

# Spirituality and survivorship: Dealing with COVID-19



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Spiritual awareness can help survivors be free from the shackles of COVID-19 by offering effective and efficient solutions while still adhering to health protocols. This qualitative research article aims to reveal the spiritual experiences of COVID-19 survivors and the role of spirituality in the healing process. The data were randomly collected from 10 COVID-19 survivors as primary sources from Java, Indonesia, who vary in age (30+), gender and profession. In contrast, secondary data were taken from the survivors whose experiences are shared online. Their information was later categorised based on concepts, attitudes and contents and then confirmed (cross-referenced) with previous studies of COVID-19 survivors' spiritual experiences and their contribution to the healing process. Statements from informants were adapted to spiritual concepts, distinguished by frequency and interpreted. This study revealed that spiritual experiences contribute significantly to the healing process, enabling COVID-19 survivors to overcome fear and alleviate depression, thereby bolstering the immune system. They could be strengthened by recognising the pandemic as Allah's will. Such recognition enables individuals to accept the disease better and the outcome can be improved through worship. This spiritual wellness contributes to survivors' physical health, one of the most critical factors in recovery.

**Contribution:** This study contributes to coping with COVID-19 with a spiritual approach practised by its survivors by practising Islamic rituals to get closer to Allah. Spiritual endeavours can reduce survivors' stress and boost their inner immune system so they remain optimistic, which eventually helps them recover.

**Keywords:** spirituality; survivorship; COVID-19; worship; health; immunity; healing.

## Introduction

The unpredictable presence of COVID-19 has made the world community, regardless of religion, race and age experience severe panic and stress as it has led to various social and religious problems. People can no longer perform normal activities in the social domain, such as gathering and interacting with others. From the aspect of religion, people cannot worship freely and comfortably, especially for prayers that are offered in a congregation. Those infected by this disease usually feel excessive anxiety, especially the fear of death. Over 150 000 people in Indonesia have died from COVID-19 (Infeksiemerging 2023).

During recovery, COVID-19 patients generally receive medical treatment in the form of drugs based on doctors' recommendations. Moreover, current developments in science and technology, including medical science, have assured people of scientific approaches. While people mainly depend on modern technology in dealing with diseases, including COVID-19, other people, especially those with strong religious beliefs, also seek other paths, such as spirituality, apart from medical treatment. So, today the facts show that people, especially patients, have started to turn to spirituality for solutions to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This is because this deadly pandemic was considered a manifestation of Allah's power, as part of His love and as a test of faith. Therefore, many people use a religious approach to deal with the pandemic. Religion has helped survivors recover from COVID-19 by improving their physical wellness and their immunity. Marzuki et al. (2021) argues that Islam offers solutions to any problem, including dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Koenig (2020) states that religious belief can improve immunity.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has attracted scholars to study from various approaches and perspectives. Some revealed the importance of taking lessons from the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) pandemic (The Lancet 2020). Others have also viewed COVID-19 based on its economic implications. The global economy has experienced a significant downturn since the beginning of the pandemic (Abuselidze & Slobodanyk 2021; Ibn-Mohammed et al. 2021).

Some studies have also investigated the psychological effects of COVID-19 (Abdullah 2020; Megatsari et al. 2020; Wang, Wang & Yang 2020). Abdullah (2020), for instance, has shown that psychological trauma must not be seen solely from an individual perspective but also from a social perspective. Other studies have also explored the importance of religion for COVID-19 survivors (Hashmi et al. 2020; Iqbal, Tareen & Saleem 2020; Modell & Kardia 2020; Taylor 2020).

In addition, Baidowi et al. (2021) studied the role of the pesantren in Indonesia in dealing with COVID-19 by combining the health protocol with the local wisdom or spiritual approach. However, this study did not discuss the spiritual endeavour taken directly by COVID-19 survivors as they collected the information just from *pesantren* caregivers, the COVID-19 task force team of pesantren and the santri. Then Pieterse and Landman (2021) examined the origin of the disease, focusing on three issues, that is whether COVID-19 is an act of Allah, it has nothing to do with Allah, or he remains in control amidst a devastating pandemic. Finally, a study by Kolganov et al. (2022) investigated people's responses to the pandemic. Some started to get closer to Allah by learning religious teaching, but the other groups kept themselves away from religion, raising the duality between science and religion.

