

Investigating the integration of prayer in family counseling among Muslim counselors in Malaysia



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ABSTRACT

Prayer is an intentional way of connecting with the sacred through thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Counselors often use prayer as part of therapeutic interventions to seek spiritual guidance. However, its use in family counseling raises questions about the methods and reasoning behind its application. This study explores how Muslim counselors in Malaysia incorporate prayer in family counseling to address various issues. A qualitative case study approach was used, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 counselors from three counseling centers. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes in the data. The findings highlight two main roles of prayer in family counseling: (i) as a source of support for counselors and (ii) as a tool to empower clients. The counselors reported that prayer helps reduce stress, promote hope, and build inner strength. The results suggest that counselors view the integration of prayer positively, reflecting their spiritual and religious values. This study offers important insights into the ethical aspects of using prayer in counseling and emphasizes the need for further research in this area.

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1. Introduction

In Malaysia, Islam is the official religion, significantly influencing family and marriage dynamics. Muslim marriages adhere to Islamic regulations, which renders integrating spiritual and religious practices essential in family and marriage counseling. Counselors often incorporate these elements into their services, as highlighted by Md Yusoff (2011) and Nelson et al. (2011), who emphasized the importance of religious-based interventions in enhancing clients' well-being during family and marital challenges.

The integration of prayer into counseling practices has historical roots in both Western and Islamic contexts. Genia (1995) and Tan (1996) were among the first to advocate for prayer as a therapeutic intervention, defining it as an internal discourse with a higher power. This perspective aligns with Rudio and Wong (2022), who described

prayer as a direct means of seeking divine assistance. Research indicates that prayer can broaden perspectives on marital issues, fostering empathy among couples (Butler and Harper, 1994). However, Tan (1996) advised the judicious use of prayer, stressing its application in specific contexts to prevent ethical violations (Weld and Eriksen, 2007).

In the Islamic tradition, prayer symbolizes a connection between the individual and Allah SWT. It is viewed as an act of worship that acknowledges human vulnerability and dependence on the divine (Radzi et al., 2014; Ibrahim et al., 2014). Prayer serves not only to purify the heart but also to instill calmness and resilience in facing life's challenges (Hamdan, 2008). During counseling, practitioners assess clients' relationships with Allah SWT, including their reliance on prayer and engagement with religious practices such as the five daily prayers and Quranic recitation. A recent review by Lucchetti et al. (2021) advocated for integrating spiritual practices, including prayer, into therapeutic settings as beneficial for mental health outcomes.

Hamdan (2008) asserted that prayer in religious psychotherapy enhances spiritual resilience, enabling individuals to effectively confront and navigate challenging situations. During counseling, practitioners assess clients' perspectives on Allah SWT and their faith. This evaluation includes

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examining the client's reliance on Allah SWT in difficult times, their propensity to seek divine assistance, their practices of repentance and forgiveness, as well as their commitment to the five daily prayers and recitation of the Holy Quran.

Several counseling approaches in Malaysia have emerged that integrate religious traditions. These include Mohamed's (2005) Ad-Din Cognitive Psychology Theory, Hamjah's (2010a) al-Irsyad al-Nafsiyy based on al-Ghazali's teachings, and Saper's (2012) Tazkiyah an-Nafs Guidance Module. Research by Sipon and Hassan (2015) demonstrated the effectiveness of family therapy programs that incorporate religious themes, suggesting that prayer can be a valuable intervention.

Froese et al. (2024) found that counselors actively engage in discussions about religion and incorporate practices such as prayer and reading sacred texts into their counseling sessions. Research consistently demonstrates that spiritual and religious approaches, particularly prayer, are commonly integrated into therapeutic interventions. This practice is especially vital within the Muslim community due to the central role of prayer in their faith. Ibrahim et al. (2014) emphasized that prayer serves as a direct means for Muslims to seek assistance from Allah SWT.

