



## *Tadabbur Fitra* as a Spiritual Coping Strategy for Parents of Children with Cancer at YKAKI Semarang

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**Abstract:** Parents of children with cancer face a range of emotional, spiritual, and practical challenges that often compel them to develop resilient coping mechanisms. This study, employing a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and participant observation, explores how *tadabbur* (contemplative reflection) on *fitra* (human innateness) reshapes how parents cope with their child's illness at YKAKI (Yayasan Kasih Anak Kanker Indonesia) in Semarang. It also investigates how internalizing *tadabbur fitra* influences their coping strategies. The findings indicate that embracing *tadabbur fitra* helps parents reconnect with their innate trust in God (*tawakkal*), gratitude (*shukr*), and acceptance (*rida*), strengthening their spiritual resilience and emotional stability. These insights underscore the potential for spiritual practices to enhance psychosocial interventions for similar contexts. By internalizing *tadabbur fitra*, parents can improve their well-being and better support their children through health crises.

**Contribution:** This study contributes to the intersection of spirituality, health psychology, and family resilience, offering practical implications for spirituality-based healthcare programs.

**Keywords:** *tadabbur*, *fitra*, coping behavior; parents of children with cancer

## Introduction

Cancer is a disease that causes various problems not only for the patient but also for their family, both physically and emotionally. Cancer patients need not only treatment but also support from family and those around them. They can help alleviate the patient's psychological pressure and improve their quality of life. Reducing stress affects blood acidity, which can help decrease pain.<sup>1</sup> Cancer is also found in children. When a child is diagnosed with cancer, parents must face several stressors. Based on initial interviews with the management of YKAKI (Indonesian Care for Cancer Kids Foundation, Yayasan Kasih Anak Kanker Indonesia) Semarang, Vita Mahaswari, parents not only experience emotional disturbances directly related to their child's care but also face societal rejection due to misconceptions that cancer is considered a contagious disease.<sup>2</sup>

Cancer in children is more likely to be curable compared to adults. With some exceptions, childhood cancers tend to respond well to certain treatments. The types of cancer that develop in children are different from those that develop in adults. Childhood cancer is not related to lifestyle or environmental risk factors. Only a small portion of childhood cancers are caused by inherited genetic factors from parents.<sup>3</sup> This motivated Mrs. Ira Soelistyo (Chairwoman of YKAKI Headquarters) and Mrs Anisah (Treasurer) to establish YKAKI in Semarang. YKAKI is a social foundation with the vision that every Indonesian child suffering from cancer has the right to receive the best treatment and care, as well as the right to learn and play even while ill. YKAKI was founded by parents of children with cancer on November 1, 2006, and has been a member of the international organisation working in the same field, namely Childhood Cancer International (CCI), since 2008.<sup>4</sup> This is a temporary home for children with cancer who are undergoing treatment at the hospital. Across seven branches throughout Indonesia, the foundation accommodates approximately 2,800 children. YKAKI provides a place called Rumah Kita, with the help of donors, to

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<sup>1</sup> Meeva Nareza, "Gangguan Keseimbangan Asam Basa," *Alodokter*, 2024, <https://www.alodokter.com/gangguan-keseimbangan-asam-basa>.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Vita Mahaswari, 7 July 2021.

<sup>3</sup> MedlinePlus, "How Childhood Cancers Are Different from Adult Cancers," 2024, <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000845.htm>; National Cancer Institute, "Cancer in Children and Adolescents," 2024, <https://www.cancer.gov/types/childhood-cancers/child-adolescent-cancers-fact-sheet>.

<sup>4</sup> "Yayasan Kasih Anak Kanker Indonesia - YKAKI," <https://ykaki.org/>, accessed on 12 May 2025.

host and meet the basic needs of children with cancer, along with their parents from lower-middle-income backgrounds, during their cancer treatment, especially for patients referred to receive treatment at hospitals outside their hometowns.

Parents, as caregivers, play an important role both as companions to their children and in providing understanding that may be difficult to communicate to doctors. Caregivers also need to be clever in motivating their children to cope with treatment side effects. In a study conducted to assess the stress experienced by caregivers arising from their caregiving role, Gopalan and Brannon found that caregivers not only face physical problems such as hypertension and immune system disorders but also mental health issues like depression or anxiety.<sup>5</sup> Caregivers also experience digestive disturbances, changes in appetite, irregular eating habits, headaches, chronic fatigue, weight gain or loss, muscle pain, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, sleep problems, decreased self-esteem, and social isolation.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, psychological disorder issues in parents as caregivers need to receive attention so that parents can provide the optimal support needed by children to overcome illness and undergo treatment smoothly.