This article attempts to reveal the relationship between health and spirituality, focusing on its influence on COVID-19 survivors. This study will concentrate on three aspects of how COVID-19 survivors understand the pandemic, whether it is purely the result of human negligence and actions or part of destiny and Allah's will, their spiritual attitudes in facing COVID-19, as well as initiatives and behaviours they exhibit during the recovery process.

So, this study assumes how individuals' spiritual attitudes contribute to physical immunity and recovery from COVID-19. Spirituality helps survivors accelerate healing by giving them the necessary passion for perseverance, such as sincerity, serenity, peace, enthusiasm and optimism. All these characteristics can be achieved through spiritual endeavours, mainly related to the heart and mind. The medical treatment gives physical strength, but spiritual remedies strengthen an inner immune system that is also crucial for COVID-19 survivors. So, accepting the pandemic as a manifestation of Allah's love or a test of humanity can improve individuals' immunity and offer unique solutions for navigating the pandemic. Measures designed to mitigate the health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic should therefore recognise and incorporate the power of faith and spirituality during recovery from COVID-19.

## Literature review

### COVID-19

COVID-19 has created global anxiety reminiscent of the SARS pandemic in 2002 (Jiang et al. 2021). Chinazzi et al. (2020), observing the early days of the pandemic in Wuhan, China, in 2019, described the pathogen that became pandemic.

COVID-19 causes symptoms similar to acute respiratory distress syndrome and has a high mortality rate (Huang et al. 2020). The novel coronavirus is believed to have jumped from animals to human beings and contains four types of RNA foreign to the human body and its immune system (Kumar 2020). Qin et al. (2020) showed that COVID-19 is transmitted from individual to individual in aerosol form and may spread through droplets carried by the wind; low wind speeds are positively correlated with increased COVID-19 rates (Rendana 2020). Crooke et al. (2020) notes that COVID-19 has caused social disruptions on a level not seen since the flu of 1918.

COVID-19 has caused significant psychosocial burdens. Abdullah (2020) notes that four types of psychological trauma have emerged during the pandemic: individual trauma, behavioural trauma as realised, for instance, through hysteria, violent trauma and social trauma, that is panic. Megatsari et al. (2020) divide COVID-19's effects into five categories: religious, economic, labour, educational and social (Megatsari et al. 2020). However, COVID-19 and its effects reach far beyond these categories, affecting, for instance, individuals' mental health. Duan and Zhu (2020) note that the rapid spread of the COVID-19 has had significant psychological effects. Windarwati et al. (2020), using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, note that fear and anxiety commonly stem from the pandemic. Yang et al. (2020) also state that such psychological traumas are experienced most severely by medical professionals treating COVID-19 patients (Yang et al. 2020).

### Spirituality in health

Spirituality is derived from the word spirit. In Islamic terminology, it is similar to the word *rūh* [soul], which is mentioned several times in the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an says that *rūh* is Allah's mystery (Al-Isra':85). *Rūh* is often seen as the antithesis of the body; if the body is the house, *rūh* is the dweller. According to the Sufis, *rūh* is the bird inside the prison or cage that is the body. So, spirituality is defined as an effort to free oneself from worldly attachments and imperfections and reach the level of spirit. Three major elements of Islamic spirituality are purification, remembrance [*dhikr*] and prayer. These three elements are related to one another (Saritoprak 2018). Purification aims to cleanse the human body and soul from sins and worldly impurities. Then *dhikr* will lead our heart to connect to the creator (Allah). Prayer is a form of servitude of a creature to Allah. These three aspects need to be considered by the Muslims to draw closer to Allah.

