

Stress Management within the Context of Heritage and Islamic Civilization: An Overview of Prayer as a Coping Strategy

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Abstract

This study examines the Islamic concept of prayer as a coping strategy and its role in alleviating stress and anxiety during periods of crisis among Muslims. It highlights how prayer and related religious practices support the psychological well-being of Muslim employees, particularly in demanding work environments. The research analyses a range of religious coping strategies commonly adopted by Muslims to manage stress and emotional distress. In addition, it reviews existing literature on religiosity and well-being within the Muslim context, emphasizing the spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions of these practices. The study also draws attention to the growing Muslim population in contemporary societies, suggesting an increasing need for culturally and religiously sensitive approaches to employee well-being and mental health support.

Keywords: Stress management, Prayer, Coping strategy, Mental health

Introduction

Stress is generally defined as a feeling of strain and pressure. Stressful situations are inevitable and form a natural part of human life. In small amounts, stress can be anticipated, beneficial, and even healthy. For instance, certain levels of stress can enhance athletic performance and play a role in motivation, adaptation, and responsiveness to daily life demands. However, excessive stress can have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health. It can increase the risk of strokes, heart attacks, ulcers, growth disorders, and mental illnesses such as depression.¹ Stress may originate from external environmental factors, but it can also arise from internal perceptions. These internal triggers can lead individuals to experience anxiety and other negative emotions, such as pressure, discomfort, or fear, which are commonly perceived as stressful conditions.²

To address stress and anxiety, many people are actively exploring effective ways to manage these feelings. There is a wealth of research and literature that investigates various stress management strategies, including insights from the Islamic perspective. For Muslims, embracing religious practices can serve as a valuable and central coping mechanism, offering support and guidance in navigating challenging times. Studies such as those by Achour et al. emphasise the importance of religious practices, particularly prayer and trust in God, as effective buffers against stress and

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¹ Robert M. Sapolsky, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: The Acclaimed Guide to Stress, Stress-Related Diseases, and Coping* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004).

² Fiona Jones, Jim Bright, and Angela Clow, *Stress: Myth, Theory and Research* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001).

promoters of emotional resilience.³ In a professional environment, the application of general Islamic coping principles assumes a significant role, particularly for Muslim employees who must navigate the demands of workplace pressures alongside their familial obligations.

The Role of Religious Faith in Coping with Job-Related Stress

This article aims to clarify the influence of prayer on Muslim employees' coping with job-related stress from an Islamic perspective. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Murtadho et al. found that Muslim patients used prayer and Islamic counselling to manage anxiety, highlighting the adaptability of religious practices in times of crisis.⁴

A study by Achour involving Muslim female academicians at the University of Malaya found that participants used religiosity as a moderating factor to cope with conflicts and challenges arising from balancing work responsibilities and family roles.⁵ A study conducted by Hussin and Noor among married Malay nurses in government hospitals and public healthcare centres on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia found that higher levels of religious coping are positively associated with greater job satisfaction. This finding suggests that fostering religious coping mechanisms could potentially improve job satisfaction among healthcare professionals.⁶

Ellison also found that Muslim working women with strong religious faith reported higher life satisfaction, fewer adverse psychosocial effects from traumatic events, and lower levels of distress.⁷ More recent cross-cultural evidence using the Brief RCOPE confirms that religious coping—both positive and negative—has robust associations with mental-health outcomes across diverse populations.⁸ Furthermore, Folkman et al. identified religious activities, particularly prayer, as effective positive coping mechanisms that contribute to both problem-solving and personal growth.⁹

Recent empirical research underscores the growing body of evidence on how Islamic spirituality and coping mechanisms contribute to mental well-being. For example, Gani and Laher studied South African Muslims during the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrated that acceptance and religious coping—especially positive religious engagement—were the most commonly used strategies; moreover, these strategies significantly predicted better psychological well-being.¹⁰ In Morocco, Zarrouq et al. conducted an extensive web-based survey, which found that negative religious coping (e.g., spiritual struggle) was strongly associated with higher levels of anxiety and

³ Meguellati Achour et al., "Religiosity and Subjective Well-Being towards a Balanced Civilization: A Study among Muslim Older Adults in Malaysia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 14, no. 2 (2019): 153–65.

⁴ Ali Murtadho et al., "Religious Coping for COVID-19 Patients: Islamic Approaches," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 1 (2022): 31–42.

⁵ Meguellati Achour et al., "Measuring Religiosity and Its Effects on Personal Well-Being: A Case Study of Muslim Female Academicians in Malaysia," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54 (2015): 984–97.

⁶ Ruhny Hussin and Nomini Mohd Noor, "Work-Family Conflict, Coping, and Well-Being in Nurses," in *The Third International Research Colloquium: Research in Malaysia and Thailand*, (2007): 131–63.

⁷ Christopher G. Ellison, "Religious Involvement and Subjective Well-Being," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 32 (1991): 80–99.

⁸ N. Saunders and Z. Stephenson, "Reviewing the Use of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE) across Diverse Cultures and Populations," *Journal of Religion and Health* 63 (2024): 3926–41.

⁹ Susan Folkman et al., "Dynamics of a Stressful Encounter: Cognitive Appraisal, Coping, and Encounter Outcomes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50, no. 5 (1986): 992–1003.