Previous studies have shown a close relationship between personality, spirituality, and religious coping behaviours. Aminnudin et al. highlight the relationship between personality traits and religious coping styles among Muslim students in Brunei.<sup>7</sup> Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), they found that personality traits significantly influence an individual's level of religious struggle. In the context of Indonesia, Buchori et al. studied religious coping strategies among people with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). This study used a qualitative approach, employing storytelling methods, and found that religious practices such as prayer and *dhikr* help individuals reduce physical and

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<sup>5</sup> Neena Gopalan and Laura A Brannon, "Increasing Family Members' Appreciation of Family Caregiving Stress," *The Journal of Psychology* 140, no. 2 (2006): 85–94, <https://doi.org/10.3200/JRLP.140.2.85-94>.

<sup>6</sup> John F Deeken et al., "Care for the Caregivers: A Review of Self-Report Instruments Developed to Measure the Burden, Needs, and Quality of Life of Informal Caregivers," *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 26, no. 4 (2003): 922–53, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-3924\(03\)00327-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-3924(03)00327-0).

<sup>7</sup> Nur Amali Aminnuddin, Saufi Puasa, and Naved Iqbal, "Mapping Personality Traits to Religious Coping Styles and Struggle: Evidence from Malay Muslim Undergraduates in Brunei," *Personality and Individual Differences* 220, no. June 2023 (2024): 112523, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2023.112523>.

psychological stress.<sup>8</sup> This study also emphasises the importance of the relationship between positive psychological conditions and enhanced immunity via the psychoneuroimmunological pathway.

Merluzzi and his colleagues' study reveals the mediating role of meaning in the relationship between surrendering control of disease outcomes to God and the quality of life of cancer patients.<sup>9</sup> Using mediation analysis, the study shows that meaning and inner peace become key mechanisms in religious coping strategies. Another relevant study by Purnama et al. explores the concept of human *fitra* in relation to the potential for tauhid, which should be maintained through literacy-based education, modelling, oral transmission, and effective discussion methods.<sup>10</sup> This study provides important insights into how religious values can form the foundation of education and behaviour. Al Afify, in his article, discusses the concept of *fitra* from an Islamic perspective and compares it with Western psychology, which often rejects this concept.<sup>11</sup> The author explains that humans are created with *fitra*, which is an innate spiritual potential that serves as the foundation for the physical and psychological structure of humans, as well as the purpose of their creation. This perspective shows that *fitra* plays an important role in shaping an individual's psychological balance.

Mufid's study further explores the relationship between spirituality and psychological health through a literature review approach.<sup>12</sup> This study notes that the modern psychology paradigm is beginning to shift from a focus on pathology toward holistic health, and from individualism to collectivism. Religion and psychology complement each other in helping individuals find meaning and purpose in life. Adam et al. highlight the experiences of caregivers of cancer

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<sup>8</sup> Baidi Bukhori, Ema Hidayanti, and Dominikus David Biondi Situmorang, "Religious Coping Strategies for People with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Muslims in Indonesia: A Qualitative Study with a Telling-the-Stories," *Heliyon* 8, no. 12 (2022): e12208, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12208>.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas V. Merluzzi et al., "'Letting Go' - Relinquishing Control of Illness Outcomes to God and Quality of Life: Meaning/Peace as a Mediating Mechanism in Religious Coping with Cancer," *Social Science & Medicine* 317 (2023): 115597, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115597>.

<sup>10</sup> Sigit Purnama et al., "The Concept of Fitrah for Children in Ibn Katsir's Qur'an Exegesis: A Pedagogical Implication in Early Childhood Islamic Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2020): 79–104, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2020.91.79-104>.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Faiz Al Afify, "Konsep Fitrah Dalam Psikologi Islam," *TSAQAFAH* 14, no. 2 (2018): 279–98, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v14i2.2641>.

<sup>12</sup> Abdul Mufid, "Moral and Spiritual Aspects in Counseling: Recent Development in the West," *Journal of Advanced Guidance and Counseling* 1, no. 1 (June 11, 2020): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jagc.2020.1.1.5696>.

patients and their impact on their spiritual well-being.<sup>13</sup> Analysis shows that caregivers with family support report higher levels of peace and life meaning than those without such support. The study by Andopa et al. explores the meaning of 'nafs' in the Qur'an based on Quraish Shihab's interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Nafs is understood as the spiritual aspect of humans with both positive and negative dimensions: *nafs al-muṭmainna* (the tranquil soul), *nafs al-lawwāma* (the self-reproaching soul), and *nafs al-ammāra* (the soul that commands evil). This understanding emphasises the importance of the spiritual dimension in guiding human behaviour.

Unlike earlier studies, this study specifically examines the concept of *fiṭra* and its impact on how parents of children with cancer at YKAKI Semarang cope. While previous studies have focused on spiritual healing, none have directly investigated how experiencing *fiṭra* influences coping strategies. Thus, this study seeks to examine how *fiṭra* experiences shape parents' coping processes in response to their children's illness. It suggests that parents, especially mothers, significantly influence their children's coping development through behavioural modelling. Parents who develop adaptive coping not only enhance their own mental health but also positively affect their child's cancer recovery. These healthy coping skills also model effective coping mechanisms for children, which can influence their treatment journey.