In addition, religion not only guides human beings in their daily activities but also instils them with a sense of peace. In health, religion has two points. On the one hand, religion gives individuals hope for a healthy and prosperous future in trying times such as pandemics (Modell & Kardia 2020). This also applies to Islam, which instils its adherents with hope through its vision of an idyllic heaven (Koenig 2020). Christianity teaches its adherents to meditate to reduce stress

and anxiety (Ford & Garzon 2017), while Hinduism urges its followers to embrace the Almighty to achieve peace and happiness (Pandya 2019). Religions have encouraged adherents to improve their wellness through mosques, temples and church worship (Modell & Kardia 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people worldwide sought religious means to protect themselves, with or without other preventative measures (Iqbal et al. 2020). Taylor (2020) notes that, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, 85% of Americans have prayed, 60% have prayed daily, 47% have prayed for their continued health and 49% have prayed for support and assistance. Similar findings were made in Italy, where people embrace religion and spirituality as they approach death and believe that the Holy Spirit will guide them through death and suffering. It is believed that religion can teach individuals about pandemics and other matters. For instance, a study by Qudsy and Sholahuddin (2020) indicates that the hadiths can improve Muslims' understanding of the pandemic. Koenig (2020) also suggests that faith and religion can strengthen the immune system and mitigate the detrimental effects of the virus. A belief provides moral support and positively affects physical and spiritual health (Asadzandi et al. 2020).

So, how people seek religion during a calamity or when facing problems proves that religion or spirituality functions and contributes to their lives. The human body consists of three elements, that is body, mind and spirit, all of which affect one another. If there is a problem in one of them another aspect will be impacted. Thus, spiritual health will also affect physical health. Spiritual health may not cure illness, but it may make someone feel better and help them cope with illness, stress and even death. Therefore, positive beliefs, peace, comfort, serenity and optimism affect human well-being (Himawanti, Hamzah & Faiq 2022).

## Method

This paper is qualitative research aimed at uncovering how COVID-19 survivors recover from this disease by using a spiritual approach while also following medical instructions. The spiritual approach here means they perform Islamic rituals to get closer to Allah and deal with their problems, especially COVID-19. This approach was followed as they believed everything is enjoined by Allah, including illness, and he can cure it. Apart from that, in Islam, there are teachings that can be applied under challenging situations, such as dealing with disasters and when there is a pandemic, by reciting certain verses in the Qur'an or specific prayers taught by *Kyai* (an honorific title for Muslim clergy).

Therefore, the research subjects in this study are COVID-19 survivors, that is individuals who have been infected by COVID-19, have recovered and had spiritual experiences during the recovery process. The respondents were randomly selected, with ten people as primary sources taken from Java, Indonesia, and who vary in terms of age (30+), gender and profession, such as a lecturer, pesantren administrator and government employee. In addition, secondary data are also

used; they were obtained from COVID-19 fighters with similar experiences whose information was collected from online media.

For data collection, this study uses the interview method. Interviews were conducted directly with the respondents in informal conversation. In interviews, information is focused on three matters; firstly, how the survivors comprehend the phenomenon of COVID-19, as a disaster or a test from Allah. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic has divided society into two groups; those who see it from a scientific perspective and those who grasp it from a religious viewpoint. Secondly, what were the attitudes of COVID-19 survivors when they were infected by this disease? This question is critical as the recovery of COVID-19 patients is more or less influenced by their attitude, whether they surrender to fate or act positively, such as remaining excited in their lives and believing in their recovery. Thirdly, how is the behaviour of the COVID-19 survivors? This is related to the efforts they are making to achieve recovery. Their endeavour here is mainly related to the religious teachings they had practised, which can help them during healing. These three issues serve as guidelines for gathering data and information from respondents so that the information obtained is in accordance with the objectives of this study.

The collected data were categorised based on their concepts, attitudes and spiritual experiences during self-isolation. This was subsequently cross-referenced with previous studies of COVID-19 and survivors' spiritual experiences (Mikkelsen 2005). The data were later analysed using content analysis, with informants' statements being transformed into spiritual concepts, then categorised based on their frequency and interpreted through discursive analysis. Data collected from written sources and interviews were analysed using discursive analysis to ascertain the reality of the text or utterance.

