

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONGST PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic that has shaken the world at the end of 2019 and is still spreading even after one year, has resulted in economic disasters, that could lead to direct or indirect mental pressures. Due to that matters, stress has become a significant phenomenon during the pandemic, which has affected almost everyone, especially during the Movement Control Order (MCO), whereas the counselling divisions of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education of Malaysia have been working effectively online or by phone to handle emotional difficulties and tensions faced by teachers and students who are impacted by this pandemic. Teachers have to deal with students who are reluctant to go to school after a long break. Students' discipline and percentage of attendance is decreasing with the new normal. Thus, in order to fill the gaps in existing teachers' stress literature, this study seeks to examine factors that lead to stress among primary school teachers and their coping strategies in order to reduce strain. This qualitative research was performed on several Muslim female primary school teachers in Malaysia. Data was obtained using semi-structured individual interviews. Addressing these factors and coping mechanisms will serve as valuable guidance in providing resources for women and, for the professional development of teachers. This research also examines the Islamic perspectives of stress and principles, and categories of coping mechanisms and addresses the role they play in promoting the well-being of Muslim workers or Muslim women in general.

Key words: stress, coping mechanism, Islamic perspectives, teacher

INTRODUCTION

Seyle (1976) defines stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand” while Linden (2004) states that “Stress is more than just acute subjective or physiological activation and has its potentially most deleterious health effects when it becomes chronic”. Teacher stress can be described as a teacher's experience of undesirable negative emotions, such as anger, annoyance, anxiety, depression, and nervousness, arising from some part of their job (Kyriacou & Chien, 2004). It is practically impossible today to read thoroughly in any of the biological or social sciences without the word stress, particularly during the current pandemic. “Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Teaching is certainly a daunting profession. In addition, the number of referrals from teachers to occupational therapy for stress-related problems, such as anxiety depression and burnout, is rising (Austin, Shah & Muncer, 2005). Teachers in primary schools are facing with a variety of obstacles, including poor working conditions, low wages, low employment status, and conflicts with co-workers, pupils, and parents (Kim et al., 2020). The teaching career is globally recognised as highly stressful, demonstrated by the high prevalence of tension, exhaustion and burnout as reported by teachers from numerous countries (McLean et al., 2020).

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON STRESS

It is the reality of this life that people will suffer from worry and stress, for this world is the land of sickness, misery and pain. Among the aspects that differentiate Heaven from this world, therefore is the fact that there is no anxiety or stress in the hereafter (Al-Munajjid, 2006). “No sense of fatigue shall touch them, nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave.” (al-Hijr 15:48). From an Islamic perspective, religious and spiritual practices are interrelated. For Muslims, spirituality and religiosity can be seen as a connection between the personal and the spiritual domains, and both entails aiming for this life and the hereafter (Rassool, 2016). Based on the definition of stress in the APA Psychology Dictionary, stress is a physiological or psychological reaction to internal or external stressors. From the Islamic point of view based on the Quranic verses, the “stressor” is supposed to be a test from Allah. This verse reminds man that there will be no loneliness in life from trials and tribulations (Kadir & Ridzuan, 2014). Both of these problems can give rise to tension, either stress or anxiety.

This is illustrated by the following translation verse:

Do you suppose that you will enter Paradise untouched by the suffering endured by the people of faith who passed away before you? They were afflicted by misery and hardship and were so convulsed that the Messenger and the believers with him cried out: "When will Allah's help arrive?" They were assured: "Behold, Allah's help is close by."

(Surah al-Baqarah, verse 214)

Any believer must understand that the evaluation comes from al-Hakim, who must have the wisdom behind it. This can be shown by the confirmation of the translation of the Quran below.

(3:186) (Believers!) You will certainly be put to test in respect of your properties and lives, and you will certainly hear many hurtful things from those who were granted the Book before you and those who have associated others with Allah in His divinity. If you remain patient and God-fearing this indeed is a matter of great resolution.

(Surah Al-Imran, 3 :186)

A true believer would consider anything that happens, or a threat to it, to be a test of Allah. Often the test comes in the form of a human being or an obstacle, Allah is the one who has created a human being or an obstacle, and Allah is the one who moves the person to do whatever it is. The Prophet (SAW) said that: *'No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that'* (Bukhari [a], n.d.). Moreover, the struggles of life are ways to measure an individual's gratitude to God, to show grace in the face of hardship, and to worship God in times of ease and challenge (Rassool, 2016).

