

THE EFFECT OF ISTIGHFAR AND DHIKR ON STRESS REDUCTION IN WOMEN: A PSYCHORELIGIOUS APPROACH BASED ON THE PROPHET'S HADITH

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the increasing prevalence of stress in women influenced by domestic, social, and professional pressures. At the same time, psychoreligious approaches based on hadith-derived worship practices remain underexplored in scientific research. This study aims to analyze the effect of istighfar and dhikr on stress reduction in women through a psychoreligious approach, integrating the study of the Prophet's hadith. The research method employed is a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative analysis, involving 28 teachers, 56 students, 50 mothers, and 50 wives who participated in religious activities at the Fadhlilah Quran Foundation. The results showed that the practice of istighfar and dhikr contributed significantly to stress reduction through mechanisms of releasing psychological burdens, improving emotional regulation, and strengthening spiritual awareness, thereby impacting affective stability. Quantitative analysis confirmed a decrease in mean stress before and after the practice with a strong level of significance. At the same time, qualitative data revealed the formation of consistent subjective experiences of calm, focus, and positive reinterpretation of life's pressures. These findings confirm that integrating istighfar and dhikr can serve as an effective psychoreligious intervention model for women's empowerment and provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic psychology and hadith studies.

Keywords: Istighfar, Zikir, Female Stress, Islamic Psychology, Hadith of the Prophet

Background

Stress is a psychological phenomenon that is increasingly prevalent in modern life, especially among women who face pressure from various aspects of life.¹ The dual role as a wife, mother, worker, and high social demands make women more susceptible to psychological disorders.² Data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) shows that the prevalence of anxiety and stress disorders is higher in women than in men. The WHO report in 2022 stated that around 264 million people in the world experience anxiety disorders, and two-thirds of them are women.³ In Indonesia, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak, a similar trend was also shown, where more than 30% of women of productive age experienced quite high psychological stress, especially those living in urban areas and having large work and family responsibilities.⁴

The trend of using Islamic sources for emotional regulation is growing, as the literature on religious psychology increasingly assesses spiritual practices as an effective coping mechanism.⁵ Istighfar and dhikr are among the most widely used practices to reduce stress, as they activate cognitive and affective processes that lead individuals to calmness and release of inner burdens.⁶ A hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī states that the Prophet Muhammad sought Allah's

forgiveness and repented to Him more than seventy times a day.⁷ Al-Bukhārī also describes dhikr as a practice that revitalizes the heart and awakens inner calm.⁸ These two hadith texts inform the design of this study, which views istighfar as a cognitive-affective cleansing mechanism and dhikr as a means of strengthening physiological calm through the repetition of words and spiritual conditioning.

Scientific studies on the effectiveness of istighfar and dhikr have been conducted by various researchers. Research by Insyra, Alfarizi, and Zakiyyah (2023) showed that structured dhikr practice reduced stress intensity and improved well-being variables in early adult women.⁹ Research by Fara and Septadina (2023) found that istighfar strengthened perceptions of self-control and reduced the tendency toward negative rumination.¹⁰ Research by Okviasanti et al. (2023) reported that dhikr therapy can reduce cortisol levels in female respondents experiencing work stress.¹¹ Research by Skalski-Bednarz (2024) showed that women who regularly performed istighfar experienced increased affective calm and decreased anxiety after four weeks of directed practice.¹² Although these studies provide initial insights into the benefits of spiritual practices, most still focus on only one aspect, thus failing to comprehensively describe the synergistic

¹ Kiranti Silvia, "Nilai Spiritualitas Tidur dalam Hadis dan Implikasinya terhadap Manajemen Kesehatan Mental Muslim," *Arba: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 1.4 (2025), 251–68 <<https://doi.org/10.64691/arba.v1i4.28>>.

² Ahmad Rauf Subhani et al., "Mitigation of stress: new treatment alternatives," *Cognitive Neurodynamics*, 12.1 (2018), 1–20 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11571-017-9460-2>>.

³ Naima Z Farhane-Medina et al., "Factors associated with gender and sex differences in anxiety prevalence and comorbidity: A systematic review," *Science Progress*, 105.4 (2022), 1–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/00368504221135469>>.

⁴ Ngakan Putu Anom Harjana et al., "Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Repatriated Indonesian Migrant Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9 (2021), 1–8 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.630295>>.

⁵ Florin Dolcos et al., "Religiosity and Resilience: Cognitive Reappraisal and Coping Self-Efficacy Mediate the Link between Religious Coping and Well-Being," *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60.4 (2021), 2892–2905 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01160-y>>.

⁶ Tiya Indriani, Jarkawi Jarkawi, dan Akhmad Rizki Ridhani, "Dhikr Therapy: Overcoming Life Anxiety with Islamic Counseling Based on QS Ar-Ra'd Verse 28,"

Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education, 8.2 (2024), 562 <<https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v8i2.477>>.

