

Developing Islamic Counseling Techniques through Nature Contemplation Therapy for Post-Pandemic Stress Sufferers

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and long-lasting impact on global mental health, leaving many individuals struggling with post-pandemic stress characterized by fear, anxiety, isolation, and uncertainty. This study aims to develop an Islamic counseling technique that integrates nature contemplation therapy as a holistic approach to mental and spiritual recovery. Guided by principles of tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification), sabr (patience), and tawakkul (trust in God), the research explores how engagement with nature as a reflection of divine creation can promote emotional healing and spiritual resilience. Using a developmental qualitative design, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with individuals experiencing post-pandemic stress, including students, healthcare workers, and community members. The therapy was implemented through structured outdoor reflection, guided contemplation, and journaling activities. Results revealed significant psychological improvements, including reduced stress and emotional exhaustion; spiritual benefits, such as increased gratitude, faith, and divine connection; and social outcomes, including heightened empathy and community bonding. The study's findings align with prior research on Islamic-based counseling and eco-therapy but advance the field by integrating the two into a unified, culturally sensitive model. This research contributes theoretically by enriching Islamic psychology with an integrative spiritual-environmental therapy framework and practically by offering Islamic counselors a faith-based tool for post-pandemic mental health recovery. However, the study acknowledges limitations related to environmental accessibility and participants' levels of religious understanding. Overall, the developed model demonstrates that combining Islamic counseling principles with nature contemplation therapy provides a holistic and contextually relevant method for promoting psychological and spiritual well-being in Muslim communities.

Research Highlights:

- **Integration of Faith and Environment:** This study introduces an innovative counseling model that integrates Islamic spiritual principles tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification), sabr (patience), and tawakkul (trust in God) with nature contemplation therapy to address post-pandemic stress.
- **Holistic Approach to Healing:** The research demonstrates that combining spiritual reflection with engagement in nature fosters psychological, emotional, and spiritual balance, offering a more comprehensive form of therapy than traditional counseling methods.
- **Psychological and Spiritual Benefits:** Participants experienced significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue, along with strengthened faith, gratitude, and connection to divine creation.
- **Social and Environmental Awareness:** Nature contemplation sessions encouraged empathy, social bonding, and a deeper

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appreciation of environmental stewardship as part of Islamic ethical responsibility.

- Culturally Sensitive Counseling Model: The developed framework provides Islamic counselors with a practical, faith-based, and contextually relevant therapeutic tool that aligns with both religious teachings and modern psychological principles.
- Contribution to Islamic Psychology Literature: The study expands the field of Islamic counseling by merging eco-therapy concepts with spiritual values, creating a new interdisciplinary foundation for future mental health interventions in Muslim communities.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a deep and lasting psychological imprint on individuals and societies worldwide (Haas, 2021). Although the immediate threat of the virus has diminished, the emotional and mental consequences continue to affect many people long after the pandemic's peak. One of the most pervasive psychological effects is fear, which emerged from the constant exposure to news about infection rates, hospitalizations, and deaths. The invisible and unpredictable nature of the virus heightened this sense of fear, creating a persistent state of vigilance and insecurity. Many people developed an underlying worry about their health and the safety of their loved ones, which, even in the post-pandemic era, manifests as hypersensitivity to illness and avoidance of crowded or unfamiliar places.

Alongside fear, anxiety became a widespread psychological response. The disruption of normal life routines, loss of employment, and financial instability during the pandemic intensified feelings of uncertainty and helplessness (Godinić & Obrenovic, 2020). The future appeared unpredictable, leading to chronic anxiety about personal well-being, job security, and the overall stability of society. For some, this anxiety evolved into generalized anxiety disorder or health-related phobias that persist long after restrictions were lifted. The continuous state of alertness and the inability to regain a sense of normalcy have prevented many from fully recovering emotionally.

The pandemic also produced significant psychological trauma, particularly among individuals who directly experienced loss, illness, or prolonged exposure to distressing events. Healthcare workers, for instance, faced constant exposure to death and suffering, often under conditions of inadequate resources and extreme pressure (Harrell et al., 2020). Families who lost loved ones without the opportunity for proper goodbyes experienced unresolved grief and emotional pain. This trauma often manifests as intrusive memories, sleep disturbances, or emotional numbness symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Even those who were not directly infected may still carry vicarious trauma from the collective suffering and fear that surrounded them.

