, and Norazani (2016). Based on the i-SC pilot study, the overall reliability value is well above the .60 level which is .927. The highest alpha value is .900 for self-identification activity and the lowest alpha value is .859 for life goal activity. The findings indicate that i-SC is valid and reliable that may be applied in interventions to strengthen students' religious values and resilience.

The research by Norazlina & Noor Shakirah (2016) also attempts to explore and clarify the nature of current Islamic counseling practices, including Islamic counseling theories and modules applied in Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews with 18 informants and texts culled from the literature make up the data for this qualitative study. The data were analyzed using grounded theory. The findings indicate that the majority of counselors have experience incorporating spirituality and Islamic concepts into conventional counseling sessions. Islamic principles, rituals, references, and interventions are all integrated into the session. Some people have also used Islamic theories and modules developed in Malaysia, including Asma Allah Al-Husna Counseling Therapy, i-CBT, the Prophet Counseling and Cognitive Ad-Deen.

Norazlina (2017) also carried out a qualitative study using the Grounded Theory methodology in the use of the terms spiritual counseling and Islamic counseling. Semi-structured interviews with respondents on Peninsular Malaysia's West Coast were used to collect data. The results of the study show that there are some disagreements among the respondents regarding the term's usage, but most of them do not object to using the term.

Norazlina & Noor Shakirah (2017) presented a concept paper that examines the main principles of the Islamic faith (aqīdah) related to counseling. The Islamic creed has been regarded as the foundation of the Islamic religion. Therefore, it should be a basic composition in Islamic counseling. The results of the literature review have suggested a method to include Islamic beliefs in the three levels of the counseling process. The main references for this survey are verses in the Qur'an, Al-Hadith and Ijma Ulama'. According to the results of this survey, there is a significant link between counseling and the Islamic faith, and there are six aspects of the Islamic faith related to counseling that Islamic counseling practitioners should adhere to.

The study conducted by Zakaria & Mat Akhir (2017) aims to clarify the nature of current Islamic counseling practices, including Islamic counseling theories and modules used in Malaysia. This qualitative research depends mostly on information from the literature and semi-structured interviews with 18 informants. This study is based on *Grounded Theory*. Findings show that most Malaysian counselors have applied the conventional counseling theory integrated using ritual, reference, intervention and Islamic ethics. Some also apply Islamic theories and modules formulated in Malaysia, such as Cognitive ad-Deen, i-CBT

(Islamic CBT), Prophetic Counseling, al-Ghazali Counseling Theory, and Asma Allah al-Husna Counseling Therapy. The study also discovered that the application of worship is crucial in counseling sessions because it can have four positive effects on the client, namely: (a) behavior control; (b) peace of mind; (c) emotional control; and (d) increased worship diligence. These four implications have the power to change and educate the client's inner self, enabling them to function more effectively.

Suhaya (2017) carried out a descriptive and inferential quantitative study to review the need for spiritual counseling. The study involved 100 respondents using the Client Attitudes Towards Spirituality in Therapy (CAST) questionnaire. Based on the study's findings, the respondents had a significant demand for spiritual counseling services. According to demographic criteria, such as gender, education level, and age, the study also showed no significant differences in the community's perception of the need for spiritual counseling services. According to the race factor researched, there are considerable variances in how the community perceives the need for spiritual counseling services. In general, this study exposes to the community that spiritual or spiritual issues in counseling are a necessity that must be addressed so that the counseling services provided meet human needs and effectively overcome the client's problems in order to achieve well-being.

In a variety of ways, studies on spiritual counseling are also frequently conducted on a global scale. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, more studies have been conducted on the relationship between religion and mental health (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Young et al., 2002). Numerous publications on how religion can enhance one's physical and mental health provide evidence for this, such as the American Journal of Public Health, the American Journal of Psychiatry, the Journal of the American Medical Association, the Journal of Gerontology, the Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine, (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Cornish, 2010; Young et al., 2002) and the Journal of Psychology and Theology and the journal Counseling and Values (Worthington, Kurusu, McCullough, & Sandage, 1996). This is in accordance with Rassool's (2021) opinion that spiritual unification improves both physical and mental health.