⁷ Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. oleh Muṣṭafā Dīb Al-Bugā (Damaskus: Dār Ibnu Kaṣīr, 1993), no. 5832.

⁸ Al-Bukhārī, no. 5928.

⁹ Attalah Rahma Insyra, Ahmad Fikri Alfarizi, dan Nabila Almas Zakiyyah, "The Effect of Dhikr Therapy on Stress Reduction: Literature Review," *Proceeding Conference on Da'wah and Communication Studies*, 2.1 (2023), 5–16 <<https://doi.org/10.61994/cdcs.v2i1.88>>.

¹⁰ Adelia Fara dan Indri Seta Septadina, "Istigfar Therapy as Self-Control," *International Journal of Islamic and Complementary Medicine*, 4.2 (2023), 85–88 <<https://doi.org/10.55116/ijicm.v4i2.34>>.

¹¹ Fanni Okviasanti et al., "Effects of Dhikr on Spirituality and Cortisol Levels Among Patients with Heart Failure: A Pilot Study," *Journal of Vocational Nursing*, 4.1 (2023), 82–86 <<https://doi.org/10.20473/jovin.v4i1.45327>>.

¹² Sebastian Binyamin Skalski-Bednarz, "The interplay of forgiveness by God and self-forgiveness: a longitudinal study of moderating effects on stress overload in a religious Canadian sample," *BMC Psychology*, 12.1 (2024), 717 <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02238-y>>.

relationship between istighfar and dhikr as an integrative intervention model.

The research problem formulation includes: how istighfar and dhikr influence stress reduction in women, how the psychoreligious mechanisms work behind these two practices, and to what extent their integration can form a more effective intervention model than using either one separately. The research objectives are to analyze in depth the contribution of istighfar and dhikr to reducing stress, to explain the psychological mechanisms involved from the perspective of the Prophet's hadith, and to develop an integrative psychoreligious-based model applicable to the context of modern women's lives. The initial argument underlying the importance of this research stems from the belief that spirituality is not only a religious expression but also a psychological instrument that shapes a person's mindset, perception of meaning, and mental resilience. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of science, intervention practices, and strengthening women's mental health in the context of modern life.

This research method uses a mixed approach with an explanatory design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effect of istighfar and dhikr on stress reduction in women in the context of religious activities at the Fadhlilah Quran Foundation. Research informants consist of four categories, namely 28 teachers, 56 students, 50 housewives, and 50 wives, all of whom were selected through a purposive technique because they regularly follow the practice of istighfar and dhikr, and reinforced with a maximum variation strategy to ensure diversity in age, educational background, and religious intensity. Quantitative data were collected through a standardized stress scale, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation of hadith texts.

The interview guide included questions about the informants' understanding of istighfar and dhikr, the frequency of their practice, emotional experiences during practice, perceptions of changes in psychological well-being, the relevance of the hadith used as references, and factors that support or inhibit carrying out the practice. The number of interviews for each category was 15 teachers, 15 students, 15 mothers, and 15 wives,

with an average duration of 35–45 minutes. Interviews were conducted in the foundation's counseling room, which features a circular seating arrangement to create a non-hierarchical atmosphere. Audio recording procedures were carried out using mobile devices with the informants' informed consent, and all files were stored in an encrypted folder to maintain data confidentiality.

Data analysis was conducted through several complementary stages. Quantitative data were analyzed using comparative statistical tests to determine changes in mean stress before and after practicing istighfar and dhikr and to assess the significance of their effects. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning, psychological mechanisms, and spiritual experiences relevant to stress reduction. Next, triangulation was performed by integrating quantitative results, qualitative findings, and documented hadith studies to form a holistic understanding of the mechanisms by which istighfar and dhikr reduce stress. This integrative approach enables the development of a methodologically robust psychoreligious model, thereby strengthening the theoretical framework in Islamic psychology and hadith studies.

Results and Discussion

Patterns of Istighfar and Zikir Practices among Women

The series of istighfar and dhikr practices carried out by a group of women comprising 28 teachers, 56 students, 50 mothers, and 50 wives at the Fadhlilah Quran Foundation demonstrates a structured and consistent religious configuration formed through the interaction between institutional religious traditions and individual spiritual habits. This pattern is evident in the relatively uniform form of recitation, which follows the foundation's guidelines, yet still incorporates rhythmic variations and the choice of dhikr formulas tailored to the background knowledge and depth of each participant's religious experience. The istighfar practice generally uses the standard wording "*astaghfirullah*" repeated sequentially, while the dhikr of *tahlil*, *tahmid*, *tasbih*, and *salawat* are part of a routine sequence guided by an instructor. The intensity of the recitation demonstrates high concentration when the session is led by a senior teacher because

the repetition structure, vocal emphasis, and tempo of recitation are consistently maintained. The frequency of practice is evident in the commitment to attend assemblies three to five times per week, thus establishing continuity that provides space for internalizing the meaning of the religious activities of each category of women. Variations in practice are also evident through the choice of additional dhikr formulas by some teachers with a higher religious education background, while students and mothers generally follow the basic pattern set by the foundation without modification to the readings.