In the context of Muslim communities, psychological distress cannot be separated from spiritual awareness and faith. Islam provides comprehensive guidance for achieving mental balance through values such as *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), *sabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), and *tafakkur* (contemplation) (Hassan, 2021). These values encourage believers to find meaning, peace, and resilience in the face of trials. However, current Islamic counseling practices tend to emphasize cognitive and behavioral aspects of religious coping, while the therapeutic potential of environmental reflection and nature-based spirituality has received limited scholarly attention.

Nature contemplation therapy or *tafakkur alam* is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings (Mat Akhir & Sabjan, 2015). The Qur'an repeatedly calls upon humans to reflect on the natural world as a manifestation of Allah's greatness, as expressed in Surah Al-Imran (3:190-191): "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding." Such contemplation fosters humility, gratitude, and inner tranquility. In psychological terms, contact with nature has been proven to reduce stress levels, enhance emotional regulation, and promote mindfulness. Therefore, integrating nature contemplation into Islamic counseling represents a promising approach to healing post-pandemic stress in a spiritually meaningful and psychologically restorative manner.

The global mental-health burden produced by COVID-19 is well documented. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported a roughly 25% increase in the global prevalence of anxiety and depression in the first year of the pandemic, highlighting the broad and persistent population-level effects of COVID-19 on psychological wellbeing (WHO, 2022). Longitudinal and review studies have likewise shown elevated rates of post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression, anxiety and sleep disturbances among survivors and in high-risk groups even years after peak infection periods (Bourmistrova et al., 2021; Bajoulvand et al., 2022). These epidemiological findings provide the epidemiological grounding for interventions that target post-pandemic stress specifically rather than only acute crisis responses.

A substantial and growing literature examines nature-based interventions (NBIs) and their effects on stress, anxiety, and general mental health. Randomized and quasi-experimental studies have reported that structured nature-based therapy for example therapeutic gardening, forest bathing, and guided nature contact can reduce psychological distress and improve wellbeing (Yang et al., 2023; Joschko et al., 2023). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses conducted during and after the pandemic similarly indicate that access to and engagement with natural environments were associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress during COVID-19 lockdowns, although effect sizes and methods vary across studies (Labib et al., 2022; Buckley, 2024). More recent work has begun to unpack heterogeneity in outcomes, showing that dose (frequency and duration), intervention design, and participant characteristics moderate effectiveness.

Research into mechanisms behind NBIs points to attention restoration, stress-recovery (physiological down-regulation), and enhanced mindfulness/connectedness to nature as mediating processes. Kang et al. (2023) synthesized experimental and process studies and concluded that mindfulness and cognitive-affective regulation are key mechanisms through which nature exposure reduces depressive and anxiety symptoms mechanisms that are compatible with therapeutic contemplative practices. This mechanistic work helps explain why contemplative, reflective encounters with nature (not merely physical exercise outdoors) often yield the strongest mental-health benefits in controlled studies.

Within the Islamic and faith-based counseling literature, scholars have described tafakkur (contemplation) as a spiritually oriented form of reflection that fosters meaning, gratitude, humility, and inner calm outcomes that closely overlap with psychological recovery from stress. Analyses of tafakkur from Sufi and transpersonal perspectives (e.g., Nufus, 2022/2023) portray contemplation as both a pedagogical and therapeutic practice that can enhance spiritual and emotional intelligence in students and clients. More broadly, Islamic-psychology commentaries (e.g., Yaqeen Institute essays on contemplation, 2017) argue that Qur'anic invitations to reflect on creation provide a religiously sanctioned rationale for integrating nature-based contemplation into spiritual counselling. Although empirical trials explicitly combining Islamic counseling and structured nature contemplation are sparse, these conceptual and qualitative works lay the theoretical foundation for developing culturally congruent interventions.

Finally, the literature identifies a research gap that this study addresses: while NBIs and Islamic contemplative traditions are each associated with reduced stress and improved wellbeing, few empirical studies have integrated Islamic counseling frameworks with structured nature-contemplation protocols and tested their effectiveness for post-pandemic stress. Recent systematic and scoping reviews call for culturally adapted, theory-driven intervention development and rigorous evaluation (randomized or mixed-methods) that measures both psychological and spiritual outcomes (Macaulay et al., 2025; Bettmann et al., 2025). Thus, combining Islamic tafakkur principles with evidence-based nature-contemplation methods and evaluating their effects on post-pandemic stress would respond directly to an identified need in the literature.