STORIES OF WOMEN'S STRESS IN THE AL-QURAN AND HADITH

Aisyah's hadith reveals her level of stress and anxiety endured by an innocent person when false allegations are made against her, when the munafiq accused her of sin during the incident of al-Ifki (slander towards Aisyah), [Muhadi (2019)].

Aisyah R.A recounted the true narration of the circumstances of the incident:

"...He had never sat with me since the day what was said, was said. He had stayed a month without receiving any Divine Inspiration concerning my case. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) recited the Tashahhud after he had sat down, and then said, "Thereafter, O` Aisyah! I have been informed such and-such a thing about you; and if you are innocent, Allah will reveal your innocence, and if you have committed a sin, then ask for Allah's forgiveness and repent to Him, for when a slave confesses his sin and then repents to Allah, Allah accepts his repentance."

When Allah's Apostle had finished his speech, my tears ceased completely so that I no longer felt even a drop thereof. Then I said to my father, "Reply to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) on my behalf as to what he said." He said, "By Allah, I do not know what to say to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)." Then I said to my mother, "Reply to Allah's Apostle." She said, "I do not know what to say to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)." Still a young girl as I was and though I had little knowledge of Qur'an, I said, "By Allah, I know that you heard this story (of the Ifki) so much so that it has been planted in your minds and you have believed it. So now, if I tell you that I am innocent, and Allah knows that I am innocent, you will not believe me; and if I confess something, and Allah knows that I am innocent of it, you will believe me. By Allah, I cannot find of you an example except that of Joseph's father: "So (for me) patience is most fitting against that which you assert, and it is Allah (Alone) Whose help can be sought. Then I turned away and lay on my bed, and at that time I knew that I was innocent, and that Allah would reveal my innocence..."

Sahih al-Bukhari (2661) and Sahih Muslim (2770)

This situation continued for a month before Allah SWT revealed verse 11 of surah al-Nur to free and clear Aisyah from this dreadful accusation. Allah SWT stated:

"Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you. Do not think it's bad for you; rather it is good for you. For every person among them is what [punishment] he has earned from the sin, and he who took upon himself the greater portion thereof - for him is a great punishment."

Surah al-Nur (11)

Maryam bint 'Imran, the mother of Prophet Isa, also endured a great deal of stress and anxiety when she got pregnant without getting married. Her stress came to such a point that: "...she said, *"Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!"* (Surah Maryam 19:23) She spoke thus because she knew that people would accuse her and not believe her when she came to them with a child in her arms. Maryam bint 'Imran, one of the chief women in Heaven, was tested so great, and then her status was lifted in the afterlife. The story of the mother of the Prophet Moses, who was stressed and sad as she had to drift her son in the river to escape the death of the Pharaoh (28:7). *"We suggested to the mother of Moses, "Suckle your child, but when you fear*

for his life cast him into the river and be not fearful nor grieve, for We shall restore him to you and make him one of the Messengers.””

COPING MECHANISM

Prior to 1960, the word 'coping' used in medicine and society referred to a constructive reaction to depression or stress. The word 'coping' did not appear in psychiatry until 1967, which was used in psychoanalysis and is known as the 'defense mechanism of the subconscious' (Achour, Bensaid & Nor, 2016). There are two main coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused, the purpose of problem-focused strategies is either to eradicate or reduce the stressor's source. This technique is not realistic when coping with emotional stressors. For example, feelings of sadness, loss or bereavement cannot be changed or updated. Here, the use of emotion-focused coping would be more successful (Rassool, 2016).

Teacher stress management is an important field of study due to its effect on the health, well-being and persistence of teachers in the profession. Promoting teacher coping is critical because of its connection to youth outcomes (Ramberg et al., 2020). Supporting adaptive coping among teachers has the potential to reduce turnover and enhance mental and behavioral wellbeing for young people, especially when paired with attempts to improve the school atmosphere by reducing the burden and obstacles encountered by too many teachers (Herman et al., 2020). In addition, when teachers with stress-related conditions seek support and care from occupational therapists, the therapist should consider coping mechanisms to reduce negative implications (Austin, Shah & Muncer, 2005). Referring to the medical aspect, dealing with stress using religious techniques has a great deal of monumental insight into the progress of professionals who have had an effect on their results (Tahir et al., 2017). A variety of studies has been undertaken to relate rituals and worship that can help Muslims handle the stress and burden they face, including activities such as *tahajud* (Sholeh, 2017), *Duha* (Yahya, 2015) *tadabbur al-Quran* (Bakar, 2014; Deuraseh & Tohar, 2008), *tafakkur* (Sonia, 2020), *almsgiving* (Qasim, 2016; Rusdi et al., 2018), *dhikr* (Utami, 2017) and wet cupping or *hijamah* (Rahman, 2016; Rahayu & Satria, 2020; Kamarudin et al., 2020).