Incorporating prayer into counseling presents distinct ethical challenges, especially with the potential risk of imposing personal religious beliefs on clients. Counselors must carefully navigate these complexities by adhering to the ethical guidelines set forth by professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the Kod Etika Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia. These guidelines emphasize the importance of respecting client autonomy, honoring cultural diversity, and ensuring informed consent (APA, 2017). To avoid ethical dilemmas, it is crucial for counselors to engage in open discussions with clients about their spiritual beliefs, ensuring that any integration of prayer is consistent with the client's values and preferences (Shaler, 2019). Counselors must also engage in self-reflection to ensure that their own beliefs and biases do not interfere with the therapeutic process. Obtaining informed consent is vital before introducing any spiritual interventions, as this helps maintain transparency and uphold ethical standards in the counselor-client relationship (Lomax et al., 2002; Subarimaniyam et al., 2020). Case studies have demonstrated that exploring clients' spiritual needs and preferences can successfully integrate prayer as a voluntary intervention, supporting client autonomy while addressing their spiritual concerns (Seesink et al., 2022). However, caution is necessary, as the use of prayer in therapy could potentially raise ethical concerns and disrupt the therapeutic relationship if not handled properly (Gubi, 2009; Weld and Eriksen, 2007). As such, counselors should obtain clear and explicit consent, whether written or verbal, before introducing prayer into sessions (Horton-Parker and Fawcett, 2010). It

is also crucial to avoid dual roles, such as acting as both counselor and religious instructor (Wolf and Stevens, 2001), and to remain vigilant in maintaining ethical boundaries throughout the counseling process.

Despite a lack of specialized training in integrating religious practices into therapy, many counselors engage in discussions about religion and incorporate elements like prayer into their sessions (Md Yusoff, 2011). This study aims to examine how counselors in Malaysia utilize prayer within family therapy settings, enhancing our understanding of its significance as a therapeutic intervention within the Muslim community.

2. Research objectives

This study investigates how family and marriage counselors in Malaysia use and implement prayer in their sessions. This qualitative study investigates how family and marriage counselors use prayer in their sessions and how prayer helps with the counseling process. This study highlights the potential advantages of incorporating spirituality into therapeutic interventions. It deepens our understanding of counseling practices' cultural and religious dynamics by illuminating the practices and motivations behind including prayer in counseling sessions. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the importance of considering various strategies, including spiritual components like prayer, to effectively and comprehensively help individuals and families in Malaysia looking for counseling services.

After this, recommendations for further research on incorporating prayer into the practices of family and marriage counseling among Malaysian counselors will be provided, along with the implications of the findings presented and an account of the methodologies utilized in this study. It is anticipated that counselors attempting to enhance their cultural competence and responsiveness when attending to their client's spiritual and religious preferences will find the knowledge and understandings acquired from this study very beneficial. Moreover, counselors can cultivate a stronger rapport and trust with their clients by gaining insight into how prayer is incorporated into counseling sessions, providing a more profound understanding of their cultural roots and belief systems.

Moreover, this investigation makes a scholarly contribution to the continuous discourse in counseling psychology concerning incorporating spirituality into therapeutic methodologies by examining the function of prayer in counseling. This emphasizes the potential advantages of integrating spiritual components into counseling interventions and the significance of acknowledging and valuing the client's religious and spiritual convictions.

This study provides a fundamental basis for future investigations into the convergence of counseling and spirituality in Malaysia. Doing so offers valuable insights that may guide the

development of counseling methodologies that are both culturally attuned and effective. Future research efforts aimed at improving the accessibility and quality of counseling services for families and individuals in Malaysia and beyond are encouraged to draw inspiration from the results of this study.

3. Methodology

This section elucidates the procedures and processes employed to carry out this investigation. The text concisely overviews the research design, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

This study utilizes a qualitative approach focusing on a case study design. This research aims to explore the perspectives of family and marriage counselors on how and why they integrate prayer into their counseling services in Malaysia. Yin (2014) suggested that a case study design is appropriate for investigating the reasons and mechanisms behind a specific phenomenon. In the case of studies, data gathered may pertain to an individual, organization, or circumstance where unexpected or ambiguous behaviors are examined closely to achieve a detailed comprehension or reorganization of the case, as described by Flick (2009).