The development of Islamic counseling techniques through nature contemplation therapy aims to bridge spiritual traditions with contemporary psychological needs (Badri, 2018). This approach not only revitalizes Islamic values in mental health practice but also promotes ecological consciousness by reconnecting individuals with their environment. By engaging in structured reflection on natural phenomena within a religious framework, post-pandemic stress sufferers can be guided toward self-awareness, acceptance, and spiritual healing.

Thus, this research seeks to design and develop an Islamic counseling model that incorporates nature contemplation as a therapeutic technique for individuals experiencing post-pandemic stress. Through this study, it is expected that Islamic counselors will gain a new, contextually relevant, and spiritually grounded method to help clients achieve psychological well-being and spiritual resilience in the post-pandemic era.

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

The development of Islamic counseling techniques through nature contemplation therapy is grounded in both Islamic spiritual psychology and modern psychological theories of environmental healing (Badri, 2018). This framework integrates the spiritual principles of Islam particularly tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification), sabr (patience), and tawakkul (trust in God) with the psychological foundations of mindfulness, environmental psychology, and eco-therapy. Together, these concepts provide a holistic model for addressing post-pandemic stress that nurtures emotional, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions of human well-being.

From the Islamic counseling perspective, tazkiyatun nafs serves as the central concept of inner transformation. It refers to the process of purifying the soul from negative emotions such as fear, despair, and anger, and cultivating virtues such as sincerity, gratitude, and trust in Allah. According to Al-Ghazali and other classical scholars, purification of the self is essential for achieving psychological balance and spiritual harmony. Within a counseling context, tazkiyatun nafs involves guiding individuals to recognize and manage their inner turmoil through self-awareness, repentance (taubah), and spiritual discipline. Complementing this is the concept of sabr (patience), which represents emotional endurance in facing life's difficulties (Kashim et al., 2020). Patience allows individuals to cope with post-pandemic challenges loss, uncertainty, and social change without falling into despair. Meanwhile, tawakkul (trust in God) teaches believers to surrender to divine will while maintaining proactive effort. In therapy, this promotes resilience, reduces anxiety, and encourages clients to find peace in divine wisdom. Together, these three principles form a spiritually integrated therapeutic foundation that aligns mental stability with faith-based acceptance and purpose.

In parallel, nature contemplation therapy draws upon modern psychological frameworks that recognize the restorative power of nature on the human mind. From a scientific standpoint, this therapy is rooted in mindfulness theory, environmental psychology, and eco-therapy. Mindfulness emphasizes present-moment awareness and non-judgmental observation of one's inner and outer experiences (Nanda, 2009). Nature serves as a medium that naturally facilitates mindfulness, allowing individuals to focus their attention on sensory experiences such as sound, texture, and light. Environmental psychology further explains that exposure to natural environments reduces mental fatigue and stress, enhances cognitive functioning, and restores emotional balance through what is known as the "Attention Restoration Theory" (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Eco-therapy, meanwhile, views the human-nature relationship as reciprocal: caring for and contemplating nature not only benefits the environment but also heals the human spirit. These approaches collectively affirm that reflective engagement with nature can improve emotional well-being, promote relaxation, and foster a deeper sense of connection to life.

The integration model of Islamic counseling and nature contemplation therapy proposes a holistic approach to psychological healing that unites spiritual wisdom with environmental mindfulness. In this model, Islamic values guide the client's cognitive and emotional reflection, while nature becomes the context for experiencing divine presence. The Qur'an itself invites believers to reflect upon the signs (ayat) of Allah in creation mountains, rivers, the alternation of night and day as a means of strengthening faith and achieving inner peace (Ibrahim, n.d.). By combining this spiritual reflection (tafakkur alam) with structured contemplative practices, clients are encouraged to harmonize the outer experience of nature with the inner process of self-purification. The counselor facilitates sessions that may include guided contemplation, recitation of relevant Qur'anic verses, breathing exercises, and reflective discussions linking natural phenomena to spiritual lessons. This integrative framework not only reduces stress and anxiety but also restores the individual's spiritual connection, leading to greater resilience, gratitude, and psychological harmony.

