

## Dhikr for Anxiety: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** Anxiety is a natural response when individuals experience a situation considered threatening. However, high-intensity anxiety triggers psychological disorders and reduces the individual's quality of life. Anxiety occurs to anyone regardless of age and background. Anxiety disorders are also the most common disorder after depression. There are various studies associated with handling anxiety, one of which is the spiritual relaxation method. Relaxation therapy of dhikr is a type of spiritual relaxation that is frequently employed. Dhikr means remembering. The objective of compiling this literature review is to examine the use of dhikr to overcome anxiety in several conditions. The method administered is to review the literature on anxiety and dhikr from 2016 to 2019. A total of 6 research articles were collected for review. The search displays that the subject's age and internal condition, the relationship between therapist and subject, and also family support influence the success of the dhikr therapy performed.

**Keywords:** anxiety, dhikr therapy, relaxation, spiritual

### 1. Introduction

Anxiety is a natural response arising when individuals are experienced with threatening situations. Each individual encounters anxiety at different levels (Mu'arifah, 2005). Hoehn-Saric and McLeod (2000) revealed that, in general, anxiety increases muscles, heartbeat, sweat glands, and digestion. Anxiety can be experienced by anyone regardless of gender; however, the cause of anxiety frequently differs from one individual to another (Prajogo & Yudiarso, 2021).

Anxiety is a disorder with a large number of sufferers. More than 3.6% of people worldwide (200 million people) have been suffering from anxiety (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). Due to the high prevalence, there is extensive literature examining the problem and



treatment. Therapies which can be employed to treat anxiety is relaxation. Relaxation is a self-management technique based on the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (Perwataningrum et al., 2016). As relaxation methods are able to reduce anxiety in the behavioral therapy category, individuals will be assisted to control or reduce reactions that increase physical and psychological comfort (Manzoni et al., 2008; Perwataningrum et al., 2016).

Numerous types of relaxation therapy can be provided to people with anxiety, one of which is dhikr relaxation. Dhikr provides varied benefits. Aliasan (2019) argued that dhikr is able to build a good person, avoid sin, relieve anxiety, and assist individuals to obtain positive things. Individuals who perform dhikr will also experience inner peace and relieve stress (Rochdiat et al., 2019). This literature review aims to examine the use of dhikr to overcome anxiety in several conditions. The things examined were the factors affecting the effectiveness level of dhikr therapy.

## 2. Literature Review

Individuals who possess high anxiety levels also experience difficulty in breathing, palpitations, and defecating or urinating (Hoehn-Saric & McLeod, 2000). Although it is a natural reaction, if it is not resolved and persisted, it may be a disorder which affects the quality of life and produces negative experiences to individuals (Abdullah et al., 2013; Mu'arifah, 2005; Nugrahati et al., 2018). While the Qur'an explains anxiety in some places in some chapters by using different quotations, among others, the anxious quotation of *al-halu`* and grievances can be found in Surah al-Ma'arij 70: 19-21 and the quotation of *ya'us* as in Surah Hud 11: 9-10. Most commentators define *al-halu`* as the nature of being anxious or complaining when a person is afflicted with an incident and if a person gets help (Azizan & Sa'ari, 2010).

Meanwhile, Şen (2021) reveals that Al-Ghazali associates anxiety with the concept of *waswasa*, which means the devil's whisper. He also uses an unseen approach to the issue. The same thing was done by Ibn Hazm, who revealed that lack of worship causes anxiety, and the absolute way to eliminate it is to work for Allah for salvation on the Day of Resurrection. Spiritual-based relaxation techniques are able to decrease the negative thoughts caused by anxiety (Bakar et al., 2020). Etymologically, *adz-dhikr* is the origin of the word 'dhikr', which means 'remember' (Retnowati, 2011). Dhikr itself is an activity which is generally performed by Muslims and possesses the meaning 'remembering Allah' (Syifa et al., 2019). Dhikr relaxation is a passive and resigned attitude or behavior by repeatedly mentioning words or sentences to produce relaxation or calm response (Hidayat & Mumpuningtias, 2018). Research conducted by Saniotis (2015) uncovered that dhikr does not possess a standard in its implementation. Hence, it will be different for each individual.

