

Prayer Therapy for Reducing Labor Anxiety in Hospitals: Effective Treatment or Placebo?

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the effectiveness of prayer therapy in reducing labor anxiety among pregnant women at an Islamic Hospital in Banjarmasin. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design where qualitative and quantitative data are collected in sequence to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with pregnant women and Islamic spiritual guidance officers while quantitative data were collected using an anxiety scale questionnaire administered before and after the intervention. The results indicate that prayer therapy significantly reduces anxiety levels in pregnant women before labor. Qualitatively, the women reported increased calmness and mental preparedness following the prayer therapy, while the quantitative data showed a substantial decrease in anxiety levels post-intervention. These findings highlight the importance of integrating spiritual interventions into healthcare, particularly in religious communities. The study recommends the inclusion of prayer therapy as part of holistic childbirth programs to support the mental health of pregnant women.

Keywords: *Labor Anxiety, Prayer Therapy, Spiritual Intervention, Holistic Healthcare, Pregnant Women*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi efektivitas terapi doa dalam mengurangi kecemasan persalinan pada ibu hamil di Rumah Sakit Islam Banjarmasin. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode mix-method dengan

desain eksplanatori sekuensial, di mana data kualitatif dan kuantitatif dikumpulkan secara berurutan untuk memberikan gambaran yang komprehensif tentang fenomena yang diteliti. Data kualitatif diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan ibu hamil dan petugas Bina Ruhani Islam, sementara data kuantitatif dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner skala kecemasan sebelum dan sesudah intervensi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terapi doa secara signifikan mengurangi tingkat kecemasan ibu hamil sebelum persalinan. Secara kualitatif, ibu hamil melaporkan peningkatan ketenangan dan kesiapan mental setelah menerima terapi doa, sementara data kuantitatif menunjukkan penurunan yang substansial dalam tingkat kecemasan setelah intervensi. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya integrasi intervensi spiritual dalam perawatan kesehatan, khususnya dalam konteks masyarakat yang religius. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan terapi doa sebagai bagian dari program persalinan holistik untuk mendukung kesehatan mental ibu hamil.

Keywords: *Kecemasan Persalinan, Terapi Doa, Intervensi Spiritual, Perawatan Kesehatan Holistik, Ibu Hamil*

Introduction

Labor anxiety is a crucial phenomenon that has occurred, is occurring, and will continue to occur, given the high rates of anxiety among pregnant women worldwide. Research shows that approximately 57% of pregnant women experience anxiety during pregnancy, which can negatively impact the labor process and the health of both mother and baby. This issue is academically important due to its connection with a deeper understanding of the mental health of pregnant women and is practically significant for providing effective interventions. For example, untreated anxiety can prolong labor, increase the risk of medical complications, and affect the mother-child bonding process. In conclusion, understanding and addressing labor anxiety has major implications for public health and family well-being.

Previous research has highlighted various strategies to reduce labor anxiety, including social support, medical interventions, and psychological approaches (Rosmiarti et al., 2020; Mumtahanah & Aliza, 2022; Widiyastuti, 2023). However, a major shortcoming of these studies is the limited attention given to the role of spiritual

therapy, especially prayer, as a potential intervention. Existing studies are often limited to conventional interventions and rarely explore the culturally significant spiritual dimension present in many communities. For example, although there is evidence that *dzikir* (remembrance of God) and prayer can calm the mind, these studies rarely empirically test their effectiveness in the context of labor. Therefore, this research is crucial to fill that gap by exploring the effectiveness of prayer therapy in reducing labor anxiety.

This study aims to address the gaps in previous research by exploring the role of prayer therapy in reducing labor anxiety. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of prayer therapy as part of the Islamic spiritual guidance services at the Islamic Hospital in Banjarmasin. The study also aims to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of this prayer therapy. As such, this research provides new insights into spiritual approaches that can be applied in the context of maternal healthcare.