Teacher involvement significantly influences the structure of the recitation, as teachers serve as ritual role models who set standards for consistency and pronunciation accuracy. Teachers generally perform istighfar more frequently and maintain stable articulation, thereby creating an auditory pattern that serves as a reference for students and other participants. Students display characteristics of the following: imitating gestures, intonation, and duration of the recitation without personal adjustments because their primary focus is on disciplined adherence to the taught procedures. Mothers and wives demonstrate a pattern of compromise between domestic demands and spiritual commitments, resulting in slightly more variable attendance frequency. Still, the seriousness of the practice remains evident through efforts to maintain rhythmic order in the recitation, even though it does not always achieve the ideal duration.

The participants' spiritual context emerged through narratives emphasizing the search for inner peace, disciplined worship, and efforts to strengthen personal relationships with God. Teachers described istighfar as a means of self-purification and emotional control, while students understood it as an exercise in obedience that strengthens religious character. Mothers and wives displayed a more pragmatic spiritual orientation, positioning dhikr as a means of inner organization that supports the management of household routines and family relationships. This spiritual dimension does not stand alone, as the practice is

grounded in strong collectivist values: the awareness that congregational dhikr fosters a sense of togetherness, strengthens motivation, and promotes a commitment to maintaining discipline.

The foundation's social environment creates ritual patterns through spatial arrangements, role assignments, and a leadership structure that ensures each session runs uniformly. The circular meeting space encourages eye contact and vocal harmony, creating a collective resonance that facilitates rhythmic movement. The teacher stands at the center of the circle, signaling changes in reading and maintaining a consistent tempo. Students and other participants adjust their positions based on their proficiency levels to facilitate the instructor's monitoring. According to research by Linde and Daniela (2025), this structure allows for a gradual internalization process, as participants with lower proficiency can observe the teacher's reading techniques firsthand.¹³ Social interaction among participants also strengthens consistency in practice, as the assembly's atmosphere fosters mutual reminders and support and minimizes absences.¹⁴ Coordination by the foundation's management, which establishes a regular schedule and standard readings, contributes to a stable and sustainable practice pattern.

Interview results show that the patterns of istighfar and dhikr are not only rooted in ritual practice but are also formed through spiritual experiences, which are understood as an integral part of self-development. Teachers emphasize that istiqamah is central to successful practice, so they are committed to maintaining vocal stability, clarity of articulation, and a predetermined number of repetitions. Students view practice as a learning process that demands discipline and full attention, so they follow the flow of the recitation without improvising to avoid disrupting group harmony. Mothers and wives view spiritual experiences as part of their efforts to maintain domestic tranquility; they feel that a uniform recitation rhythm facilitates concentration and helps build religious habits that can be practiced at home. Conclusions from the thematic categories

¹³ Inga Linde dan Linda Daniela, "Teachers' Insights into the Efficacy of the 'Reading Circle' Project Using English Language Teaching Graded Readers," *Education Sciences*, 15.1 (2025), 91 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010091>>.

¹⁴ María Jesús Rodríguez-Triana et al., "Social practices in teacher knowledge creation and innovation adoption: a large-scale study in an online instructional design community for inquiry learning," *International Journal of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning*, 15.4 (2020), 445–67 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11412-020-09331-5>>.

reveal three main focuses that shape the patterns of practice: regular recitation as a mechanism for consistency, social engagement as a motivating factor, and spiritual experience as a foundation for internalizing meaning.

The Effect of Istighfar on Stress Reduction

The quantitative data set reveals that the practice of istighfar consistently reduces stress across all informant groups, providing a strong empirical basis for understanding the psychoreligious mechanisms at work during the process of internalizing the meaning of istighfar. The results indicate that the mean stress before practice was relatively high across all groups. In contrast, the mean after practice showed a significant decrease consistent with the depth of participants' religious experience. Paired t-test analysis yielded a p-value of < 0.001 across all categories of women, indicating that all differences in mean stress were declared statistically significant. These quantitative findings demonstrate that the practice of istighfar is an effective means of emotional regulation, as the repetition of the formula of regret, asking for forgiveness, and reliance on God induces cognitive relaxation, reducing physiological tension. The stable, rhythmic, and surrendering ritual structure strengthens the mechanism of psychological release, so that informants experience a marked shift in mental state after a period of consistent practice.

