



THE IMPACT OF COMPLAINING ON THE HEALING PROCESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL, MEDICAL, AND ISLAMIC SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

DAMPAK MENGELUH TERHADAP PROSES KESEMBUHAN: PENDEKATAN PSIKOLOGI, MEDIS, DAN SPIRITUALITAS ISLAM

Andik Isdianto ^{1*}, Nuruddin Al Indunissy ², Novariza Fitrianti ³

¹Universitas Brawijaya, Email: andik.isdianto@ub.ac.id

²Rehab Hati Foundation, Email : nai.rehab@icloud.com

³Rehab Hati Malang Kota, Email : novarizza.sda@gmail.com

*email Koresponden: andik.isdianto@ub.ac.id

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Abstract

Complaining is a common emotional response to illness, yet its impact on healing is rarely examined from a multidisciplinary perspective. This article aims to analyze how complaining influences the recovery process through psychological, Islamic spiritual, and medical lenses. The method used was a literature review with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected from scientific articles published between 2015 and 2024 using Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. Findings reveal that excessive complaining amplifies stress, worsens mental health, and disrupts the immune system. Psychologically, uncontrolled complaints are linked to low emotional resilience. From an Islamic view, patience (shabr) and supplication to God provide spiritual strength and mental stability. Medically, emotional stress raises cortisol levels, negatively impacting tissue healing and immune responses. This study underscores the urgency of a holistic approach that integrates psychological, spiritual, and medical dimensions in healthcare services. It contributes to scientific discourse by offering a model for more humane and comprehensive healthcare. Further empirical studies are recommended to validate this integration in clinical settings.

Keywords : coping strategy, emotional resilience, holistic health care, patient recovery, stress management

Abstrak

Perilaku mengeluh sering muncul sebagai respons umum terhadap sakit, namun dampaknya terhadap proses penyembuhan belum banyak dikaji secara multidisipliner. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis dampak mengeluh terhadap kesembuhan pasien dari tiga sudut pandang: psikologi, spiritualitas Islam, dan kesehatan medis. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi



literatur (literature review) dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data diperoleh dari artikel ilmiah terbitan 2015–2024 melalui pencarian di database Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, dan Google Scholar. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa mengeluh secara berlebihan dapat memperkuat stres, memperburuk kondisi mental, dan mengganggu sistem imun tubuh. Dalam perspektif psikologi, keluhan yang tidak terkendali berhubungan dengan rendahnya resiliensi emosional. Dalam pandangan Islam, perilaku sabar dan mengeluh hanya kepada Allah menjadi saluran spiritual yang memperkuat mental pasien. Sementara itu, dari sisi medis, stres akibat keluhan emosional meningkatkan kadar kortisol yang berdampak negatif pada penyembuhan luka dan imunitas. Kajian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan holistik yang mengintegrasikan aspek psikologis, spiritual, dan medis dalam pelayanan kesehatan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi ilmiah sebagai rujukan pengembangan model layanan kesehatan yang lebih manusiawi dan komprehensif. Diperlukan studi lanjutan berbasis lapangan untuk menguji efektivitas integrasi ini dalam praktik klinis.

Kata Kunci : ketahanan emosional, manajemen stress, pemulihan pasien, pelayanan kesehatan holistik, strategi koping

1. INTRODUCTION

Illness is part of the human experience that encompasses not only physical dimensions but also psychological and spiritual aspects. In facing illness, individuals exhibit varying emotional responses. One of the most common responses is complaining behavior. In this context, complaining can be understood as an expression of discomfort, dissatisfaction, or suffering conveyed either verbally or non-verbally (Offor et al., 2024). Although it may appear to be a natural reaction, this behavior carries complex implications for the healing process (Andriyani, 2019).

From a modern psychological perspective, complaining may serve as a form of catharsis—a release of negative emotions that provides temporary relief (Azis et al., 2024). However, studies also indicate that excessive complaining can reinforce negative thought patterns, increase stress levels (Yu et al., 2022), and worsen the perception of pain. This pattern may disrupt patients' mental balance and potentially delay the recovery process (Koukoulithras et al., 2021). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) emphasizes that recurring negative perceptions can intensify stress symptoms and hinder emotional adaptation (Gimigliano et al., 2022).