## Results

The connection between religion and COVID-19 is evident in three aspects. Firstly, survivors' knowledge of the pandemic is related to Allah rather than addressed to human action; this is inexorably linked to their understanding of the disease as His power. Secondly, survivors' attitudes towards healing and recovery, especially dealing with their inner characteristics such as calm, optimism and acceptance. Thirdly, survivors' behaviours incorporate Islamic practices and rituals such as prayer and *dhikr* to cope with COVID-19.

### Survivors' understanding of COVID-19

Survivors' had a diverse understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, they view COVID-19 as the will of Allah and a warning to humanity. Survivors believe that all begins with Allah, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. They accept it as Allah's will and believe all Allah's desires are good. They believe that all individuals must have such an awareness. Khol Basyir, a lecturer survivor, in his interview on 26 October 2020, said:

'... COVID-19 occurred and was created by Allah in His love. This is what people do not understand. We must face COVID-19. Otherwise, we will be stressed. Our immune systems will suffer, and we will fall ill and die. All people must be aware of it, not just those suffering from COVID-19. They must face it with awareness and patience. When I was infected by COVID-19, I felt beloved by Allah, as not all are given the same opportunity. I felt closer to Him, something impossible when I was healthy.' (Interviewee, Khol Basyir, lecturer, male) (see appendix)

He also stated that those with mistaken perceptions make this disease persevere. Muhammad Kudhori and Abdullah, lecturer survivors, affirmed that all that comes from the Almighty is undoubtedly good. The Almighty is responsible for all of his creation. He also argued that Allah not only created COVID-19 but also prepared a cure for it; humanity must find that cure (interview, 01 March 2023).

Secondly, COVID-19 tests individuals' faith or commitment to the divine's destiny. Survivors hold that COVID-19 was created by Allah as a warning to remind the faithful to stay committed to him and religious values in their daily activities, which the pragmatism of everyday life has eroded. In his interview:

'that the treatment (means of recovery) is repentance or *tauba*' (Faktual News 2020) (Interviewee, Sutarno, teacher, male).

Another interviewee said:

'the same point that death could come anytime and anywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic is not a punishment, as it strikes all individuals, regardless of status or piety.' (Interview, 25 October 2020) (Interviewee, Suwendi, government employee, female)

So, survivors perceive COVID-19 as a test and a trial from Allah. Anyone must bolster their ability to cope with temptation and remain focused on their purpose in life. The pandemic and its various individual and social consequences have reminded the faithful of the importance of being patient, surrendering to the Almighty and following proper health protocol.

Thirdly, survivors accept COVID-19 as a form of Allah's love:

'... We must improve our health by improving physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects. Only then can we create a new mentality. With this fighting spirit, I felt myself become a new man with the DNA of a fighter. This is Allah's way of refreshing the world.' (Interviewee, Fakhruddin, *pesantren* administrator, male) (See appendix)

For survivors, COVID-19 has reignited their faith in Allah and revitalised their relationship with him. Their connection with Allah, long disrupted by work and other everyday activities, has been restored and reduced life's burdens. Faith in Allah alleviates life's responsibilities. For survivors:

'self-isolation or quarantine provides the perfect opportunity for introspection. Basyir states it is the best time to bring order to my heart and mind and plan for the future. It is the perfect opportunity to recharge my spiritual energy, something rarely possible when I am healthy. The interview and date are not part of the quote thus

should not appear before the closing quote mark.' (Interview, 26 October 2020) (Interviewee, Basyir, lecturer, male)

## Survivors' attitudes towards COVID-19

The survivors' attitude towards the disease is essential to coping with COVID-19. Any negative attitude, such as stress, will not help survivors. This study reveals that beliefs such as tranquillity and acceptance, positive thinking and self-motivation and getting closer to Allah are followed by COVID-19 survivors.

