

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) from Islamic and Western Perspectives

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Abstract: Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a chronic disorder which is characterized by excessive anxiety and exaggerated worry and tension. The West categorized it as a psychiatric disease or mental illness neurosis. There is no real cause of this disorder but research has shown that pressure from the family, society, finance and interpersonal are among the factors. This disorder brings a lot of negative effects physically such as palpitations, less focus and sleep disorder. In terms of its psychological impact, the person who suffers GAD experiences stress and depression. Among the treatments that have been used by the psychiatrists nowadays are pharmacology and psychotherapy. Islam on the other hand, views GAD as a spiritual or soul disease. Some would argue that this disease was originated from the human inner self because of the satanic interference, passion sedition and low faith in God due to the estranged relationship with Him. As a result, the patient would have a soul disease in which he/she would feel distress. Although Islam does not provide a specific treatment to cure GAD, there are methods that had been used by the previous Islamic scholars and theologians to heal such mental illness which are through the practice of Al-Quran and Hadith and the implementation of the Islamic scholar practice in the past. These had been proven to be successful by all the Islamic scholars during the golden Islamic civilization. Among the methods that had been practiced were being faithful to God, performing prayer, practicing specific chant and prayer, being happy and also being patient with God's certainty. Obviously, religious mechanisms with the spiritual approaches gave positive effects compared to the treatments from the west which can only cure patients physically.

Key words: Concept • Generalized Anxiety Disorder • Islam • The West • Psychiatric disease • Mental illness

INTRODUCTION

According to the western perspective, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is classified as mental illness or psychiatric illness neurosis. It is also categorized as anxiety disorder. In the Islamic point of view, anxiety is a spiritual disease which develops from the heart or soul. There are many causes, effects and treatment methods presented by the western and Islamic scholars. Although the ideas given by the West and Islam distinguish each other, both perspectives acknowledge anxiety as a serious disease which may interfere one's life. Thus, if a person discovers himself or herself suffering from General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), he or she should deal with it immediately.

The Concept of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Gad) from the Islamic and Western Perspectives

Definition of Generalized Anxiety Disorder: According to "*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*" [1], General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is defined as uncontrolled anxiety and fear towards any activities within 1 month (minimum) or 6 months (maximum). Besides, it is also defined as unrealistic or excessive worry in life such as being concerned towards the plight of a child (when the child is not even in danger) or being worried about finance (without any reasonable cause). This fear can last up to a period of 6 months. It was the final diagnosis after a person does not fit any other anxiety disorder diagnosis [2].

In the *Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders* [3], it was reported that GAD is characterized as a chronic disease. It is triggered by a specific cause. The GAD patients may worry about various issues in their daily routines. It is difficult for the GAD patients to divert their attention from one matter to another matter. Among the symptoms of anxiety disorder is sleep disturbance, stress, lack focus, unstable emotion and fatigue [4]. From the psychological aspect, the major symptom is being upset about something or having the fear that something bad will happen without any concrete reason.

From the Islamic perspective, Islam never discusses GAD specifically. However, anxiety was mentioned by some famous Islamic scholars such as al-Razi, Ibn Kathir, Muhammad 'Uthman Najati, Hasan Langgulung and others [5]. One of the scholars who frequently discussed anxiety is Al-Ghazali due to his prominence in the spiritual field. According to Al-Ghazali, anxiety is a mental disease developed by the heart. It grows from an unhealthy soul of a human being. It is similar to other diseases such as anger, hatred, envy, sadness, pride and others. He characterized anxiety as fear towards certain things which leads to restless and frustrated feelings [6]. Thus, Abd Rahman Muhammad 'Iswa [7], concluded that the anxious feeling as described by Al-Ghazali is close to the definition of fear.

Although the definitions presented by the Western and Islamic scholars distinguish each other, both have the same correlation. This is due to the condition that a person who is suffering from mental disorder usually faces difficulty to control his or her emotion during tough situations. The frequent environmental factor which influences someone's soul would affect his or her mentality. For instance, someone who fails to cope with the emotion would ultimately experience mental disorder such as staring, crying and losing self-esteem. This would severely lead to GAD. Thus, it is clear that anxiety disorder is generally caused by the mental or emotional instability. It is a soul disease, not the mental disorder as promoted by the psychiatrics from the West.

