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(IJEPC)[www.ijepec.com](http://www.ijepec.com)EFFECTS OF *DHIKR* SPIRITUAL MEDITATION PRACTICE ON  
THE RECOVERY OF DRUG ABUSER: A PHENOMENOLOGY  
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## Abstract:

Meditation based intervention such as mindfulness-based therapy, mantra, yoga, Qi Gong and Zen are generally focused on the integration of Buddhism, Hinduism and Western psychology. However, little is known about Islamic *dhikr* spiritual meditation. The present article intent to describe the implications of *dhikr* meditation to recovering drug addicts' wellbeing and life based on their experiences. Phenomenological qualitative study design was used with face to face and semi structured interview. Six participants were recruited among recovering drug addicts who had been in the Islamic rehabilitation centre and still practising *dhikr* spiritual meditation. The entire interviews were recorded and transcribed into verbatim. Then, the transcripts were thematic analytically. Four broad domains which spiritual changes, shift of thought, emotional and behavioural transformation were revealed after consistent and prolonged period of continuous *dhikr* spiritual meditation. Findings revealed that consistent practice of *dhikr* meditation has give an apparent impact on recovering drug addicts' cognitive, emotion and behaviour. In conclusion, the individuals' belief, values, culture, and spiritual paradigm should be addressed by healthcare professional and counselor to develop holistic strategy for drug addiction therapy.

## Keywords:

Drug Addiction, Meditation, Spirituality, Substance Abuse

## Introduction

Meditation-based intervention such as mantra, yoga, mindfulness, Qi Gong and Zen are generally focused on the integration of Buddhism, Hinduism and Western psychology

(Ospina et al., 2007). In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on meditation based intervention and its effects on individuals' wellbeing (Burke, Lam, Stussman & Yang, 2017; Goyal et al., 2014). Basically, these meditation based therapy were used as psychotherapeutic intervention to heal physical and mental health cases including depression, anxiety, stress, traumatic event and addiction (Koenig, 2009; Oman & Bormann, 2015; Plante, 2010; Pruett, Nishimura & Priest, 2007; Kadri et al, 2020). The Islamic research to date has found that meditation based intervention, in particular spiritual meditation aspects also prevailed in the Islamic scripture fundamentally regarding the Sufism psychology (Isgandarova, 2019; Kadri, et al., 2017).

Recent developments in the field of Sufi based therapy have led to the interest in *dhikr* spiritual meditation. *Dhikr* (*remembrance of God by its name or its attributes*) spiritual meditation is the simplest and convenient practice in Islamic tradition as it can be performed anytime, anywhere, either as an individual or as a group and without any restriction movement (Saniotis, 2018; Guemuesay, 2012). *Dhikr* spiritual meditation reveals the psychotherapeutic healing to treat mental illness especially anxiety and depression. Multiple clinical studies reported that *dhikr* spiritual meditation bring calmness and eventually lessen the anxious feeling to the patient (Hosseini, Salehi, Fallahi Khoshknab, Rokofian & Davidson, 2013). Another study also supported that Muslims professional workers used *dhikr* as therapeutic tools in reducing stress and combating depression (Ahmad Nabil, Saini, Nasrin & Sharip, 2016). However, little is known about *dhikr* spiritual meditation effects in drug addiction field and how *dhikr* spiritual meditation contributes to the wellness and life of recovering drug abuser, regardless of the growing studies on meditation. Therefore, the current article aimed to describe the implications of *dhikr* meditation to recovering drug addicts' wellbeing and life based on their experiences.

## Literature Review

Drug misuse is a complex issue that involves pharmacological, psychological, biological, and psychosocial components. Addiction is a severe neuropsychiatric issue that may lead to distortion in the neurotic brain circuit. Once this circuit is formed, addiction can result in poor behavioral performance even after the person is aware of the negative effects (Volkow et al., 2011). To properly treat drug addiction, a comprehensive approach is required.

The emergence of the illness model, theory of change model, social learning-based theory, moral model, meditation model, and enlightenment model of addiction (Rassool, 2016) was sparked by this seminal subject and led to several in-depth research for comprehensive approach addiction rehabilitation. These theories therefore have an impact on addiction treatment that focus on many components including motivation, spirituality, intrapersonal skills, and interpersonal abilities. The addiction recovery model was required for comprehensive therapy to yield the best results, and the addition of the spiritual element to aid in long-term healing—such as piety concept and spiritual practice—is noteworthy. Consequently, most studies suggested using a biopsychosociospiritual approach to treat addiction. This strategy produced a comprehensive outcome and achieved the best possible recovery by integrating the fields of biology, psychology, social interaction, and spirituality.