In Islamic thought, complaining to fellow humans is often viewed as a sign of impatience toward divine destiny. Islam teaches patience (shabr) as a primary virtue in enduring illness. Patience is believed not only to reflect spiritual obedience but also to bring inner peace and great reward from Allah (Miskahuddin, 2020). Complaining directed to Allah through prayer and supplication is considered a legitimate form of devotion (Ramadhan et al., 2024), as exemplified by Prophet Ayyub AS. Spiritual values in confronting trials such as illness have been shown to enhance mental resilience and reduce emotional distress (Village & Francis, 2023).

Medically, negative emotional responses such as repeated complaints can trigger increased stress hormones like cortisol, which directly affect the immune system. Prolonged negative emotions are known to slow down wound healing and weaken resistance to infections (Haynes & Holloway, 2019). Conversely, emotional stability and positivity contribute to



stronger immunity, faster tissue regeneration, and improved clinical prognosis (Ping et al., 2019).

Previous studies have shown that negative emotional expression has physiological consequences for health. For instance, Susanti et al. (2023) found that chronic stress can impair adaptive immune function. Research by Hassan & Soltan (2020) also confirmed that patients with high stress levels experienced delayed wound healing after surgery. A more recent study by Eltaiba & Harries (2015) found that a psycho-spiritual approach rooted in religious values can enhance mental health and accelerate recovery in chronic patients.

Nonetheless, there remains a lack of interdisciplinary research specifically addressing complaining behavior from the combined perspectives of psychology, Islamic theology, and medical science. This article aims to fill that gap by exploring how the expression of complaints may influence the healing process through a multidimensional approach. It is hoped that this study can serve as a reference for developing holistic healthcare strategies grounded in both spiritual and scientific values.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a literature review using a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at exploring the relationship between complaining behavior and the healing process from psychological, medical, and Islamic spiritual perspectives. The review was conducted online between March and April 2025 by examining articles from databases such as Scopus, PubMed, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. The research subjects consisted of scientific articles published between 2015 and 2024 that were relevant to the topic and sourced from peer-reviewed and accredited journals.

Data collection was carried out using keywords such as “complaining and healing,” “emotion and immune system,” and “sabar in Islam.” Articles that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed using content and thematic analysis approaches by categorizing findings into three main perspectives—psychological, medical, and Islamic spiritual. Each article was examined to identify patterns of relationships, differences in findings, and the contribution of each perspective to the core topic. This method enabled a comprehensive and reflective understanding of the impact of complaining on the healing process while opening space for integrating religious values and scientific approaches in healthcare services.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Complaining as Catharsis or Stress Reinforcement: A Psychological Perspective

Complaining in a psychological context has significant implications for an individual's mental health. It can serve as a form of catharsis, allowing individuals to release negative emotions based on their daily experiences. Research by Kowalewski (2019) suggests that complaining can provide individuals with a space to express dissatisfaction, potentially reducing short-term psychological pressure. This aligns with the view that occasional complaining can bring emotional relief and offer an opportunity to share psychological burdens with others (Wu et al., 2023).

On the other hand, while complaining can serve as catharsis, it is important to note that repetitive complaints without constructive solutions or efforts to address the situation may reinforce negative perceptions of the problem. Bruk et al. (2016) found that persistent complaining patterns may increase stress levels and disrupt an individual's mental balance. Although complaining may offer temporary relief, a habitual pattern of unproductive



complaints can be detrimental to mental health (Song & Im, 2017). Furthermore, Nolen-Hoeksema et al. (2015) noted that individuals with recurrent negative thought patterns often experience psychosomatic disorders that slow down their recovery process. This highlights the connection between frequent complaining and an individual's ability to cope with stress, where difficulty in managing stress contributes to increased dissatisfaction and emotional distress (Daskal & Kampf, 2015).

There is also a strong association between habitual complaining and coping mechanisms. Individuals with low emotional resilience tend to complain more frequently and are more susceptible to anxiety. Recent studies show that emotional regulation, including how one processes complaints and expresses feelings, significantly affects psychological well-being (Um, 2023). This supports the notion that complaining is not merely an emotional outlet, but also an indicator of a person's capacity to cope with life's pressures. If left unaddressed, individuals may find themselves trapped in a cycle of complaints that could escalate into more serious mental health issues without adopting more adaptive coping strategies (Nhat & Tučková, 2017).