## 3. Method

The literature search was conducted by utilizing a research journal database, which was Google Scholar, from 2016 to 2019. Researchers selected the literature based on keywords and topics discussing anxiety, dhikr therapy, and relaxation. Researchers organized inclusion

criteria and research in Bahasa Indonesia and English. Moreover, only studies with at least a pre-post-test stage can be encompassed as empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of dhikr therapy. There were 32 pieces of literature revealed and only six pieces of literature associated with the effectiveness of dhikr therapy scrutinized.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Dhikr and Anxiety Levels in Patients with Chronic Diseases**

Chronic disease is a degenerative disease which develops over time (Wahyunita et al., 2014). Moreover, chronic disease is a severe health problem and is the most significant cause of death globally (Rosdiana et al., 2017). Patients with chronic diseases are susceptible to psychological problems, particularly anxiety. Anxiety which is not resolved in people with chronic diseases owns a destructive impact. The adverse effects occurring are inhibiting healing, decreasing quality of life, repeated hospitalization, and even death (Bakar et al., 2020). There are several studies associated with the implementation of dhikr therapy in patients with chronic diseases.

There are three studies related to the implementation of dhikr to overcome anxiety in patients with chronic diseases. Perwitaningrum et al. (2016) conducted the first study on dyspepsia patients. The study showed significant results ( $p = 0.021$ ). The second study was conducted on cardiac patients in a hospital by Bakar et al. (2020). Significant results were also obtained in this study ( $p = 0.000$ ). The third study also showed significant results ( $p = 0.001$ ) and was carried out on cancer patients by Sulistyawati et al. (2019). All of these studies divided the subjects into two groups, namely the experimental group and the control group.

It is understood that dhikr therapy is more effective in patients of chronic disease. Several factors may cause these differences, one of which is the age of the subject. The subjects with chronic diseases possess much older age. Older individuals tend to own high involvement in religious activities (Zimmer et al., 2016). Spirituality and religion are also present as assistance for individuals encountering aging to overcome problems in everyday life (Lima et al., 2020). Family support also plays an essential role in the effectiveness of the interventions. Some subjects with chronic diseases receive full family support, following Kostelecky & Lempers (1998) which revealed that strong family support is able to decrease stress and pressure. It also can foster a more positive outlook on life and the future.

### **4.2. Dhikr and Anxiety Levels in Students**

There are several studies related to dhikr for dealing with academic stress. Stress is usually caused by unfulfilled academic tasks, poor grades, piling up assignments, and socializing (Barseli et al., 2017). Stress can actually motivate individuals to do work, but excessive stress can have a negative impact on students' physiological and psychological conditions (Misra & McKean, 2000). Students who experience academic stress are prone to experience anxiety.

Several studies discuss the effect of dhikr therapy on students that have been carried out (Reza et al., 2021; Sucinindyasputeri et al., 2017; Syifat et al., 2019). Of the three studies, only

the research conducted by Sucinindyasputeri et al. (2019) showed insignificant results ( $p = 0.06$ ). Research conducted by Sucinindyasputeri et al. (2017) did not discover significant results due to the ambiguity of the administered therapy. In this study, subjects were provided two different therapies in two sessions. Classical musical instruments were employed to create a relaxation feeling so that the subject is easier to receive direction. Another factor affecting the results of the study is internal validity. In a study conducted by Sucinindyasputeri et al. (2017), the subjects were familiar with the research measurements because all subjects were master students of professional psychology. Hence, the diffusion of treatment might occur because the subjects recognize each other. Individual internal factors also influence the research results due to the varied demands experienced by research subjects. For instance, the parents' demands and the workload encountered could affect their readiness to obtain training materials properly.

Furthermore, therapy providing positive results is frequently due to the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and client (Sharpley et al., 2006). In the context of dhikr therapy, if it is administered with the correct method according to the guidance of the Qur'an and as-Sunnah in high intensity and guided by a mursyid, it will definitely be able to create more significant benefits (Syafudin, 2017). Moreover, Syafudin explained that dhikr is a movement of 'taste' (dzauq). In order to achieve the benefits, maximum and continuous efforts should be performed. It can be one of the success factors of dhikr therapy conducted in Reza et al. (2021) research on first-year students. The therapy was organized for six consecutive days.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the review of the research above, it can be concluded that dhikr relaxation therapy is able to affect individual anxiety levels. However, many factors play an essential role in the intensity of the effect exerted. These factors encompass the subject's condition, age, family support, and stress. Furthermore, the setting also plays a significant role, particularly the skill of the facilitator in providing the intervention, the number of subjects involved, and the intensity of the provided intervention.

Future research should put concern on the number and the relationship between subjects. It aims to reduce the threat to the variable. Another thing required to be considered is the procedure for administering the instrument in measuring anxiety. The next researcher should also consider involving a control group. It is performed to identify whether the provided dhikr therapy indeed influences the significant results. The follow-up stage was to discover whether remembrance therapy still affected the individual and the application of remembrance therapy to daily life after termination. Researchers are also advised to examine the effect sizes to determine differences between groups.

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