## Literature Review

### *Tadabbur Fiṭra*

Two terms are often interpreted the same way but are, in fact, different: *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*. *Tafakkur* is thinking or observing, while *tadabbur* is examining carefully. *Tadabbur* is thinking about the result. Meanwhile, *tafakkur* is the strength in thinking about what is seen. Allah SWT says, "This is a Book which We have sent down to you, full of blessings, so that they may ponder (reflect on) its verses and so that those of understanding may take heed" (Q.S. Shad 38:29). Ibn al-Qayyim, as cited by Purnama et.al., states, "If you want to benefit from the Qur'an, then focus your heart when reading and listening to it, concentrate your hearing, and be present as if Allah SWT is speaking directly to

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<sup>13</sup> Rebecca N. Adams et al., "Caregiving Experiences Predict Changes in Spiritual Well-Being among Family Caregivers of Cancer Patients," *Psycho-Oncology* 23, no. 10 (2014): 1178–84, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.3558>.

<sup>14</sup> Alpaqih Andopa, H Hardivizon, and Nurma Yunita, "The Meaning of Nafs in the Qur'an Based on Quraish Shihab's Interpretation," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018): 139–62, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v3i2.578>.

you."<sup>15</sup> Ibnu Taimiyah, as cited by Purnama et.al., said, 'Whoever contemplates the Qur'an to seek guidance from it, the path of truth will become clear to him.'<sup>16</sup> There are two benefits of pondering the Qur'an: first, to feel that the Qur'an truly comes from Allah; second, pondering the Qur'an can open a locked heart, because the heart is the most important tool for capturing the Qur'an's messages.

So, *tadabbur* means observing and paying attention to the result of all affairs and how they ultimately turn out. Al-Alusi, as cited by Purnama et al., explains that *tadabbur* essentially means deeply contemplating the conclusion of a matter and the consequences it produces.<sup>17</sup> Ibnu Qayyim also explains that to contemplate a statement means to observe and pay attention to the words from beginning to end, bring the heart into the context of the words, and then repeat the process.<sup>18</sup>

Next, the Qur'an mentions the concept of *fiṭra*, that all children are born spiritually pure. This is what is meant by the state of *fiṭra*. Qur'an 30:30 states, 'There is no change in Allah's creation.' This indicates that *fiṭra* is a universal, unchanging aspect of human nature.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Yasien states that within the spiritual nature (*fiṭra*) lies universal moral intuition (ethics towards God, humans, and all creatures), and it is profound. However, although humans are born in a state of *fiṭra*, they also have the potential to do wrong. Humans need to master their potential for error to realise their *fiṭra*. Wrongdoings, disbelief (rejection of monotheism), and violations of God's laws are part of the Creator's scheme. Allah has endowed humans with an innate ability to distinguish right from wrong. Through intelligence, free will, and revelation, humans can be guided to choose what is right and lawful, thereby reviving their *fiṭra*. Although humans are not born evil, they are vulnerable to evil stimuli or sources of misguidance from outside. The constitutional trait of humans that is susceptible to error is intrinsic and is called the soul or self (*nafs*). Human emotional and biological urges are not inherently evil but are vulnerable to evil stimuli. They must be controlled and directed according to divine laws so the *nafs* can be transformed into the highest spiritual achievement.

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<sup>15</sup> Purnama et al., "The Concept of Fitrah for Children."

<sup>16</sup> Purnama et al.

<sup>17</sup> Purnama et al.

<sup>18</sup> Purnama et al.

<sup>19</sup> Yasien Mohamed, *Fitrah: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 1-194.

The psychological implications of the concept of *fiṭra* are related to the soul, emotions, and desires, and are an integral part of the human soul.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the psychological implications are directed toward the emotional dimension, which has both positive and negative effects on humans. Emotional control accompanied by physical discipline will lead humans to achieve a high spiritual level. Although emotions and physicality are different entities, both are mental drives. The soul must be trained to integrate with the spirit. Low-level souls need to be transformed so that individuals are freed from the slavery of vulnerable souls that tend toward satisfying biological and emotional needs, which distance them from God.

Based on the above explanation, *tadabbur fiṭra* in this study is not intended as a new standalone theory, but rather as a conceptual synthesis between the tradition of *tadabbur* in the Qur'an and the understanding of *fiṭra* in Islamic psychology. The tradition of *tadabbur*, as explained by al-Alusi and Ibn al-Qayyim, emphasises deep reflection on an event's meaning and ultimate consequences. At the same time, Yasien Mohammed interprets *fiṭra* as an innate spiritual disposition that guides humans toward monotheism, moral goodness, and spiritual growth. Therefore, *tadabbur fiṭra* is understood as a reflective process of interpreting life experiences through awareness of their origins, the purpose of creation, and human orientation toward God. In facing difficulties, this process helps individuals view events not merely as burdens but as experiences that can be meaningful, accepted, and lived responsibly while remaining reliant on God.