Despite prior studies, researchers contend that they may create a holistic model of counseling by incorporating religious principles (Tisdale, 2002; Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006; Myers & Williard, 2003). Rigved (2014) conducted a pilot study to evaluate the effect of spiritual counseling on the quality of life of patients with heart failure. Patients are advised to follow "religious" or "non-religious" counseling services. Patients should also comply with the counseling session procedures that have been set based on their respective choices according to QoL standards. During the patient's stay in the hospital, a volunteer visits them daily or every two days. All patients completed questionnaires at the beginning, at 2 weeks, and 3 months. The integration of spiritual counseling in standard medical management for patients with chronic heart disease has been found to have a positive effect on QoL.

An article by Samuel & Jamie (2014) explores the obstacles for counselors in applying religious and spiritual values effectively in counseling. They discovered that positive methods for dealing with issues related to religion and spirituality in counseling include three important components: knowledge and comprehension of the counselor on religious values, ability of the counselor to increase self-awareness with spiritual knowledge and develop new counseling skills in the spiritual counseling session.

Furthermore, Ryan & Stephen (2017) reviewed the writing entitled *Intersection of Spiritual and Social-Emotional Development in Children and Adolescents We review the work of Fowler* in 1981 and Greenspan in 1981, 1992 and 1998. This review aims to provide a more

comprehensive understanding of children's and adolescents' holistic development needs. When conceptualizing, planning, and implementing treatment, Ryan and Stephen opine that counselors should focus on the emotional, spiritual, and functional development of individuals.

Miles Matise, Jeffery Ratcliff, and Flavia Mosci (2017) investigated how spiritual models can be integrated into spiritual counseling. The study's findings indicate that the spiritual model's validity and reliability are high. Furthermore, a qualitative study by Ann M. Callahan & Kalea Benner (2018) aimed to examine the experiences of 37 undergraduate students in an online spirituality course. The study's findings show that students are becoming more sensitive to the diversity of spiritual approaches. The study also revealed that a variety of spiritual approaches is required to improve the efficiency of spiritual counseling sessions.

Meanwhile, Rosalyn & Tenesha (2018) perform a spiritual role in helping relationships in the church. The study's findings indicate that the "Black Church" not only has a role and responsibility in meeting the mental health needs of African Americans both inside and outside the church, but it can also use religious elements as facilitators rather than barriers in providing mental health services and treatment to African Americans.

In conclusion, spiritual studies are not something new in the world of research. The study of spiritual counseling in some religious and spiritual beliefs has received the attention of counselors, and it has even been implemented in their counseling sessions. The effect of practicing spiritual counseling at the global level shows a positive finding where a spiritual approach can assist clients with a variety of issues. Malaysia is not far behind in terms of the development of Islamic counseling. According to a review of the literature, some Muslim counselors have used Islamic religious values in their counseling sessions in addition to identifying the terms Islamic and spiritual counseling. The literature review also discovered that counselors made efforts to develop an Islamic Counseling model and conducted some research to adapt conventional counseling methods with basic Islamic knowledge to be adapted as Islamic counseling. This study examines counselors' perspectives on the practice of Islamic counseling in educational settings.

Research Methodology

The research was descriptive in nature, with a quantitative approach employing the distribution of questionnaires. Counselors from the Selangor State Education Department were among those who took part in the study. The study included 200 counselors. According to Krichie and Morgan's table for determining the total sample size (2010) 132 respondents were sufficient for this study. The questionnaire was distributed via *Google.doc* to all counselors on duty. The questionnaire received responses from 132 people. This figure fills the survey respondent table proposed by Krichie and Morgan. The researcher created the questionnaire used in this study because the existing questionnaire could not measure the objectives of this study. The collected data were descriptively analyzed using SPSS Version 22 software.

Research Findings and Discussion

The general findings of the study will present the demographic information of the respondents from the aspect of their experience working as counselors and their religious beliefs.