¹⁰ Salma Gani and Sumaya Laher, "The Relationship between Coping and Well-Being among South African Muslims during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 18, no. 3 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.3576>

depression, while positive religious coping showed modest but significant protective effects.¹¹ Beyond coping styles, Zahir and Qoronfleh argue that traditional Islamic meditative practices—such as dhikr (remembrance of God) and Qur’an recitation—can be conceptualised as powerful psychotherapies, with promise for systematic integration into mental-health interventions.¹² Complementing these findings, a comprehensive review by Ellias et al. synthesises research on psychospiritual interventions (including faith-based and Islamic-informed modalities). It reports consistent improvements in anxiety, depression, and emotional resilience across culturally sensitive studies.¹³ Finally, Ibrahim provides a theological–empirical synthesis of how Islamic cognitive frameworks (e.g., tawhīd, forgiveness) and ritual practices (e.g., prayer, dhikr) are associated with reduced stress and improved emotional regulation, offering a culturally congruent foundation for integrative mental-health care.¹⁴

Islam, which means “peace,” has a rich tradition of spiritual guidance that offers various coping strategies, methods, and techniques deeply integrated with acts of worship and ethical practices. Achour et al. assert that Islamic observances—such as prayer, supplication, patience, trust in God, and recitation of the Qur’an—can help individuals overcome stress, depression, and anxiety. Their research suggests that these spiritual coping strategies offer therapeutic benefits by transforming positive religious beliefs into behaviours that are reinforced by deeply rooted emotional and spiritual convictions.¹⁵

The Holy Qur’an contains numerous verses illustrating how prominent historical figures endured hardships with patience (*sabr*). For example, when the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), upon him be peace, presented a blood-stained shirt to their father as false evidence of Yusuf’s death, Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob), upon him be peace, responded with the words: “Fa sabrun jamil” (“So patience is best”) (Qur’an 12:18).

Similarly, in another Qur’anic account, Maryam (Mary), upon her miraculous pregnancy, faced severe accusations of adultery. Despite the immense pressure, she remained steadfast and patient (Qur’an 19:26–29). Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad’s wife, Aishah, may Allah be pleased with her, demonstrated remarkable patience and resilience during the ordeal in which she was falsely accused of infidelity. This event is narrated in Sahih Muslim (Hadith no. 2377), highlighting her strength in the face of slander.

While often translated as “patience,” *sabr* in Islamic teachings encompasses much more—it includes self-control, perseverance, endurance, and a conscious effort to seek God’s pleasure through trials. From an Islamic perspective, life’s challenges are seen as valuable opportunities for spiritual growth, emotional development, and the cultivation of a strong personal character. Muslims believe that approaching adversity with faith and trust in God’s wisdom not only fosters

¹¹ Btissame Zarrouq et al., “An Investigation of the Association between Religious Coping, Fatigue, Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Morocco: A Web-Based Cross-Sectional Survey,” *BMC Psychiatry* 21, no. 264 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03271-6>.

¹² Farah R. Zahir and M. Walid Qoronfleh, “Traditional Islamic Spiritual Meditative Practices: Powerful Psychotherapies for Mental Wellbeing,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (2025): 1538865. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1538865>.

¹³ Mohd. Sobri Ellias et al., “Psychospiritual Interventions and Mental Health: A Recent Comprehensive Review,” *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication* 10, no. 41 (2025): 639–656. <https://doi.org/10.35631/IJLGC.1041041>.

¹⁴ H. M. Ibrahim, “Islamic Spirituality and Mental Well-Being: A Systematic Review of Theological Foundations and Empirical Evidence,” *IMAN Medical Journal* 11, no. 1 (2025). <https://nigerianjournalonline.org/index.php/IMJ/article/view/317>.

¹⁵ Achour et al., “Measuring Religiosity,” 984–97.

inner peace and self-assurance but also leads to divine rewards. This viewpoint encourages resilience and promotes a constructive mindset in the face of difficulties. As Achour et al. note, this belief strengthens emotional resilience and instils a sense of comfort in the face of adversity.¹⁶

These theological meanings of *sabr* are not only spiritually significant but also have clear psychological implications, laying the foundation for understanding how specific practices such as *zikr* contribute to emotional regulation and stress reduction. This concept is affirmed in many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), including the following: “No calamity befalls a Muslim but that Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn”.¹⁷ Building on the Qur’anic narratives of patience and trust in God, Islamic teachings also prescribe continuous remembrance of Allah (*zikr*) as a concrete spiritual technique through which believers experience this inner peace in their daily lives.

Zikr and Qur’anic Reflection as Spiritual Anchors

Another powerful solution offered by Islamic teachings for dealing with complex life challenges—such as stress, anxiety, and work-family conflict—is the practice of *zikrullah* (the remembrance of Allah). *Zikr* is a deeply virtuous and comprehensive spiritual practice. In the Qur’an, God says: “Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace” (Qur’an 13:28). This verse clearly indicates that inner tranquillity and emotional composure can be achieved through constant remembrance of Allah.

It is especially vital for Muslims to engage in *zikr* during times of emotional turmoil or distress. *Zikr* encompasses various forms of worship and reflection, including *tasbih* (glorifying God), *tahmid* (praising God), *tahlil* (declaring God’s oneness), *salat* (prayer), *duā* (supplication), recitation of the Holy Qur’an, and contemplation of the universe and God’s creation. This practice serves as a form of intimate communication between a human being and their Creator—One who hears all, knows all, and grants contentment to the heart. The Qur’an emphasises this again: “Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Truly, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (Qur’an 13:28). In another verse, Allah says: “So remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and do not deny Me” (Qur’an 2:152).