### **Coping Behaviour and Religious Coping**

Coping means a conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems and to control, minimise, or tolerate stress and conflicts.<sup>21</sup> Psychological coping mechanisms are often referred to as coping strategies or coping skills. The term coping generally refers to adaptive/constructive strategies that reduce stress. Conversely, maladaptive coping strategies will increase stress; therefore, maladaptive coping is also described based on its outcomes as non-coping. Furthermore, the term coping generally refers to reactive coping, a response that follows a stressor. This is different from proactive coping, in which the coping response aims to neutralise the source of

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<sup>20</sup> Mohamed.

<sup>21</sup> Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1984), 1-456.

stress. Coping responses are partly controlled by personality (traits/habits) and partly by the social environment, especially its stressful nature.

There are many types of coping strategies. The classification of these strategies has not yet been agreed upon. In the early days, Folkman and Lazarus divided coping strategies into four groups: problem-focused, emotion-focused, support-seeking, and meaning-making coping.<sup>22</sup> Weiten has identified four types of coping strategies: appraisal-focused (adaptive cognitive), problem-focused (adaptive behaviour), emotion-focused, and work-focused.<sup>23</sup> Billings and Moos added avoidance coping strategies as one of the emotion-focused interventions.<sup>24</sup> An individual can adopt multiple coping strategies simultaneously. All strategies have proven useful, but some people claim that those who use problem-focused coping strategies adjust to life better. Problem-focused coping mechanisms allow individuals to have greater control over their perception of the issues they face. In contrast, emotion-focused coping can sometimes lead to a decreased sense of control (maladaptive coping).

People use problem-focused strategies by trying to address the causes of problems. They do this by seeking information about the problem and learning new skills to manage it. Problem-focused coping aims to change or eliminate the source of stress. Three problem-focused coping strategies identified by Folkman and Lazarus are: taking control, seeking information, and evaluating pros and cons. However, problem-focused coping is not always adaptive, especially when the situation is uncontrollable and the person cannot eliminate the source of the problem. Evaluation-focused strategies involve changing one's thinking, such as using denial or distancing oneself from the problem. People can change how they think about a problem by altering their goals and values, for example, by finding humour in a situation. Some people argue that humour acts as a stress moderator.

Emotion-focused coping strategies involve changing the meaning of a stressor or diverting attention from it, such as finding a more positive meaning in the source of stress to reduce its emotional impact.<sup>25</sup> Avoiding emotional stress shifts attention away from negative feelings associated with the stressor.

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<sup>22</sup> Lazarus and Folkman.

<sup>23</sup> Wayne Weiten, *Psychology: Themes & Variations, Briefer Version* (USA: Thomson, 2008), 1-501.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew G. Billings and Rudolf H. Moos, "The Role of Coping Responses and Social Resources in Attenuating the Stress of Life Events," *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 4, no. 2 (1981): 139–57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00844267>.

<sup>25</sup> Lazarus and Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*.

Emotion-focused coping is suitable for dealing with seemingly uncontrollable stress, such as a diagnosis of a terminal illness or the loss of a loved one.<sup>26</sup> Some emotion-focused coping mechanisms, such as distancing or avoidance, can improve short-term outcomes but may be harmful if used long-term. Positive emotion-focused mechanisms, such as seeking social support and positive reappraisal, are associated with beneficial outcomes.<sup>27</sup> Emotional coping focuses on emotions, using emotional expression and processing to manage responses to stressors adaptively.<sup>28</sup> Another example includes relaxation training through deep breathing, meditation, yoga, music and art therapy, aromatherapy, and grounding using physical sensations.

If adaptive cognitive strategies improve function, then maladaptive coping, also known as non-coping, will only reduce symptoms but maintain or strengthen stress triggers. Maladaptive techniques are only effective as short-term coping processes. Examples of maladaptive strategies include dissociation, sensitisation, avoidance, and rationalisation. Dissociation is a splitting of the mind, memories, and emotions resulting from an individual's effort to suppress stress or anxiety that feels too overwhelming, usually occurring after trauma. Sensitisation is an excessive behaviour in which a person tries to anticipate frightening events or prevent them from happening in the first place. Rationalisation is the practice of using reasoning to minimise the severity of an incident. This most often manifests as making excuses for behaviours by people perceived as threatening to the ego.

In its development, coping involves not only cognitive, emotional, and behavioural efforts but also religious resources. This form is known as religious coping. Kenneth Pargament's work provides a comprehensive framework for understanding religious coping. Kenneth Pargament is an emeritus psychology professor at Bowling Green State University.<sup>29</sup> He has published many works on

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<sup>26</sup> Charles S. Carver, "Coping," in *The Handbook of Stress Science: Biology, Psychology, and Health*, ed. Richard J. Contrada and Andrew Baum (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2011), 221–29.