These days, treatments rooted on spirituality and religion might be useful in treating drug addiction problems. According to Seghatoleslam et al. (2015), the use of spiritual and religious practices in drug recovery is no longer unusual in Malaysia and really plays a vital role. This is because, in contrast to globalization, which placed a strong emphasis on secularism, a

significant portion of Malaysians believe in religion and God (Khalid, 2008). For instance, Inabah Remaja Pondok (PRI) and Baitul Taubah (BT), which employ the notion of Islamic religion and morals, are rehabilitation clinics that incorporate spirituality and religious principles. In addition, spiritual and religious therapies are becoming more and more common in today's medical field, particularly in the field of mental health.

## Methodology

### Design

A phenomenology qualitative approach was selected for this current study (refer Figure 1). As a forementioned, a phenomenological epistemology and ontology were rooted based on psychological approach in order to truthfully stick with the principle of phenomenology. Phenomenology approach was used to unravel the experiences of participants through the reflective behaviours to attain the specific meanings, concept or phenomenon, which give rise to fundamental knowledge (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Particularly, this approach is useful to uncover the meaning of *dhikr* spiritual meditation experiences that affected the participants' wellbeing and quality of life.

### Participants

An individual face to face, semi structural interview was conducted. Prior to that, a pilot interview was conducted with former ex resident as well as a manager of the rehabilitation centre. Participants were eligible when they had attended at least two years at the rehabilitation centre programs, were adult, currently has been actively stopping taking substances and does not require detoxification and voluntarily able to share the experiences and stories. Eligible participants were received the information from the managing staff and phenomenology interview was conducted at different times depend on the participants choice. Each participant was compensated with a money gift for their time. Six participants agreed to contribute to this study.

### Data Collection

The entire interviews were conducted in the mother tongue language from May 2018 until February 2019. Before starting the interview, consent form and demographic profile were filled up. The researcher (RK) used triangulation data (Brymann, 2004) by preparing the semi constructed questionnaire, field note and observation of nonverbal action of participant during the interview session. The semi constructed interview questionnaires were developed from the discussion with the experts and the relevant literature (Schmitt & Pilcher, 2004; Nasr, 2008). The questions emphasized on the respondents' personal experiences of practicing spiritual meditation during their recovery process.

Phenomenological interview guide was used to lead the interview session. The topics were focused on the 1) individual rapport, 2) participant personal experience regarding drug addiction and *dhikr* spiritual meditation 3) effects of *dhikr* to the participants' life and wellbeing, 4) permission to contact again for improvement or reconfirmation of rising issue. The first verbatim from the first participant was transcribed to reduce the bias of the 'I' between the interviewer and the interviewee (Hamilton, 2020) prior proceed to the second interview. Prior to the data analysis, the entire interviews were recorded and transcribed into verbatim by using Microsoft Office 2010 (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

Constant Comparative Method (CCM) of qualitative analysis data analysis was used to transcribed the data comprehensively. The CCM consists of five important procedure (Stoevelaar, 2020); 1) data collection, 2) identifying the repetitive issue or event, 3) labeling or coding the data, 4) building up the theme and sub theme, 5) elaboration on the finding (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Each verbatim was coded and transferred carefully into Microsoft Excel 2010 to building the thematic experience. Researchers made a meticulous judgement about the meaning and importance of the data when transferred the coding, as well as the comparisons within and among the transcripts of each participant. Then, the quotes rearranged from the generalization coding to produce an appropriate new theme after the judgment process. Lastly, the findings were mapped and interpreted to achieve the objective for this interview by combining all the participants' perspectives. The global descriptions of the theme were discussed with the staff at rehabilitation centre and two other available participants for their feedback to validate the emergent theme and sub theme.

### **Result**

#### ***Participant Demographic Profile***

The interviews were conducted in a private space such as the main office of rehabilitation centre, participants' workplace and cafe. The duration of the interviews varied from 55 to 120 minutes. Descriptive analysis of the participants showed that the initial age of the respondent caught up with drug addiction started at the early age as early as 17 and to 23 years old. The participants still maintain abstinence after more than 5 years. The most expected factors of addiction reported are because of life struggle, peer influence, workload stress and upbringing factors. Another remarkable point that needs to be highlighted was the current participants contributed to the society as self-worker, non government worker, manager and security guards. Lastly, most of the respondents have been marriage while two of them were still single.