Spiritual invocation (*zikr*) is intended to draw the believer closer to God and to increase *barakah* (blessings) in their life. At its core, the Qur’anic message affirms that the remembrance of God nurtures inner peace and emotional stability. It cultivates a profound awareness of a higher power, reassuring believers that even the most difficult circumstances can be transformed through divine will and support.

Achour et al. emphasised that reflecting on the meanings of Qur’anic verses is one of the most effective forms of *zikr*. Muslims are encouraged to recite the Qur’an with understanding and humility, as it is regarded as a direct form of communication with God. This practice not only soothes the heart and mind but also provides spiritual clarity and comfort.¹⁸ Several contemporary studies have demonstrated the physiological and psychological benefits of listening to Qur’anic recitation. Research shows that it can help regulate heart rate, stabilise blood pressure, and reduce

¹⁶ Achour et al., “Measuring Religiosity,” 984–97.

¹⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari. The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Volume 7, Book 70, Hadith 544 (also referenced as Hadith 5640 in Dar-us-Salam numbering). Narrated by ‘Aisha: “No calamity befalls a Muslim but that Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it were the prick he receives from a thorn.” In-book reference: Book of Patients. Islamic texts online.

¹⁸ Achour et al., “Measuring Religiosity,” 984–97.

muscle tension, with positive effects reported across individuals of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. These findings are consistent with broader evidence that religious coping is associated with lower physiological stress markers, such as reduced cortisol levels.¹⁹

In a study by Achour et al. involving Muslim female academics in Malaysian higher education institutions, the findings revealed that regular engagement with the Qur'an—such as daily reading and efforts to understand its meanings—helped participants better cope with life's challenges. This practice also allowed them to achieve a healthier balance between work demands and family responsibilities, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being.²⁰

As previously mentioned in the Qur'an, the highest level of contentment and inner peace is achieved through the remembrance of God. The most noble and complete form of this remembrance is found in the performance of salat (ritual prayer). Prayer is a fundamental pillar of Islamic worship, ranking second among the Five Pillars of Islam. The Qur'an affirms the ultimate purpose of human existence in the verse: "I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me" (Qur'an 51:56). Therefore, prayer serves as a direct response to this divine command, representing an essential act of servitude to the Creator.

In Islam, prayer is expressed in two primary forms. The first is salat, a structured act of worship performed at specific times with particular physical and spiritual requirements. The second is du'ā (supplication), a more informal, spontaneous conversation with God that can be made at any time or place, with minimal conditions. A key prerequisite for salat is ritual purity, both of the worshipper and the place of prayer. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: "The key to Paradise is prayer, and the key to prayer is wudu (ablution)" (Musnad Ahmad). According to Ibn Rushd, the word wudu is derived from the Arabic root dhaa', meaning "light," symbolising spiritual purity. Ablution, therefore, is not merely a physical act, but a spiritual preparation for entering into a state of worship.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) further illustrated this concept with the analogy: "Your prayers are like a flowing river at your doorstep in which you wash yourself five times a day."²¹ This metaphor links prayer with regular physical and spiritual cleansing. As Kabbani explains, when a Muslim performs wudu with full awareness of its inner meaning, it becomes a means of washing away the burdens and distractions of worldly life, preparing the soul for sincere and focused devotion to God.²² Although zikr may be performed in various ways, the Islamic tradition regards salat as its most comprehensive and organised form, combining physical actions, verbal recitation, and deliberate intent.

The Healing Power of *Salat* (Prayer) and Supplication

Salat (ritual prayer) represents a direct, unmediated form of communication and remembrance between a Muslim and Allah (SWT). It is a sacred interaction, free of barriers, in which the worshipper engages in intimate dialogue with the Creator. By its very nature, prayer is a form of

¹⁹ A. M. Haney and S. P. Lane, "Religious Coping Is Differentially Associated with Physiological and Subjective Distress Indicators: Comparing Cortisol and Self-Report Patterns," *Behavioral Medicine* 50, no. 4 (2024): 312–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08964289.2023.2277926>.

²⁰ Achour et al., "Measuring Religiosity," 984–97.

²¹ Sahih al-Bukhari. The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari. Translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Volume 1, Book 10, Hadith 506 (also referenced as Sahih al-Bukhari 528 in traditional numbering),

²² Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *The Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition: Guidebook of Daily Practices and Devotions* (Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2016).

supplication and entreaty that demands the full conscious participation of the individual—mind, body, will, and soul. The one who prays enters into a direct connection with the divine, who hears every word and intention of the supplicant.

Due to its deeply spiritual and divine nature, salat has a significant effect in reducing stress. When a person engages in prayer with sincere focus and a detachment from worldly distractions, they symbolically and spiritually release the very elements that contribute to their stress. As a result, they enter a state of inner peace and divine tranquility.

Through salat, a Muslim bows in humility and submission before God, seeking His mercy and forgiveness. This act can free the believer from feelings of guilt and remorse that often arise from sin or moral shortcomings—emotions that commonly lead to psychological distress. As Ramadhan explains, this spiritual surrender through prayer can significantly alleviate states of stress and anxiety.²³

The Qur'an also links prayer to emotional resilience. In Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah commands: "O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer. Surely, Allah is with those who are patient" (Qur'an 2:153). Notably, this verse pairs *sabr* (patience) and *salat* (prayer) side by side, emphasising the essential role both play in coping with life's challenges. As salat is obligatory for all Muslims, this parallel suggests that *sabr* is equally critical in the spiritual life of a believer. Sadly, in today's fast-paced world, many Muslims experiencing stress tend to neglect prayer and, as a result, struggle with impatience and frustration in the face of life's trials. Reconnecting with these foundational practices can offer a powerful path toward emotional balance and spiritual well-being.