This case study delves into the utilization of prayer in family and marriage counseling, specifically examining how practitioners integrate prayer and why they incorporate it in their interventions. The study's design was chosen based on Yazan's (2015) proposal that conducting a case study is necessary to gather detailed information and generate fresh findings. We used a qualitative case study design to investigate the utilization of prayer to incorporate spiritual and religious methods in managing family and marriage counseling situations in Malaysia (Md Yusoff, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The participants were selected using purposive non-probability sampling. Potential participants in the study were selected from three government agencies providing family and marriage counseling services: The Department of Public Welfare, the National Population and Family Development Agency, and the State Islamic Religious

Council. The researchers contacted the desk officers of the three agencies by phone and obtained letters of authorization. They then explained the study's aim and sought approval to enter the study site for participant interviews. The researchers established the following requirements for the study participants, which are:

1. A registered counselor by the Malaysian Board of Counselors and holding a valid practice certification
2. Currently working as, a Psychology Officer
3. Have at least five years of experience in practicing family and marriage
4. Only among Muslim counselors

The study involved a sample of 13 counselors who identified as practicing Muslims, consisting of three males and ten females. The counselors were selected from three distinct counseling institutes that offer family counseling services in the regions of Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Kelantan. The study included individuals aged 32 to 46 with eight to 18 years of expertise in offering family and marriage counseling services. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants. To protect the participants' privacy and anonymity, they were addressed throughout this study using distinct anonymous names or pseudonyms.

The participants were provided with a comprehensive overview of the research method, aims, and protocols and were informed that their involvement in the study was optional. The participants provided their consent by signing informed consent forms before the commencement of the interviews. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews employing an interview protocol comprising validated questions endorsed by three experts in the respective subject of study and research methodology. During the interviews, the researchers used a set of questions, including one that asked about the use of prayer in counseling: "What is the role of prayer in counseling sessions?" and "What is the rationale behind incorporating prayer into counseling practice?"

Table 1: Summary of the participants' demographic information

Participants	Gender	Marital status	Setting of experience	Years of experience in family and marriage counseling
P1	Male	Married	Islamic counseling center	18 years
P2	Female	Married	Islamic counseling center	12 years
P3	Male	Married	Islamic counseling center	16 years
P4	Female	Married	Islamic counseling center	11 years
P5	Male	Married	Islamic counseling center	12 years
P6	Female	Married	Islamic counseling center	12 years
P7	Female	Married	Social welfare	15 years
P8	Female	Married	Social welfare	11 years
P9	Female	Married	Social welfare	8 years
P10	Female	Single	Social welfare	9 years
P11	Female	Widow	Social welfare	8 years
P12	Female	Married	Family planning agency	14 years
P13	Female	Widow	Family planning agency	16 years

The audio recordings of the interviews were taken verbatim and transcribed. Thematic analysis

was performed on the verbatim transcriptions using the NVIVO version 11 software tool. Regarding

descriptive case study design, the researcher always followed the bracketing principle by not imposing our perceived knowledge, interpretation, theoretical underpinning, or experience during the analytic process. The researcher further confirmed that when composing the findings report, they solely described the participants' pure perceptions, excluding any extraneous external information unrelated to the event environment. Finally, two significant themes emerged that reflect the perception and practice of prayer in family and marriage counseling: 1) prayer as a counselor support tool, and 2) prayer as a client empowerment technique. Each of these themes has a subtheme. The specifics are explained in the results section. In [Table 2](#), a summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged is presented.

Table 2: Summary of themes and sub-themes of findings

Themes	Sub-themes
Prayer as a supportive tool for counselors	Gain inner strength and confidence
	Feel empowered to assist client
	Self-balance, humility, and calming To seek guidance and help from God
Prayer as a client empowerment strategy	As a coping mechanism
	Reduced stress levels
	A source of renewed hope

This qualitative study ensures reliability and validity through reflexivity, peer review, member checking, and triangulation, aligning with [Guba's \(1981\)](#) framework for evaluating the quality of qualitative research: Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Validity reflects the researcher's commitment to ethical standards in collecting, processing, and interpreting data ([Creswell, 2013](#)). Reflexivity and triangulation help mitigate researcher bias, ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of findings ([Creswell, 2014](#)). Reflexivity encourages researchers to critically examine how their backgrounds, beliefs, cultures, and experiences shape their interpretation of the data ([Creswell and Miller, 2000](#); [Yin, 2014](#)). Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the study's ability to produce consistent results and be replicated across different contexts ([Merriam, 2009](#)). Credibility relates to how accurately the research methods capture the phenomena under study ([Morrow, 2005](#)), while transferability addresses the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts, akin to generalization in quantitative research ([Shenton, 2004](#)). Together, reliability and validity work to ensure data integrity by minimizing bias and the influence of the researcher. This integrity is further strengthened by triangulation and expert review ([Shenton, 2004](#); [Morrow, 2005](#)).