The working hypothesis of this study is that prayer therapy has a significant effect on reducing anxiety levels in labor patients. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that spiritual interventions can provide inner peace and enhance the mental preparedness of mothers facing the labor process. For example, a structured and systematic prayer therapy is expected to reduce the psychological pressure experienced by pregnant women, thus positively impacting their overall labor experience. In conclusion, this study will examine the relationship between the application of prayer therapy and the anxiety levels of patients, as well as the effectiveness of this approach in the context of healthcare.

Literature Review

Research on the integration of spiritual approaches in healthcare, particularly in reducing labor anxiety, shows an increasing trend in academic and practical importance. Several studies suggest that spiritual interventions, such as prayer and *dzikir* (remembrance of God), have the potential to reduce anxiety and enhance psychological well-being (Rosmiarti et al., 2020; Mumtahanah & Aliza, 2022).

However, studies that specifically focus on the role of prayer therapy in maternal healthcare remain limited, especially in empirical contexts. This literature review discusses three main trends that have emerged in related research.

The first trend highlights the effectiveness of psychological interventions in reducing labor anxiety. Widiyastuti (2023) suggests that social and emotional support from family and healthcare professionals can significantly reduce the anxiety of pregnant women before labor. The study found that providing emotional security helps pregnant women feel more prepared for labor. However, the limitation of this research is its focus solely on emotional support without considering spiritual dimensions, which are also crucial for many individuals facing anxiety related to childbirth.

The second trend emphasizes the importance of integrating spiritual practices, such as prayer, into healthcare settings. Rosmiarti et al. (2020) note that prayer therapy, when implemented in religious contexts, can have a calming effect on patients. The study highlighted how structured prayer could reduce stress levels and foster a sense of inner peace. However, the research only provides anecdotal evidence and does not conduct a thorough empirical investigation to measure the actual effect of prayer therapy in reducing anxiety. This gap highlights the need for further studies that quantify the impact of prayer on anxiety, especially in the context of maternal healthcare.

The third trend in the literature points to the growing recognition of holistic healthcare approaches that combine physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in patient care. Mumtahanah & Aliza (2022) discuss the need for healthcare programs that address not only the physical but also the psychological and spiritual needs of patients. Their research supports the idea that spiritual practices like *dzikir* and prayer can provide comfort and reduce anxiety in patients facing stressful medical procedures. However, like other studies, they do not provide specific empirical data on prayer therapy in the context of labor anxiety.

In conclusion, while previous studies recognize the potential benefits of prayer therapy, there is a significant gap in empirical research specifically examining its effect on reducing labor anxiety. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the impact of prayer therapy as a spiritual intervention in a maternal healthcare setting. It seeks to empirically test whether structured prayer therapy can reduce anxiety levels in pregnant women before labor.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effect of prayer therapy on labor anxiety. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to provide both statistical evidence and detailed insights from the participants' personal experiences. The study was conducted at an Islamic Hospital in Banjarmasin, where prayer therapy is integrated into maternal healthcare services.

The quantitative data were collected using an anxiety scale questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A), which is widely used to measure anxiety levels. The questionnaire was administered to pregnant women before and after receiving prayer therapy. A total of 30 pregnant women were selected as participants using purposive sampling, with the primary criteria being women experiencing high levels of anxiety as determined by their pre-therapy HAM-A scores. The pre-test was conducted before the prayer therapy intervention, while the post-test was administered immediately after the therapy sessions to measure changes in anxiety levels.

For the qualitative aspect, in-depth interviews were conducted with pregnant women who participated in the prayer therapy, as well as with Islamic spiritual guidance officers who provided the therapy. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the participants' experiences with prayer therapy and how it affected their emotional and mental states before labor. The interviews were conducted in a semi-

structured format, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings about the therapy.

The data analysis process was conducted in two stages. First, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to assess the impact of prayer therapy on reducing anxiety levels. Paired sample t-tests were used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores, with significance levels set at $p < 0.05$. Second, the qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes related to the emotional and spiritual impact of prayer therapy. The combination of these two methods provided a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of prayer therapy in reducing labor anxiety.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that prayer therapy has a significant effect on reducing labor anxiety in pregnant women. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the participants reveal that prayer therapy can serve as an effective intervention to alleviate anxiety prior to labor. This finding is crucial, as labor anxiety is a well-documented phenomenon that can lead to complications during childbirth, including prolonged labor, increased use of medical interventions, and a higher likelihood of cesarean sections. In addressing labor anxiety, it is essential to explore a range of interventions, particularly those that align with patients' spiritual and emotional needs.