When performing salat (ritual prayer), the worshipper is required to fully concentrate and detach from external distractions in order to focus solely on the presence of the divine. This sacred practice serves as a continuous psychological and emotional catalyst, functioning as an effective form of therapy for stress. The impact of salat on emotional well-being is closely linked to the calm and composed state it demands. Through this ritual, the heart and mind are drawn into deep remembrance (*zikr*) of Allah, which has a direct and soothing effect on a person's emotional state.

Salat begins with *niyyah* (intention) in the heart, followed by purification (*wudu*), recitation, structured physical movements, and concludes with *duā* (supplication), through which the worshipper brings their needs, worries, and desires before Allah. Each component of the prayer centres around the remembrance of God, making salat a focused and time-bound act of spiritual mindfulness, as emphasised by Ayoub.²⁴

Empirical studies support this view. For instance, research by Jodi et al. demonstrates that prayer (*salat*) acts as a form of psychological therapy, reducing emotional stress and fostering calmness—even in high-stress environments such as prisons. While people often seek therapy and counselling from professionals, salat offers a unique form of comfort by allowing direct communication with the Almighty, whom believers regard as the ultimate healer and counsellor.²⁵

²³ Mabruk Bahiyyuddin Ramadhan, *Wasatiyyah al-Islam fi 'Ilaaj al-Dhuguut al-Nafsiyyah* (King Saud University, 2001).

²⁴ Mahmoud Ayoub, *Islam, Faith and Practice* (Open Press, 1989).

²⁵ Khairul Hamimah Mohamed Jodi, Mohd Afifuddin Mohamad and Mohammad Taqiuddin Mohamad, "The Effectiveness of Religious Programme: Analysis of Spirituality Programme in Prison among Muslim Female Inmates," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 10, no. 2 (2015): 51–60.

Salat establishes a transcendent bond between the worshipper and God. It is unique among Islamic rituals in that it was delivered directly to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) by Allah (SWT) without any intermediary, including the Angel Jibril (Gabriel). The Prophet described the highest form of prayer as that performed with *ihsan*—a state in which the worshipper prays with full awareness, as if seeing God, or at least knowing that God sees him.

Through this deeply conscious and spiritual act, salat purifies the heart from spiritual ailments such as arrogance, anxiety, or guilt, which may otherwise harm a person's psychological and physiological health. In this way, salat serves not only as a religious obligation but also as a holistic healing practice, nurturing both soul and mind. In its broadest sense, performing congregational prayer at the mosque helps worshippers absorb the positive atmosphere of the gathering and connect with fellow Muslims. The shared experience of prayer fosters a strong sense of community and strengthens the bonds of solidarity among believers.

Praying in congregation not only cultivates a sense of belonging but also provides emotional support and warmth from one's community. By observing the prescribed prayer times, individuals also develop self-control in dealing with life's challenges. Congregational prayers, in this context, offer an opportunity to shift from feelings of self-pity or distress to a more positive, driven state, while embracing the tranquillity and divine blessings of the mosque. Acknowledging the importance of these values, Achour et al. argued that religious coping strategies, particularly those focused on emotional support, such as advice, assistance, and emotional encouragement, are effective tools for managing work-family demands.²⁶

Notably, Beach found a significant correlation between intrinsic religiosity and health, but none with extrinsic religiosity. She emphasises that religion should not be viewed as a means of attaining external goals, such as social approval or increased status.²⁷ According to Beach, individuals who practice religion primarily for these external benefits miss the true essence of their faith. When people seek comfort and protection from external goals rather than in God, they are not truly experiencing solace in the divine. If approval and social status drive their actions, individuals may engage in behaviours that ultimately harm their well-being. In seeking temporary validation from others, they might resort to risky actions or even compromise their true selves. When a person relies on others for comfort and security, they are more likely to experience an unhealthy and unstable life compared to those who derive comfort and protection intrinsically from their faith.

Ritually, salat involves a series of structured movements ordained by divine command, which also offer physical benefits to the body. The movements, which engage the hands, body, head, shoulders, and other parts, have been scientifically shown to promote blood circulation and support overall health.²⁸ Similarly, Kazeem et al. found that medical professionals believe that prayer, particularly supplication to God, can serve as an alternative therapy as effective as meditation, exercise, or herbal treatments.

Experts from various religious traditions agree that the sense of peace generated through prayer strengthens and nourishes the immune system. Many physicians, regardless of their religious affiliations, believe that praying with patients, either before or after surgery, or before

²⁶ Meguellati Achour, Ali Bin Boerhannoeddin and Aqeel Khan, "Religiosity as a Moderator of Work-Family Demands and Employees' Well-Being," *African Journal of Business Management* 5, no. 12 (2011): 4955.

²⁷ Victoria L. Beach, "Religiosity and Prayer in Relation to Health and Life Satisfaction in Older Adults" (Unpublished manuscript or thesis, 2016).