#### ***Implications of Dhikr Practice***

Table 1 was shown implications of dhikr repetition practice. The nine sub themes were further grouped into four categories. The themes discussed on the effects of dhikr practice to the spiritual, thought, emotion and behavioural aspects based on the experience of the informants. All the participants described that their awareness to life qualitatively change after practising the *dhikr* spiritual meditation. The summary of life changes was displayed in Table 1.

#### ***Spiritual Changes***

The most prominent change is spiritual elements. All the participants experienced the changes in spirituality level after practising the *dhikr* meditation at least after two years of practice. One commented that,

'I always repeat "*Lailahaillallah*", at the same time I think deeply on the meaning, I believe it. The *dhikr* is the name of Allah, in sha Allah, I believe it has an affect to my heart and alleviate my soul.' [P1]

Another also described in words that;

'I always perform Taubah prayer, always *dhikr*, I read Quran to raise my spiritual. Actually, it doesn't matter what practice you do, but the important is to bring ourselves to God.' [P2]

In summary the spiritual transformation increased their faith and belief to God. This resulted on their acceptance on their fate and strives to the best for the remaining days.

### ***Shift Of Thought***

A more detailed account of cognitive changes is given in the current topics. Based on the experience of the respondent, the *dhikr* practice can train their mind to forget about drug. The *dhikr* activated the mind training directly or indirectly. The respondent said,

'When I practice the repetition of *dhikr*, I focus with the word "god", so I forget about drugs, so I can slowly forget about it. I admit, it not easy. I try keep consistent with this practice, so I can remove the drug from my memory. In the outside, I need to find a way to limit the space and opportunity to drugs.' [P2]

Another respondent also commented,

'Now my understanding is close to that [meaning of *Lailahailallah*]. There is a urge to maintain this abstinence because of Allah. When I think about that [drug], oh! I start to remember LA, no, no, Allah only. Repeat, repeat this remembrance. Sometimes, I feel goosebumps, afraid to make sin again [vibrating voice]. It's enough.' [P3]

In addition, the understanding of the philosophy of *dhikr* practice also helps them to boost their self-esteem and motivation to become a better person in the future as well as redeem their misdeed action. This sub theme came up for example in the comment below,

'Recovery is along process. First, when I came here, I didn't know anything, I didn't know how to read Quran, but, after learning "iqra", 3 to 4 months, I'm can read it [Quran] already. I could read the Quran. It boosts my confident. Then, they [member and ustaz] push me and support me to talk in front them. It's like build self confidence. At first, I always said "I can't :: I can't :: but now, Alhamdulillah, I always volunteer to help my juniors and brothers [recovering drug addicts in the rehabilitation centre]' [P6]

One concern also expressed regarding this issue,

'After you have success on abstinence, you want to help other people, like us [drug addicts]. Because I know how hard it is to quit addiction. In terms of our religion [Islam], Islam recommends us to help others. I did *dhikr* practice and service [*dakwah*], the "sweetness" is different, not ordinary sweet. Indeed, I need to focus to myself but I do not forget others. For example, I eat something sweet; it will actually be sweeter if I invite others to eat together. And whenever, I do this, simultaneously I also tighten my connection with God' [P2]

Overall, these results suggested that the practice of *dhikr* with understanding in heart and contemplation can improve the mind in more excellent manner.



### **Emotional Changes**

There no doubt that *dhikr* practice gave serenity to the emotion. The focus on the more powerful element brings the sense of secure. The *dhikr* practice also helps them to curb their negative emotion. This issue was described by the respondent comment,

'Repeat, repeat, repeat the same, I feel it after repeat the same word for a long time. Remembrance of Allah brings peace to my heart, I feel like God is beside me.' [P2]

In addition, the emotional control also helps them to interact and blend well during the social interactions as one informant said,

'*Dhikr* can calm me down when something goes wrong. Everyone has their own problems, for instance when fighting with a wife or financial problems. This could bring stress and open up the opportunity for drugs. However, having the practice of *dhikr* practiced daily can be a shield to relapse by handling the situation calmly.' [P2]

Overall, the repetitions of *dhikr* play important roles in their emotional constrain when cope with problems.

### **Behavioural Changes**

The last change that can be observed after the continuance of *dhikr* practice is the behavioural change. The strongest proof is their cessation of drug addiction for a long time. The respondent said that *dhikr* practice helps them to cease the addiction craving and problems.