Firstly, what the survivors need are *tranquillity and acceptance [riḍa]*. In responding to COVID-19, survivors have sought to remain calm and tranquil, surrender to Allah and accept his pandemic. Although acceptance was initially tricky, survivors realised that Allah only desired the best for humanity. A survivor, said:

'that the key to strengthening our faith is remembering that Allah SWT will protect us and give us strength so long as we surrender ourselves and prostrate ourselves (Pinisi 2020).' (Interviewee, Saiful Samad, teacher, male)

Further, Khol Basyir, in his interview on 26 October 2020, stated that according to him:

'COVID-19 is the greatest blessing for humanity, a form of his love, so he accepted it happily. He could feel close to Allah. This was not possible when he was healthy.' (Interviewee, Khol Basyir, lecturer, male)

Survivors saw the ability to surrender to their fate as improving their mental health and bolstering their immune systems. Acceptance requires recognition of Allah's plan, willingness to follow his plan and dedication to using positive energy in everyday life. This does not mean allowing COVID-19 to spread unchecked; it means understanding and following his plan, mobilising personal resources and dedicating oneself to recovery while recognising that one's fate is in Allah's hands.

Secondly, other important factors are always *positive thinking and self-motivation*, practised by a survivor who stated:

'... I see COVID-19 as a question of faith and immunity. So, if Ibnu Sina says that panic is half of the problem, calmness is half of the treatment and half of recovery. That was a good suggestion for me. In four or five days, I got recovered and was healthy. I tried to make my heart happy and calm. I read the Qur'an and remembered Allah, so I found peace. I did my hobbies, wrote songs, recited Qur'an (murattal), and practised worship' (Bisnis 2020). (Interviewee, Arif Satria, Rector of Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), male)

Another survivor also argues:

'that we must try to calm our hearts and minds, think positively, accept our fate and face COVID-19.' (interviewee, Suwendi, government employee, female)

We must keep worshipping Allah, be passionate and surrender ourselves to Allah's power (Nu Online 2020a,b,c,d).

Our immune systems are harmed by panic, stress, anger, etc. To improve our immune systems, we need to be happy, optimistic and think positively, as stated by Detri Warmanto (Tribun News 2020a,b,c,d). Likewise, Yuyun Nurhayati, a survivor, has the same point that it is best to think about positive things. While worshipping, we must live our faith as taught by Habib Luthfibiin Yahya. Positive thinking is no less critical, believing we will undoubtedly recover (Nu Online 2020b). So avoiding anxiety, staying happy and being hopeful are necessary for survivors. It is better to bring positive energy from within our bodies. Riko Sihombing stated that our minds influence our immunity and help us recover. As such, we must try and avoid anxiety and stay optimistic (Tribun News 2020a,b,c,d).

For many survivors, although COVID-19 is fated, human beings have their share. As promised by Allah in the Qur'an Surah Ar-Ra'd verse 11: 'Verily, Allah will not change the fate of a people until they work to change it themselves.' Thus, the key lies in individuals' ability to accept their fate while working towards improving it. Muhammad Aulia Rizki Agsa has reminded us to avoid stress and remain passionate. Recovery will come from within us, how we carry ourselves, relax and avoid stress. Psychologically and mentally, we must strengthen ourselves (Tribun News 2020a,b,c,d).

Thirdly, it is necessary to *approach Allah*. Many COVID-19 survivors accepted, feeling that they had been selected by Allah and shown his love by being subjected to this trial. A survivor, in an interview on 03 March 2023, stated:

'I was only bedridden for two days, unable to move, struggling to breathe and communicate.' (Interviewee, Muhammad Syakur, 35, male)

Allah always rewards the faithful with abundance; even suffering is perceived as evidencing his concern and love for believers. Sickness and health are divided by a fine line, bringing happiness. 'If you are beloved by Allah, why would you be sad, let alone angry? That is a mistake. It should make you happy' (Khol Basyir 2020). Soetarno, a teacher in Jombang, said:

'As a Muslim, I believe that every illness has a treatment. The medicine for sins is repentance. I lessened my mental burden; even eating made me want to vomit' (Faktual News 2020). (interviewee, Soetarno, teacher, male)

Another survivor, Rhesa, a Faculty of Engineering, Brawijaya University student, also argued that being infected by COVID-19 is a moment to approach Allah. She said: '... As such, I increased my worship, asking Allah for health. This was a great moment for me to approach myself to Allah Almighty' (Berita Satu 2020). While Abdul Haris, a survivor from Jombang, became more diligent in worship [*ibadat*], such as reciting the Qur'an and *dhikr* to Allah. 'We must surrender ourselves to the Almighty and strengthen our belief that we will recover if we fall ill' (Kabar Jombang 2020).