²⁸ Sentot Haryanto, *Psikologi Solat* (Mitra Pustaka, 2001).

administering potent medications, can aid in the patient's recovery.²⁹ Recent scientific studies have shown that prayer can reduce post-operative complications following open-heart surgery. Prayer has also been found to lessen the psychological distress experienced by patients after hospitalisation significantly. Below, several prophetic traditions illustrate how the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself offered supplications to Allah (SWT):

Abu Hurairah reported that whenever the Prophet (PBUH) faced a serious difficulty, he would raise his head to the sky and supplicate, saying, "Subhanallah al-Azim." When he pleaded with intensity and earnestness, he would say, "Ya Hayyu, Ya Qayyum."³⁰

Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "The supplication made by the Companion of the Fish (Prophet Yunus) in the belly of the fish was: 'La ilaha illa anta, subhanaka, inni kuntu mina al-zalimin' (There is no God but You, You are far exalted above all weaknesses, and I was indeed the wrongdoer). If any Muslim recites these words in their supplication, their prayer will be accepted".³¹ In another narration, it is stated, "I know words that will cause Allah to remove one's distress. These are the words (of supplication) of my brother Yunus, peace be upon him" (Ibnu Sunni, vol. 2, ed. 1990: 342³²).

Although the preceding sections have focused on Islamic doctrines and practices, stress is a universal human experience, and other religious traditions also offer distinctive spiritual frameworks for coping with psychological strain.

Stress Management from a Christian Perspective

Prayer holds a central place in Christian spirituality as a means of coping with stress and emotional distress. Scripture encourages believers to turn to God in moments of anxiety: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6–7, New International Version). This passage reflects the Christian belief that prayer leads to divine peace that guards the heart and mind, offering comfort in stressful situations.

Empirical research also supports the stress-reducing effects of prayer. Studies show that private Christian prayer — such as meditative, contemplative, or conversational prayer — is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress.^{33 & 34} These types of prayer often function as emotional expression or cognitive reframing, helping individuals reinterpret

²⁹ Bakare Kazeem and Che Noraini Hashim, *Stress Management from Islamic and Western Perspectives: A Psycho-Analytical Approach* (LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011).

³⁰ Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, translated by Abu Khaliyl (Darussalam, 2007), Hadith no. 3436.

³¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, translated and edited by Ḥāfiẓ Abū Ṭāhir Zubair 'Alī Za'ī (Darussalam, 2007), Hadith no. 3505.

³² Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Sunnī, *Amal al-Yawm wa al-Laylah*, Vol. 2 (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 342.

³³ Matej Bělousov, "The Influence of Private Christian Prayer Types on Mental and Physical Health," *Proceedings of the MEi:CogSci Conference* 19, no. 1 (2025). This theoretical paper reviews how private prayer types (including meditative and conversational prayer) are generally associated with improved psychological well-being and lower anxiety and depression.

³⁴ Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (Oxford University Press, 2016). This comprehensive handbook summarises research showing associations between private prayer and various measures of mental health, including reduced anxiety and depression.

challenges through a spiritual lens. This can enhance feelings of hope, meaning, and perceived control, all of which reduce stress.

Prayer may additionally activate physiological mechanisms that counteract stress. Research indicates that meditative forms of prayer can reduce heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension, promoting a “relaxation response” similar to that observed in mindfulness practices.³⁵ Such responses decrease sympathetic nervous system activity and encourage calmness. Furthermore, prayer strengthens a believer’s sense of connection with God, fostering spiritual support during adversity. This perceived divine relationship provides reassurance, emotional security, and resilience, enabling Christians to endure stress with greater stability.³⁶

In sum, from a Christian perspective, prayer serves as a holistic stress-relief practice — integrating spiritual trust, psychological coping, and physiological relaxation. Consequently, the Christian coping model prioritises trust in divine immutability over the attempt to control changing life circumstances.

Stress Management from a Hindu Perspective

While the Christian coping model emphasises an external locus of control—finding relief through surrendering burdens to a transcendent, protective God—other spiritual traditions approach stress mitigation by cultivating internal mastery. The Hindu perspective, for instance, pivots the strategy from reliance on the divine to somatic and cognitive integration. Here, the emphasis shifts from petitionary assurance to the principles of detachment and self-regulation, utilising the systematic discipline of yoga to achieve freedom from suffering rather than relying on theological promises for security.

This distinction sets the stage for a comparative understanding of how different spiritual worldviews institutionalise stress management. In the context of Hindu tradition, stress management is not compartmentalised into mental or physical relief but is approached holistically through mind-body integration. Unlike Western dualism, Hinduism posits that spiritual development and physiological regulation are inseparable. The primary vehicle for this integration is yoga, a product of profound intellectual and spiritual exploration found in texts such as the Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita.

Functionally, yoga operates as a somatic regulation mechanism. While it includes physical postures, its efficacy in stress management lies in its control over the autonomic nervous system. Chandra notes that by regulating breath (Pranayama), the practitioner directly influences heart rate and mental fluctuations. This suggests that the Hindu approach to stress is rooted in physiological mastery—calming the mind by first disciplining the body.³⁷ Theologically, this practice reframes stress as a symptom of worldly attachment.

The ultimate goal, Moksha (liberation), requires a detachment from the cycle of suffering (Samsara). Therefore, yoga is not merely a relaxation technique but a cognitive restructuring tool that shifts the practitioner’s focus from temporary worldly stressors to eternal spiritual union.