Furthermore, complaining behavior is also shaped by social and cultural factors. Nasurdin et al. (2020) found that individual attitudes and traits, such as self-confidence and individualism, influence one's tendency to complain. More assertive and individualistic consumers tend to feel more entitled to express dissatisfaction, while more conservative individuals are inclined to hold back. This suggests that complaining is not only a psychological phenomenon but also a social behavior influenced by environment and cultural norms.

In psychology, it is essential to distinguish between constructive and destructive complaints. Constructive complaints, which are grounded in efforts to solve problems, can lead to positive change and emotional recovery (Varnali & Cesmeci, 2021). Destructive complaints, on the other hand, provide no solutions and may worsen an individual's mental condition. This is why cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is often used to help individuals recognize their thought patterns and improve their behavioral responses to complaints (Turner et al., 2017).

Complaints can also be viewed as indicators of dissatisfaction. A study by Leo and Pate (2024) found that how individuals deal with dissatisfaction largely depends on context and the outcomes they expect from complaining. This highlights the risk associated with chronic complaining, which, if left unresolved, may pose a serious threat to mental well-being.

In conclusion, complaining can be a double-edged sword: on one hand, it can help individuals release emotions and feel temporary relief, but on the other hand, it can escalate stress and lead to mental health problems if not managed appropriately. Therefore, it is essential to identify more constructive ways of managing complaints, such as expressing emotions within supportive social networks and using effective emotional regulation techniques to enhance coping with stress (Summers, 2015).

The Ethics of Complaining in Islam and the Power of Spirituality

In the context of Islamic spirituality and the ethics of complaining, understanding patience (*shabr*) as a core value is essential. The concept of patience in Islam emphasizes the importance of remaining calm and composed when facing hardship or suffering. Excessive complaining is often perceived as a sign of impatience toward Allah's decree, whereas turning to Him in supplication, as exemplified by Prophet Ayyub (Job) AS, is regarded as an expression of surrender and a plea for divine help. This aligns with the understanding that expressing complaints to Allah strengthens one's spirituality and faith, rather than weakening it.



A study by Asrun and Nurendra (2021) shows that during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, spirituality played a vital role in helping individuals cope with difficulties. The study found that those who practiced their faith sincerely tended to experience greater calm and a sense of purpose in life, particularly when facing suffering (Wajdi, 2022). In this context, complaining should not be seen merely as venting negative emotions, but rather as redirecting sadness or frustration into positive and constructive actions, such as prayer and seeking meaning behind life's trials.

Moreover, Islamic spirituality is not limited to ritual practice; it also encompasses how individuals build relationships with others and with their environment. This view is aligned with the concept of *tasawwuf* (Sufism), which encourages inner reflection and spiritual discipline. Strengthening spirituality can also be seen in the presence of social support systems that help individuals cope with stress and build emotional resilience. Family and community play a critical role in this regard (Rosyada et al., 2023).

Practices such as prayer, attending religious gatherings (*majelis dzikir*), and engaging in beneficial social activities can also serve as effective outlets for managing emotions during times of difficulty. Numerous studies have shown that family support positively correlates with quality of life among patients, indicating that the presence of loved ones offers comfort and strength when facing adversity (Rosyada et al., 2023; Rahma & Suyadi, 2024). This underlines the importance of building strong social support networks.

Additionally, the Islamic concept of spirituality includes awareness of the importance of controlling desires (*nafs*) and cultivating a positive mindset. Research shows that rituals such as remembrance of God (*dzikir*), prayer (*shalat*), and fasting help regulate the heart (*qalb*) and the soul (*nafs*) (Setiawan et al., 2020). This awareness contributes to personal development and the ability to avoid becoming trapped in patterns of complaints that may weaken one's spirituality. Therefore, individuals are encouraged to focus on gratitude and positive thinking as a way to strengthen faith and inner peace.