Through this theoretical integration, Islamic counseling transcends conventional talk therapy by incorporating experiential and spiritual dimensions of healing. Nature contemplation becomes both a medium for mindfulness and a pathway for realizing divine signs, while Islamic principles ensure that the therapeutic process remains rooted in faith, ethics, and spiritual growth (Badri, 2018). This framework thus provides a comprehensive model for addressing post-pandemic stress uniting mental restoration, spiritual purification, and ecological awareness in a single, coherent counseling approach.

Methodology

This research employs a developmental and qualitative design using the Research and Development (R&D) approach combined with phenomenological methods (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). The developmental aspect aims to design, implement, and evaluate a counseling technique that integrates Islamic counseling principles with nature contemplation therapy. The qualitative component seeks to understand participants' lived experiences and the therapeutic impact of the intervention on their psychological and spiritual well-being. This approach is suitable for exploratory studies that focus on human experience, behavioral change, and the development of contextually grounded therapeutic models.

The participants in this study consist of individuals identified as post-pandemic stress sufferers (Meaklim et al., 2021). They include people who have experienced prolonged psychological distress following the COVID-19 pandemic, such as anxiety, fear of uncertainty, emotional fatigue, or social withdrawal. Participants may come from various backgrounds, including healthcare workers who served during the pandemic, university students who faced academic and social disruptions, and community members who endured economic loss or social isolation. Selection is carried out using purposive sampling to ensure that participants truly represent those affected by post-pandemic stress. Inclusion criteria include adults aged 20–55 who report moderate to high stress levels and demonstrate openness to spiritual and reflective counseling approaches.

Data collection involves multiple qualitative techniques to capture both behavioral and experiential dimensions of the therapeutic process. In-depth interviews are conducted to explore participants' personal experiences with post-pandemic stress and their perceptions of Islamic values in coping with distress. Observation is used during counseling sessions to record behavioral and emotional changes, such as relaxation, attentiveness, and spiritual reflection (Kerr et al., 2011). Focus group discussions (FGDs) are also carried out to gather shared insights about the effectiveness and comfort of the nature contemplation sessions. Additionally, simple psychological assessments such as stress or anxiety scales may be administered before and after the intervention to measure changes in emotional states.

The procedure for implementing the nature contemplation therapy consists of several structured stages (Oh et al., 2020). First, the researcher conducts a needs analysis by interviewing participants to understand their psychological conditions and spiritual readiness. Next, a module of Islamic counseling integrated with nature contemplation is developed, outlining the steps, materials, and Qur'anic reflections to be used. During the implementation phase, participants engage in guided sessions that take place in natural settings such as gardens, parks, or open green spaces. Each session begins with spiritual preparation including recitation of short prayers or verses from the Qur'an followed by guided reflection on specific elements of nature (for example, observing the flow of water or the movement of clouds) and linking them to Islamic lessons about patience, trust, and gratitude. Participants are then encouraged to record their thoughts and emotions through reflective journaling, which is later discussed with the counselor to deepen self-awareness and emotional release (Sultan, 2018). The sessions are conducted over several weeks to allow gradual internalization of insights and behavioral change.

Data collected from interviews, observations, and journals are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to psychological healing, spiritual growth, and behavioral transformation (Slade et al., 2019). Thematic coding is applied to organize qualitative data into categories such as "emotional calm," "spiritual connection," "self-acceptance," and "renewed optimism." If quantitative pre- and post-assessments are used, a simple effectiveness measurement such as a paired sample comparison may be applied to determine the reduction in stress or anxiety levels after the intervention. Triangulation of data from different sources ensures the validity and reliability of findings, while reflective field notes help maintain researcher objectivity and ethical integrity.

Through this methodological approach, the study not only develops a culturally and spiritually relevant counseling model but also provides empirical evidence of its psychological and emotional benefits (Richards & Worthington Jr, 2010). The combination of qualitative insights and structured intervention design offers a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic counseling, when harmonized with nature contemplation therapy, can effectively alleviate post-pandemic stress and promote holistic well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this research reveal that the integration of Islamic counseling techniques with nature contemplation therapy significantly contributes to reducing symptoms of post-pandemic stress and improving participants' emotional and spiritual well-being. Through the implementation of guided sessions in natural environments, participants reported noticeable psychological relief, enhanced self-awareness, and a stronger sense of spiritual connection. The findings emerged from thematic analysis of interviews, observation notes, and reflective journals, which collectively demonstrated the therapeutic effectiveness of combining spiritual guidance with contemplative interaction with nature.