In addition, another respondent also stated that *dhikr* acts as a protective shield from relapse. 'After I practice this practice, in time I changed, I can remove that thing [drug] from my mind, I, I used that [*dhikr*] to discard evil thought [sin], to:: think closer to the God. Ah:: it gives that feeling, warm and calm feeling. When the evil thought comes ah:: I spontaneously say *astaghfirullah ala azim* [May Allah forgive me]. If I look something like undesired act, spontaneously *astaghfirullah ala azim, lailahaillallah*, then I avoid it.' [P4]

The respondent with the longest experience said that, at some point drug addiction was substitute with the addiction to *dhikr*. He feels restless if do not meditate a *dhikr* for a day.

'*Dhikr* gave me protection, I don't to commit sin because fear towards God even in my imagination.' [P6]

In a nutshell, the *dhikr* practice can bring positive outcome to the behavioural change especially regarding addiction behaviour.

### **Discussion**

The implications of *dhikr* were divided into four distinct domains; spiritual, thought, emotion and behavioural changes that lead to the cessation of drug addiction.

First domain is the spiritual changes. Majority of the participants' encountered the spiritual changes in term of faith, belief, Islamic knowledge and religious understanding after practicing *dhikr* meditation at least for two years. These results are in agreement with Sabri and colleagues (2018) findings which showed that spiritual meditation increased the faith level after following the rehabilitation program. This result may be explained by the fact that spiritual cognitive

framework that been adapted in the spiritual based program that light up the participants view on meaning and purpose of life. Moreover, the interference feeling of God also cannot be ruled out. Consistent with the literature, the element of *taqwa* (Piety to God) were suggested in as key element for the addiction treatment for Muslim community (Seghatoleslam et al., 2015). In Islamic doctrine particularly, the spiritual practice of *dhikr* are intertwined tightly with the element of faith, knowledge, belief and practice. In order to attain the profound meaning of *dhikr* practice, the practiser heart, body and mind were centered toward God presence (Omar & Sa'ari, 2011). Consequently, the programs may reduce the severity of drug addiction problems as corroborated by the study of Adam, Ahmad, Anuar and Ab Rahman (2015) that found a longer abstinence period among the former drug addicts after dismissing from Inabah rehabilitation center.

The next domain is thought. The most prominent finding is the struggle of participants to train their mind from thinking about drugs using continuous *dhikr* practice. According to the study of Scott, Foss & Dennis (2005), relapse is the common event that occurred among the recovering drug addicts. A possible explanation for this occurrence might be because of the psychological memory or 'longing' feel towards drug (Noor & Kamarudin, 2015) that eventually lead to relapse even after abstinence for such a long period. Hence, when practicing *dhikr*, the recovering drug addicts tried to switch the attention towards drug to the remembrance of Allah which in turn increasing their mind and spiritual awareness. There are similarities between the attention improvements and memory enhancement due to the repetition of spiritual words in this study and those described by Gao and others (2017). Moreover, increased in spirituality awareness would also increased the individual self-esteem and directly strengthen the self efficacy of soul to put an end to addiction difficulties. These findings mirror those of the previous study that found self-esteem and self efficacy are the significant key role to lessen the dependency among recovering drug addicts (Zakaria, Raba'aton & Robiah, 2013; Griffioen, van der Vegt, de Groot & de Jongh, 2017; Huzili, 2013; Kadden & Litt, 2011; Habibi, Nasrabadi, Hamedan & Moqadam, 2016; Coholic, 2005).

The third domain is the emotion. It is undeniable that emotional dysregulation like over stress and aggressiveness plays a significant role in the relapse predictions (Le Moal & Koob, 2007; Ghouchani et al., 2018). The current study found that *dhikr* meditation produces a warmth feeling inside the practiser heart. There is plenty of evidence that *dhikr* meditation practice may bring calmness to the individual mind and hearts (Adam, Wan Ahmad & Abdul Fatah, 2012; Nasiri, Naboureh & Fayazi, 2016). The calm mind and heart lessen the stress level, reduce the longing feeling and help the drug addicts to take no notice on drug. Study by Sabri and others (2018) stated that during *dhikr* practice, the body movement, feeling togetherness and focussed mind towards God make the heart of the practiser becoming calmer. This finding broadly supported the work of other studies in this area linking spiritual meditation with emotional aspects. For instance, the study on mantra meditation proven brings calmness to the practiser by activation of the alpha wave and theta wave (Chanu & Devi, 2014). Other than that, the repetition of spiritual word has a positive impact at hypothalamus that charge of emotion. The activation suggested that positive emotion such happiness and patient may alleviate after a long time of meditation practice (Engström & Soderfeldt, 2010; Thomas, Jamieson & Cohen, 2014). Similarly, *dhikr* practice, chanting and MRP reduce the stress level among patients with mental health illness such as PTSD, HIV and cancer (Oman & Bormann, 2015; Hosseini, Kashani, Akbari, Akbari & Sarafrasmehr, 2016; Bormann & Carrico, 2009). Moreover, the right emotional handling also assists them to mix with the community in a better way. The study by