Healthy outdoor sports such as archery, cycling and horse riding may also relieve stress. This practice is organized in Islam, whereas a person who performs it will be praised for doing the Sunnah of Rasulullah (ﷺ). Remembrance of Allah by *Dhikr* would also be able to reduce the hormonal reaction due to reduced cortisol and improve the personality by producing positive, healthy personal and autonomous actions (Utami, 2017). According to Sholeh (2017), *tahajud* prayers performed constantly, specifically, honestly and sincerely would be able to generate optimistic impressions and emotions. This in essence, will be able to trigger the system to cope with the stress experience, and will potentially alter the rhythm or the pulse and the heartbeat. Bakar (2014) conducted a study on the impact of listening to the verses of the Qur'an on Muslim patients in the intensive care unit to alleviate the psychological discomfort faced by the patient. He found that listening to the Qur'an will fulfil spiritual needs and allow individuals to reconnect to the root of creation. This helps people to feel relieved as they can be reconnected to their maker and at the same time feeling less scared and more determined to heal (Bakar, 2014).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the detrimental impacts among the schoolteachers that affects them psychologically and physically is occupational stress. Though research in a variety of occupational groups has related a number of stressors to ill-being (Kahn, 1981 in Sutton, 1984), yet there are limited studies done among primary school teachers (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977 in Sutton, 1984). Apart from having a high degree of anxiety that correlates with stressors inherent in teaching, a large proportion of primary school teachers also encountered stress due to organizational factors within schools (Proctor & Alexander). The problem statement of this research is therefore:

1. As many majorities of prior stress studies focus on quantitative approach, the literature reviews specify that the issues have been examined on higher education or secondary schools' levels, on psychology, education and health perspectives.
2. So, to fill the gap, this study focuses on qualitative research, primary school teachers and the Islamic perspective.
3. Physiological dan psychological stresses can occur among the vulnerable and stressful primary school teacher, in which may create stress among their students too, as well as, minimize the effectiveness of teaching and learning process.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Hence, the research objectives are to:

1. investigate the factors that cause occupational stress among primary school teachers,
2. analyze the effects of occupational stress on Muslim primary school teachers, and
3. suggest the coping strategies used by Muslim primary school teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is a qualitative research, as it focuses on discovery, knowledge and understanding from the viewpoint of those being examined and provides the greatest promise to make a difference in people's lives (Merriam, 2009). This agrees with Creswell (2014) who defines qualitative research "as a study which begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem".

Qualitative research consists of a series of interpretive, material practises that make the environment recognisable and change the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

People's thoughts and emotions that affect their actions can be conveyed by a qualitative research (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Case studies that are rich in detailed data, time, place of events and experience are used in a qualitative research (Simons, 2014). For that reason, in investigating the critical issue such as stress that is faced by primary school teachers and those closest to the working environment of teachers, the applied methods should be detailed and correct in order to provide a true description of the issue. A qualitative research design is chosen by the researcher to explore and recognise stress among Muslim primary school teachers. At the same time, recommends ways to deal with the stress among teachers, as well as the policy makers.

The researchers follow the data collection approach defined by Creswell (2014) and have taken the necessary steps to handle the data collection as shown in the diagram below.

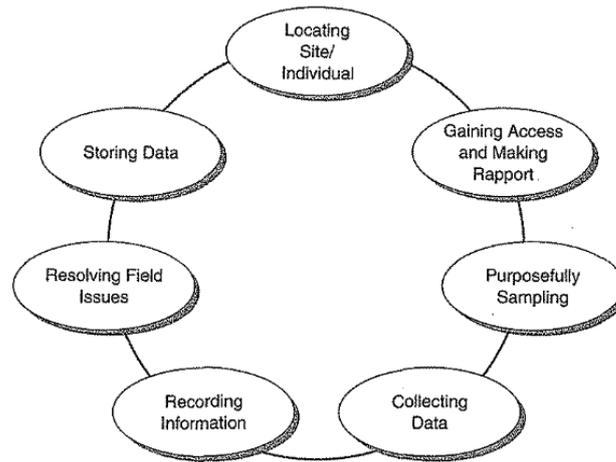


Figure 1: Data Collection Activities
Source: Creswell (2014)

RESEARCH SAMPLE

Research participants in this study involved primary school teachers in Larut Matang and Selama, Perak. They were selected using the purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to classify and select research participants because it allowed the combination of research interest and purpose (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, five teachers were chosen to be the main criteria for this study. Pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the research participants (*PST Aulia, PST Azura, PST Fazrin, PST Shazmin and PST Zubaidah*).