This study involved 132 counselors under the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) in the State of Selangor. Based on Table 1, a total of 7 (5%) have experience working as a full-time

counselor for 0-3 years, a total of 4 (3%) have an experience of 3-5 years, then a total of 8 (6%) have an experience of 5-7 years, a total of 17 (13%) have experience for 7-10 years while a total of 96 (73%) have experience for more than 10 years. The demographic information of the respondents is as in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent Demographic Information

Demographics	Number N	Respondents (n= 132) %
Experience working as a full-time counselor		
0-3 years	7	5
3-5 years	4	3
5-7 years	8	6
7-10 years	17	13
More than 10 years	96	73
Religion		
Islam	110	83
Christian	3	2
Hindu	11	8
Buddha	8	6
Others	0	0

As for the religious background, a total of 110 (83%) were Muslim, and 3 (2%) were Christian. Meanwhile, there were 11 (8%) Hindu respondents, followed by 8 (6%) Buddhist respondents.

Research Question 1: What is the significance of counselors' agreement to include spiritual elements in the counseling session?

Based on Table 2, The number of counselors who agree with the use of spiritual/religious elements in counseling sessions is as high as 117 (89%) have used spiritual/religious elements in counseling sessions, while 15 (11%) disagree.

Table 2

Counselors' Consent to Use Spiritual Elements in Counseling Sessions

Answer	Number N	Respondents (n= 132) %
Yes	117	89
No	15	11
Not giving response to this question		

This demonstrates that the majority of counselors agree that spiritual or religious values should be used in counseling sessions.

Question 2: How many counselors have incorporated spiritual elements into their counseling sessions?

Only respondents who had used religious values in their counseling sessions answered the second and subsequent questions. Table 3 shows how many counselors have already used spiritual or religious values in their counseling sessions. 116 people responded to this statement. A total of 100 (88%) counselors have applied religious values in their counseling sessions. While 16 counselors (12%) have not yet used a spiritual or religious approach in the counseling session.

Table 3

The number of counselors who have used spiritual elements in counseling sessions

Responses	Number N	Respondents (n=132) %
Yes	116	88
No	16	12

This data shows that the majority of counselors have applied spiritual values or religious elements in counseling sessions to help their clients.

Research Question 3: In which stage of the counseling sessions is the use of spiritual elements used?

Based on Table 3, the respondents stated at which stage they tend to use spiritual elements in the counseling sessions conducted. Through this item, respondents are allowed to mark more than one answer option according to their practice in the conducted counseling sessions. For the stage of building relationships, 18 (15.5%) have used spiritual/religious elements. As for the exploration stage, a total of 25 (21.6%) have used spiritual/religious elements, followed by a total of 30 (25.9%) who have used spiritual/religious elements at the stage of problem identification. Next, for the intervention and action stage, a total of 100 (86.2%) have used spiritual/religious elements in counseling sessions while a total of 49 (42.2%) have used spiritual/religious elements at the termination stage.

Table 4

Phases of Application of Spiritual/Religious Values in Counseling Sessions Conducted

Stages	Number N	Respondents (n= 116) %
Relationship building	18	15.5
Exploration	25	21.6
Problem identification	30	25.9
Intervention and action	100	86.2
Termination	49	42.2

The study's findings indicate that the majority of counselors use spiritual elements to help clients in the intervention and implement action phases. Many counselors also use religious values in the termination phase and the problem identification phase.

Question 4: What is the counselor's take on the significance of incorporating spiritual elements into counseling sessions?

The table below shows, the number of counselors who stated the need for spiritual/religious elements when conducting counseling sessions. Out of 116 respondents, 116 respondents answered this statement. A total of 103 (89%) answered yes, while a total of 13 (11%) answered no.

Responses	Number N	Respondents (n=116) %
Yes	103	89
No	13	11

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, descriptive data analysis was used to answer the research questions. The first research question is to identify the consent of the counselor to use spiritual/religious elements in the counseling session; the majority of respondents agree if the counseling session is conducted using religious values or spiritual values. This is consistent with the results of Norazlina's (2015) study that the majority of counselors in Malaysia who are Muslim and Christian do not object if the counselor intends to apply religious values in counseling sessions.