4. Results of the study

The study's analysis revealed two main themes regarding the perspectives and approaches used by counselors who integrate prayer into their counseling sessions: (i) prayer as a supportive tool for counselors, and (ii) prayer as a client empowerment strategy.

4.1. Prayer as a supportive tool for a counselor

The study revealed that ten counselors engaged in practices such as prayer, meditation, and voluntary prayers to achieve balance before conducting counseling sessions. The counselors acknowledged that these practices helped them gain strength and confidence. When asked about the role of prayer in counseling, Participant 4 (P4) explained that their routine includes starting with personal prayer, primarily to build their own resilience. This process involves creating a mental and emotional defense mechanism before offering counseling services. P4 stated: "Usually, I pray for myself first, focusing on strengthening my inner resilience. I build my self-defense first and then pray for the well-being of others. I often perform voluntary prayers, and when I wake up at night, I pray devotionally. My intention always begins with myself—that's what I emphasize the most."

Engaging in prayer can lead to an increased sense of self-assurance and, in turn, indirectly bolster their internal fortitude. It is believed that counselors should prioritize cultivating their strengths to enhance their confidence and resilience in assisting their clients. This finding aligns with [Horton-Parker and Fawcett's \(2010\)](#) research, which claimed that counselors who pray before counseling sessions experience an improved sense of spiritual connection and personal resilience during client interactions.

Similarly, P1 expressed that prayer empowers them to support clients while providing a sense of calm when addressing the challenges clients face. P1 emphasized the importance of seeking guidance and strength from God, acknowledging that God is the ultimate source of authority in their work. P1 views their role as a medium through which God's assistance is delivered, rather than relying on personal ability. By praying for God's mercy, P1 shared that they experience greater peace of mind when dealing with their clients' situations. This perspective is consistent with [Horton-Parker and Fawcett's \(2010\)](#) findings, which highlighted that prayer before counseling sessions helps counselors maintain balance, humility, and mental clarity when working with clients. P1 stated: "If I know I have an appointment with a client tomorrow, I wake up early in the morning to pray to Allah to make things easier. I ask Allah to help the client accept what I share, facilitate the process, and relieve their burdens. I also pray for guidance to ensure that what I say aligns with the teachings of our religion."

In addition to its potential for fostering physical and emotional resilience, prayer is widely seen as a method of seeking divine guidance and assistance from Allah SWT. According to P1, in anticipation of an upcoming meeting with a client, they wake up at night to conduct the supplication prayer known as a special prayer. This act is undertaken to seek divine intervention from Allah SWT to facilitate a successful counseling session on a subsequent day. In addition, the practitioners pray, expressing their desire for the

client to cultivate a receptive disposition and embrace the constructive elements discussed during the counseling session. P1 elaborates in the provided interview excerpt that he performs the supplication prayer upon awakening, intending to seek divine intervention from Allah SWT to facilitate his upcoming session with a client. The purpose of this prayer is to ensure that the client is receptive to the advice and guidance provided by P1.

Additionally, P1 and P7 emphasize the importance of seeking help from Allah SWT through prayer to support their clients and alleviate their burdens. Both counselors acknowledge that their ability to perform effectively is not solely based on their expertise but on divine assistance. Despite having over 15 years of experience in handling family cases, they continue to rely on their faith in Allah SWT for hope and strength. Their approach reflects deeply ingrained religious attitudes, which are shared by other counselors, such as P4, P10, P11, P12, and P13. These findings are consistent with the research by Ibrahim et al. (2014), which highlights that prayer helps individuals recognize their limitations and their role as servants of Allah SWT. P7 shared: "I will perform a special prayer, or if I don't have time for the special prayer, at least in my final prostration, I will ask for Allah's help to ease the session." P10 explained: "I performed a special prayer... that night, I performed a special prayer. On the day I was going, I performed a special prayer, and usually, that morning, I did a little Duha prayer, as that is my routine... then another special prayer."

