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The Effect of Mindful Prayer on Perceived Stress and Psychological Well-Being Among Adults

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Abstract: ***Perceived stress adversely impacts psychological well-being and daily functioning among adults. While secular mindfulness and traditional prayer independently serve as emotional regulation mechanisms, limited research explores their integrative efficacy. This study evaluated the effect of a 10-day mindful prayer intervention- incorporating attentional mindfulness into Islamic Namaz—on perceived stress and psychological well-being among adults ($N = 100$, aged 25–45 years). Utilizing a mixed-method pre-test–post-test design, quantitative changes were measured via the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB-18), complemented by qualitative semi-structured interviews. Paired-samples t-tests revealed a statistically significant reduction in perceived stress, $t(99) = 37.08$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d_z = 3.71$, and a significant increase in psychological well-being, $t(99) = 32.16$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d_z = 3.22$. No significant baseline or outcome gender differences were observed. Qualitative thematic analysis identified key mechanisms including present-moment somatic grounding, enhanced non-judgmental awareness of cognitive chatter, emotional regulation, and spiritual meaning-making. Findings suggest that mindful prayer represents a feasible, culturally integrated psychospiritual intervention for stress management.***

Keywords: Mindful prayer, perceived stress, psychological well-being, Islamic Namaz, psychospiritual intervention, mindfulness

1. Introduction

Stress is a pervasive psychological state stemming from cognitive appraisals of unpredictability, uncontrollability, and environmental overload (Cohen et al., 1983). Chronic stress severely compromises eudaimonic psychological well-being—defined by Ryff (2014) as multi-dimensional positive human functioning, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. In contemporary adulthood, balancing occupational competition, caregiving obligations, and digital connectivity often fosters rumination and emotional dysregulation (Epel et al., 2018).

Contemplative science highlights mindfulness—intentionally directing non-judgmental attention to present-moment internal and external experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2013)—as a primary mechanism for reducing cognitive distress (Rajan et al., 2026). Concurrently, psychology of religion demonstrates that spiritual coping and prayer offer existential meaning, emotional reassurance, and cognitive reframing during adversity (Pargament & Exline, 2021). However, traditional prayer is frequently performed automatically, leading to mind-wandering and diminished emotional engagement (Ijaz et al., 2017).

Mindful prayer bridges this operational gap by embedding core attentional qualities of secular mindfulness—present-moment awareness, somatic anchoring, and non-judgmental observation of distraction—into devotional ritual. While prior studies focus predominantly on prayer frequency (Maltby et al., 1999) or secular app-based mindfulness (Huberty et al., 2019), empirical evaluation of structured, ritual-embedded mindful prayer remains scarce. This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact of a 10-day mindful *Namaz* intervention on perceived stress and psychological well-being among adults.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Design and Participants

A mixed-methods pre-test–post-test intervention design was employed. A convenience sample of 100 healthy adults (50 males, 50 females; mean age $M = 30.13$ years, $SD = 4.43$, age range 25–42 years) was recruited. Inclusion criteria comprised adults aged 25–45 years, regular practitioners of Islamic prayer (*Namaz*), and willingness to complete a 10-day structured intervention along with pre- and post-assessments. Participants with severe cognitive impairments or active psychiatric conditions were excluded.

2.2 Intervention Protocol

The 10-day Mindful Prayer Intervention integrated standardized mindfulness instructions into participants' daily *Namaz*. The protocol emphasized three attentional pillars: (a) *Somatic Anchoring*—focusing conscious attention on physical postures (e.g., *Ruk'u*, *Sujud*), body contact points, and natural respiration; (b) *Auditory and Semantic Focus*- grounding attention on the phonetic articulation and personal meaning of recited verses; and (c) *Gentle Redirection*- acknowledging cognitive wandering without self-judgment and gently returning focus to the prayer experience.

2.3 Psychometric Measures

1) *Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10; Cohen et al., 1983):* A 10-item scale measuring degree of life unpredictability, uncontrollability, and overload on a 5-point Likert scale ($0 = \text{never}$ to $4 = \text{very often}$). Higher aggregate scores denote elevated perceived stress.
2) *Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB-18; Ryff et al., 2010):* An 18-item standardized instrument evaluating six eudaimonic dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, self-acceptance) on a 7-point Likert scale ($1 = \text{strongly disagree}$ to $7 = \text{strongly agree}

$).

3) *Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews:* Post-intervention interviews exploring subjective experiences regarding attentional control, emotional states, coping, and mind-wandering.

3. Quantitative Results

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Normality was evaluated via Shapiro-Wilk testing alongside visual inspection. Paired-samples t-tests and non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted to evaluate intervention effects. Independent-samples t-tests evaluated demographic differences.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Intervention Effects for PSS and PWB ($N = 1 00$)

Variable	Pre- Test $M (SD)$	Post- Test $M (SD) $	Mean Diff.	$t (99) $	p	Cohen's d_z
Perceived Stress (PSS)	21.51 (4.35)	1 6.51 (4.67)	-5.00	37.08	<.001	3.71
Psychological Well-Being (PWB)	79.54 (1 2.58)	89.31 (1 2.73)	+9.77	32.1 6	<.001	3.22

As detailed in Table 1, perceived stress scores decreased significantly from pre-intervention ($M = 21.51$, $SD = 4.35$) to post-intervention ($M = 16.51$, $SD = 4.67$), $t(99) = 37.08$, $p < .001$, representing an extraordinary effect size (Cohen's $d_z = 3.71$). Non-parametric confirmation via Wilcoxon signed-rank test reinforced significance ($W = 0$, $p < .001$). Simultaneously, psychological well-being scores