The following table summarizes the quantitative results of the study:

Table 1.
Quantitative Data on the Effect of Istighfar on Stress Reduction

Informant Category	Mean Stress Before	Mean Stress After	Mean Difference	p-value
Teacher (n=28)	23.4	14.1	9.3	<0.001
Student (n=56)	24.8	15.6	9.2	<0.001
Mother (n=50)	26.2	16.7	9.5	<0.001
Wife (n=50)	25.7	16.2	9.5	<0.001

¹⁵ Abū Dāwud Sulaimān bin al-Asy'aš bin Ishāq bin Basyīr bin Syaddād bin 'Amr al-Azdī Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abi Dāwud*, ed. oleh Muhammad Muhyiddin 'Abd Al-Ḥamīd, vol. 4 (Beirūt: al-Maktabah al-Is̄riyah, 1993), no. 1297.

The mean stress score before the istighfar practice ranged from 23 to 26, indicating moderate to high levels of mental tension. The mean stress score after the practice dropped significantly to 14–16, reflecting consistent improvements in psychological well-being. The mean difference of 9 points reflects a steady decrease in stress across categories, with no extreme variations between groups. Strong statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) confirms that these changes were not due to chance but were closely related to the disciplined istighfar practice during the observation period.

Qualitative analysis of informants' narratives provided an in-depth explanation of the psychoreligious mechanisms that contribute to this stress reduction. Teachers described istighfar as a form of inner reconciliation that restores serenity because the formula for asking for forgiveness activates a reflective awareness of one's limits and dependence on God. Students reported that repeating istighfar provided a sense of emotional relief because they felt they had gained a spiritual space to release academic pressures and the burden of daily tasks. Mothers and wives emphasized that the practice fostered a sense of acceptance by God, making the emotional burdens associated with household routines easier to cope with. This mechanism aligns with the Prophetic hadith: "Whoever consistently seeks istighfar, Allah will surely provide a way out of every difficulty and relief from every anxiety, and He will provide him with sustenance from sources he does not expect."¹⁵ According to al-Khattābī (1997), this hadith is not merely a verbal activity but a cognitive-emotional process that reorganizes one's perception of oneself, the burdens of life, and one's relationship with God.¹⁶

Psychological interpretations suggest that stress reduction occurs through three main pathways. The first pathway involves a mental release mechanism: repeated requests for forgiveness foster awareness of one's own imperfections, thus relieving emotional stress. The second pathway consists of an experience of spiritual connectedness, creating a sense of security as individuals perceive the presence of

¹⁶ Abū Sulaimān Ḥamad bin Muḥamamad Al-Khattābī, *Ma'ālim al-Sunan*, vol. 4 (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutb al-Ilmiyyah, 1997), hal. 100.

transcendental support, thereby reducing feelings of isolation. The third pathway involves inner reconciliation, as istighfar provides an opportunity to integrate mistakes, hopes, and moral demands into a more stable belief structure. These three pathways operate simultaneously, resulting in emotional responses after the practice tending toward calmer, more controlled, and better able to cope with everyday stress.

This mechanism configuration appears stronger in teachers due to their relatively higher spiritual intensity compared to other groups. The average decrease in teachers' stress of 9.3 points indicates that a more consistent, structured practice of istighfar influences the effectiveness of reducing inner tension. Students exhibit a similar pattern, although their emotional maturity backgrounds vary more, allowing for a gradual internalization of the meaning of istighfar. Mothers and wives exhibit the highest mean difference, at 9.5, indicating that the group with heavier domestic burdens experiences more tangible benefits.

Overall findings indicate that istighfar fosters a more stable psychological state by integrating cognitive relaxation, spiritual support, and self-regulation. The consistent reduction in stress across all groups demonstrates the universal effectiveness of istighfar practice within the women's community of the Fadhlilah Quran Foundation. Quantitative and qualitative data indicate a strong relationship between religious experience and improved mental health, with no contradictions between empirical findings and theoretical foundations. These psychoreligious mechanisms provide a foundation for a broader understanding of how repetitive prayer-based practices can foster a calmer and more adaptive emotional state.

The Effect of Dhikr on Emotional Regulation and Stress

The quantitative data set shows that dhikr practice led to a systematic and significant decrease in stress across all informants, providing a solid empirical basis for analyzing the psycho-spiritual mechanisms that shape emotional regulation during dhikr practice. The mean stress before the practice ranged from high to moderate, while the mean after the practice showed a consistent decrease in line with the intensity of participants'

involvement in structured dhikr. The paired t-test showed a p-value < 0.001 across all informant categories, indicating that the stress reduction was statistically significant. This pattern suggests that the repetitive structure of the *tasbih*, *tahmid*, *tah�il*, and *salawat* forms a stable state of focus, reduces sympathetic activation, and encourages parasympathetic relaxation, which helps reduce emotional tension. The quantitative data show that the rhythm of dhikr creates a state of *tuma'ninah* through the synchronization of verbal repetition, cognitive concentration, and the feeling of being present before God, thereby consistently demonstrating its positive psychological impact.