<sup>27</sup> Hasida Ben-Zur, "Coping Styles and Affect," *International Journal of Stress Management* 16, no. 2 (2009): 87–101, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015731>.

<sup>28</sup> Annette L. Stanton, Anita Parsa, and Jennifer L. Austenfeld, "The Adaptive Potential of Coping Through Emotional Approach," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, C. R. Snyder (New York: Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2001), 148–58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195135336.003.0011>.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth I. Pargament et al., "Religious Coping Methods as Predictors of Psychological, Physical and Spiritual Outcomes among Medically Ill Elderly Patients: A Two-Year

religion, spirituality, and health. Religious coping strategies, such as positive reappraisal and seeking spiritual support, are associated with improved mental and spiritual well-being.<sup>30</sup> Religious coping or faith-based coping strategies are increasingly gaining attention as an approach to deal with severe stress, especially in the context of crises involving terminal illness or major trauma.<sup>31</sup> These strategies have been proven to improve quality of life, emotional stability, and mental health.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, negative religious coping, such as feeling punished by God or feeling abandoned, can worsen mental and spiritual conditions.<sup>33</sup> A study by Jayanti et al. introduces faith-based counselling as an innovative method to address behavioural issues.<sup>34</sup> The model integrates spiritual practices such as *murāqabatullāh* (awareness of God), *dhikrullāh* (remembrance of God), and community-based therapy to preserve the innate nature and foster moral and psychological development.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Salleh et al. proposed a dual approach consisting of internal strategies (spiritual development) and external strategies (social support), aligned with Islamic values to enhance coping mechanisms.<sup>36</sup>

## Method

This study uses a qualitative-interpretive approach with a phenomenological paradigm to explore the lived experiences of parents who accompany children who have cancer at the YKAKI shelter, Semarang. This approach aims to understand the meaning behind the subjective experiences of

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Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Health Psychology* 9, no. 6 (2004): 713–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105304045366>.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth I. Pargament, Harold G. Koenig, and Lisa M. Perez, "The Many Methods of Religious Coping: Development and Initial Validation of the RCOPE," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 4 (2000): 519–43, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4679\(200004\)56:4519::AID-JCLP63.0.CO;2-1](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(200004)56:4519::AID-JCLP63.0.CO;2-1).

<sup>31</sup> Pargament, Koenig, and Perez.

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth I. Pargament and Hisham Abu Raiya, "A Decade of Research on the Psychology of Religion and Coping: Things We Assumed and Lessons We Learned," *Psyke & Logos* 28, no. 2 (2007): 25, <https://doi.org/10.7146/pl.v28i2.8398>.

<sup>33</sup> Sakinah Salleh et al., "Spiritual Coping Strategies from the Islamic Worldview," in *Proceedings of ICIC2015 – International Conference on Empowering Islamic Civilisation in the 21st Century* (Malaysia: Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 2015), 136–50.

<sup>34</sup> Syara Jayanti, Imas Kania Rahman, and Akhmad Alim, "Fitrah Guidance And Counseling In The Elimination of Delinquency," *Prophetic Guidance and Counseling Journal* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.32832/pro-gcj.v1i1.2914>.

<sup>35</sup> Jayanti, Rahman, and Alim.

<sup>36</sup> Salleh dkk., "Spiritual coping strategies from the Islamic worldview."

parents as they support their children through the cancer treatment process. This study focuses on the dynamics of emotions, spirituality, and coping behaviours based on the concept of *fiṭra*, the innate human nature oriented toward recognising and serving Allah.

The research participants consisted of home administrators and parents accompanying children with cancer who were temporarily staying at YKAKI shelter house during data collection. In this study, they are identified as M1 (mother 1), M2 (mother 2), F1 (father 1), M3 (mother 3), and M4 (mother 4). Before each interview, all informants received a complete briefing on the study's purpose, procedures, and the use of their statements, and they provided informed consent. Participants were selected using incidental sampling, which involved parents present at the shelter house who met the research criteria, were willing to participate, and could be interviewed during the research period. This technique was chosen because the length of stay for children and parents at the shelter house could not be predicted. Their presence depended on the schedule and availability of treatment services at Dr. Karyadi Hospital Semarang, including doctors, medication, and care facilities. If the waiting time were too long, some families would return to their hometowns, causing fluctuations in the shelter house population. There were also children with cancer who only stayed at the shelter house for a few weeks before passing away, resulting in their treatment at Karyadi Hospital not continuing and their parents returning to their hometowns, leaving the shelter with the child's body. Therefore, the participants are not all parents who have ever stayed at the shelter house but are a sample available and meeting the criteria at the time of the study.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews to understand participants' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, as well as observations to understand the social and emotional contexts that influence their coping. The data are analyzed in six stages: first, reading and immersing in the transcripts to understand the participants' experiences; second, making initial notes on emerging patterns and themes; third, formulating relevant emergent themes related to the research objectives; fourth, grouping the emergent themes into broader categories; fifth, analyzing patterns and relationships between themes across all participants; and sixth, composing a narrative that describes the relationships among the main themes. In addition, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was also applied to explore how individuals understand their primary life experiences.