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

As a data collection method, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted using a two-way dialogue mechanism to gain information from the research participants. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative researcher is involved in a sequence of events or in a variety of data collection methods. In order to gather information and be directed by the aims and questions of the study, the researcher has developed an interview protocol. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggested, protocols are relevant because they are rules for ensuring that there is a successful relationship between two entities. A collection of interview protocols was then submitted to the panel of experts to check the authenticity of the interview. Other than that, researchers need to preserve flexibility in reacting to any problems that occur unexpectedly when interviewing through dialogue and conversation. In any case, any random problems are welcome, and researchers are able to steer the flow back to the study context. All interviews took between 45 to 60 minutes per informants to ensure that the data are unique and appropriate.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data from all interviews have been transcribed and translated from Malay language to English for quotation purposes. It is also a task to ensure that the researcher stays near to the original context. Afterwards all data were coded and thematically evaluated to identify variations and repeatable ideas using Miles and Huberman's Interaction Model (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

Themes on the basis of the guidance that are provided by Carla Willig and Rogers (2017) are analyzed and they are divided into six phases; familiarizing with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data analysis discusses the qualitative data obtained by interviews with 5 primary school teachers who encountered stress throughout their teaching experiences. The interviews made some fascinating insights about how they approached their initial difficulties.

Teachers' Challenges During the Pandemic Outbreak

The accelerated dissemination of COVID-19 has increased stress, anxiety and depression in societies worldwide, leading to mental health disorders in individuals (Salari et al., 2020). Nervousness and anxiety in society affect everyone to a significant degree. Recent research shows that people who are held in isolation and quarantine report elevated levels of fear, frustration, uncertainty, and stress (Brooks et al., 2020). Teachers also face challenges and difficulties during the Pandemic, particularly during the MCO, when they need to teach online through several platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, WhatsApp, Telegram and YouTube.

Challenges faced by primary school teachers during online learning and facilitation sessions during the first MCO:

"During the 1st MCO, not just me, most of the teachers had to start from scratch...there's no syllabus from college or university on "How to teach during the Pandemic", no, none, that's not something we're trained for, and that's so sudden. I am a class teacher, my year 6 class out of 26 pupils, I can only reach out about 5-6 students, and the main reason is their family background and economy. My school, is in the area of people with low economic status... I was thinking whether they have eaten or not. What about their parent's jobs, because we know that some of them were fired during the MCO? My school itself has put efforts in helping the families who were affected by the MCO." (PST Aulia)

The difficulties faced by primary school teachers at the opening of the new school following the first MCO:

"During this time, it was really tiring to comply with this SOP, and we can't leave the student at all, meanwhile the teaching time is the same as usual. Teachers must follow the students to the canteen and escort them back to class. There is no break for teachers if they have classes before and after recess. When it's time to go home, we need to wait at the school's gate until parents come to fetch their children. At this moment, there's no time to spend to mark books at the school, we always have to stay back. My school is spacious and 3-storeys, oh my God, it's very tiring to climb the stairs, up and down at that time". (PST Azura)

"I teach Standard 1 students, just imagine that they just entered the school, for less than 3 months, ... You know the students, when they have a long break, they begin to be lazy to return to school. After the MCO, there was one of my students, Rayyan. Every morning at school, he will claim that he's sick, so I have to call his parents or guardian to take him home. A week after that...he often went to the toilet... A week after that, he didn't go to the toilet but this time he argued and fought with his friends. He said that he was fighting like in the online game. When I walked past him, he started to tease his friends, and the class became so noisy, that made me very hard to teach. Oh my God, it was very stressful". (PST Azura)

"There was one time when I had to wait for the Standard 3 students to finish eating, then a girl told me that there was a worm on the table. When I checked, there was stale food with worms in it that was left under the table. It happened that she always ate late and sometimes when it was not finished, she would leave it under the table and forgot to bring it home... it's quite repugnance and smelly". (PST Azura)

Primary school teacher challenges when performing online learning and facilitation sessions during the first MCO.

"The first week of the CMCO, the teachers in my school, we really struggled to build modules so that in the next week, we could give it to the pupils to use during the CMCO. I managed to gather all my pupils in a WhatsApp group. I could finally reach out to them even though their responses were not as what I expected and hoped, but it's up to them. I thought for my year 6, lack of responses came from them because they were comfortable as they didn't have to sit for UPSR. It's so disappointed because we, teachers, had prepared all those modules. I thought that online classes for the 2nd MCO would be much better, and now we could see that pupils themselves didn't respond. At that time, it was sad, honestly really sad, as teachers". (PST Aulia)

Pupils' poor attitudes towards work and too heavy workloads have been generally found to be major sources of teachers' stress (Kyriacou, 1987 in Brown et al., 2002).