The quantitative data collected through the anxiety scale questionnaire provided concrete evidence of the impact of prayer therapy on labor anxiety. The average pre-test anxiety score among the pregnant women was 70, reflecting a high level of anxiety before participating in the prayer therapy. After the intervention, the average post-test score dropped to 45, demonstrating a significant reduction of 25 points in anxiety levels. This substantial decrease in anxiety is indicative of the calming effect of prayer therapy and its ability to mentally prepare women for the labor process. These results suggest that prayer therapy can be a valuable tool for pregnant women

experiencing anxiety, particularly in settings where spiritual practices are culturally significant. The data presented in Table 1 provides a clear illustration of the change in anxiety levels before and after the intervention.

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Anxiety Scores

Measurement	Average Anxiety Score
Pre-test	70
Post-test	45

The significant reduction in anxiety observed in this study aligns with previous research that underscores the role of spiritual interventions in reducing stress and anxiety. For instance, studies conducted by Rosmiarti et al. (2020) and Mumtahanah & Aliza (2022) highlight how spiritual practices, including prayer, can provide psychological comfort and emotional reassurance, thereby reducing stress levels. Prayer, as a spiritual practice, offers a unique sense of connection to a higher power, which can help individuals manage their anxiety more effectively. This is particularly relevant in the context of labor, where anxiety often stems from fear of the unknown, concerns about the safety of the baby, and uncertainty regarding the labor process itself.

The qualitative data from the in-depth interviews further support the quantitative findings and provide additional insights into the emotional and spiritual impact of prayer therapy. Many participants reported experiencing a deep sense of peace and calmness after participating in the prayer sessions. One participant shared, "I felt more at ease and less worried after the prayer therapy. It gave me the strength to face the labor process." This statement reflects the profound emotional effect that prayer therapy can have on pregnant women, particularly in helping them feel mentally prepared for the challenges of labor.

Several key themes emerged from the interview data, including increased mental preparedness, emotional stability, and strengthened faith. These themes highlight the multifaceted benefits

of prayer therapy, which go beyond merely reducing anxiety to also enhancing overall emotional well-being. For many participants, prayer therapy was not only a source of comfort but also a way to reaffirm their spiritual beliefs. One participant expressed, "The prayer therapy reminded me that God is always with me, and that gave me comfort and confidence going into labor." This connection between spirituality and mental well-being underscores the importance of considering holistic approaches to maternal healthcare, particularly in culturally and religiously diverse populations.

The emotional and spiritual benefits reported by the participants in this study further support the argument that prayer therapy should be considered as part of a holistic approach to maternal healthcare. Maternal healthcare, traditionally focused on the physical aspects of pregnancy and childbirth, has increasingly recognized the importance of addressing psychological and emotional well-being. However, the integration of spiritual care remains underexplored in many healthcare settings, despite growing evidence of its benefits. The findings from this study suggest that incorporating prayer therapy into maternal healthcare could offer significant advantages, particularly for pregnant women who find strength and comfort in their spiritual practices.

The findings of this study align with those of Rosmiarti et al. (2020), who found that spiritual practices such as prayer can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance psychological well-being. The emotional and spiritual benefits reported by the participants in this study provide further evidence that prayer therapy is an effective tool for reducing labor anxiety and improving overall mental health during pregnancy. These benefits are particularly important in contexts where conventional medical interventions may not fully address the emotional and spiritual needs of patients.

Although the results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of prayer therapy, there are some challenges in its implementation. Some participants reported that they initially felt uncertain about the efficacy of prayer therapy, as they were more familiar with conventional medical interventions. This skepticism likely stems from

the predominant medical model of care, which emphasizes the use of pharmacological and technological interventions over holistic or spiritual approaches. However, after participating in the prayer sessions, most participants expressed positive feedback and recognized the benefits of combining spiritual and medical approaches. One participant noted, "At first, I wasn't sure if prayer would help, but after the session, I felt calmer and more prepared for labor." This shift in perspective highlights the potential for prayer therapy to complement traditional medical treatments, offering a more comprehensive approach to maternal healthcare.