## Results and Discussion

### Parents as Caregivers: Emotional and Spiritual Challenges

Supporting a child through cancer treatment is a challenging experience for parents. They often confront situations that disrupt their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Common feelings include fear of their child's disease progression, anxiety over unpredictable treatment outcomes, fatigue from constant caregiving, helplessness due to lack of control over the results, and anger at an unforeseen fate. This journey not only causes emotional distress but also prompts deeper questions about the meaning of suffering, divine justice, and how to fulfil parental roles amid adversity.

These challenges began when parents first received a doctor's diagnosis of their child's health condition. Some parents are in severe shock. Sadness, anger, fear, confusion, and even despair haunt them. From the beginning, they have borne a heavy psychological burden. This burden is compounded by insults from people around them who blame them for their child's illness, and by some family members who do not support treatment efforts and refuse to cooperate. As a result, many of them blame themselves for their child's condition. M1 and M2 expressed their experiences.

"...I repeatedly fainted when Ali was diagnosed with cancer. I held a grudge against Karate Coach because it all started when Ali was kicked by his training friend. He had a fever; we took him to the doctor, he recovered for a while, then had a fever again..."<sup>37</sup>

"My reaction when the doctor said Erlan had leukaemia, oh God...What disease is this...I don't understand...You can cry...Oh my God... blaming yourself...The punishment of my sin ..."38

Under this psychological burden, they are compelled to accompany their children through treatment with wholehearted commitment. Even though they are sad and disappointed, they must show a calm, optimistic face to strengthen their children's resolve. In addition, their daily lives are consumed by caring for their children, meeting their needs, and accompanying them, even though they are tired and face many other problems. They are forced to abandon many social obligations. They are compelled to rely on help and support from other family members. Meanwhile, they must also be ready to face any setbacks that may befall their children during treatment.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with M1, 7 July 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with M2, 7 July 2021.

" ...I had separated from Erlan's father, so I lived with my parents. When Erlan needed a blood transfusion, the hardest moment came during the 40<sup>th</sup> bag. Erlan had seizures, and the doctor said, 'Mom, if anything happens to Erlan, you must be sincere.' Seeing Erlan in pain, tied so he would not rebel, I prayed, 'Oh Allah, protect Erlan.' The doctor's words left me even more confused. Thank God I have parents who understand me and helped pay for Erlan's treatment and take care of Erlan's brother while I accompany Erlan for chemotherapy in Semarang. I have burdened my parents a lot, including my marriage problems. Hopefully, I can repay their kindness... (M2).<sup>39</sup>

The burden on parents grows heavier because they must also consider the family's economic situation. They must meet their own needs while caring for their children and supporting other family members. Meanwhile, most parents cannot go to work because they must always be by their child's side. This dilemma often leaves parents even more desperate, especially when they lack support from other family members, relatives, and close friends. F1 almost decided to stop the treatment process and chose to go home. He even packed his clothes and belongings at the YKAKI shelter house to take home.<sup>40</sup> However, with moral support from other parents at the shelter house, he ultimately changed his mind. M3 shared her experience.

"I left work for my child. When I see my child, I feel like crying. However, everyone at YKAKI has become like family, supporting each other. Honestly, I am fragile, but I force myself to be strong. The support from fellow YKAKI parents made me realise that there are still people who care about us, and that gives me strength. Not feeling alone in bearing the burden, I feel very helped.<sup>41</sup>

The heavy psychological, social, and economic burden they feel makes them question God's presence, His justice, and His compassion for creatures. Some of them can accept it well and avoid despair and anger. With the support of those around them, they can strengthen their spiritual and psychological resilience. F1 said he would have almost given up if not for remembering the advice of an *ustādh* (Islamic teacher) in his village to believe in God's plan, and that other parents strengthened him at the YKAKI.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with M2, 7 July 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with F1, 7 July 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with M3, 7 July 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with F1, 7 July 2021.

Nonetheless, some feel angry and disappointed over God's destiny for them, even feeling that God is actually unjust. The psychological pressure, social and economic burden, and spiritual fragility they experience often make their physical condition weak. This condition further worsens the child's condition because the role of parents accompanying the child during the treatment period is very crucial.

### **The Process of Internalising *Tadabbur Fiṭra* and Transforming Spiritual Values**

The spiritual and psychological resilience of each parent who accompanies their children with cancer varies. Despite this, all parents experience similar emotional and spiritual distress in the early days after receiving their child's diagnosis. Sadness, anger, disappointment, and even despair envelop them. However, over time, they gradually begin to process the reality they face. It is precisely when they feel they have lost control of their child's situation that they eventually return to divine orientation and find calm and meaning in it.