## Survivors' behaviours towards COVID-19

Survivors recognise that COVID-19 is part of the will of Allah; thus, they must improve their worship and follow Allah's commands. Five prayers are compulsory in Islam; COVID-19 patients often conduct additional prayers, such as *tahajjud*, *hajat* and *tasbih*, as stated by Suwendi (Republika 2020). Reading Qur'an and performing a range of other recitations are also crucial, as practised by Fakhruddin and Muhammad Rozin. They used to read *Surah An-Nās*, *Al-Falāq*, *Al-Ikhlās* and the Throne Verses [*Ayāt Kursiyy*] towards evening prayers, after evening prayers and after dawn prayers. Fakhruddin told his experiences during quarantine as follows:

'After catching COVID-19 and being required to stay isolated in the hospital, I did nothing but recitations and read the Qur'an. As someone who had memorised the Qur'an, I did not have to bring my own because I could see it in my mind. As I went through the Qur'anic verses, if my mouth were tired, I would read them in my mind, onward and onward, and when I had recited all 30 *juz*, I would start again. Over time, I improved and was tested negative and thus allowed to return home.' (Interviewee, Fakhruddin, administrator, male) (NU Online 2020a,b,c,d)

Meanwhile, under the direction of his teacher, Suwendi read and re-read only one *surah*, that is *Surah Al-Mulk*, also known as *Surah Tabārah*. Suwendi believed reading this *surah* repeatedly would imbue her with inner strength and a positive mindset. She thought the Qur'an, particularly *Surah al-Mulk*, had a miraculous power to bolster believers' health and save them from COVID-19 (Nu Online 2020a,b,c,d). Again, another survivor, often recites *Ṣalawāt Ṭibbil Qulūb* during treatment that reads:

*Allāhumma ṣalli 'alā Sayyidīnā Muhammadīn ṭibbil qulūbi wa dawā-ihā wa 'afiyatil abdāni wa syifā-ihā wa nūril absāri wa diyā-ihā wa 'alā ālihi wa ṣahbihi wa sallim* [O Allah, give mercy to our Prophet Muhammad, the healer of the heart and medicine, provide health to the body and treat it, be the light of the eyes of the heart and its light, also to his family and companions, and may You give him safety] Hikmatun Balighah (35 years old, female, lecturer) (see appendix).

*Ṭibbil Qulūb* itself means 'medicine and/or heart healer'. This recitation is beneficial for maintaining a healthy body and becomes a medicine for all physical and mental ailments. The benefits above apply to those practising their *aifiya* [how to read]. So, anyone who practices it consistently with any number will be given physical and mental health with the permission of Allah.

Kyai Ahmad Mustofa Bisri or Gus Mus also teaches some practices and prayers to cope with COVID-19. This practice must be performed in sequence. Firstly, perfecting ablution, then reciting '*Bismillāhi lā yaḍurru ma'asmiHī shai-un fil arḍi walā fissanā-I wa Hua s-Sam''ul''Alīm'* [By the name of Allah, when mentioned, everything on earth and in the sky will not be dangerous, He is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing]. Insert the source. This must be recited after every *Fajr* and *Maḡhrib* Prayers and if we want to leave the house (three times or seven times),

then reciting Asmā' names of Allah (Asmā'ul Husna), that is *yā Salām* [the Giver of peace], *yā Hafīz* [the Preserver] and *yā Mān'u* [the Withholder] *yā Dhārru* [the Distresser] 20 times each after every prayer; secondly, reciting *ṣalawat* upon the prophet and thirdly pray '*Allāhumma innā na'aluKa al'afwa wal'āfiyata wal m'āfāta fiddīni waddunyā wal ākhirat*' [O Allah, we ask You for pardon, wellness and permanent well-being in religion, this world and the Hereafter] (Ngopi Bareng 2023). Survivors admitted often practising this ritual. Or sometimes, he just recites *yā Salām*, *yā Hafīz*, *yā Mān'u* and *yā Dhārru* after every five times prayers (Interviewees, Muhammad Sobirin, teacher, male, and Ahmad Mustofa, teacher, male).