The findings indicate that counselors use different forms of prayer depending on their circumstances and available time. Some counselors perform prayers during Qiyam al-Layl (night prayers), while others pray during the Duha prayer (mid-morning prayer). Specific counselors engage in supplication prayers, referred to as special prayers, while others pray during the obligatory fardu prayers. P11 elaborated: "In the special prayer, during the final prostration, I seek divine intervention to ensure the counseling session goes smoothly. Because in prayer, we acknowledge that it's not our power but a higher power that helps us accomplish things." These practices demonstrate that counselors view prayer as a profound expression of their dependence on Allah SWT in all aspects of their work.

P10 emphasizes their role as a counselor acting as an intermediary to support clients, underscoring that true help originates from Allah SWT. They believe counselors should rely entirely on Allah SWT in their counseling services. P10 and P7 both assert that their ability to continue their work is not due to their own efforts but rather the strength granted by Allah SWT. They actively seek assistance from Allah SWT, acknowledging that they must rely on Him. Similarly, P1 highlights that if clients achieve their goals, it is not due to the counselor's abilities but to the intervention of Allah SWT. Counselors see themselves as instruments facilitating change, not as the source of solutions. P10 shares this perspective,

stating that prayer represents their complete reliance on Allah SWT for support. This aligns with Horton-Parker and Fawcett's (2010) findings, which suggest that therapists are more effective when they seek assistance from a higher power. Hanin Hamjah and Mat Akhir's (2014) research similarly emphasizes the importance of seeking Allah SWT's guidance as a cornerstone of counseling services. P10 expressed: "Every time I handle a case, I will pray, perform a special prayer... relying entirely on Allah's help." P7 stated: "My process of conducting sessions is I first go pray. First, I will go get my ablution water and perform a special prayer. Because in prayer, we seek, we know it's not our power, it's another power that helps in doing something."

The study further reveals that counselors employ a variety of prayer styles and practices. These include supplication prayers (special prayers), repentance prayers, mid-morning prayers, night prayers, and remembrance prayers (zikr). Another observed practice involves incorporating silent prayers during counseling sessions. P8 explained that engaging in zikr, including mentioning Allah SWT's names (Asmaul Husna) and sending blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (shalawat), helps alleviate tension and fosters inner tranquility. Similarly, P9 shared that remembering Allah SWT through zikr creates a sense of calm and focus. P1 stated: "I have to recite some prayers first, in those prayers, 'O Allah, grant me, open Your doors of mercy to us.' When I do that, I feel calmer in facing the client's reality. Another thing I do is mention the client's name in my prayer, asking Allah for their well-being. I acknowledge that Allah has power over everything, including the hearts of His creations, and I am no different from them."

According to P1, P5, P7, P8, and P12, praying for a client's well-being is a practice they continue after counseling sessions. P8 specifically noted that after a session, they pray for the client's matters to be resolved and for the best outcomes. This aligns with Tan's (1996) proposal that prayer can be incorporated into various stages of the counseling process, including before, during, or after sessions, at the beginning, the end, or even during pauses in sessions. P8 stated: "What we can help clients with, but usually after the session, we try to pray for the client's affairs to be facilitated. We try to pray for the best for them."

Counselors use prayer to seek guidance and demonstrate reliance on Allah SWT, reflecting the concept of al-Raja' (hope). As described by Hamjah (2010b), Imam al-Ghazali viewed al-Raja' as cultivating hope in Allah and actively seeking His benevolence. This sense of hope inspires consistent effort, helping individuals avoid despair and motivating them to persist in their work.

4.2. Prayer as a client empowerment strategy

The study revealed that therapists use prayer as an intervention to support clients during counseling

sessions. According to P8, individuals facing significant challenges, particularly related to their children, report that incorporating prayer into their daily routines reduces stress and acts as a protective factor against despair. Despite the difficulties, these individuals persist in guiding their children's behavior while maintaining hope through prayer. This finding suggests that prayer serves as an effective coping mechanism, reducing psychological burdens, fostering optimism, and encouraging perseverance in the face of challenges. P8 noted that prayer helps them manage stress, cultivate trust in Allah (tawakkal), and remain steadfast in their efforts to assist their children.