The second question has identified that the majority of counselors have already used spiritual and religious elements in their counseling sessions. The findings of this study also do not differ from the study of Rigved (2014), who has applied and evaluated the effects of spiritual use in counseling sessions. A review of Jeffery Ratcliff & Flavia Mosci (2017); Ann M. Callahan & Kalea Benner (2018); Rosalyn & Tenesha (2018) have shown that there are counselors in different settings who have applied spiritual counseling in their counseling

sessions. Studies from Zakaria & Mat Akhir (2017); Norazlina & Noor Shakirah (2016, 2017) also coincide with the results of this study, indicating that many counselors have used Islamic values in their counseling with varying approaches while adhering to the correct counseling implementation process and procedure. Even the study of Md Noor, Nurul Ain & Norazani (2016) has highlighted an Islamic counseling model that has a high validity value to be implemented in counseling sessions. This is because Islamic aspects can influence almost every facet of daily life, including eating habits, daily activities, social relationships, education, health care and many more. If this were not taken into account, some people would become alienated because they might be concerned that their belief system wouldn't be reflected or even understood (Chucci, 2022).

The third research question found that the application of religious values in counseling sessions is in a different stage. This depends on the stage that is seen as appropriate to apply religious values in helping the client. Suhaya et al. (2017) discovered that changes in counseling sessions entail ongoing process development. The counseling process will also go through several stages that include the counselor's experience in exploring spiritual beliefs, the incorporation of psychological experiences, internal spiritual belief systems, and spiritual belief systems that influence psychotherapy practice. The results of the study by Suhaya et al. (2017) also support the use of spirituality as a method that can be used in counseling sessions by including techniques, strategies and intervention methods related to religious practices in the counseling process by using existing counseling theories..

Based on the fourth research question, the majority of respondents think that spiritual or religious elements should be used when conducting counseling sessions. According to Ryan and Stephen (2017) and Ann M. Callahan and Kalea Benner (2018), the use of spiritual or religious values in counseling sessions is necessary to increase the effectiveness of counseling by meeting the client's current needs and wants. The findings of Salasiah Hanim's study (2015); Md Noor, Nurul Ain & Norazani (2016): and Norazlina & Noor Shakirah (2017) also demonstrated the importance of using religious elements by following specific methods such as applying elements of worship, elements of belief, and systematically as in the proposed Islamic counseling model and the goal of Islamic counselling is not only to heal illness and distress, but also to raise awareness of Allah, increase closeness and deepen relationships with Allah, discover and develop human potential, and strengthen our confidence in Allah (Yusoff et.al, 2020).

Finally, this study revealed that counselors employed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education agree and are willing to incorporate spiritual and religious values into counseling sessions. Some have even used religious and spiritual values in counseling sessions with clients. They have used religious elements at various stages depending on the suitability of the session and the client's needs. The findings of this study do not contradict previous research.

Spiritual counseling assists individuals in aligning their actions with their values and ethical principles, promoting a more authentic and purposeful life too. In fact, spiritual also offers comfort and guidance to individuals experiencing grief and loss, helping them find solace and meaning in their spiritual beliefs. Spiritual counseling often helps individuals cultivate inner peace and a sense of spiritual connectedness, which can contribute to overall well-being. It provides a safe and non-judgmental environment for individuals to explore their beliefs, values, and questions related to spirituality. In fact, spiritual can assist individuals in preparing for the end of life by addressing spiritual concerns, providing comfort, and facilitating a peaceful transition.

Recommendations/ Conclusions

Based on the study's findings, some recommendations can be made to future researchers who wish to conduct research in the same area. The study's focus is solely on MoE counselors in Malaysia. The future study may be able to broaden its scope so that the overall data of spiritual/religious counselors are more comprehensive. Furthermore, the findings of the study can be used as a guide and reference that the application of spiritual/religious elements can help counselors handle counseling sessions effectively. This research can also be conducted with a focus on current issues, such as financial issues, family issues, social issues, and so on, to determine how counselors use spiritual/religious elements in conducting counseling sessions related to these issues.