The Factors of Generalized Anxiety Disorder: According to *Anxiety Disorders Association of America* [8], there is no exact factors of GAD and therefore, its description is partially furnished. The common reasons for children to experience anxiety are because of family factors, lack capabilities, past events, negative thoughts of the future, mistakes made and also school performance [9].

The researchers concluded that genetic factors have a great impact for GAD to occur [10]. About 40% to 50% of youth and adults inherit GAD from both parents [11, 12]. The family system and the environmental influence also play significant roles in the emergence of this disease [13]. Two concurrent studies which were conducted on a chemical imbalance in the brains of individuals were seen as another cause of GAD. The instability of these chemicals may cause one to feel more sensitive, anxious, moody and depressed which may lead to psychosomatic disorders [14]. However, until now, the weakness of the nervous system is still being debated whether it has become one of the causes of GAD.

Furthermore, the pressure of life one faces is also the factor of GAD. Among the problems associated with it are fighting/divorce of parents, loss/death of family members/loved ones, health problems and also financial problems [15]. Furthermore, stress and anxiety are very closely correlated. This is because occasional or prolonged stress can cause anxiety [16]. A research by Muhammad 'Uthman Najati [17] and Harussani Hj. Zakaria [18] found that this soul disease whether it is caused by fear or anxiety, is developed by someone's attitude which includes the weak of heart and mind, the weak of faith, the influence of passion and also the effects of other soul diseases. People today have forgotten the spiritual aspects and this lead to frustration, stress, psychosis, neurosis and phobias. Ahmad Taha [19] stated that soul diseases such as anxiety and stress are the result of Satan's domination over the human spirit and unhealthy soul. This is due to the poor religious belief and insufficient relationship with Allah SWT.

The same issues had been discussed by Imam Al-Ghazali. According to Al-Ghazali [6], among the factors of anxiety are the fear of old age, fear of death, fear of Allah, fear of poverty, fear of losing status and jobs and fear of being different with others. All these fears come from the unpeaceful heart when someone does not give full trust in the Qada and Qadar set by Allah and does not have complete reliance on Allah SWT.

The Impacts of Generalized Anxiety Disorder: GAD usually affects the physical and psychological aspects. A study was made on two subject groups at Harvard. Both groups showed a very low quality of life in their social life. Adverse symptoms can be found in a person who is in this disorder [20]. Among the physical aspects experienced by GAD patients are fatigue, sweating and

sleep disorder. They also tend to expect something bad will happen in the near future. There are studies shown that adolescents are more likely to commit bad action and receive negative information as a result of this disease [21]. In addition, the impact on students is that they exhibit passive attitude in education such as they have lack interest in learning, they perform poorly in exam and they produce low quality assignment [15]. Sometimes, this fear is also followed by the tension of certain muscles, the increase of body movement, the failure to focus on jobs and the incapability to think rationally. The most significant effect for people with GAD is depression [22]. In terms of psychological impact, the patient faces rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, appetite loss, shortness of breath, over sweating, frequent urination and sleep disorder. These changes are due to the increase activities of the autonomic nervous system in the patient's body [23]. As a result, the patient experiences unstable and restless soul.

Islam views GAD as a disease that leaves negative impact in which the patient experiences stress and depression. When a person's soul is not calm, it gives implications to the mind. The patient will undergo many negative thoughts. As a result, the satanic influence and own desire would easily affect the soul and mind.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder Treatment: There are two treatments practiced in the West today as an effort to help cure GAD, either by pharmacology or psychotherapy, or both [24]. Pharmacology is often given to patients who have chronic disorders. There are various types of medications used to treat this disease. However, medication, either taken during short or long term period depends on the symptoms and individual circumstances. Drug reaction usually takes time; and patients have to remain calm because drug use is required in the composition of medicine [25]. Among the most common drug used is *Benzodiazepines*. This medication might be the best option to cure GAD in the short term period [26]. However, this sedative is not able to reduce GAD, but only reduces the level of anxiety through reducing the muscle tension of the patient. This medication is usually given to chronic patients since the reaction is immediate. *Buspirone* is as effective as *Benzodiazepines* when it comes to coping with the symptom of anxiety. This anti-anxiety drug is generally said to be a safe drug for GAD treatment. It acts a bit slow for the effects of about two weeks. However, patients may experience some side