³⁵ Amy B. Wachholtz and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Is Spirituality a Critical Ingredient of Meditation? Comparing the Effects of Spiritual Meditation, Secular Meditation, and Relaxation on Spiritual, Psychological, Cardiac, and Pain Outcomes,” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 28, no. 4 (2005): 369–384. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-005-9008-5>.

³⁶ Kevin S. Masters and Glen I. Spielmans, “Prayer and Health: Review, Meta-Analysis, and Research Agenda,” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 30, no. 4 (2007): 329–338. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-007-9106-7>.

³⁷ Suresh Chandra, *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (Sarup & Sons, 1998).

Londhe observes that this therapeutic evolution allows yoga to serve a dual purpose: it is a spiritual path to the divine and a practical clinical intervention for enhancing well-being. By fostering mastery over the body and emotions, the practitioner mitigates the psychological impact of external pressures.³⁸

Stress Management from a Jewish Perspective

In contrast to the internalised somatic discipline advocated in Hinduism, and extending the transcendent reliance seen in Christianity, the Jewish approach to stress management is deeply characterised by the integration of communal obligation and divine partnership. The Jewish approach to managing stress is a multifaceted system integrating religious beliefs, structured law (Halakha), and collective identity as primary coping resources. Jewish adolescents, while potentially facing unique stressors such as Sabbath restrictions or antisemitism, frequently leverage religious coping strategies. This reliance—which includes seeking guidance from God and engaging in spiritual reflection—is not just an outcome of faith but an active reinforce of Jewish identity,³⁹ suggesting that coping is intrinsically linked to self-definition.

For religious Jewish women, research confirms that actively seeking support from God, rabbis, and the community is associated with improved emotional adjustment.⁴⁰ The theological element functions as a key component of cognitive reframing; stress is mitigated by the belief that God empowers individuals to endure hardships.⁴¹ This perspective, known as Trust in God (Bitachon), fosters resilience by reassuring the individual that suffering is either meaningful or temporary, thereby enhancing positive affect even when objective distress remains high.

Empirical studies, such as observations during the COVID-19 pandemic, validate this mechanism, showing that intrinsic religiosity and a high level of Bitachon were associated with lower perceived stress and more positive emotional outcomes among American Orthodox Jews.⁴² The structured, ritualistic nature of Jewish practice also provides stability during times of crisis. Moreover, the effectiveness of spiritually integrated cognitive behavioural therapy (SI-CBT) in reducing anxiety⁴³ further validates the inclusion of these spiritual resources within clinical therapeutic frameworks.

In summary, the Jewish perspective conceptualises stress management as a covenantal partnership, where the individual is empowered by divine support and buttressed by a legally and culturally defined community. This blending of traditional religious practices with modern therapeutic techniques reflects an adaptive, culturally grounded path in which communal ties and

³⁸ Sushama Londhe, *A Tribute to Hinduism: Thoughts and Wisdom Spanning Continents and Time about India and Her Culture* (Pragun Publication, 2008).

³⁹ Eric F. Dubow et al., “Religion as a Source of Stress, Coping, and Identity among Jewish Adolescents,” Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Albuquerque, NM, April 15–18, 1999; Eric F. Dubow et al., “Components of Ethnic Identity and Ethnic-Related Coping among Jewish Adolescents” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2000).

⁴⁰ Hani Nouman and Yael Benyamini, “Religious Coping in Stressful Situations: Developing the JRP-COPE Measurement Tool for Religious Jewish Population,” *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 38, no. 2 (2016): 184–209.

⁴¹ Kate Loewenthal et al., “Comfort and Joy? Religion, Cognition, and Mood in Protestants and Jews under Stress,” *Cognition & Emotion* 14, no. 3 (2000): 355–74.

⁴² Steven Pirutinsky, Aaron D. Cherniak and David H. Rosmarin, “COVID-19, Mental Health, and Religious Coping among American Orthodox Jews,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, (2020): 2288–2301.

⁴³ David Hillel Rosmarin, “A Randomized Controlled Evaluation of a Spiritually Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Sub-Clinical Anxiety among Jews” (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2009).

spiritual resilience are paramount for emotional well-being. Taken together, these Islamic and interfaith perspectives reveal both shared themes and important differences in how religious traditions conceptualise and respond to stress.

Conceptual Model

This article proposes a conceptual model that integrates Islamic coping mechanisms with established psychological theories of stress. The model connects key spiritual practices—such as Salat (ritual prayer), dhikr (remembrance), duā' (supplication), and tawakkul (trust in God)—with Lazarus and Folkman's⁴⁴ Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, cognitive-behavioural theory⁴⁵, emotional regulation models⁴⁶, and psychophysiological theories of relaxation.⁴⁷ Within this framework, ṣalāh functions as both a cognitive and behavioural coping strategy, promoting cognitive reappraisal and physiological regulation through structured movements shown to reduce autonomic arousal.⁴⁸

Dhikr aligns with emotional regulation and mindfulness-based mechanisms, as repetitive spiritual recitation has been associated with reduced anxiety and improved attentional control.⁴⁹ Du'ā' reflects a form of problem-focused and meaning-focused coping by enhancing hope and perceived control.⁵⁰ Tawakkul contributes to positive cognitive appraisal by fostering acceptance, meaning-making, and reduced perceptions of threat.⁵¹ Collectively, these connections provide a coherent theoretical bridge between Islamic spiritual practices and contemporary stress psychology, demonstrating how prayer-based coping operates across cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physiological domains to reduce stress and enhance well-being.