Other studies explain that the relationship between spirituality and religious practices—such as prayer and reflection (*tafakkur*)—can reduce stress levels and improve patients' quality of life (Wajdi, 2022). In high-pressure situations, complaining may be used as a means of seeking support, but it is more beneficial when approached through a spiritual framework that offers deeper solutions. Complaining within reasonable limits and directing it toward Allah as the ultimate source of protection can give new meaning to emotional experiences.

On another note, pedagogy in the context of character education that emphasizes spiritual values is equally important, as revealed in research on Islamic education in Indonesia. Integrating spiritual values into the curriculum can help students find meaning in life and navigate challenges (Gusviani, 2016). A holistic education should guide children to understand and apply their spirituality in all areas of life.

Overall, the Islamic approach to illness and suffering highlights the essential role of spirituality for individuals, with broader implications for the community. Cultivating awareness in managing complaints and channeling emotional energy into meaningful spiritual practice can significantly improve one's quality of life. This underscores that spirituality in Islam is not merely about rituals—it also encompasses positive mental attitudes and empathetic engagement with the world. Through this, individuals can find peace amid hardship while continuing to seek wisdom in every trial they face.

The Impact of Negative Emotions on the Immune System and Healing Process



The effects of negative emotions on the immune system and the body's healing process have become an increasingly important subject of study in the fields of medicine and psychology. Several studies have shown that negative emotional responses—such as stress and repetitive complaining—directly affect immune system health. Stress hormones, particularly cortisol, are known to interfere with immune functions that are essential for healing. For instance, research indicates that psychological stress can delay wound healing and increase the risk of infection (Elsaka et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2017; Öztürk et al., 2016).

Chronic stress caused by negative emotions has also been associated with elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, which further contribute to delayed healing (Muhrawi et al., 2022). The surge of stress-induced hormones, including adrenaline and noradrenaline, disrupts immune function by suppressing gene activity involved in the inflammatory phase necessary for tissue repair (Kumar et al., 2020; Rajabi et al., 2019). A decrease in anti-inflammatory cytokines such as interleukin-10, along with increased pro-inflammatory cytokines, can worsen healing outcomes. These findings are supported by evidence showing that stress can impair immune regulation and distort immune responses required during the healing process (Breen et al., 2015; Almeida et al., 2015).

Conversely, positive emotions and social support significantly enhance the pace of healing. Studies have found that social support improves mental health, which in turn positively impacts immune system function (Hassan & Soltan, 2020; Elsherif & Elgafaar, 2021). Positive emotions not only reduce the negative effects of stress but also enhance immune responsiveness by stimulating the production of growth factors that aid in cellular regeneration and tissue repair (Shetty et al., 2024).

An integrated approach combining mental health and spiritual well-being is also seen as an effective strategy to improve immune response. The incorporation of spiritual values into mental health management has been shown to help patients cope with pain, ultimately accelerating recovery (Muhrawi et al., 2022; Hassan & Soltan, 2020). For example, practices such as Bhramari Pranayama meditation can create a calmer mental state, which affects the production of nitric oxide—a key component in the healing process (Shetty et al., 2024). Follow-up studies have recorded reductions in stress hormone levels and improvements in immune function in patients undergoing spiritually and psychologically based interventions (Öztürk et al., 2016; Almeida et al., 2015).

Therefore, within the context of holistic healthcare, it is essential for service providers to address patients' emotional expressions, including complaining behavior, which can contribute to negative health outcomes. Psychological interventions focused on stress management and strengthening social support systems can help mitigate the adverse effects of negative emotions and create a more supportive environment for effective and efficient healing (Robinson et al., 2017; Pinto et al., 2016; Breen et al., 2015).

In conclusion, the regulation of both positive and negative emotions is vital in the healing process and plays a crucial role in optimizing immune system performance. By understanding these aspects, we can develop a more effective and integrated healthcare approach that considers not only the physical but also the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the patient. These explanations demonstrate the close relationship between emotions and immunity and underscore the importance of a holistic approach in health management and patient recovery.

The Urgency of a Holistic and Interdisciplinary Approach in Healthcare Services



A holistic and interdisciplinary approach in healthcare services is increasingly recognized as essential in understanding and managing patients' complaints. The integration of diverse scientific perspectives—such as psychology, medicine, and Islamic spirituality—is key to achieving a comprehensive understanding of the emotional and physical impact of complaints experienced by individuals. This analysis shows that managing complaints cannot focus on a single dimension alone but must consider all three aspects simultaneously.