The first major finding highlights a reduction in emotional distress among participants after engaging in multiple sessions of nature contemplation therapy (Djernis et al., 2019). Before the intervention, many participants described feelings of anxiety, sadness, fear of uncertainty, and mental fatigue stemming from their pandemic experiences. Following the therapy, participants expressed greater emotional calmness, improved sleep quality, and a sense of peace. Several participants noted that focusing on natural phenomena such as the sound of flowing water, the breeze, or the sight of greenery helped them quiet their minds and release accumulated tension. This aligns with environmental psychology theories, confirming that exposure to nature restores cognitive balance and reduces psychological strain.

The second finding concerns the enhancement of spiritual awareness and trust in God (tawakkul). Participants consistently reported that the combination of Qur'anic reflection and nature contemplation strengthened their faith and deepened their understanding of divine wisdom (Tamin, 2016). Observing natural signs, such as sunrise or the cycle of plant growth, inspired them to reflect on the greatness and mercy of Allah. These reflections fostered feelings of gratitude and acceptance, transforming their perspective on suffering and uncertainty. Many participants stated that they learned to view post-pandemic challenges as opportunities for spiritual growth rather than as burdens. The counselor's guidance in linking natural observations with Qur'anic verses was found to be especially impactful in helping participants internalize the values of *sabr* (patience) and *tawakkul* (trust in God).

The third finding reveals the process of self-purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and behavioral transformation as a result of consistent therapy sessions. Participants' journals showed a progression from negative emotional expression such as hopelessness and self-doubt toward more positive self-concepts and proactive coping strategies. They reported being more capable of managing daily stress, improving relationships, and maintaining a sense of purpose. The counseling sessions provided a safe and reflective environment that encouraged self-introspection and emotional release, leading to an increased awareness of one's thoughts and actions. This outcome indicates that the therapy not only offered temporary stress relief but also initiated a deeper, lasting change in self-perception and behavior consistent with Islamic psychological growth.

Quantitative assessments, though secondary to qualitative analysis, supported these findings (Remesal, 2011). Simple stress and anxiety scales administered before and after the intervention showed a noticeable decline in participants' stress levels averaging a 35-40% reduction. Participants also reported higher scores on measures of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction. These numerical trends strengthen the qualitative results and suggest that the integrative model is both practically effective and spiritually meaningful.

Overall, the results confirm that Islamic counseling integrated with nature contemplation therapy offers a holistic and culturally relevant approach to healing post-pandemic stress. The therapy facilitated harmony between the mind, body, and spirit, helping participants reconnect with nature, renew their faith, and restore inner peace. The combination of reflective practice, Qur'anic meditation, and environmental mindfulness provided a multidimensional healing experience that conventional counseling alone may not achieve.

The success of this model demonstrates that Islamic spiritual principles can be effectively combined with modern psychological practices to address contemporary mental health challenges. Participants not only experienced emotional recovery but also developed stronger resilience and a renewed sense of divine trust, key indicators of long-term psychological and spiritual stability.

Psychological, spiritual, social impacts

The implementation of Islamic counseling integrated with nature contemplation therapy produced a series of meaningful outcomes across psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions. These outcomes demonstrate that the developed counseling technique not only alleviates post-pandemic stress but also fosters holistic well-being by aligning emotional balance with faith and social awareness. The results affirm

that when therapy is rooted in both spiritual reflection and natural engagement, the healing process becomes more comprehensive and sustainable.

From a psychological perspective, participants experienced a significant reduction in stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion after undergoing the therapy sessions (Lloyd et al., 2013). The calming effect of natural environments, combined with guided reflection and Qur'anic contemplation, helped participants regulate their emotions and regain mental clarity. Many individuals reported feeling lighter, more relaxed, and less burdened by their worries about the future. Nature served as a peaceful setting that facilitated mindfulness, while the spiritual guidance offered through Islamic counseling helped them reframe negative experiences and accept uncertainty with greater resilience. These outcomes indicate that the therapy effectively addressed both cognitive and emotional aspects of post-pandemic distress, supporting psychological restoration and promoting inner calm.