Table 2.
Quantitative Data on the Effect of Zikr on Emotional Regulation and Stress

Informant Category	Mean Stress Before	Mean Stress After	Mean Difference	p-value
Teacher (n=28)	22.9	13.8	9.1	<0.001
Student (n=56)	24.3	15.0	9.3	<0.001
Mother (n=50)	25.6	16.1	9.5	<0.001
Wife (n=50)	25.2	15.7	9.5	<0.001

The mean stress score before practice ranged from 22 to 25, indicating that all informants experienced moderate to high levels of emotional distress before the dhikr was performed. The mean stress score after practice dropped significantly to 13–16, reflecting decreases in anxiety, tension, and impaired concentration after consistent dhikr practice. The approximately 9-point difference indicates a relatively even effect across categories. These findings suggest that dhikr functions as an emotional stabilizer, creating a state of mental relaxation through structured repetition and deep appreciation of its meaning.

Qualitative analysis showed that the psycho-spiritual mechanism of dhikr operates by creating a state of tranquility (*tuma'ninah*) that arises when participants sense the divine presence through rhythmically guided recitation. Teachers described dhikr as a process of renewed focus, as the repetition of the tauhid formula directs full attention to a single point of concentration, allowing scattered thoughts to regroup. Students emphasized that dhikr creates cognitive calm because the rhythm of the recitation helps

eliminate internal distractions that previously triggered stress. Mothers and wives reported that dhikr provides a safe emotional space that allows them to resolve domestic tensions and inner conflicts more steadily. This psycho-spiritual mechanism is firmly grounded in Surah 13:28 of the Quran, which states that dhikr calms the heart, and in the hadith, which mentions “angels surrounding the gathering of dhikr,”¹⁷ confirming that this activity has a spiritual dimension that directly affects the mental state.

A series of psychophysiological mechanisms supports the explanation for stress reduction: the repetition of dhikr creates a regular breathing pattern that increases parasympathetic nervous system activation, resulting in a lower heart rate and reduced muscle tension.¹⁸ Teachers exhibit a more rapid physiological response because they maintain stable concentration while reciting dhikr, resulting in more harmonious synchronization between breath and vocalization. Students show a more gradual response because the breath-control practice is not yet fully optimized, but it remains strong enough to produce significant stress reduction. Mothers and wives exhibit the most pronounced physiological effects because dhikr helps relieve the emotional burdens of household demands, making it easier to achieve. These findings are consistent with the study by Hidayat et al. (2023), which reported physiological changes, including more relaxed shoulders, more regular breathing, and a lighter head after an intensive dhikr session.¹⁹ This explanation suggests that dhikr combines spiritual and physiological dimensions working simultaneously: creating focus through meaningful repetition and activating the body’s relaxation system, resulting in stable calm.

Overall results indicate that dhikr functions as an effective medium for emotional regulation by integrating spiritual appreciation, cognitive control, and harmonious physiological responses. Significant stress reduction across all informants confirms that the structure of a regular, repetitive, and meaningful dhikr ritual consistently reduces

mental tension. Quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the basis of hadith, provide a comprehensive picture: dhikr creates a more stable, focused, and calm inner state through the process of *tuma’ninah* internalized in daily religious experiences. These findings indicate that dhikr is universally effective in building adaptive emotional regulation among women across all categories who participate in the spiritual activities of the Fadhlilah Quran Foundation.

Psychoreligious Integrative Model of Istighfar and Dhikir

The development of a hadith-based psychoreligious integrative model on the synergistic role of istighfar and dhikr in reducing stress in women shows that both practices work through complementary cognitive, affective, spiritual, and physiological pathways. Quantitative data synthesis shows that the mean difference in stress reduction through istighfar ranges from ± 9.3 to ± 9.5 points. In contrast, the mean difference in dhikr ranges from ± 9.1 to ± 9.5 points, indicating that the effectiveness of both is relatively equal but operates through different and mutually reinforcing mechanisms. A comparative analysis confirms that istighfar has advantages in the dimensions of inner reconciliation and release of psychological burdens, while dhikr strengthens concentration and emotional stabilization. This integrative mechanism aligns with the Prophetic hadith, which explains that whoever frequently seeks forgiveness will be given freedom and a way out of difficulties.²⁰ Another hadith states that the heart finds peace through dhikr.²¹ These two theological messages provide a framework for the encounter between self-forgiveness, self-surrender, and inner peace as the foundation of emotional regulation.

The integration of these mechanisms is reinforced by the findings of several studies in the psychology of religion by Gao et al. (2020), which showed that repetitive spiritually oriented practices

¹⁷ Al-Bukhārī, no. 5929.

¹⁸ Erica Sharpe et al., “Investigating components of pranayama for effects on heart rate variability,” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 148 (2021), 110569 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2021.110569>>.

¹⁹ Arif Imam Hidayat et al., “Effect of Combining Dhikr and Prayer Therapy on Pain and Vital Signs in Appendectomy Patients: A Quasi-Experimental Study,”

Journal of Holistic Nursing, 42.1 (2023), 6–14 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/08980101231180051>>.