effects such as dizziness, headache, sweating and symptoms related to intestinal [27, 28]. This medication can calm the patients without making them addicted to it. Besides, there are other medications used specifically to reduce GAD which is *Tricyclic Antidepressants*; such as *Imipramine*, *Nortriptyline* dan *Desipramine*. However, it cannot completely dispel anxiety. The side effects of taking these medications are dry mouth, constipation and unstable mind. These drugs increase the risks for patients to involve in various accidents [29].

Furthermore, there are also GAD patients who choose to do psychotherapy such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). It is the most popular therapy and it is effective in treating GAD compared to other therapies [30]. This psychotherapy is divided into three techniques which are self concentration technique, relaxation training technique and teaching problem skills technique. In the concentration technique, the patients are taught to observe things which give anxious response and to detect the environment that may endanger themselves. Although the CBT package generally produces positive results, most patients are not successfully healed from the disease. According to Malik, B. Badri [31] patients who undergo treatment by the Western psychotherapy, would feel less painful due to the immune therapy given by the psychiatrists. However, problems such as depression, anxiety, guilt and others would remain. Thus, the effectiveness of CBT in curing this disease is still being debated by the West until now [32, 33].

During the golden era of Islamic civilization, the Islamic scholars had discussed the concept of psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy and their relationship to mental health. According to famous moralists like Miskawayh (m.1030), al-Tusi (m.1274) and al-Ghazali (m.1111), the knowledge is necessary since the body, like the human soul, would become sick and unhealthy and thus, it requires treatment such as psychotherapy and counselling [34]. For example, Abu Bakar Muhammad Zakaria Al-Razi (m. 925M) is the first Muslim physician who introduced the methods of psychotherapy and he had achieved a lot of success in discovering the definition, symptoms and mental health treatment. The discussion on mental health was published in his book entitled '*El Mansuri*' dan '*Al Tibb al-Ruhani*'. Al-Razi on the other hand, is of the view that a medical practitioner should know about both mental and body health to achieve balance life [35]. Besides, Abu Zayd

Ahmed ibn Sahl al-Balkhi (m. 934M)'s famous book *Masalih al-Abdan wa al-Anfus* has discussed the relationship between body and soul and describes the spiritual and psychological health [36]. Ibn Sina (n.d) in his famous book '*al-Syifa*' on the other hand, had debated on the theories of mental health and its relationship with human's soul. Cleanliness and the purity of heart/soul is the key to gain happiness. The purity of soul is significant to ensure the person is away from any disease/depression. At the end of the 9th century, Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (m.923M), a famous medical practitioner was born. He has developed an Islamic psychotherapy to heal patients suffering from mental disorders. This has been mentioned in his famous book entitled '*Firdaus al-Hikmah*' [37].

Besides, Muhammad 'Uthman Najati [38] stated that having strong faith in Allah SWT is a tremendous power that can prevent anxiety/fear of a person. Imam al-Ghazali (1994) also supported this idea in which to gather the confidence and faith towards Allah SWT and to worship Allah as the only God would create a sense of piety to Allah which leads to peaceful mind. When a person has given his or her full submission to Allah, the soul will be primarily devoted to Him. As a result, one would gain Allah SWT's blessing and the peace of mind/soul could be obtained.

Among other ways to treat GAD is through performing Solat (prayer). Taha [39] suggested that the Solat stated in the Qur'an is among the ways to apply in the psychotherapy process. Through Solat, the person would be able to express all the hope by asking help from Allah SWT during difficult situations. If the Solat is performed sincerely, then it is able to purify the heart and transform one's life to be calm, confident and disciplined. Solat is able to generate compassion, spirituality and consciousness to express the greatness of Allah [40] Solat is also regarded as a remedy for anxiety because it can develop positive values such as patience, endurance, contentment and perseverance needed when facing hardship and turmoil in the world [41].