"During the second MCO, surprisingly even to myself, I could be stressed until this level. I could not work from home; I need to be at school to work. For me, my home is not a place that I could work. I can't. I am stressed. During the MCO, my baby (eight months old) he was under the 'separation anxiety phase', a phase when he will want to be close to his mother like a koala bear. And then when I needed to do something, when I started to focus for work, suddenly the disturbance appeared. I mean not to say that my baby was the disturbance, but when in sudden, he came asked for this and that, mama, mama, I can't handle that. At some point, I needed to cook, oh my God, the house was in a mess, and then when I heard his crying, I couldn't focus at all. I am easily stressed, overthinking which made me even stress". (PST Aulia)

"Recently, I was overstressed because I just kept on failing in filling the online PDPR information for JPN. Many times, I tried, as the data must be filled before 6 pm. If it I didn't fill it up, it seemed like I didn't do my work. Next year, I will be retired, and its make me surrender, always my husband and kids help me. Unfortunately, all of them were not at home at that time. Seemed like I couldn't do anything, I cried my heart out. When I was feeling better, I remembered my friend and quickly I WhatsApp her and asked. So, she guided me on how to log in, but still failed. I was so relieved to think that I am going to retire soon". (PST Azura)

Nowadays, teaching is increasingly characterized as a high-stress career, and many experienced teachers are eager to retire early. Stress or stress-related disorders are sometimes cited as a cause for early retirement for teachers (Brown et al., 2002).

Stress Effects on Teachers' Teaching and Facilitating

Teachers' main role is to facilitate the learning sessions and serve a conducive and harmony learning environment, as well as, generate students' interests while considering their well-beings and necessities. Unfortunately, teachers cannot play their role effectively if they were stressed and disturbed by their personal problems. The same happened to *PST Fazrin*, *PST Syazmin* and *PST Zubaidah*, whereas they continued teaching in stress. The following was said by *PST Fazrin* in her interview session with the researcher.

"But when we are stressed, we will scold the students when we're teaching. Our mind is not straight anymore. Because I'm not that kind of teacher. Because usually, I am good to students, even SIC previously always observed and praised my rapport (relationship) with students. But, that's it, when problems occur, and I am stressed, I turn to be a 'monster'". (PST Fazrin)

Research has shown that many teachers cope with intensely stressful emotional circumstances in ways that impair their capacity to establish and maintain stable interactions with their pupils, handle their classes efficiently, and facilitate student learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). According to Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016), there is a significant relationship between the stressful work experience of teachers and the biological stress rate of pupils. Whereas when under stress, *PST Syazmin* tended to be more sensitive and frustrated with the students who drove her to leave the classroom.

As a result, the class was stopped. It has been suggested by Spilt et al., (2011) that it was commonly accepted that personal relationships with their pupils provide teachers with intrinsic incentives and bring value to their work.

"Our deeds are not acknowledged by the students; we feel so stressed. That makes me rethink, why do I want to put high hopes." (PST Syazmin)

For *PST Zubaidah*, the language problem that she faced with her Chinese students had disturbed her teaching/role, because she felt that the time she spent at her school, an SJKC, was a failure as every teaching objective that had been planned was failed to be achieved due to the communication problem and students' attitudes.

"I asked Chinese students to help me use the Chinese – Malay Language Dictionary. I find the word in the Malay language (BM) and the Chinese word next to it. I asked the student to write it on the white board. And then, there should be another book. Very tiring!" (PST Zubaidah)

Effects on Physiology, Psychology and Teachers' Behavior

World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a condition where an individual is perfect physically, mentally, emotionally and socially and not just being healthy from any diseases or defects (Callahan, 1973).

Effects on Physiology

Subramaniam (2015) states the clinical signs of stress include; elevated heart rate and blood pressure, predisposition to cardiovascular disease, increased release of stress hormones, gastrointestinal disorders, increased risk of physical injuries and

accidents, headaches, breathing disorders, muscle pain, sleep disorders and damage to body immune system. *PST Fazrin* and *PST Syazmin* experienced very severe stress, and these dialogues pointed out the impact of stress on their physiology.