COVID-19 survivors view worship as a highly potent medicine. A survivors explained that prayer offers a means of turning to Allah and recognising his involvement in all parts of life – including in the COVID-19 pandemic. He believes that all prayer, spoken by individuals or others, helps patients recover (Kabar Jombang 2020). He said:

'I used to read the Qur'an and direct my recitations to Allah SWT, surrender ourselves to the Almighty, strengthen our belief that we will recover. I continuously turned to Allah. Allah created the disease, and Allah too will cure it.' (interviewee, Abdul Haris, school principal, male)

Again, Fakhruddin states that he had urged his students to take turns praying for him and other COVID-19 patients, ensuring that prayers were continuous while he was in isolation. Survivors believe that people have more opportunities to recover with constant prayer.

So, a belief becomes a fundamental element among religious people. It is this that differentiates them from non-believers. A belief in Allah the Omnipotent, especially during a difficult situation like the pandemic, will relieve our stress and burden. Setyo Witarto said that the believers have Allah. They need only surrender and worship diligently to stabilise (their minds) because it affects their minds and immune systems too (Tribun News 2020a,b,c,d). After making any endeavour, we must give our total reliance [*tawakkal*] to Allah. Triyana said there are two forms of *tawakkal*: prayer and *ikhthiar*, being passionate and disciplined while following medical instructions (Solo Pos 2020).

## Discussion

COVID-19 patients have diverse backgrounds, especially regarding their insights and religious beliefs. This affects the attitudes and actions they initiate in the healing process. Those who do not possess strong religious beliefs may rely entirely on medical treatment. Yet, those with deep religious knowledge and beliefs use other approaches, especially spirituality, to recover from COVID-19, except following medical treatment. This study then proves that the survivors who take spiritual endeavours have a greater chance of recovery. Their efforts are reflected in their understanding of COVID-19, their attitude when infected by the disease and their actions or steps for recovery.

The survivors who take spiritual approaches in the healing process believe that COVID-19 is fate and Allah's will as a form of the test for his creatures rather than a result of human actions and errors. With such an understanding, they tend to be better able to surrender, relax, trust Allah's plan and accept the condition, finally comforting the mind and heart. Meanwhile, their attitude in dealing with the disease is that they remain positive thinking and optimistic. Finally, all these understandings and attitudes must be followed by actions to draw closer to Allah through prayers and *dhikr*. Combining these three aspects has proven to make COVID-19 survivors more persistent so that their immune system becomes more robust, which in turn helps them recover.

Survivors' religious experiences in isolation enabled them to understand the pandemic as part of Allah's plan and thus helped them to accept it better. Acceptance enabled them to receive the pandemic with *husnuẓẓan* [positive thinking], *ikhhlāṣ* [surrender], *tawakkal* [dedication of all achievements to Allah] and to realise Islamic values in their everyday activities: worship, prayer and recitations. They sought to understand worship positively, holding that the fruits of prayer ultimately return to the worshipper. This contributed significantly to their efforts to recover from COVID-19.

This article has shown that spirituality – realised through the ability to behave calmly, think positively and surrender to Allah – positively correlates with survivors' recovery. Harmony and optimism enable survivors to challenge fear, anxiety, worry and other emotions that hinder their recovery. Stopping the spread of COVID-19 requires antivirus and supplemental measures such as quarantine to confine the virus physically and proper nutrition, handwashing, exercise and bedrest to strengthen the immune system (Shakoor et al. 2021). While stability and optimism – rooted in religious understanding, spirituality and belief in Allah – provide COVID-19 patients with a means of bolstering their immune systems and limiting the spread of COVID-19. However, it must be used with healthy living: nutritious food, regular exercise, handwashing and sufficient sleep.