Moreover, meditation is a practice that has never been abandoned by the mystic Islamic scholars. This practice gives a lot of virtue and strengths. Among the benefits is controlling one personal desire. When passion influences a person's life, the person would become restless and anxious. The desire towards the world increases. When one fails to satisfy his or her desire, it would lead one to stress (work such as

anxiety. According to Imam al-Ghazali, meditation can deepen 'ma'rifatullah' (knowing Allah) in the heart which is the beginning of purification in the soul [42]. Rasulallah has also been practicing this meditation while he was in the Cave of Hira'. Here, he has found peace that he had never experienced before. He also received the first revelation from Allah SWT. Thus, Islam does not prohibit a person to undergo meditation for as long as it is not contrary to the teaching of Islam. Certain effective techniques in strengthening the soul through meditation in Islam will help remove the negative elements of the soul. Once all the impurities soul be erased, then the peace of mind would be obtained.

Besides, performing *Zikir* can also clean the dirty soul [43]. This is because *Zikir* can protect the heart from the evil. *Zikir* is an activity to remember Allah since our thinking has been focused towards positive activities and thus, the feeling of anxiety can be reduced. Hence, if a person is suffering the loss of rank or property, he or she should always remember Allah so that Allah will restore what has been lost. Practicing a lot of *Zikir* would also activate the mind and open spaces in the heart for peace. *Zikir* is normally accompanied by prayers. Thus, the most efficient way to strengthen the relationship between Allah and His slaves is through prayers since it is a direct interaction between two parties. Praying and giving full submission to Allah will also release the fear and anxiety one feels. This is because the person has hope that Allah would answer the prayers by solving the problems he or she is facing [17]. A person who never ceased to pray to Allah will always be calm if he or she guarantees that every prayer will be answered by Allah [44].

Among the most potent medication mentioned by Imam Al-Ghazali to treat soul disease is by being patient and pleased for all the conditions set by Allah SWT. It is indeed very hard to do but it can give a very effective impact. According to Al-Ghazali [43], these characteristics make a person adopts the feeling of perseverance towards the challenges faced in life due to the love one feels for Allah. Besides, if the person still feels sad of the difficulty he or she goes through life, he or she still managed to be grateful and pleased with these condition, knowing that every good deed will be given rewards by Allah. This also means that if the person is given poverty and illness as one of the life's trials, he or she should practice perseverance. If one can do that, it means that there is no bad expectation against Allah since he or she believes and confident that Allah never ever wanted to oppress

His servants. If problems occur in life, the person would consider that there must be some hidden wisdom behind the bad events that had happened. In addition, positive thinking will prevent the person from feeling anxious. One should also consider all problems as a test in life because everything happens in this world needs a lot of sacrifice and struggle [45]. Islam teaches Muslims to always be patient and pleased with life and at the same time evaluate the test given by Allah as a way to increase the faith. This practice will ultimately eliminate frustration and despair one has when having problems. In fact, the person will be rewarded by Allah since he or she accepts all the challenges given with an open heart [46]. Up till today, there is no specific practice/spiritual treatment/religious practice in the treatment of psychiatric illness [47] including GAD. Most religions in the world do not deny the roles of religions since they are very effective in treating anxiety, depression and stress due to their ability to treat external and internal aspects. Moreover, the spiritual healing is more significant than the physical healing because the physical illness is caused by the spiritual pain.

Pilot Study: In this pilot study, the researchers took two samples from Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia (HUSM) Kubang Kerian, Kelantan. The data obtained from this pilot study was analyzed by the researchers in order to find out the important elements that should be addressed during the interview and intervention. In this pilot study, both patients had undergone Islamic psychotherapy intervention for one time only while the assessment for pre and post intervention was done by the psychiatrist at the same hospital. The instrument used was Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (*HARS/HAM-A*) and Parallel Analysis to measure the effectiveness of the Islamic psychotherapy intervention. The following is the findings of a pilot study which have been done.