Table 2: Gender Comparisons Across Pre- and Post-Intervention Phases ($n = 50$ Male, $n = 50$ Female)

Timepoint & Measure	Male $M (SD)$	Female $M (SD)$	Mean Diff.	$t(98)$	p	Cohen's d
Pre-Test PSS	20.96 (4.58)	22.06 (4.07)	-1 .1 0	-1 .27	.208	-0.25
Pre-Test PWB	81 .54 (11 .1 9)	77.54 (1 3.64)	+4.00	1 .60	.11 2	0.32
Post-Test PSS	1 5.78 (5.04)	1 7.24 (4.1 9)	-1 .46	-1 .57	.11 9	-0.31
Post-Test PWB	91 .1 6 (11 .63)	87.46 (1 3.61)	+3.70	1 .46	.1 47	0.29

Independent-samples t-tests (Table 2) indicated no statistically significant gender differences at baseline for either perceived stress ($p = .208$) or psychological well-being ($p = .112$). Similarly, post-intervention outcomes showed no significant gender divergence for PSS ($p = .119$) or PWB ($p = .147$), confirming that treatment gains were equivalently distributed across male and female participants.

4. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of post-intervention semi-structured interviews yielded six core qualitative themes regarding the subjective operational mechanisms of mindful prayer:

Theme 1: Shift from Automaticity to Present Awareness. Participants reported moving away from mechanical repetition toward deliberate, conscious presence. Focusing on postural execution (*Ruk'u* and *Sujud*) grounded attention in the physical present.

Theme 2: Non-Judgmental Re-centering of Distractions. The instruction to notice cognitive wandering without self-criticism reframed distraction. Rather than experiencing frustration, participants learned to gently return focus to prayer recitation.

Theme 3: Somatic and Respiratory Regulation. Conscious awareness of breathing and physical postures induced bodily relaxation, dampening physiological arousal and mental tension.

Theme 4: Emotional De-escalation and Calmness. Mindful prayer acted as a daily "psychological pause," enabling participants to observe distressing emotions with greater distance and emotional balance.

Theme 5: Cognitive Reframing & Spiritual Meaning. Anchoring attention on sacred texts facilitated positive cognitive appraisal, fostering feelings of hope, gratitude, and transcendent connection.

Theme 6: Practical Challenges. Initial sessions presented difficulties with sustained attention, particularly during periods of high work-related fatigue, though attentional stamina improved across the 10 days.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating attentional mindfulness into traditional Islamic prayer produces substantial reductions in perceived stress alongside marked improvements in eudaimonic psychological well-being. These results align with contemporary contemplative frameworks (Crosswell et al., 2024) positing that structured attention training operates on restoration pathways to mitigate physiological and subjective stress.

The observed reduction in perceived stress ($d_z = 3.71$) corroborates prior literature on secular mindfulness-based interventions (Rajan et al., 2026; Owolabi, 2023), while expanding upon studies examining specific Islamic spiritual practices such as *Tahajjud* (Pranata et al., 2025) and *Dhikr* (Sufya, 2025). By deliberately focusing on physical sensations, breath, and recitation, participants disengaged from anticipatory anxiety and ruminative thought cycles (Vasudevan & Reddy, 2019). Crucially, the qualitative data demonstrate that non-judgmental acceptance reduced the secondary distress typically caused by self-criticism when attention wanders during prayer.

Simultaneously, the significant increase in psychological well-being ($d_z = 3.22$) highlights the additive value of spiritual framing. While secular mindfulness cultivates attentional regulation, ritual prayer provides an existential

context of meaning, hope, and transcendent alignment (Das, 2016; Froese et al., 2024). This finding supports Albatnuni and Koszycki (2020), who noted that spiritual engagement directly enhances eudaimonic dimensions such as purpose in life and self-acceptance. Mindful prayer transforms routine religious practice into an active psychospiritual resource.

From a clinical and community health perspective, mindful prayer represents an exceptionally accessible, culturally congruent intervention. Standard secular mindfulness interventions often encounter implementation barriers in religious communities due to perceived cultural or philosophical misalignment (Shonin et al., 2014). By embedding mindfulness techniques within an existing daily ritual (*Namaz*), individuals acquire evidence-based stress-regulation tools without incurring additional scheduling burdens or cultural friction.

Methodological Limitations

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the single-group pre-test–post-test design lacks an active control group (e.g., standard prayer without mindfulness instructions), limiting definitive causal assertions regarding specific intervention active ingredients versus general expectancy effects. Second, the 10-day intervention period precludes evaluation of long-term retention of psychological gains. Third, reliance on self-report instruments introduces potential social desirability bias. Finally, physiological indicators of stress (e.g., cortisol, heart rate variability) were not measured.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study confirms that a 10-day mindful prayer intervention significantly reduces perceived stress and enhances psychological well-being among adults. Integrating attentional awareness into daily devotional rituals provides a effective, culturally compatible approach to stress management and emotional regulation.

Future research should employ randomized controlled trials (RCTs) comparing mindful prayer against active secular mindfulness controls and standard prayer controls. Longitudinal follow-up assessments (e.g., 3 and 6 months) are recommended to establish sustained therapeutic efficacy. Incorporating biomarker measurements (such as salivary cortisol or neuroimaging) would further elucidate the physiological substrates of mindful prayer.

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