From a psychological standpoint, complaints often reflect deep emotional vulnerability. Research indicates that while complaints may function as a necessary emotional release mechanism, they can become problematic if not accompanied by resolution. For instance, patients who complain repetitively may experience elevated stress hormone levels, which negatively affect the immune system and delay the healing process (Balikji et al., 2022; Yazdi et al., 2019). Recurring complaints may also indicate underlying untreated psychological conditions. One study found that somatic complaints are often linked to mental health disorders, highlighting the interplay between physical and psychological symptoms (Wilson et al., 2015).

Medically, frequent physical complaints may signal more serious health problems. The study by Balikji et al. demonstrated a significant correlation between self-reported complaints and decreased immune function and impaired wound healing, underscoring the physiological impact of stress on overall health. This emphasizes that managing complaints should not only address physical symptoms but also consider the underlying psycho-emotional conditions (Corell et al., 2021).

Islamic spirituality offers a more transcendental perspective on complaints. In this context, complaining is not merely an expression of dissatisfaction or pain, but also an acknowledgment of human limitations and a form of supplication to God. Studies have shown that spiritual practices help reduce stress, increase inner peace, and improve overall quality of life for patients (Teut et al., 2019). Values such as patience (*shabr*) and gratitude play a key role in giving meaning to painful experiences and supporting the healing process in a deeper and more positive way.

Despite increasing awareness of the importance of holistic care, there remains a significant gap in the literature that simultaneously examines these three dimensions. Existing research tends to be compartmentalized, with each discipline focusing on its own perspective without linking them through an interdisciplinary approach (Rathmann et al., 2016). Therefore, there is an urgent need to advance studies that bridge these three fields—psychology, medicine, and spirituality—to develop a more integrated healthcare service model.

The next step is to develop a service model that embraces a holistic approach by integrating these three dimensions into a unified system. Such a model would not only enhance the effectiveness of patient care but also make the healing process more humane. By understanding individuals not only from a physical perspective but also from emotional and spiritual standpoints, healthcare systems can be built on a stronger foundation to achieve optimal and sustainable recovery.

A healthcare model based on a holistic approach can also foster better interactions among patients, healthcare providers, and their environments. Interventions designed with an understanding of the patient's holistic condition—including balanced psychological and spiritual support—can lead to improved health outcomes, reduced stigma surrounding mental health issues, and encourage individuals to take a more proactive role in maintaining their well-being (Sæther et al., 2017; Cosma et al., 2020).



By placing physical, mental, and spiritual health within a single framework, healthcare services will not only meet patients' medical needs but also respond to their emotional and spiritual needs. This will lead to more comprehensive care and ultimately create a more supportive healing environment for all individuals facing health challenges.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this literature review, it can be concluded that complaining behavior has a significant impact on a person's healing process, from psychological, spiritual, and medical perspectives. Within certain limits, complaining can serve as emotional catharsis; however, when it becomes repetitive and unresolved, it tends to exacerbate stress and slow the recovery process. The psychological perspective indicates that uncontrolled complaints are associated with low resilience and high anxiety, which negatively affect mental health. On the other hand, Islamic spirituality offers a constructive approach through patience (shabr) and prayer, which have been shown to promote inner peace and strengthen psychological resilience. From a medical standpoint, negative emotions such as stress resulting from excessive complaining can directly impact the immune system, delay tissue regeneration, and worsen clinical outcomes.

The strength of this study lies in its holistic and interdisciplinary approach, combining the three main perspectives into a single integrated analysis. However, the primary limitation is that, as a literature review, it does not present original empirical data. Nevertheless, this article successfully addresses a gap in the literature that has previously received limited interdisciplinary attention. Therefore, further development is needed through field studies or clinical interventions that directly examine the integration of these three approaches.

The implication of this review is the importance of developing a healthcare model that not only focuses on physical aspects but also addresses the emotional and spiritual conditions of patients. By incorporating these three dimensions into a unified framework, the healing process can proceed more optimally, humanely, and sustainably.

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