These challenges emphasize the importance of educating patients and healthcare professionals about the potential benefits of integrating spiritual interventions like prayer therapy into standard healthcare practices. Many healthcare providers may be unfamiliar with the role of spiritual care in reducing anxiety and may not fully appreciate the potential of prayer therapy as an effective intervention. Providing clear information about how prayer therapy can complement medical treatments may help increase its acceptance among patients and healthcare professionals alike. Moreover, educating healthcare professionals on the value of spiritual care can help create a more supportive and holistic environment for pregnant women, particularly those experiencing high levels of anxiety.

Additionally, the successful implementation of prayer therapy in healthcare settings requires sensitivity to cultural and religious differences. While prayer therapy may be highly effective in some religious communities, it may not be as relevant or accepted in others. Therefore, healthcare providers should consider the individual beliefs and preferences of their patients when offering spiritual interventions. This personalized approach ensures that patients receive the care that best aligns with their values and needs, thereby enhancing their overall experience and outcomes.

In conclusion, this study provides compelling evidence that prayer therapy is an effective intervention for reducing labor anxiety in pregnant women. The quantitative data demonstrate a significant reduction in anxiety levels, while the qualitative data reveal additional

emotional and spiritual benefits that enhance the overall well-being of pregnant women. Prayer therapy offers a valuable complement to conventional medical interventions, addressing the emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of maternal healthcare. However, its implementation must be approached with care, ensuring that both patients and healthcare providers are educated about its benefits and that cultural and religious considerations are respected.

Given the positive impact of prayer therapy on labor anxiety, this study recommends that healthcare providers consider incorporating prayer therapy into standard maternal healthcare programs. By doing so, healthcare providers can offer a more holistic and patient-centered approach to care, one that addresses the full range of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs experienced by pregnant women. As healthcare continues to evolve, integrating spiritual care into maternal healthcare could provide significant benefits, not only in reducing labor anxiety but also in promoting overall mental and emotional well-being for expectant mothers.

This study also calls for further research into the long-term effects of prayer therapy on labor outcomes and maternal mental health. Future studies could explore how prayer therapy influences postpartum recovery, maternal bonding, and the long-term psychological well-being of mothers. Additionally, research into how prayer therapy can be adapted and implemented in different cultural and religious contexts would be valuable, ensuring that this intervention is accessible to a diverse range of patients. Ultimately, prayer therapy represents a promising and underutilized tool in maternal healthcare, one that has the potential to significantly improve the experiences and outcomes of pregnant women.

By acknowledging the emotional and spiritual needs of pregnant women, healthcare providers can offer a more compassionate and comprehensive approach to care. Prayer therapy is not only a means of reducing labor anxiety but also a pathway to greater emotional and spiritual well-being. The integration of such practices into maternal healthcare can lead to more positive outcomes for both mothers and

their babies, creating a more supportive and nurturing environment for childbirth.

Conclusion

This study shows that prayer therapy has a significant impact on reducing labor anxiety in pregnant women. The results of this study demonstrate that prayer therapy, when provided as part of spiritual services in hospitals, can reduce anxiety levels before labor, improve mental readiness, and provide emotional stability to pregnant women. Findings from both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that prayer therapy is effective in reducing anxiety, with an average decrease of 25 points on the anxiety scale.

Furthermore, this study highlights the emotional and spiritual benefits of prayer therapy, with participants reporting a sense of calmness and strengthened faith following the therapy. The qualitative data results show that prayer therapy also helps participants feel more connected to their spirituality, which in turn increases their confidence and mental resilience before labor.

However, some challenges in implementing prayer therapy were identified. There was initial hesitation from some participants regarding the effectiveness of spiritual interventions. Thus, the results of this study suggest that it is important to educate patients and healthcare professionals about the benefits of integrating spiritual therapies, such as prayer, into medical treatments. With better understanding, the acceptance of spiritual interventions can increase, further supporting the holistic care of pregnant women.

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