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Spirituality among Flood Victims: A Comparison between Two States

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Abstract

In the field of psychological research, more and more studies suggest ways that spirituality and religiosity is important in dealing with life's problems including flood disaster. Many mental health workers considered seeking a spiritual understanding of one's place in the universe is important in overall health and well-being including disaster management intervention. Given the potential effects of spiritual and religious beliefs on coping with traumatic events such as flood disaster, the study of the role of spirituality in fostering resilience in flood disaster survivors may facilitate the understanding of human adaptation to trauma. This paper is based on quantitative and qualitative approach conducted on three groups of flood victims from two different states in Malaysia. The findings show that there was no significant difference on spirituality among the two states studied.

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1. Introduction

One of common natural disaster that have been part of Malaysian geographical dilemma is floods. In Malaysia, flood disaster usually happen due to both natural and man made factors such as monsoon climate, unsupervised construction and infrastructure development and unusual increased of rain fall in one particular time (Barzani et al.,

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2010). Flood, like any other disaster had affected victims from various aspects such as the psychological and emotional stress. The 2006-2007 floods in Malaysia have witnessed unusually high levels of rainfall and has resulted in the displacement of thousands of people especially children. People were isolated, and naturally they were depressed. Victims experienced chronic stress such as psychological changes, fear, demoralizations, emotional or anxiety disorder and depression (Holly & Dominic, 2010). Research conducted by Badian et al (2008) on flood victims in Johor proved that they experienced stress, anxiety and depression. In terms of coping, religion and spirituality may offer a unique opportunity and how it can operate in lives of individuals in the context of the broader community following flood disaster. In many instances, during and after the flood institutionally and individually has affected the lives of those coping with floods in many ways.

2. Method

2.1 Sampling and Procedure

Before conducting the formal investigations, a pilot test was carried with a group randomly selected survivors participating.

A total of 762 participants in the study all lived in flooded communities. The participants represented a variety of areas, gender and age.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Demographic data	Frequencies (%)
Areas	
Johor	302 (39.5%)
Pantai Timur	460 (60.5%)
Gender	
Male	403 (52.7%)
Female	358 (46.9%)
Age	
< 20	108 (14.1%)
21-30	187 (24.5%)
31- 40	138 (18.1%)
41-50	168 (22.0%)
>50	160 (20.9%)

The population for this study was selected from flood victims in Malaysia. The total number of sample used was 762. Out of these, 460 (60.5%) were victims from Pantai Timur and Johor constituted 39.5% (302) of the total flood victims. In terms of gender, Male constituted 403 (52.7%) and female constituted 358 (46.9%). Age was coded as 1 (< 20) with 108 (14.1%), 2 (21-30) with 187 (24.5%), 3 (31- 40) with 138 (18.1%), 4 (41-50) with 168 (22.0%) and 5 (>50) with 160 (20.9%).

2.2 Measure

The participants completed the measures of spirituality

The measure used is an adapted Malay version of the Brief Religion Coping Inventory (BRCOPE) by Pergament (1997). The scale consists of seven positive coping items and seven negative coping items. Positive items were

generated from seven different subscales from the original RCOPE: spiritual connection, seeking spiritual support, religious forgiveness, collaborative religious coping, benevolent religious reappraisal, religious purification, and religious focus. The seven negative items originate from five different subscales: spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisal, interpersonal religious discontent, demonic reappraisal, and reappraisal of God's power.

Table 2: Spirituality between Pantai Timur and Johor

Variable/Area	N	Mean	SD	Sig (p)	Df	t-value
Spiritual						
Pantai Timur	460	41.63	5.76	.694	760	.648
Johor	302	41.36	5.54			

T-test analysis was employed to determine whether there was a significant difference in spirituality between Pantai Timur and Johor. It was found that there was no significant difference between the two areas ($t = .648, p > .05$) in spirituality.

3. Discussion

Both groups considered religion as important aspect in coping and it was looked as a social resource that was readily available. The flood victims in both Pantai Timur and Johor considered God as a reference to turn to and share all their pain and despondent as one of the participants in the Johor group said “God is always with us in sadness or happiness”. The importance of spirituality in reducing the trauma that was caused by flood was more prominent as spirituality can easily be tapped through groups and congregations in every community (Pergament, 1997). The study also found that both groups believed that by putting the trust in God, it minimizes the stress on themselves.

One of the participants said

“I experienced sickness and I couldn't sleep at night. I was afraid but I believed that this flood was caused by God's love for me”.

This study found that there was no significant difference in spirituality between the two groups. Both areas were found to be similar in terms of socio-cultural and geographical aspects. Most respondents from both areas found that religious values and beliefs provided deep sense of purpose and meaning in life. They believed that God offer hopes and solutions during the period of adversity and suffering. Believing in God created a sense of belonging among the believer, caring and strengthening the brotherhood relationship among each other.

In the local context, many psychologists have been supportive of addressing religion and spirituality in dealing with trauma (Sipon, 2000). They were in the opinions that spirituality and religiosity can be integrated into clinical practice and further used for personal spiritual growth. believing that religious treatment plays significant impact to the overall mental health and well-being of clients.

This research finding was also in accordance with other research findings that spirituality plays an important role to disaster victims in expressing and trusting God for a brighter future. Spirituality is also a sign of building a new relationship with God. Their spiritual and religious conviction maybe strengthened as a result of trauma. Spiritual and religious belief and behaviours can be beneficial to survivors during post-trauma recovery. A positive spirituality helps survivors to cope during traumatic stress and fosters resilience and an ability to move forward. On the other side, spirituality can also a tool in blaming God for their suffering.

4. Limitations

This study has its limitations. More data should be collected and using random sampling. The sample used in this study was selective. The participants were chosen by representatives recruited through head community villages in the flooded community. In addition, the return rate was not very high for the questionnaire.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this study examined the spirituality aspect of the lives of flood victims in the two areas. Comparison was made between these two areas and it was found that due to the similarity in terms of socio-cultural and geographical aspects, both groups shared one thing in common that was religion and spirituality appear to have brought a sense of hope and purpose. Most of the respondents in both groups considered religion as an important part of the coping process. Further and future research should be undertaken in better understanding and help people in flood disaster by continuing to illuminate the role of religion in coping.

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