At the bottom of these parents, they find strength and the path of *tadabbur fiṭra* through diverse experiences. Among them is advice from religious leaders who remind us of the essence of God's justice and the wisdom behind every event. P3 experienced this condition. He had initially decided to stop caring for his child due to psychological and economic pressure, but regained confidence after remembering his *ustādh's* advice. He said:

"*Ustādh* said, If God wants us to be good people, he gives us trials. I believe that God does not sleep and will always accompany His servants in difficulties. I have never asked God for more; I ask for enough."

Some other parents shared different experiences, namely by being more diligent in worship, especially carrying out prayers, both mandatory and sunnah, and reading the Qur'an. By performing many prayers, they chant prayers to God and hope He will heal their child. They also recite prayers and *dhikr* whenever they can. Meanwhile, in the midst of despair and fear that ambushed him, another thing that was spontaneously remembered was to recite the surah many times until he regained his composure. Islamic teachings explain that if a servant wants God to speak to him, he should read the Qur'an.<sup>43</sup> M4 shared that she reads Sūra Yāsin three times from 23.00 to 03.00 AM because she felt confused and could

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<sup>43</sup> This is part of the statement of Imam Hasan al-Bashri, the full text of which is: "Whoever wants to talk to Allah, then establish prayer. And whoever wants Allah to speak to him, then recite the Qur'an." Umar Abd Al-Kafi, *Sharḥ Kitāb Al-Fawā'id* (Qatar: Al-Shabka al-Islamiyya, 2011), 3.

not sleep, seeing her child's condition. Thus, he was finally able to get used to it and accept fate calmly.<sup>44</sup>

Another experience that strengthens parents the most is the support from those closest to them. When social, psychological, and economic pressures make them desperate, the support, presence, and cooperation of other family members help them see the lessons in the harsh reality they face. They also get great support from fellow parents in the YKAKI. Feelings of solidarity foster empathy in their hearts. By sharing and supporting each other, they strengthen one another. In addition, support from YKAKI management strengthens them. Thus, they do not feel alone and see God's presence through the kindness of their closest people and fellow parents in the YKAKI shelter who support them.

In the next stage, the experience further opens their awareness of the essence of their existence as human beings and servants of God. They can also see the reality they face from a different perspective. They can finally trust the destiny God has outlined for them. They no longer blame God and consider it unfair. In fact, they can be at peace with their destiny and accept it with pleasure, trusting in God and submitting everything to His will. In fact, they are more grateful for God's presence through the presence of family, friends, and fellow parents in the YKAKI, which has become closer and more supportive to them, as well as the reality that they are becoming closer and closer to God.

### ***Tadabbur Fiṭra as a Spiritual Coping Strategy***

The experiences of parents at YKAKI show how *tadabbur fiṭra* plays a major role in coping. In the face of various pressures, the parents did not merely carry out religious activities as a routine. Prayer, reading the Qur'an, attending study sessions, and sharing experiences with fellow parents provide spaces for reflection and reinterpretation of their circumstances. Through this process, their attention gradually shifts from why calamities occur to how to receive, live through, and find wisdom in them. At the experience level, *tadabbur fiṭra* appears to be a process of returning to divine orientation when parents feel they lose control of the children's circumstances.

*Tadabbur fiṭra* works as a process of meaning, not as theological knowledge that stands separate from everyday life. Spiritual reflection helps participants organise emotional responses, nurture expectations, and determine the most appropriate attitude when accompanying the child. YKAKI's community support also strengthens this process because encounters with other

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with M4, 7 July 2021.

parents make them feel not alone and gain new ways of understanding the experience of pain. Overall, the coping process is organised into four main themes: spiritual anchoring, sincerity in accepting destiny, positive thinking to God, and finding meaning in experience. These four themes are compiled from patterns of repeated experiences in interviews with all participants. Each theme describes the form of experience, change of perspective, and psycho-spiritual function that arises during their accompaniment of a child undergoing cancer treatment.

### **1. Spiritual Anchoring as the Main Pillar of Coping**

Spiritual anchoring, or adherence to spiritual values, is the primary mechanism identified in this study. Many parents, like M4, shared that, under heavy emotional pressure, they found peace through religious activities such as praying, reading the Qur'an, and attending recitations. This activity not only provides inner peace but also build confidence that everything they do is part of the worship of Allah. This supports Yasien Mohammed's idea that human nature tends to return to God in times of difficulty.<sup>45</sup> In addition, M4 mentioned that reading Sūra Yāsīn regularly helped her feel calmer and that she believed Allah would provide the best for her family. This reflects the relationship between spirituality and psychological resilience, as explained by Pargament's theory of religious coping.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, spiritual anchoring acts as a foundation in managing difficult emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and anger. In some cases, participants reported that these religious activities helped them maintain better relationships with their spouses and children, creating a more supportive family environment amid adversity.