Borras and colleagues (2010) highlighted that the recovering drug abuse need to learn on how to control the emotions in order to adapt and function in a complex social life. Indirectly, continuous *dhikr* practice may control their aggressiveness and bring calm to handle the situation. Therefore, the *dhikr* meditation may control the negative emotions and alleviate the positive emotion that can give good feedback on the journey of recovering drug addicts to a better life.

The last observed changes are the behavioural changes. The most obvious behavioural change to emerge from this phenomenological interview is participants' behaviour toward the religion obligation. Islamic religious practice or known as *ibadah* is divided into the compulsory and recommendation such as daily prayer, fasting, giving to the poor (*zakat*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*) (Koenig & Al Shohaib, 2014). All respondent show a full agreement that they need to practice, perform and preserve the compulsory religious practice to maintain the recovery process along with the *dhikr* meditation practice. Although the *dhikr* meditation practice is not a part of the compulsory act, but generally, any act that bring the practiser closer to Allah is known as *dhikr* (Saniotis, 2018). This study supports evidence from qualitative studies (Sabri et al, 2018; Williamson & Hood Jr., 2013) that a recovering drug addicts prone to perform religious practice frequently after follow the religious based treatment. Correspondingly, the recovering drug addicts use a religious act as a weapon to control the bad behaviour as well as moral support and social networking due to the interaction with community as the religious practices usually perform collectively at mosque and church (Chambers, 2015; Esperandio, 2010; Rashid et al., 2014). As a result, these actions assist gradually in their recovering process.

Another prominent transformational change that showed in this study is the participant behaviour towards drug. Unquestionably, the spiritual meditation with the clear orientation to life in terms of self and Higher Power interaction play a fundamental role in the drug recovery (Ghobary Bonab, Miner & Proctor, 2013; Sandoz, 2014). Comparison of the findings with those other studies (Shamsalinia, Norouzi, Khoshknab & Farhoudian, 2014; Avants, Warburton & Margolin, 2001; Williamson & Hood Jr., 2013) confirms that spiritual meditation may expand the participants' vision of themselves and their life. Especially, Islamic law has stated that any substance that can bring harm into human mind and body was prohibited including drug and alcohol (Ali, 2014). Subsequently, this profound vision developed the cognitive map and translated on their behaviour. This relationship may partly explain why the syllabus on Islamic based rehabilitation center emphasized on the Islamic framework on soul and perspective of drug addiction in Islamic theology to awaken the soul during the recovery process. The awaken soul will strength the heart and guide the participant to recover from drug problems.

### **Limitations And Conclusion**

This study appears to be the first study to explore the implication of *dhikr* that prove to be useful in addiction recovery. The main strenght of this study is its long duration conversations included the deep thematic analysis that explains the key success of drug addiction recovery. However, a limitation of using phenomenological study is that it only focused on the experience of the respondents thus, the effectiveness may be questionable. The homogeneity of the sample which is only Muslims respondents in this current study adds further caution regarding the generalizability of these findings that might be differed with others religions. Yet, the interference of spirituality aspects cannot be ruled out. Finally, it should be noted that the



present study was only focussed on the experience without not much interest on the demographic characteristics of the participant that might be influenced the result.

In a nut shell, the current study highlighted crucial information in the knowledge about the *dhikr* spiritual meditation in the field of drug addiction recovery that assists recovering drug abuser to consistent and sustain the abstinence. Overall, consistent practice of *dhikr* meditation give an apparent impact on recovering drug addicts cognitive, emotion and behaviour. Clearly not all recovery is associated on the religious and spirituality framework solely, nevertheless, significant effort in person to maintain the *dhikr* meditation remains fundamental in the recovery process. The individuals' belief, values, culture and spiritual paradigm should be addressed by healthcare professional and counselor to develop holistic drug addiction treatment strategy.

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### Declaration Of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Table

**Table 1: Implications of Dhikr Practice.**

Spiritual	Thought	Emotion	Behaviour
Effect to <i>qalb</i>	Switch thought on drug	Calm and peace	Guidance
Increase the understanding and knowledge on Islamic teaching	Self-esteem	Positive feeling	Substitution to addiction
			Protector

**Figure**

**Figure 1: Methodology**