Prayer also provides renewed hope for clients who feel disheartened by unsuccessful attempts to address their problems. [Sipon and Hassan \(2015\)](#) argue that prayer creates a sense of divine presence, reinforcing the belief that Allah SWT is always present to provide support. Similarly, [Hamjah \(2015\)](#) emphasized that prayer fosters remembrance of Allah SWT, offering clients comfort and peace during adversity.

During counseling sessions, participants P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, and P11 noted that clients often requested prayer texts or scripts for personal use. P4 shared that they maintain a collection of prayer excerpts, particularly for clients dealing with marital difficulties, and provide these upon request. P2 and P6 also reported similar practices. P4 explained that many clients, particularly women, seek prayers to strengthen their marital relationships, such as prayers for love and harmony. P4 stated: "I have a collection of clippings, prayers that I often use in sessions, especially when I'm involved in many household cases. Many wives complain to me, wanting prayers to be loved by their husbands and to soften their husbands' hearts. I copy these prayers for clients who have such problems." In addition to providing prayer texts, P3 and P12 instruct clients on how to perform prayers. For example, P12 teaches clients to recite supplications such as: "O Allah, guide me towards the righteous path that is blessed. O Allah, bestow upon me all favorable decrees and protect me from unfavorable ones." P3 encourages clients to engage in night prayers (tahajud), advising them to wake up during the last part of the night and pray to Allah SWT as they would confide in their counselor. This aligns with [Hamjah's \(2015\)](#) findings, which recommend tahajud as a way for clients to seek divine guidance and peace. P1 and P3 also reported instances where clients requested joint prayer sessions during counseling. P1 clarified that while this is not a routine practice, they comply with such requests, typically concluding sessions with a collective "Amen." P7 disclosed that they engage in silent prayer during sessions, praying privately for the client without their knowledge. This approach aligns with [Yucel and Nursi's \(2010\)](#) perspective that prayer can be performed discreetly to assist others.

The study highlights that prayer fosters trust between the client and counselor, demonstrates

empathy, alleviates feelings of isolation, cultivates hope, and promotes a safe space for emotional expression. Counselors also noted that prayer enhances their self-awareness and spiritual readiness to support clients, as described by [Salhah \(2017\)](#) and [Fisher \(2011\)](#).

However, incorporating prayer into counseling requires careful ethical considerations. [Gubi \(2009\)](#) and [Weld and Eriksen \(2007\)](#) emphasized the importance of securing informed consent before using prayer as a therapeutic tool to avoid ethical transgressions or dual relationships, such as simultaneously acting as a religious instructor. The Malaysian Counselor Code of Ethics of 2011 outlines key provisions, such as obtaining informed consent (Section A.2.a), respecting client values (Section A.4.b), working within one's professional training (Section C.2), and ensuring smooth role transitions during the counseling process (Section A.5.e).

The study identified two primary themes: the role of prayer as a tool for counselors and its significance as a coping mechanism for clients. These findings are summarized in a conceptual framework illustrating the integration of prayer in family counseling ([Fig. 1](#)). This framework demonstrates how prayer supports both counselors and clients, enhancing the therapeutic process and promoting resilience, hope, and spiritual growth.

5. Conclusions

This study examines the incorporation of prayer within the domain of family therapy in Malaysia. Counselors employ prayer to enhance their well-being and efficacy as helpers and promote the well-being of their clients seeking aid. Counselors perceive engaging in prayer before counseling sessions as possessing inherent merits. Engaging in personal prayer before counseling sessions can offer counselors an indirect source of strength and self-assurance when interacting with clients. This belief aligns with the assertion made by [Horton-Parker and Fawcett \(2010\)](#) that counselors who hold religious beliefs perceive prayer as having distinct advantages for both counselors and clients. According to [Rassool \(2015\)](#), prayer can be utilized as a coping mechanism by clients and as a means of providing spiritual support from therapists to their clients.