²⁰ Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Yazīd Ibnu Mājah, *Sunan Ibnu Mājah*, ed. oleh Muḥammad Fuād ‘Abd Al-Bāqī (al-Su’ūd: Dār al-Šadīq, 2014), no. 3809.

²¹ Abū al-Ḥusain Muslim bin al-Ḥajjāj al-Qusyairi Al-Naisābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. oleh Muḥammad Fuād ‘Abd Al-Bāqī (Kairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955), no. 4867.

activate cognitive regulation in the prefrontal cortex and reduce limbic hyperactivation in chronic stress conditions.²² Neuropsychological research by Eames and O'Connor (2022) shows that focused attention during repetitive religious activities plays a significant role in reducing rumination.²³ Both provide a theoretical basis for the substantial role of oral religious activities in strengthening self-control, which in turn reduces mental tension. This initial model reinforces the idea that istighfar and dhikr can be understood as two distinct psycho-spiritual tools that operate on the same emotional management system through complementary pathways.

An integrative understanding of these mechanisms is strengthened by interdisciplinary studies examining the relationship between repetitive religious practices and psychological recovery. Positive psychology research by Mróz, Toussaint, and Kaleta (2024) found that repeating prayers about forgiveness activates self-compassion mechanisms that encourage inner openness to accepting one's shortcomings,²⁴ while spiritual intervention research by Koch (2025) shows that religious affirmations centered on confession, repentance, and asking for forgiveness have a significant impact on the recovery of mental stress.²⁵ Another study by Monteiro, Brito, and Pereira (2024) in the field of spirituality-based psychotherapy explains that the experience of forgiveness reduces the emotional burden that arises from accumulated guilt and the inability to manage life's demands.²⁶

In line with this, research by El-Ashry (2024) on repetition-based meditation confirms that repeating certain phrases related to monotheistic

values creates stable cognitive focus, reduces the flow of distracting thoughts, and activates the process of cognitive defusion.²⁷ In parallel, neuroscientific studies examining breathing rhythms during repetitive activities found that synchronization between sound and breath results in parasympathetic activation, which leads to relaxation.²⁸ Both sets of findings provide scientific justification for the claim that istighfar strengthens the dimension of self-acceptance, while dhikr strengthens attentional stability and emotional regulation. Both then form a mutually supportive psychological recovery system through strengthening cognitive control on the one hand and releasing affective burdens on the other.

Table 3.
Comparison of Psychoreligious Mechanisms between Qualitative Findings at the Fadhilah Quran Foundation and Empirical Findings of Previous Studies

Dimensions of Psychoreligious Mechanisms	Qualitative Findings on Informants of the Fadhilah Quran Foundation	Empirical Consensus in the Contemporary Psychology of Religion and Neuroscience Literature
Reducing Affective and	The practice of istighfar resulted in the release of	Forgiveness-based spiritual practices strengthen self-

²² Junling Gao et al., "Repetitive Religious Chanting Invokes Positive Emotional Schema to Counterbalance Fear: A Multi-Modal Functional and Structural MRI Study," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 14 (2020), 1–11 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2020.548856>>.

²³ Catrin Eames dan Donna O'Connor, "The role of repetitive thinking and spirituality in the development of posttraumatic growth and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder," *PLOS ONE*, 17.8 (2022), e0272036 <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272036>>.

²⁴ Justyna Mróz, Loren Toussaint, dan Kinga Kaleta, "Association between Religiosity and Forgiveness: Testing a Moderated Mediation Model of Self-Compassion and Adverse Childhood Experiences," *Religions*, 15.9 (2024), 1137 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091137>>.

²⁵ Amie Koch et al., "Coming Out as LGBTQ+: A Qualitative Study on the Mental Health Impact of Religious Responses to Disclosure," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 72.14

(2025), 2811–28 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2025.2452464>>.

²⁶ Isabela Monteiro, Laura Brito, dan M Graça Pereira, "Burden and quality of life of family caregivers of Alzheimer's disease patients: the role of forgiveness as a coping strategy," *Aging & Mental Health*, 28.7 (2024), 1003–10 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2024.2320138>>.

²⁷ Ayman Mohamed El-Ashry et al., "Effect of applying nursing-based cognitive defusion techniques on mindful awareness, cognitive fusion, and believability of delusions among clients with schizophrenia: a randomized control trial," *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15 (2024), 1–12 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1369160>>.

²⁸ Eric Harbour et al., "Step-adaptive sound guidance enhances locomotor-respiratory coupling in novice female runners: A proof-of-concept study," *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 5 (2023), 1–9 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2023.1112663>>.

