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## Spirituality and Social Support in Flood Victims

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### Abstract

Research on flood disasters in the past decade has impacted outcomes such as spirituality and social support. A number of studies have shown that flood also changes the victims' belief about themselves and meaning of life. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between spiritual and social support. The paper is based on a quantitative approach by conducting a survey on 764 flood victims. A questionnaire battery including a translated Malaysian version of spirituality and a Modified version of social support were administered to households in flood affected areas. All analysis were carried out using Statistical Package For The Social Science (SPSS Version 21). The study found that there was significant relationship between spirituality and social support ( $r=202^{**}$ , family,  $r=286^{**}$ , friends,  $r=210^{**}$  and significant others,  $r=.448^{**}$ ) in flood victims. In sum, this study provide theoretical contributions to spirituality and social support research. The study of the role of spirituality and social support in fostering resilience in flood survivors may advance the understanding of human adaptation and coping to flood trauma. © 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

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**Keywords:** flood, spirituality, social support

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### 1. Introduction

Flood is one of the most common and severe forms of natural disasters in Malaysia and has resulted in direct economic and property losses, physical injuries, deaths and psychological injuries (Norris et al., 2002) stated that flood can have devastating effects on the psychological functioning of trauma survivors. In light of flood, most studies examining social support following natural disasters showed the beneficial influences of social support

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regardless of the levels of victimization. As such, social support is one of the well-documented psychosocial factors influencing physical well-being outcomes of the flood victims.

The relationship between religion and social support as outcomes following stressful events caused by flood have been widely examined (Smith, Pergament & Oliver, 2000). Several studies have investigated the relationship between religious involvement and social support (Schuster et al, 2001; Koenig et al., 2001; Spouse, 1993). In most cases, they have found that higher levels of religious involvement are greater well being and mental health (Moreira-Almeida et al., 2006). The primary aims of this study were to examine the relationship between spirituality and social support. In the present study, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were selected.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Sampling and Procedure

A month after the flood water crested, community village heads were contacted to find representatives to assist in collecting data. A survey of the representative revealed that approximately 900 questionnaire were distributed and 764 were returned. In terms of procedure, the participants were asked to sign a consent form before taking part in the study.

The demographic profiles of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Demographic data	Frequencies (%)
State	
Terengganu	324 (42.4%)
Johor	302 (39.5%)
Pahang	138 (18.1%)
Gender	
Male	403 (52.7%)
Female	358 (46.9%)
Race	
Malay	712 (93.2%)
Chinese	37 (4.8%)
India	11 (1.4%)
Others	1 (0.1%)
Age	
< 20	108 (14.1%)
21-30	187 (24.5%)
31- 40	138 (18.1%)
41-50	168 (22.0%)
>50	160 (20.9%)

A total of 764 participants took part in the study and they all lived in flooded communities. The participants represented a variety of ages, level of education and income categories. The total number of sample used was 764. Out of these, 324 (42.4%) were flood victims from Terengganu, 302 (39.5%) and Pahang constituted 18.1% (302) of the total flood victims. Gender was coded as 1 (male) and 2 (female) with male constituted 403 (52.7%) and female constituted 358 (46.9%). There were four categories of races, mainly Malay 712 (93.2%), Chinese, 37 (4.8%), India 11 (1.4%) and others 1(0.1%). 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 measures of spirituality and social support.

### 2.2.1 Spirituality

It consists of 3 factors with 11 items. The instrument using five Likert scale and respondents were asked to use a 5 point scale (1= strongly disagreed and 5 strongly agreed). The study showed high reliability of Cronbach Alpha .739.

### 2.2.2 Social support

Social support has been defined as the “assistance and protection given to others, especially to individuals. It was measured using the Social Support Rating (SSR) which has been shown to have high reliability and validity. Modified version of social support inventory consists of 21 items to assess self-perception toward social support. The instrument using five Likert scale and respondents were asked to use a 5 point scale (1= strongly disagreed and 5 strongly agreed). The study showed high reliability of Cronbach Alpha is .931.

## 3. Findings

Table 2: Intercorrelation of spiritual and social support (family, friend and significant others)

	spirituality	Social support	family	friend	Significant others
spirituality	1				
Social support	.202	1			
Family	.288**	.844**	1		
Friend	.210**	.888	.700**	1	
Significant others	.017	.802	.448**	.579**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.1 (level)

The correlation coefficients among the study variables are presented in Table 2. The spirituality and social support were highly correlated. The study found that there was significant relationship between spirituality and social support (family,  $r=286^{**}$ , friends  $r=210^{**}$  and significant others,  $r=448^{**}$ ) in flood victims. Overall, the correlation coefficients between spiritual and social support is high ( $r=202^{**}$ ). The social support was also highly correlated with family  $r=288^{**}$ , friend  $r=888^{**}$  and significant others  $r=448^{**}$ .

## 4. Discussion

The study was concerned with how individuals recover from and may experience spirituality and received social support. The findings of this research suggest that spirituality and social support were highly related. The participants reported a high level of spiritual and received good social support from various parties involved in flood management. The findings were in line with considerable research indicating a positive link between spiritual and social support. The participants felt that the social support they received maintained feelings of belonging and being loved and were found to be most effective for stressful situations. Kubzansky et .al (2001) found that patients who functioned at a higher level of coping often used their religious belief to cope better with their illness and found meaning or strength from their belief.

Several studies have also implied that support availability is an important factor influencing the psychological

environment of flood disaster victims. In this light, more support availability is related to less arousal and encourages the participants to get involved in more social activities available in the communities. The results emphasize the importance of suitable social support strategies. It is highly recommendable that further social support is needed as part of long term mental health care policies. One main explanation for why spirituality was significantly relevant to the flood victims because it prevented them from avoidance, emotional numbing and as a result they were more active in their daily social activity.

## 5. Limitations

This limitations of this study should be discussed. Among others are due to the lack of data before the flood occurrence, it is difficult to assume that the stress and other symptoms reported are the direct result of the flood. This study used a self-report instrument and this has lead to a tendency for the participants to have over or under reported. The results also emphasized the importance of developing suitable and well-organized strategies for flood victims with stress and other related symptoms. This study also recommended that further social support is needed to cope with the affect of flood. In all, spirituality and social support provided by the Malaysian government, non-organization involved and the society to flood victims should be more comprehensive by helping victims establish and maintain social relationships by providing more support networks and aids related to flood management.

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