Tranquillity, surrender and faith – all essential elements of religion, as highlighted by Asadzandi et al. (2020) – have provided survivors with a means of achieving spiritual and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. While recognising that physical recovery is slow, survivors attribute it to their spiritual experiences and understandings. The deeper one's spirituality, the more one is willing to accept that all happens in accordance with Allah's plan (Riddell 2021). No matter how difficult, one must assume that everything follows a plan; this includes COVID-19, a dangerous and even deadly disease. Only by accepting this reality can one find happiness and optimism for the future, which can help improve the immune system. Clarity and stability support survivors on their road to recovery.

This study differs significantly from existing ones on COVID-19, which have rarely touched on spirituality.

Previous studies have recognised that survivors' mental condition influences their immune systems. They have failed to consider the effects of optimism, preparedness, tranquillity, happiness, compliance with religious obligations and continued social interactions on the immune system (Asadzandi et al. 2020; Peteet 2020). Spirituality strengthens the immune system, helping individuals resist COVID-19 and its deleterious effects. A positive approach that underscores religion and belief in Allah reduces patients' stress levels and contributes positively to their recovery (Pirutinsky, Cherniak & Rosmarin 2020).

Building on studies that have shown that worship and spirituality correlate positively with recovery, bolstering their immune systems and accelerating their recovery, this study emphasises the importance of sharing survivors' valuable experiences and preparing others, both potential patients and caregivers, for potential dangers. Good news is essential; at the same time, everyone must recognise the challenges posed by the pandemic. Everyone, young and old, must realise the importance of spirituality and Allah's plan, for oneself and others, through worship, which supports recovery from COVID-19 and other diseases.

## Conclusion

Spirituality and recovery are closely intertwined. Spirituality offers human beings essential power during trying times, including pandemics and all situations that create individual and social unrest. Today, humans depend overly on technology and science, thus losing a vital aspect of everyday life. When people orient themselves towards worldly goals, they often experience higher stress levels and lose their essential identity and dignity; spirituality offers an answer.

By employing the concept of spirituality, this study of COVID-19 has found that a deep understanding and appreciation of spirituality and a strong belief in Allah and his plan enables individuals to live their lives with conviction and acceptance. With such an understanding and appreciation, Indonesian COVID-19 patients have maintained their optimism and strengthened their immune systems, thereby accelerating their recovery. Spirituality enables individuals to maintain hope and optimism, thereby facilitating recovery efforts.

This study's exploration of survivors' spiritual experiences has enabled it to understand their conceptualisation of the COVID-19 pandemic and their attitudes and behaviours. It has highlighted the importance of spirituality throughout the recovery process and the need to disseminate such information to the general public. Further research is necessary, however, to determine whether or not COVID-19 patients who die after contracting the disease followed similar spiritual practices.

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## Authors' contributions

A. A. formulated methodology, conducted investigation, wrote original draft, reviewed, edited and found resources. I.T. did the conceptualisation, formal analysis and performed data curation and supervision.

## Ethical considerations

This article follows all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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Appendix starts on the next page→



## Appendix

### Questionnaire

1. People are divided into those who believe and do not believe in COVID-19. What is your opinion about this?
2. Regardless of various information spreading, in your opinion, is the emergence of COVID-19 the result of human actions, or is it God's will? Why?
3. How did you feel when you contracted COVID-19?
4. What was your attitude when you were suffering because of COVID-19?
5. Apart from medical treatment, are other endeavours, such as spiritual practices and rituals, important for recovery? Why?
6. In your opinion, are positive beliefs critical for the healing process? Why?
7. What efforts did you make for the recovery process?
8. Where did you get practices or prayers to help cope with calamity, especially COVID-19?
9. To what extent do these prayers help you recover?
10. What lessons can you take from the outbreak of COVID-19?