Psychological Burden	emotional stress, reduced feelings of guilt, and reduced the gender role conflict experienced by informants	compassion mechanisms and reduce the accumulation of emotional stress
Stabilization of Attention and Cognitive Focus	Dhikr produces sustained mental focus and dampens intrusive thoughts related to domestic and social stress	Religious repetition increases prefrontal modulation and decreases limbic hyperactivation
Serenity and Consolidation of Spirituality	Informants felt a stable inner calm after istighfar and dhikr when done consistently	Repetitive verbal activities increase parasympathetic dominance and create deep physiological relaxation
Reconstruction of Meaning and Strengthening of Self-Identity	Istighfar helps informants rearrange the structure of meaning, strengthen self-acceptance, and stabilize perceptions of personal competence	The practice of spiritual acceptance strengthens the reconstruction of personal meaning and enhances inner well-being
Negative Emotion Regulation and Affective Resilience	Dhikr reduces negative emotional tendencies such as anxiety, irritability, and overthinking	A single spiritual focus reduces affective variability and strengthens emotional resilience

A comprehensive synthesis of previous empirical findings demonstrates an integrative pattern in which istighfar underlies cognitive-affective changes aimed at shedding emotional burdens. In contrast, dhikr underlies cognitive-physiological changes that stabilize emotional responses. Several clinical psychology studies by Yang (2025) confirm that the release of emotional burdens is a fundamental factor preventing the accumulation of prolonged stress,²⁹ while neuroscientific meditation research by Wang et al. (2025) shows that repetitive rhythms with a single

focus result in a significant decrease in stress system activation.³⁰ Research by Bilosevych, Oleksyuk, and Savylyuk (2025) in spiritual psychology shows that religious awareness, developed through self-surrender, reduces sensitivity to external pressure,³¹ while studies of emotional regulation based on repetitive practices show that attentional stability minimizes the variability of negative emotions.³²

The integration of these findings reinforces the idea that istighfar through its dimensions of self-acceptance and forgiveness completes the process of processing psychological burdens, while dhikr through its dimensions of focus and rhythm regulates physiological responses related to calm and affective stability. The two do not work separately but rather converge at a single point: the formation of *tuma'ninah* as a state of calm strengthened by the experience of being guided, protected, and affirmed through spiritual relationships.

The integrative theoretical model formulated based on the findings of this study shows that istighfar and dhikr form two clusters of mutually reinforcing mechanisms. The first cluster consists of cognitive-affective mechanisms, including inner reconciliation, self-forgiveness, recognition of limitations, and the restoration of meaning structures, which produce a sense of spaciousness, as explained in the hadith regarding the expansiveness that comes with istighfar. The second cluster consists of cognitive-physiological mechanisms, including attentional stabilization, breath regulation, decreased physiological arousal, and the construction of divine awareness that produces tranquility, as explained in the hadith regarding the tranquility that descends with dhikr. Several studies in the psychology of religion by Chen (2025) confirm that the process of self-forgiveness promotes long-term emotional stability,³³ while research on spiritual

²⁹ Yuntong Yang et al., “Emotional habituation as a protective factor for resilience: Insights from ERP and hierarchical linear modeling,” *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 391 (2025), 119965. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2025.119965>>.

³⁰ Shimeng Wang et al., “Does physical activity-based intervention decrease repetitive negative thinking? A systematic review,” *PLOS ONE*, 20.4 (2025), e0319806. <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0319806>>.

³¹ Ivan Bilosevych, Mariia Oleksyuk, dan Natalia Savylyuk, “Religious Faith as a Tool for Psychological Support During Combat Operations,” *Pharos Journal of*

Theology, 106.3 (2025), 1–13 <<https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.3026>>.

³² Patrick J F Clarke et al., “The effects of left DLPFC tDCS on emotion regulation, biased attention, and emotional reactivity to negative content,” *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 20.6 (2020), 1323–35 <<https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-020-00840-2>>.

³³ Gila Chen, “Self-Forgiveness and Gratitude in Recovery from Substance Use Disorders,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 57.3 (2025), 304–13 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2024.2366172>>.

neurophysiology shows that repetitive activities grounded in transcendental values build brainwave patterns consistent with deep relaxation.³⁴

Several other studies by Ludwig, Koetke, and Schumann (2025) showed that a belief structure about divine forgiveness reduced the intensity of chronic guilt,³⁵ while a religious meditation-based intervention study by Simonovich et al. (2022) found that prayer repetition played a significant role in reducing anxiety.³⁶ These two sets of findings suggest that each practice has its own unique power. When both are practiced regularly within a consistent spiritual framework, the effects are not only additive but synergistic.

A conceptual analysis of how the synergy between the two works reveals a multi-layered strengthening mechanism. The first layer involves releasing mental burdens through *istighfar* (religious remembrance), which opens the inner space for serenity. This aligns with research by Avci (2025), who explains that admitting mistakes reduces intrapsychic conflict, which triggers latent stress,³⁷ and with affective neuroscience research by Chou (2024), which shows that self-acceptance reduces amygdala activation.³⁸ The second layer involves affective stabilization through *dhikr* (remembrance of God), which strengthens this serenity and makes psychological conditions more resilient to internal pressures.