In conclusion, the study met the objectives and research questions. The findings obtained can be used to convince certain parties to conduct counseling sessions implementing spiritual or religious elements. Integration of Islamic beliefs is a valid alternative that should be seriously addressed, particularly when treating Muslims. As previously stated, the spiritual element is only limited to being used primarily in the conduct of counseling sessions because it is a sensitive element, particularly in Malaysia. In multiracial and multinational societies, the integration of Islamic aspects in counseling depends on the skills and abilities of the counselor along with upholding the principles specified by professional organizations.

References

- Abdurrahman, S., Saragi M, P, D, Zahra R, and Yoserizal. (2021). Exploration Of The Implementation Of Islamic Guidance And Counseling Services At Darul Mursyid Modern Islamic Boarding School In South Tapanuli, Indonesia. *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO)*, 11(5), 4418-4426. Doi: 10.48047/rigeo.11.05.320.
- ACA. (2014). Code of ethics. American Counselling Association. American Counselling Association.
- Akta, K. (1998). Akta 580, Undang-undang Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur. PNMB.
- Ann, M. Callahan & Kalea, B. (2018). Building spiritual sensitivity through an online spirituality course.
- Blando, J. (2006). Spirituality, religion and counseling. *Counseling and Human Development* 39(2):1-14.
- Cornish, M. A. (2010). The integration of religion and spirituality in group therapy: Practitioner's perceptions and practices by Iowa State University.
- Cucchi, A. (2022). Integrating cognitive behavioral and Islamic principles in psychology and psychotherapy: a narrative review. *Journal of religion and health*, 61(6), 4849-4870.
- Ellison, C. G. & Levin, J. S. (1998). The Religion-Health Connection: Evidence, Theory and Future Directions. *Health Education {7} Behavior*, 25(6), 700-720. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819802500603>
- Ginsberg, F., & Sinacore, A. L. (2013). Counseling Jewish women: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 91(2), 131-139.
- Goolam, H. R. (2021). Re-Examining the Anatomy of Islamic Psychotherapy and Counselling: Envisioned and Enacted Practices. *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal*, <https://journal.iaimnumetrolampung.ac.id/index.php.igcj>
- Hage, S. M., Hopson, A., Siegel, M., Payton, G., & Defanti, E. (2006). Multicultural Training in Spirituality: An Interdisciplinary Review. *Counseling and Values*, 50 (3), 217. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2006.tb00058.x>