### **2. Sincerely Accepting Fate: From Rejection to Acceptance**

An important stage in the parenting journey is sincerely accepting their child's condition. This theme appears consistently in participants' narratives. In the early stages, many parents experience rejection, anger, and even blaming God for their child's circumstances. Over time, with the support of the YKAKI community, they began to find meaning in the diagnosis and accept the condition with an open heart. For example, M3 at first felt very angry with God because her son was diagnosed with cancer at a very young age. However, after talking with other parents in similar situations, she began to understand that every exam has a bigger purpose. The emotional support from the YKAKI community helped

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<sup>45</sup> Mohamed, *Fitrah: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature*.

<sup>46</sup> Pargament, Koenig, and Perez, "The Many Methods of Religious Coping."

him see this condition as part of God's plan. This acceptance process illustrates the importance of social support in forming adaptive coping. Therefore, this acceptance aligns with the Qur'anic view of human nature as subject to God's will, as explained in Ibn Katsir's commentary.<sup>47</sup> From the perspective of *fiṭra*, *ikhhlāṣ* (sincerity) is the highest form of surrender to Allah, which is the way to achieve inner peace.

### **3. Positive Thinking to God: Maintaining Optimism in the Midst of Trials**

The belief that God will not give tests beyond the abilities of His servants is one of the main principles held by the participants. Positive thinking (*ḥusnuddhān*) to God, or being kind to God, emerged as a strong theme in their coping strategy. This is evident in the experience of F1, who initially felt discouraged after losing his job because he had to take time off to care for a sick child. By remembering the religious message and moral support of the YKAKI community, he changed his perspective. FI began to see this situation as God's way of bringing him closer to his family and strengthening his spiritual connections. Such positive thinking gave him a sense of optimism that helped him survive, even when the situation seemed very difficult. This optimism also provides positive energy that affects children's emotional state. Positive thinking about God not only serves as an individual coping strategy, but also builds a collective spirit within the YKAKI community. Parents often share stories and support one another, creating an environment full of positive spirit.

### **4. Finding Meaning in Experience: Self-Transformation through Testing**

Meaning-making is an important element that helps participants cope with overwhelming emotional distress. M2, for example, shared that through her experience accompanying her child, she began to realise the importance of family love and support. Previously, he admitted that he was often busy with work and did not pay attention to his children. However, this condition makes him appreciate every moment with his family more. Discovering this meaning not only helped M2 overcome her sense of despair, but also gave her new energy to keep fighting to accompany her child. In this context, discovering meaning becomes a powerful mechanism for shifting perspectives from suffering to growth. These findings support Merluzzi's study, which found that meaning in

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<sup>47</sup> Purnama et al., "The Concept of Fitrah for Children."

life is an important mediating mechanism in religious coping, helping individuals find inner peace amid difficult situations.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, discovering this meaning reflects the spiritual transformation that occurs in participants. They are not only able to survive but also grow emotionally and spiritually, showing that tough tests can catalyse deep personal development. The results of this study make an important contribution to understanding the role of spirituality and the concept of *fiṭra* in supporting the psychological well-being of parents of children with cancer. In practical terms, these findings show that spiritual support should be an integral part of the cancer patient's family mentoring program. Activities such as recitation, spiritual counselling, and faith-based coping training can help parents manage stress better. Supportive communities, such as those at YKAKI, play an important role in building solidarity and providing significant emotional support. *Fiṭra* values, especially acceptance and *ḥusnuddhān* to God, can be included in parent education and training programs to help them build adaptive coping strategies.

## Conclusion

This study shows that the concept of *fiṭra* plays a key role in helping parents of children with cancer develop effective coping behaviours. Spirituality-based coping mechanisms, such as spiritual anchoring, sincerity in accepting destiny, devotion to God, and finding meaning, not only help them overcome emotional distress but also strengthen their relationship with God, family, and community. By highlighting the importance of spiritual values in coping strategies, this study provides a basis for developing interventions that focus on psychosocial and spiritual aspects in both national and global contexts. These findings are also relevant in supporting global initiatives such as the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer, which aims to improve the quality of life of pediatric cancer patients through a holistic approach.

However, this study has some limitations. Its qualitative approach and small participant group limit how broadly the results can be applied to parents of children with cancer in different cultural, religious, or healthcare settings. Additionally, this study mainly captures parents' personal experiences without quantitatively measuring changes in psychological health or coping skills. The outcomes may also be shaped by each participant's level of religious involvement and their social and cultural background. Future studies should explore the link

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<sup>48</sup> Merluzzi et al., "Letting Go."

between *fiṭra*-based spiritual coping and psychological well-being using mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches. Comparing parents from various religious, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds could reveal how spiritual coping varies by context. Further study might also develop and test *fiṭra*-based psychosocial-spiritual interventions, working with healthcare professionals, psychologists, and religious counsellors to assess their practicality, effectiveness, and role in family-centred childhood cancer care.

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### **Author Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to this study and approved the published version of this article.

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