An Analysis from the Pilot Study

Profiles

The Post Intervention Results

The Differences of the Total Score During Pre and Post Intervention

Patient1: Before the intervention, she was at stage 4 (severe anxiety) and her total score was 34 (above the serious concern). However, after the intervention, she was at stage 1 (mild) and the total score dropped to 10 (mild). The percentage difference before and after the intervention was 70.2%.

Patient 2: Before the intervention was carried out, she was at stage 4 (severe anxiety) and the total score was 44. However, after the intervention, she was at stage 2 (mild-moderate) while the overall score was 18. The low anxiety level was not so obvious because she still experiences anxiety, tension, fear and insomnia. The percentage difference before and after intervention was 59.1%. This probably happened because the observation/assessment was made when she was busy preparing for her final examination. Besides, her final examination results will be announced three days after the observation/assessment. Thus, this could be the main factor that caused her to still feel anxious at stage 2 (mild).

From the pilot study that has been conducted on these two patients, it is clear that both of them have experienced generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). They had taken some medication to deal with their depression but the result shows very little positive implications. However, after they had undergone intervention using the Islamic psychotherapy, there are some changes happen to them physically and mentally. Besides, the overall scores showed a significant decrease between pre- and post-intervention. This distinguished the levels of anxiety disorder from Stage 4 (severe) to Stage 1 and 2

Table 1: Patients profiles

Themes and Sub-themes	Discussion
Sub-theme: Gender	Woman
Sub- theme: Age	Both patients aged 25
Sub-theme: Status	Single
Sub-theme: Level of study	Patient 1 is in her fourth year of Science Dental School while patient 2 is in her fifth year of Medical School.
Sub-theme: Psychiatric history	Both patients reported that their families have never had the history of Generalized Anxiety Disorder.
Sub-theme: Family relationship	Both patients stated that they have a close and intimate relationship with the family.
Sub-theme: Family stability	Both patients come from a stable and happy family.

Table 2: The main reasons of the patients experienced Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Themes and Sub-themes	Discussion
Sub-theme : Main factors	Both patients stated that cognitive factors are the main causes of Generalized Anxiety Disorder.
Sub-theme: Main ideas	Patient 1 reported that she was often condemned by her own mother while patient 2 claimed that she has low confidence level.

Table 3: The Effects of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Themes and sub-themes	Discussion
Sub-theme: Main effect	Both patients faced depression
Sub-theme: Physical effect	Patient1 faced the effect of ‘flushing’ or body heat while patient 2 experienced ‘palpitation’ or strong heartbeat.
Sub-theme: Spiritual effect	Both patients admitted that they undergo stress and tension.
Sub-theme: Action taken	Patient 1 will share his problems with friends or surf the internet. Patient 2 on the other hand, will recite the Quran and read the Quran’s interpretation.

Table 4: The Impacts on Medication

Theme and Sub-theme	Discussion
Sub-theme: Medication	Patient 1 has stopped taking medication while patient 2 has just started taking anti-depression medication for two months.
Sub-theme: Medication effects	Both patients agreed that medication can cure the ailment.
Sub-theme: Medication side effects	Both patients are aware that the medication intake contains drugs.
Sub-theme: Other side treatment	Both patients agreed that they have never undergone any treatment other than modern treatment.

Table 5: The Islamic Psychotherapy Treatment (Pre)

Themes and Sub-themes	Discussion
Sub-theme: Intervention	Both patients are of the same view that the Islamic psychotherapy intervention is a practical approach.
Sub-theme: Interest	Both patients agreed to participate in the intervention which will be carried out.

Table 6: The Effects of Islamic Psychotherapy (Post)

Themes and sub-themes	Discussion
Sub-theme: Islamic psychotherapy intervention	Patient 1 and patient 2 stated that the intervention session is fun until it became a habit.
Sub-theme: Intervention effects	Patient 1 and patient 2 felt calm. This was labelled as a moderate stage..
Sub-theme: Follow-up psychotherapy treatment	Both patients admitted that they still continue practicing this therapy like before.