"I am suffering with hypertension, but when I'm stressed, my blood pressure raises higher. My hands have become numb and I can't lift it now. I am afraid of cardiac attack because I have many problems at home. I have problems with my knee, and it hurts more when I'm stressed, but when the stress declines, the pain lessens. When I take the hypertension pills, the stress is gone. That's why I am always sick, but I know that I am sick because of the stress. I am always in bad condition, and suddenly my knees in pain." (*PST Fazrin*)

"I have seizures, actually. I was taken to the hospital recently, it was a disaster, and I collapsed. When I was taken to the ER, I was not in my correct mind because it's too painful, my thoughts messed up... Recently, my bag was stolen when I was unconscious on my way to the ER. When I was too stressed, I held it inside me and it couldn't escape, it went right up to my brain, and bam! I fell, and unconscious... Other diseases that I have are stomach ulcer and 'Carpal Tunnel Syndrome'". (*PST Syazmin*)

Several studies have been performed which show that excessive and prolonged stress can have a detrimental effect on the physiological and physical condition of an individual (Subramanian, 2015; Sholeh, 2017; Kim et al., 2020; Johari & Omar, 2019). Furthermore Hobby, Venkatesh and Motkur (2005) conducted research on 110 patients with carpal tunnel syndrome and found that there was a significant correlation between stress and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Effects on Psychology

Symptoms of stress are clearly seen when feelings of comfort develop into tiredness, frustration or dissatisfaction, or when job challenges become too urgent (Makhbul & Khairuddin 2013, Subramanian 2015). The psychological symptoms of stress were detailed in Subramaniam (2015) as follows; anxiety, tension, confusion and irritability, feelings of frustration, anger, and hatred, sensitive, harboring feelings, depression, ineffective communication, feel isolated and isolated, boredom and job dissatisfaction, mental fatigue, decreased intellectual function, loss of concentration, spontaneous loss and creativity and lower self-confidence. Usually, the undesired situation that people despised would feel too long, and so did *PST Fazrin*, who had been teaching at her recent school for just a year, felt that her time at school was too long.

In their first meeting with counselors, both *PST Fazrin* and *PST Zubaidah* started with tears.

"It has only been a year, but it feels like ten years... When I first met the counselor that day, I couldn't help myself from weeping, but I couldn't talk either, nothing came out of my mouth. I cried and cried until I felt fine. My eyes got swollen... I felt like I am alone in this world. I felt like everybody didn't understand me. I didn't know where to go. I was only thinking about my children. Pity my children. I cry every day." (*PST Fazrin*)

"When the counsellor talked to me, my tears burst, I said, please, I can't work, I love this job. If you don't believe me, just ask my previous school, I taught there for 14 years. The stress, I have never felt it before when working... Feel really like scolding the students, ... The unbearable was Year 1 and Year 2, we ask them to keep quiet, they won't be silent, they don't understand your words, ..., I feel so useless there. I don't think I can contribute anything at all. It's like a nightmare there". (*PST Zubaidah*)

PST Syazmin was having more serious stress effects on her psychology whereas she herself who was suffering with diseases was being referred to the psychiatric due to depression.

"When I was in the psychiatry ward, it was because of a depression. I needed to control the stress to avoid seizures. But that's last year when I was admitted in the psychiatry ward...When I am too stress, I can't think rationally, and I just do whatever I want to do. Later I'll rethink." (*PST Syazmin*)

Then there was a sense of having had enough of it for the day (Selye, 1980) had been confessed by *PST Azura* *"One day I could no longer tolerate Rayyan's behavior"* and *"When I feel like I'm too stressed, I can't do my duty as a teacher, as a mother or as a wife"* (*PST Aulia*). According to Yao et al., (2019), prolonged stress will lead to emotional problems that increase the number of fatty acids in the blood and cause atherosclerosis (a progressive chronic vascular disease in which plaques will accumulate in the artery walls).

Effects on Behavior

Behavior symptoms could be seen easily on stressful teachers compared to psychology and physiology, because the behavior symptoms could be shown unconsciously by those with stress. Behavioral stress effects include postponing, avoiding and absenteeism, lower performance and efficiency, increased alcohol and medical intake, sabotage at work, abnormal eating patterns,

rapid weight loss, a tendency to act at high risk, such as driving with threat, physical aggression, vandalism and crime, and reduce the quality of the relationship between interpersonal with family and friends (Subramaniam, 2015).