Research findings on emotional regulation by Graça and Brandão (2024) confirm that a singular

focus on spiritual stimuli reduces emotional fluctuations,³⁹ while research on religious mindfulness by Oman, Bormann, and Kane (2022) shows that inner presence during repetitive prayer creates lasting psychophysiological stability.⁴⁰ The third layer is the internalization of spiritual beliefs, which strengthens the previous two layers by establishing a stable framework of meaning. Research on the psychology of religion by Rutledge (2025) confirms that a sense of closeness to God strengthens mental resilience,⁴¹ while research on existential psychology by Wong (2021) finds that belief in transcendental acceptance reduces the existential burden that typically contributes to stress.⁴² These three layers form an integrative working structure, reinforced by Prophetic hadiths regarding forgiveness, serenity, and inner peace that come with *dhikr*.

The final synthesis shows that the psychoreligious integrative model formed through the combination of *istighfar* and *dhikr* operates through five axes: inner purification through self-forgiveness, meaning-making through divine awareness, focus through meaningful repetition, physiological stabilization through vocal and breath rhythms, and the construction of *tuma'ninah* as the final result of the integration of all these mechanisms. Empirical findings regarding stress reduction in all categories of women consistently demonstrate that these two practices not only produce short-term psychological effects but also

³⁴ Giulia Avvenuti et al., “Reductions in perceived stress following Transcendental Meditation practice are associated with increased brain regional connectivity at rest,” *Brain and Cognition*, 139 (2020), 105517 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandc.2020.105517>>.

³⁵ Justin M Ludwig, Jonah Koetke, dan Karina Schumann, “Implications of Divine Forgiveness for Conciliatory Behavior: Understanding How Feeling Forgiven by God Influences Apologies Via Self-Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Humility,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2025, 01461672241312265 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672241312265>>.

³⁶ Shannon D. Simonovich et al., “Faith Practices Reduce Perinatal Anxiety and Depression in Muslim Women: A Mixed-Methods Scoping Review,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13 (2022), 1–7 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.826769>>.

³⁷ Mahsum Avci, “The repetition principle of traumatic dreams,” *Scientific Reports*, 15.1 (2025), 19945 <<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-05246-z>>.

³⁸ Tina Chou et al., “Transcranial focused ultrasound of the amygdala modulates fear network activation and connectivity,” *Brain Stimulation: Basic, Translational, and Clinical Research in Neuromodulation*, 17.2

(2024), 312–20 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brs.2024.03.004>>.

³⁹ Lídia Graça dan Tânia Brandão, “Religious/Spiritual Coping, Emotion Regulation, Psychological Well-Being, and Life Satisfaction among University Students,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 52.3 (2024), 342–58 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/00916471231223920>>.

⁴⁰ Doug Oman, Jill E Bormann, dan Jim J Kane, “Mantram Repetition as a Portable Mindfulness Practice: Applications During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Mindfulness*, 13.6 (2022), 1418–29 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01545-w>>.

⁴¹ Kathleen Rutledge, “Rethinking pathways to well-being: the function of faith practice in distress alleviation among displaced Muslim women affected by war,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16 (2025), 1–22 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1335640>>.

⁴² Paul T.P. Wong et al., “Self-Transcendence as a Buffer Against COVID-19 Suffering: The Development and Validation of the Self-Transcendence Measure-B,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12 (2021), 1–21 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648549>>.

create a pattern of sustainable mental strengthening. The Prophet's hadith, which emphasizes the expansiveness of those who ask for forgiveness and the tranquility of those who perform dhikr, provides a normative basis that aligns with contemporary scientific findings regarding religious relaxation and spirituality-based emotional regulation. This integrative model not only explains the mechanisms of stress reduction but also provides a theoretical framework for further research on psychological interventions grounded in Islamic practices and the development of spiritual development programs focused on women's psychological recovery.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that structured spiritual practices can significantly reduce women's psychological burden, with key findings confirming that istighfar and dhikr operate through mechanisms of emotional regulation, increased self-awareness, and strengthened transcendent meanings that support affective stability. Istighfar appears to be more prominent in mediating reductions in cognitive stress related to guilt and overthinking. At the same time, dhikr is more effective in slowing the intensity of the stress response through its calming, repetitive rhythm. Thus, the two form a synergistic model that enriches the construction of Islamic psychology and expands the body of hadith studies on spiritual practices as coping strategies. Practically, these results provide a strong foundation for educational institutions, families, and women's communities to design systematic, adaptive, and evidence-based psychoreligious interventions. The study's limitations stem from its non-experimental design, its relatively homogeneous sample, and the psychological instruments that lack physiological indicators. Future research should develop a more rigorous experimental design, expand the population to include a diverse age range and social backgrounds, and incorporate biometric measures, such as heart rate variability and cortisol, to more comprehensively validate this psychoreligious model.

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