- Haghighat, M., Mirghafourvand, M., Mohammad-Alizadeh-Charandabi, S., Malakouti, J., & Erfani, M. (2018). The effect of spiritual counseling on stress and anxiety in pregnancy: A randomized controlled clinical trial. *Iran Red Crescent Med J*, 20(4), e64094.
- Ibrahim N, Amit N, Che Din N, Ong HC. Gender differences and psychological factors associated with suicidal ideation among youth in Malaysia. *Psychol Res Behav Manag*. 2017 Apr 28;10:129-135. doi: 10.2147/PRBM.S125176. PMID: 28496374; PMCID: PMC5417667.
- Incorporating Islamic Creed into Islamic Counselling Process (2017): A Guideline to Counsellors. *Journal of Religion and Health* November.
- Islamiyyat 39 (1) 2017:57-65 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2017-3901-07>)
- Khairunnas Rajab. (2015). Nilai-nilai Holistik dalam Kaunseling Islam. *Jurnal Afkar*, 17, 25–50.
- Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia. (2011). *Kod Etika Kaunselor Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia*. KodEtika Kaunselor Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia (1). Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Lembaga Kaunselor.
- Marrs, Richard (2014) "Christian Counseling The Past Generation and the State of the Field," *Concordia Journal*: Vol. 40: No. 1, Article 4.
- Md. Noor Saper, Nurul Ain Mohd Daud & Norazani Ahmad. (2016). Kesahan dan kebolehppercayaan Modul I-Sc (Islamic Spiritual Counselling). *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 9 (June): 32-43. doi:10.24035/ijit.9.2016.004. Retrieved: 16 July 2019.
- Miles Matise, Jeffery Ratcliff., Flavia Mosci. (2017). A working Model for the Integration of Spirituality in Counselling.
- Norazlina Zakaria's.(2015).The Recognition Of Islamic Counseling: The Perception Of Muslim & Christian Counselors In Malaysia. Conference: 2nd National Conference On Islamic Psychology.
- Norazlina, Z., & Noor Shakirah, M. A. (2016). Theories and Modules Applied in Islamic Counseling Practices in Malaysia. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 56(2), 507–520. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-016-0246-3>
- Oxhandler, K. H., & Giardina, D. T. (2018). Social workers' perceived barriers to and sources of support for integrating clients' religion and spirituality in practice.*Social Work*,62(4).doi:101093/sw/swx036.
- Rassool, G. H. (2021). Re-examining the anatomy of Islamic psychotherapy and counselling: Envisioned and enacted practices. *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal*, 4(2), 133-143.
- Rosalyn Denise Campbell &Tenesha Littleton (2018). Mental health counseling in the Black American Church: reflections and recommendations from counselors serving in a counseling ministry.
- Ryan D. Foster., Stephen A. Armstrong. (2017) Md. Noor Saper, Nurul Ain Mohd Daud., Norazani Ahamd. (2016) Kesahan dan Kebolehppercayaan Modul I-Sc (Islamic Spiritual Counseling) ke atas Pelajar Bermasalah Tingkah Laku.
- Sabki, Z. A., Sa'ari, C. Z., Muhsin, S. B. S., Kheng, G. L., Sulaiman, A. H., & Koenig, H. G. (2019). Islamic integrated cognitive behavior therapy: a shari'ah-compliant intervention for muslims with depression. *Malaysian Journal of Psychiatry*, 28(1), 29-38.
- Samuel T. Gladding &Jamie E. Crockett. (2014). Rigved Tadwalkar, Dioma U. Udeoji, Rabbi Jason Weiner, Father Lester Avestruz, Denise LaChance, Anita, Phan, David Nguyen, Parag Bharadwaj & Ernst R. Schwarz. (2014). The Beneficial Role of Spiritual Counseling in Heart Failure Patients.Religious and spiritual issues in counseling and therapy: Overcoming clinical barriers. Published online: 29 May 2018.

- Salasiah Hanin Hamjah (2010). Bimbingan spiritual menurut al-Ghazali dan hubungannya dengan keberkesanan kaunseling: Satu kajian di Pusat Kaunseling Majlis Agama Islam Negeri Sembilan (PK MAINS). *Islamiyyat: Jurnal Antarabangsa Pengajian Islam* 32: 41-61.
- Tisdale, T. (2002). Three voices, one song: A psychologist, spiritual director, and pastoral counselor share perspectives on providing care. *Journal of Psychology*, 31(1), 52–68.
- Walsh, F. (1998). Beliefs, spirituality, and transcendence: Keys to family resilience. Dlm. *Re-visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practise*, disunting oleh McGoldrick, M., 62-89. New York. Guilford.
- Yusoff, S. N. A. M., Raudhah, A., Zulkifli, N. A., & Azmi, L. (2020). Bridging science and religion—treatment of depressed Muslim patients using Islamic Integrated Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. *Malaysian Journal of Science Health & Technology*, 6.
- Young, J. S., Cashwell, C., Wiggins-Frame, M., & Belaire, C. (2002). Spiritual and Religious Competencies: A National Survey of CACREP Accredited Program. *Counselling and Values*, 47, 22–33.
- Zakaria, N., & Akhir, N. S. M. (2016). Redefining Islamic counseling according to the perspective of Malaysian Muslim counselors. *Advanced Science Letters*, 22(9), 2215-2219.
- Zakaria, N., & Mat Akhir, N. S. (2017). Theories and modules applied in Islamic counseling practices in Malaysia. *Journal of religion and health*, 56(2), 507-520.