"Until my face was seen differently by others. No appetite, couldn't sleep, I lost weight. I walked and felt like not stepping on the ground... I even had no appetite, puking when I ate. My weight decreased from 70 to 60, skinny, all clothes didn't suit me anymore... But when I started to go to school, it started again. With lots of problem in mind, I faced it all alone. Until one day, I couldn't wake up in the morning. I couldn't go to school, as I wanted to go to the school, I shivered inside". (PST Fazrin)

"I did an operation because of the Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. At that time, I was under pressure from my GB, she was calling me and asking for MC even though I was admitted, I was really depressed and couldn't think, I took a scissor to repair my hand, I couldn't think at that time (crying)...that was the worst thing, ...I was attempting suicide." (PST Syazmin)

"After the Eid, coming home from the 'umrah', I took my leaves, CRK, MC pretending to be sick when it was only mere cough... Didn't want to go to the school, when woke up in the morning, I started to cry. My husband said it's okay to sleep, just sleep... Even my child said, "Thought that only students cry didn't want to go to school, but even teachers are the same". Oh, very stressful, ten years I was never on MC, my last MC was when my late mother was sick... Because the stress was released at home. I tried to control, tried to do the best, but when at home... My husband who was always listening, he also became worried." (PST Zubaidah)

Stress may also lead to an increased absenteeism and turnover of teachers that are costly for the education sector (Herman et al, 2020), as can be seen in the case of *PST Zubaidah*. She also had only shown her stress at home, according to Beehr and Newman (1978), it was obvious that the phenomenon of work stress required complex relationships between the individual and the environment. Time plays an important role, for example, while an individual's work can be a stressor, his or her response to the stressor may occur instantly, at home tomorrow, or at any time and place in the future. Sometimes when a person has a crucial stress, they are unaware that they are in a dangerous zone. Similarly, to *PST Fazrin*, where she was a single mother who had no help to resolve or express her feelings at home. Grateful to God, for *PST Zubaidah* and *PST Syazmin* got strong supports from each other's husbands in handling their stress.

Islamic Views on Coping with Stress

A Muslim must have faith in Allah and the '*qada and qadar*'. Believe it or not, every person and every experience is governed by Him, the Creator (Al Khaliq) and the Designator (Ar-Rabb). There will be someone or something in this life that will test or help, everyone will have to undergo some sort of test before they are judged in the afterlife. Nobody will be left out from His judgement The All-Wise (Al-Hakim). Everyone faces their stress differently. If the stress is being related to Allah and the life in this world is temporary, then it will be easy to handle it.

Most of the informants in this study acknowledged that what happens to them is a test from Allah and they acknowledge it as an Islamic coping mechanism to reduce the effect of their stress. According to *PST Aulia* "*For me, what I have experienced is a test from Allah, to see whether or not I am grateful. When I mention that I'm depressed because I have to work from home, I'm going to think about myself and consider people who work harder than me.*" Similarly, *PST Azura* said "*I realize that this stress is indeed a test from Allah, that Allah wants to see my patience in educating my students.*" To address these issues, the trials that people are going through may not have been a punishment from Allah, but rather tests that would strengthen their faith and place in Paradise. It is part of the goodness of Allah that people are going through these hardships in this life, not in the afterlife (Hamdan, 2008).

PST Fazrin practiced Tahajud prayer and supplication to alleviate her stress, "*But, thanks to God, we are Muslims, we can wake up in the middle of the night to pray, we can get up from sleep and pray, then we can feel better.*" When she could no longer bear the pressure, "*I have reached the level, when I have doubts,*" she begged and made supplication while crying to get protection from Allah, "*O Allah, enough is enough, I can't bear this anymore, I cried in the fasting month. Oh, Allah, at that moment, I felt so bad.*". Like *PST Fazrin*, *PST Zubaidah* also applied the same approach. "*I prayed wholeheartedly...It's such a miracle to pray in front the Kaaba, so miraculous. Logically, it's hard to be transferred... That's why I said to my husband, I felt like it's a dream to be transferred there*".

This is in line with the research by Achour, Bensaid and Nor et al., (2016) who conducted a study to examine the moderating effect of prayer and age on the relationship between work stress and the well-being of 300 Muslim nurses at the University of Malaya Medical Center (UMMC). Findings of their study showed that the influence of work stress on well-being was significant for nurses and that the prayer of nurses had helped to minimize work stress and improved well-being. Praying to Allah-du'a (prayer or supplication) was very helpful, it provided both safety and care (Barhem, Younies & Muhamad, 2009). Though *PST Syazmin's* coping mechanism was a bit different, she followed the District Education Officer Counselor advised to eased her stress, "*The counsellor advised my husband to give charity/sadaqah' during Subuh every morning in the mosque, to say that it might ease my distress*" (*PST Syazmin*).