Table 7: The post-intervention results via telephones

Patient 1	Therapy : 14-3-2011 Observation 1 : (21-3-2011): ‘Alhamdulillah, I practice the Zikr after my prayers and I can almost memorize them all. Up till now, there are no drastic changes but I feel more calm than usual’. Observation 2 : (28-3-2011): ‘Alhamdulillah, I feel there is a positive energy within myself. I am more relaxed than before.’ Observation 3: (4-4-2011): ‘Alhamdulillah, I am getting better now. I am not depending on medication anymore.’
Patient 2	Therapy : 17-3-2011 Observation 1: (24-3-2011): ‘I feel relieved but not much.’ Observation 2: (31-3-2011): ‘I still practice it. But it’s just a routine. Maybe my exam is just around the corner.’ Observation 3: (24-4-2011): ‘I am still practicing it. Now, I still feel anxious as before but sometimes, I feel calm. I guess my anxiety has been reduced.’

(mild or moderate). Moreover, the patients also began to feel calmer even though the intervention was only done once by the researcher. Hence, the Islamic psychotherapy intervention is indeed giving positive effects to GAD.

Thus, the researcher believed that if the intervention was carried out six times in three months, the potential for the patients to experience peace at optimum level is higher.

Table 8: The analysis of total scores and the symptom levels of pre and post intervention

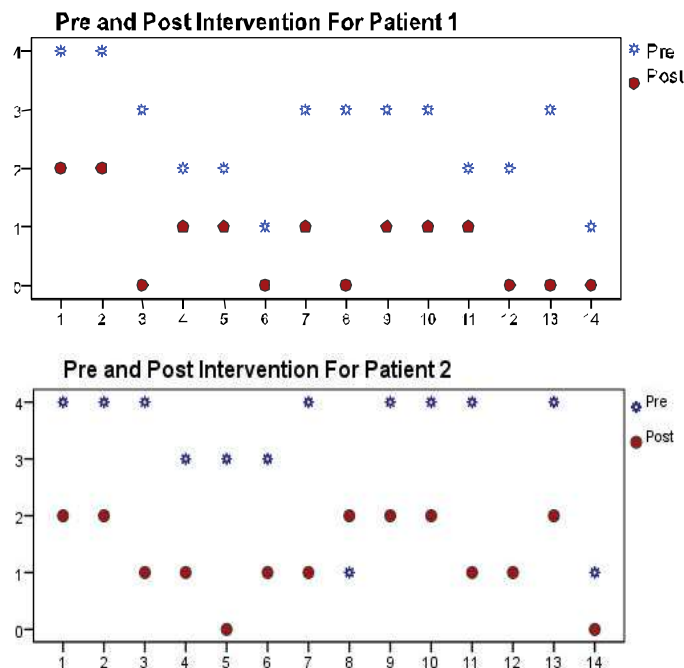


Table 9: Percentage (%) Difference Between Pre and Post intervention

	Pre- intervention status (score)	Post-intervention status (score)	Percentage (%) Difference
Patient 1	34 (Stage 4- severe)	10 (Stage 1- no)	70.2
Patient 2	44 (Stage 4- severe)	18 (Stage 2- mild)	59.1

CONCLUSION

Although Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is different according to the Islamic perspective and the Western perspective, both of them are interrelated. Both Islamic and Western scholars agreed that GAD has the same effect even though both have different views in terms of its definition, causes and treatment. According to Islam, GAD is caused by spiritual interference while the Western stated that GAD is derived from mental disorder. Most people who suffer from this disorder will experience it again since the modern medical treatment is unable to cure the disease completely. The method recommended by Al-Quran, Sunnah of the Prophet and the practice of the Islamic scholars in the past should be practiced because it has been proven to be effective since the glory of Islamic civilization in the previous era. Thus, it is recommended for those who are practicing modern medicine to switch to spiritual treatment such as Islamic psychotherapy. Through this way, the soul disease can be healed effectively and the relationship with God can be improved.

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