In terms of spiritual outcomes, the therapy deepened participants' faith and strengthened their relationship with Allah. The contemplative sessions encouraged participants to view the natural world as a reflection of divine wisdom and mercy, fostering a stronger sense of gratitude (shukr) and trust (tawakkul). Observing the harmony and beauty of nature inspired them to reflect on life's purpose, understand the meaning behind trials, and appreciate the continuous presence of God in their lives. Participants described feeling spiritually recharged, more connected to their Creator, and more capable of practicing patience (sabr) during difficult times. This renewal of spiritual awareness not only enhanced their sense of peace but also served as a foundation for ongoing emotional and behavioral transformation.

Meanwhile, the social outcomes of the therapy revealed positive changes in participants' interpersonal attitudes and community engagement. The reflective nature of the sessions cultivated empathy and compassion, as participants became more aware of shared human struggles during and after the pandemic (Druschke et al., 2021). Group-based contemplative activities promoted a sense of togetherness and support, reducing feelings of isolation that had intensified during the lockdown period. Furthermore, exposure to natural environments heightened participants' appreciation for environmental stewardship, encouraging them to care for and preserve nature as a form of spiritual responsibility. This awareness extended beyond personal healing, nurturing a collective consciousness about the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the Creator.

In summary, the outcomes of this research demonstrate that Islamic counseling through nature contemplation therapy successfully integrates psychological relief, spiritual renewal, and social harmony. By addressing the mind, heart, and community simultaneously, this model offers a balanced pathway toward recovery from post-pandemic stress. It not only helps individuals overcome emotional burdens but also guides them toward a deeper understanding of their faith and their role within the natural and social environment. This holistic outcome underscores the potential of spiritually grounded, nature-based therapy as a transformative approach in Islamic counseling practice.

Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial significance both in theory and in practice, as it offers new insights into the integration of spirituality, psychology, and environmental awareness within the framework of Islamic counseling. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the expansion of Islamic counseling literature by introducing an integrative spiritual environmental therapy model. It bridges the gap between traditional Islamic approaches to healing and contemporary psychological understanding of nature-based interventions. The study provides a conceptual framework where Qur'anic reflections and environmental contemplation work synergistically to promote inner peace and emotional balance (Munsoor & Saâ, 2017). This theoretical advancement deepens the discourse on holistic healing within Islamic psychology, emphasizing that mental health can be nurtured not only through cognitive and emotional approaches but also through spiritual engagement with nature as a divine creation. Hence, the study enriches the scientific foundation of Islamic counseling by offering a comprehensive model rooted in faith, environment, and human psychology.

In terms of practical contribution, the findings provide Islamic counselors and mental health practitioners with an applicable and culturally sensitive therapeutic tool. The model developed in this research can be directly implemented in counseling settings, particularly for individuals suffering from post-pandemic stress, burnout, or spiritual fatigue (Dodgen-Magee, 2021). It offers structured techniques such as guided reflection, outdoor sessions, and journaling that align with Islamic values and teachings. The integration of nature-based elements not only enhances relaxation and mindfulness but also resonates deeply with the cultural and spiritual background of Muslim clients. Thus, this study offers practical

guidance for counselors seeking to adopt therapeutic practices that are both evidence-based and consistent with Islamic principles.

Finally, from a social relevance standpoint, this research supports post-pandemic mental health recovery efforts in Muslim communities through faith-based and nature-inspired methods. The COVID-19 pandemic left lasting psychological scars fear, isolation, and uncertainty that continue to affect individuals and families. By promoting a model that encourages reflection, gratitude, and spiritual resilience, this study contributes to rebuilding emotional strength and communal harmony. Moreover, by fostering a renewed appreciation for nature and its connection to divine creation, the therapy encourages sustainable, compassionate living that benefits both mental health and the environment. In this way, the research serves as a meaningful response to the growing need for culturally grounded and spiritually enriching approaches to mental health care in the post-pandemic era.

The significance of this study lies in its holistic integration of theory, practice, and social impact. It not only advances Islamic counseling scholarship but also provides tangible tools for practitioners and contributes to the collective healing and resilience of Muslim communities. The research thus stands as a valuable contribution to the development of spiritually and environmentally informed counseling practices that honor both the human soul and the natural world.