Integrated Framework

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, the role of Islamic practices in stress management can be interpreted through established psychological frameworks such as Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and Engel's⁵² biopsychosocial model. According to Lazarus and Folkman, coping involves cognitive appraisal of stressors and the use of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Islamic practices—such as ṣalāh (ritual prayer), dhikr (remembrance), duā' (supplication), and tawakkul (trust in God)—align closely with this model: ṣalāh promotes cognitive reappraisal through structured rituals that facilitate regulation of thoughts and emotions,⁵³ dhikr functions as an emotion-focused coping strategy that reduces physiological arousal and enhances mindfulness,⁵⁴ duā' encourages problem-focused coping by fostering hope,

⁴⁴ Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (Springer Publishing Company, 1984).

⁴⁵ Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (International Universities Press, 1976).

⁴⁶ James J. Gross, "Emotion Regulation: Past, Present, Future," *Cognition and Emotion* 12, no. 2 (1998): 145–174.

⁴⁷ Herbert Benson and Miriam Z. Klipper, *The Relaxation Response* (William Morrow & Company, 1975).

⁴⁸ Hazem Doufesh et al., "Effect of Muslim Prayer (Ṣalāh) on α Electroencephalography and Its Relationship with Autonomic Nervous System Activity," *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 20, no. 7 (2014): 558–562. <https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2013.0426>

⁴⁹ Wachholtz and Pargament, "Is Spirituality a Critical Ingredient of Meditation?"

⁵⁰ Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (Guilford Press, 1997).

⁵¹ Cuong U. Krägeloh, "A Systematic Review of Studies Using the Brief RCOPE: Religious Coping in Psychological Adjustment," *Journal of Religion and Health* 50, no. 3 (2011): 513–532. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-010-9374-5>

⁵² George L. Engel, "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine," *Science* 196, no. 4286 (1977): 129–136. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.847460>.

⁵³ Doufesh et al., "Effect of Muslim Prayer (Ṣalāh) on α Electroencephalography."

⁵⁴ Wachholtz and Pargament, "Is Spirituality a Critical Ingredient of Meditation?"

reliance on divine aid, and a sense of agency,⁵⁵ and tawakkul supports positive appraisal by reframing stressors within a framework of trust and divine wisdom.⁵⁶ From the perspective of the biopsychosocial model, Islamic practices address all three domains: biologically, prayer induces relaxation responses and autonomic balance,⁵⁷ psychologically, it restructures thoughts, reduces rumination, and enhances emotional stability,⁵⁸ and socially, communal worship and shared religious identity strengthen social support.⁵⁹ While these frameworks are secular in origin, Islamic coping adds a spiritual dimension, providing meaning, transcendence, and existential reassurance, thus complementing modern stress theories.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative analytical methodology to explore how prayer contributes to managing psychological stress within the context of Islamic heritage and civilisation. The study relies exclusively on secondary data, analysing Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and selected classical scholarly texts that address concepts such as spiritual tranquillity, coping with hardships, and the development of inner peace. These heritage-based sources were examined alongside contemporary psychological literature on stress and coping strategies, as well as recent research on the cognitive-behavioural and physiological effects of prayer, meditation, and mindfulness.

The selected sources were chosen for their scientific credibility, authenticity, and relevance to the topic, while non-academic materials or texts unrelated to psychological and spiritual well-being were excluded. The study employed a thematic analysis approach, and the analytical process aimed to integrate Islamic heritage perspectives with contemporary scientific findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of prayer in reducing psychological stress. Although the study is limited to secondary sources and acknowledges the diversity of interpretations within the Islamic tradition, it adheres to ethical standards by accurately documenting its sources and relying on published, credible sources.

Discussion

The synthesis of literature presented in this article underscores the vital role of Islamic religious practices, particularly salat (prayer), zikr (remembrance of God), and sabr (patience), in mitigating stress and fostering emotional resilience among Muslims, especially those in high-stress professions such as nursing. These findings align with the broader academic consensus that religiosity functions as a protective factor against psychological distress.⁶⁰

For Muslims, integrating faith into daily life through rituals such as the five daily prayers and Qur'anic recitation offers a structured, spiritually grounded approach to coping with adversity.⁶¹ This framework is anchored in the belief that trials are divinely ordained as a means of spiritual growth, as exemplified by Qur'anic accounts of prophets who endured hardship with unwavering trust in God (Qur'an 12:18; 19:26–29). These narratives reinforce the concept of tawakkul (reliance on God), which actively reframes stressors as opportunities for spiritual elevation and

⁵⁵ Pargament, *Psychology of Religion and Coping*.

⁵⁶ Harold G. Koenig, "Religion, Spirituality, and Health: The Research and Clinical Implications," *ISRN Psychiatry* 2012 (2012): Article ID 278730. <https://doi.org/10.5402/2012/278730>.

⁵⁷ Doufesh et al., "Effect of Muslim Prayer (Ṣalāh) on α Electroencephalography."

⁵⁸ Koenig, "Religion, Spirituality, and Health."

⁵⁹ Pargament, *Psychology of Religion and Coping*.

⁶⁰ Achour et al., "Measuring Religiosity."

⁶¹ Ellison, "Religious Involvement and Subjective Well-Being."

emotional release.⁶² A critical comparative perspective reveals that, while stress coping is universally sought, the Islamic framework offers a unique integration of mind, body, and social responsibility that directly translates into modern psychological resilience constructs.