Using the concept of *tafakkur*, PST Zubaidah recognized that there was a blessing (*hikmah*) behind the test and stress she was facing. Passive attitude is like surrender to God, and meditation can usually be interpreted as thought or thinking (reflection), which can relieve stress (Sonia, 2020).

"...Then my husband replied... Take it as a motivational camp from Allah... Has there ever been anybody from other area who gets in for two months and then gets out... when I was at my previous school before transfer here I sometimes complaint to my husband that my student did not understand, even doing it for so many times, ... So, when I got into the Chinese school, then I rethink. It's miracle, isn't it? Allah wants to teach us something there. We should be grateful with what we have, don't complain a lot.

PST Zubaidah also talked about her view in the hereafter, "Thankfully, we can teach our own people the same religion with us, and we are among the Muslims. And we're going to be woken up with people who are beside us in the afterlife." This was confirmed by Hamdan (2008), it was to be expected and to look forward to the next life, and to understand the meaning of this world that would make it easier to face the challenges that needed to be resolved. From an Islamic perspective, every work of finding the approval of Allah (*Redha* from Allah) is called worship. Thus, confidence and trust in Allah can lead to greater acceptance, tolerance, ability and sacrifice to work (Barhem, Younies, & Muhamad 2009).

This concept of *tafakkur* and reflection, thankful to God also had been used by PST Aulia and PST Azura.

"When I said that I am stressed because I need to work from home, I reflect and look at other people. There were some people out there who were also stressed as being fired, no food at home or jobless. Many were stressed because of the pandemic, weren't they? "When I was stressed, when being disturbed by my kids while working, I would reflect on those out there who had spent hundred and thousand ringgits to have their own kids or feel lonely without one. And here, why must I be stressed when disturbed by my kids, I supposed to be able to handle it. Everybody has their own problems. So, I need to be grateful." (PST Aulia)

Whereas PST Azura used the concept of *redha* and *tawakkal* to reduce her stress, she also used the knowledge she knew on certain verses of Al-quran and benefited them to educate and change her pupil's behaviour.

"... At one time I couldn't bear Rayyan, and I went to his back and recite Surah Yusuf verse 4 while praying for him, and stroke gently on his head. I just prayed to Allah to help changing his behaviour. I did it for a week. Alhamdulillah, I could see changes in him. After that, he was the first to finish doing the works. One day I was touched...Rayyan draw a love symbol and write my name on the door. Later I learn that Rayyan's parents had divorced, that's why he sought for attention at school...and that girl actually, his father has lost his job and they just transfer near my school, and all the food that she's been eating wasn't paid yet... after the incidents, we teachers done a collection and help their family. Just imagine if I had lost hope in teaching my students... (PST Azura)

There were times when I couldn't handle, so I discussed with my husband. I said that we need to adjust our schedules, to care for the kid and working hours, we take turns. But the stress hadn't disappeared easily, but at least I could cope with the help of my husband. When I felt that I was overstressed, ...g, so I think why not use my baking skill to release my stress. So, I baked, and when baking, I was happy. Alhamdulillah. I figure out something about myself. And then thanks to my husband too, who help me. (PST Aulia)

Severe stress responses in young, healthy adults can be resilient and do not usually affect their health. However, if exposure is unyielding, particularly in elderly or unhealthful people, the long-term effects of stressors can be harmful to health (Schneiderman, Ironson & Siegel, 2005). 'Until stress is widely understood as a real and adverse impact on wellbeing, people can continue to mask the reality from themselves and their employers, go off sick' and adopt poor and potentially fatal coping mechanisms' (Brown et al, 2002, p. 49).

CONTRIBUTION TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION

This study is seen as an effort to fulfil social responsibility, as well as a form of support for policy makers and the government in addressing the issue of stress among teachers. This research is also an important initiative to raise awareness among teachers and to alert them to the formation of social support among them.

This research is expected to help a variety of parties, in particular it will lead to improving teachers' ability to cope with stress. It is hoped that this study will be a guide for Muslim teachers who face stress by looking at and being able to recognize that the stress they face is a challenge and a test from Allah to strengthen their mental and physical resilience.

CONCLUSION

Teaching is the most essential profession because it supplies society with scholarly, social, technological and moral human resources (Oteer, 2015). Teachers deal with such a broad spectrum of stress factors on a regular basis. Researches have shown that teaching is a demanding job, and without careful handling, it can contribute to teachers suffering from burnout, as well as detrimental effects for their mental performance and well-being. Through practicing good Islamic values and reliance on Allah, and looking at stress from a positive perspective, teachers who encounter stress will deal with it well. Usually those who are stressed are not those who are weak and lack of faith, but rather dedicated individuals who are tested by God.

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