Counselors engage in implicit prayer, wherein they pray before and after sessions without the explicit awareness of their clients. Counselors also explicitly employ prayer when they openly and directly pray upon the client's request. The incorporation of prayer in counseling, as observed in the practices of counselors, is consistent with the proposition put forth by [Horton-Parker and Fawcett \(2010\)](#) that counselors may employ implicit or concealed techniques that are permissible and ethically acceptable. Hence, Muslim counselors' utilization of prayer in family therapy does not give rise to ethical transgressions, as stipulated in the Counselor Code of Ethics.

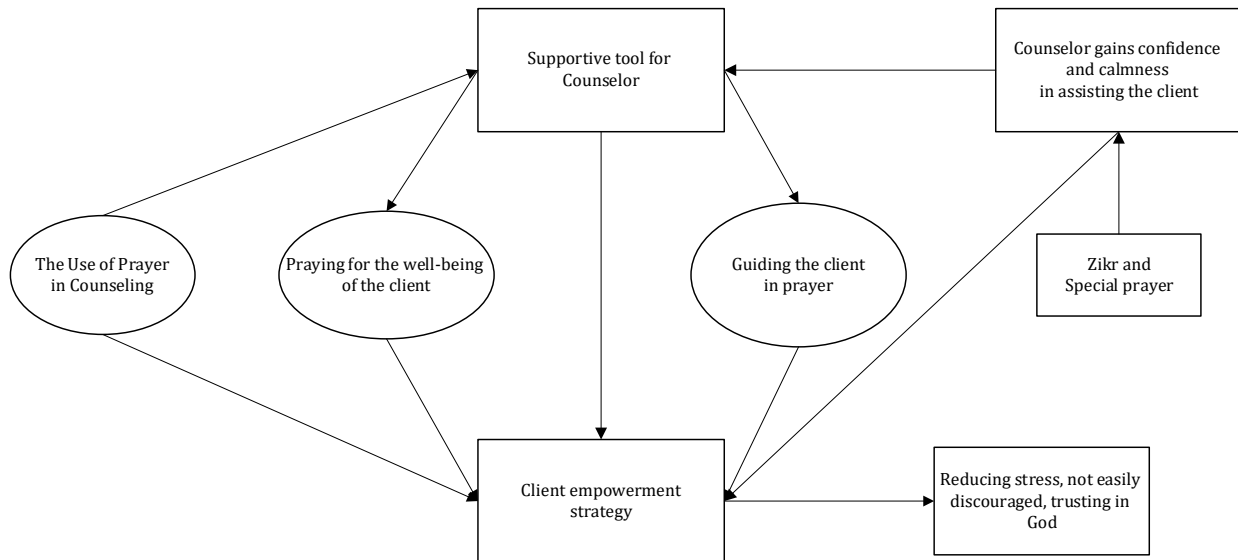


Fig. 1: A model for the use of prayer in family and marriage counseling

6. Limitation and future direction

This case study highlights the potential benefits of incorporating prayer into family and marriage counseling for Muslim clients. However, several limitations need to be considered. The small sample size, limited to Muslim counselors, may affect the generalizability of the findings, as it doesn't fully reflect the broader spectrum of counseling practices in Malaysia. Additionally, further research across different Muslim counseling contexts is needed to explore the cultural and religious sensitivities involved in integrating prayer into counseling.

A key limitation of this study is the reliance on semi-structured interviews as the only method of data collection. While this approach offers valuable insights into counselors' perspectives on prayer in therapy, it may not capture the full complexity of therapeutic interactions. Without observational data or client feedback, important dynamics and contextual factors within therapy may have been missed.

Despite these limitations, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both client feedback and observations of therapy sessions. This would provide a more holistic understanding of how prayer is integrated into counseling and its effects on client outcomes and the therapeutic relationship. Expanding the participant pool to include a wider range of therapeutic settings and methodologies would also offer deeper insights into the various roles that prayer may play in different contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore the long-term impact of prayer in therapy, shedding light on its lasting effects on clients' psychological well-being.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

Participants' well-being, autonomy, and confidentiality were prioritized throughout the

study. Informed consent was obtained after participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks, with the option to withdraw at any time. Privacy and anonymity were safeguarded to prevent harm or breaches of trust, ensuring ethical integrity in all aspects of the research.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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