Within the broader landscape of theocentric coping mapped by Joseph et al., Islamic practices can be seen as a particularly integrated system in which ritual, belief, and community support are tightly coupled.⁶³ Christianity emphasises surrender to a transcendent deity and trust in scriptural promises, establishing an external locus of control.⁶⁴ Hinduism advocates for personalised somatic discipline through yoga and meditation to achieve internal mastery and detachment.⁶⁵ Judaism emphasises community support and faith in divine providence⁶⁶, with a focus on the collective covenant.

In contrast, Islam's contribution lies in the ritualised integration of these elements into a non-negotiable daily rhythm. Salat is a structured, five-times-daily practice that acts as a scheduled cognitive interruption and somatic grounding. The physical movements, synchronised with recitation and mental focus, function as an intensive form of Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation Training that is intrinsically mandated, unlike optional secular interventions. Furthermore, the principles of Tawakkul and Sabr serve as potent tools for Cognitive Restructuring, empowering the individual to accept difficulty (Sabr) while simultaneously taking constructive action, rather than relying on passive fate. This active, dynamic reliance on God uniquely contributes to resilience by merging surrender with responsibility.

The implications for workplace well-being are substantial. For Muslim employees, Islamic practices serve as accessible and self-sustaining coping mechanisms that require minimal external intervention. Congregational prayers, for instance, foster a sense of communal belonging, which has been linked to increased resilience in managing work-family tensions.⁶⁷ However, significant challenges persist, especially in secular or non-Muslim-majority settings where religious obligations, such as prescribed prayer times and ritual ablution, may conflict with workplace norms or policies. Addressing these tensions requires institutional sensitivity, including flexible scheduling and provision of prayer facilities, to accommodate religious observances without compromising productivity.⁶⁸

A key limitation in the current body of research is its geographic focus on Muslim-majority contexts, particularly Malaysia,⁶⁹ which may limit the applicability of findings to Muslims living in diasporic or multicultural settings. Additionally, while intrinsic religiosity is consistently associated with improved well-being,⁷⁰ extrinsic religiosity, driven by social expectations rather than sincere belief, may yield fewer psychological benefits. Future research should explore cross-cultural dynamics and longitudinal outcomes of Islamic coping mechanisms, particularly in diverse workplace environments.

⁶² Achour et al., "Measuring Religiosity."

⁶³ Jemimal Joys Joseph et al., "Mapping the Landscape of Religious Coping: Review and Bibliometric Analysis of Theocentric and Non-Theocentric Practices," *Journal of Religion and Health* (2025): 1-24.

⁶⁴ Norman Wright, "How to Deal with Stress," accessed May 8, 2016. <http://www.charismamag.com/life/health/19047-how-to-deal-with-stress-gods-way>.

⁶⁵ Chandra, *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*.

⁶⁶ Pirutinsky et al., "COVID-19, Mental Health, and Religious Coping."

⁶⁷ Achour, Bin Boerhannoeddin, and Khan., "Religiosity as Moderator."

⁶⁸ Hussin and Mohd Noor, "Work-Family Conflict, Coping, and Well-Being."

⁶⁹ Achour et al., "Measuring Religiosity."

⁷⁰ Beach, *Religiosity and Prayer in Relation to Health and Life Satisfaction*.

These insights point to the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive applications of religious coping strategies in both clinical and workplace settings, which this article seeks to highlight through an Islamic lens. We agree that a more critical comparative discussion would strengthen the manuscript.

Accordingly, we have expanded the comparative section to more analytically highlight how Islamic stress-management principles particularly prayer, tawakkul, spiritual tranquillity, and structured ritual discipline, offer unique contributions to modern psychological resilience. The revised discussion clarifies where Islamic concepts align with contemporary psychological theories and where they provide distinctive cognitive, emotional, and behavioural mechanisms that are not fully captured in other traditions or models. This enhancement clarifies the unique value that Islamic perspectives bring to current understandings of stress management and resilience.

Conclusion

This scholarly article explores how Islamic doctrines offer a comprehensive, spiritually grounded framework for managing stress, emphasising the interplay among ritual practices, personal faith, and communal support. The obligatory nature of acts such as salat enables their seamless integration into daily life, providing Muslims with a consistent and accessible means of emotional and spiritual recalibration during times of crisis. Comparative analysis with other religious traditions reveals shared themes of divine reliance, while also underscoring Islam's distinctive ritual discipline and theological emphasis on life's trials as opportunities for purification and spiritual growth.

In professional environments, accommodating Islamic practices goes beyond ethical inclusivity; it represents a practical strategy to enhance employee well-being and performance. This perspective aligns with the findings of Achour et al. who observed that structured religious practices, particularly prayer, play a significant role in fostering resilience and psychological health among Muslims experiencing hardship.⁷¹ Future research should prioritise interdisciplinary approaches to empirically assess the biopsychosocial benefits of Islamic rituals and support the development of faith-sensitive well-being programmes.

Ultimately, creating environments that respect and embrace religious diversity—through inclusive policies and interfaith engagement can connect spiritual coping strategies with modern demands, contributing to overall well-being in increasingly diverse societies. As the Qur'an affirms, "Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest" (13:28), a timeless declaration that continues to resonate deeply within contemporary discourses on emotional and occupational health.

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⁷¹ Achour et al., "Religiosity and Subjective Well-Being."

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