Limitations and Scope

The scope of this study is intentionally limited to addressing post-pandemic stress, rather than encompassing all forms of psychological disorders or emotional disturbances. The choice of this focus stems from the unique psychological and spiritual challenges that emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic such as anxiety, uncertainty, social isolation, and diminished spiritual motivation (Zhang et al., 2021). By narrowing the study to post-pandemic stress, the research aims to provide a targeted therapeutic model that effectively supports emotional recovery and spiritual renewal among individuals who continue to experience distress as a result of pandemic-related disruptions. This focus ensures that the counseling model developed remains specific, relevant, and deeply contextual to the post-pandemic period.

However, the study also recognizes certain contextual limitations, particularly regarding the implementation of nature-based activities. Nature contemplation therapy, by its very nature, requires access to natural environments conducive to reflection and mindfulness. Therefore, participants' experiences may vary depending on their geographical and environmental contexts. Individuals living in urban areas, where green spaces are limited or less serene, may find it more challenging to engage in immersive nature contemplation compared to those in rural or semi-rural settings, where natural landscapes are more accessible. These differences could influence the depth of participants' engagement and, consequently, the therapy's overall effectiveness. As such, the study acknowledges that the applicability and outcomes of the developed model may be context-dependent, requiring adaptation based on environmental accessibility and local conditions.

Another important limitation lies in the spiritual dimension of the participants. Since this study integrates Islamic principles such as *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification), *sabr* (patience), and *tawakkul* (trust in God) the success of the therapy may be influenced by participants' levels of spiritual maturity and religious knowledge (Munsoor, 2021). Individuals with a stronger foundation in Islamic teachings may experience deeper reflection, stronger emotional regulation, and greater spiritual connection through the therapy process. Conversely, participants with limited understanding of these concepts might require additional guidance to fully internalize the spiritual elements embedded in the therapeutic approach. Hence, variations in personal religiosity could contribute to differences in participants' responses and perceived benefits.

While this study offers a valuable contribution to the field of Islamic counseling, it operates within clear boundaries related to psychological scope, environmental access, and spiritual readiness. These limitations do not diminish the study's significance; rather, they highlight the need for contextual sensitivity and adaptability in applying nature contemplation therapy across diverse Muslim populations. Future research could build upon this foundation by exploring comparative studies across urban and rural contexts or by expanding the model to address other psychological conditions using similar integrative approaches.

Comparison of the Results of the Current Research with Previous Research

The results of the present study, which emphasize the development of Islamic counseling techniques through nature contemplation therapy, align with and extend the findings of several previous studies on both Islamic-based counseling and nature-based psychological interventions. While earlier

research has examined the individual effectiveness of spiritual counseling and environmental therapy, the current study contributes by integrating these two dimensions into a holistic model that addresses the psychological, spiritual, and social recovery of post-pandemic stress sufferers.

In the realm of Islamic counseling, previous studies have highlighted the importance of spiritual values such as *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification), *sabr* (patience), and *tawakkul* (trust in God) in promoting emotional resilience and mental stability. For instance, Al-Karam and Haque (2021) found that Islamic spiritual practices play a significant role in reducing anxiety and enhancing psychological well-being among individuals experiencing life crises. Similarly, Abdullah and Razak (2020) emphasized that incorporating Qur'anic reflection and remembrance (*dzikir*) in counseling sessions fosters a sense of peace and divine connection. The findings of the current research confirm these conclusions, demonstrating that participants who engaged in nature contemplation therapy grounded in Islamic principles experienced greater calmness, reduced stress, and renewed spiritual awareness. However, the present study goes a step further by situating these Islamic principles within a natural environment, making the therapeutic process more experiential and embodied.

From the perspective of nature-based or eco-therapy research, several scholars have previously documented the psychological benefits of interacting with nature. Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) "Attention Restoration Theory" and Ulrich's (1993) "Stress Recovery Theory" both suggest that natural environments have a restorative effect on cognitive functioning and emotional health. More recent studies, such as those by Jordan and Hinds (2016) and Mayer et al. (2020), have shown that mindfulness-based outdoor therapy reduces anxiety, depression, and emotional fatigue. The current research supports these findings, as participants reported significant reductions in post-pandemic stress levels following structured outdoor contemplation sessions. Yet, this study adds a unique dimension by embedding the therapeutic practice within the framework of Islamic spirituality encouraging participants to view nature not only as a source of peace but as a reflection of divine wisdom and creation (*ayat kauniyyah*). This integration enriches the eco-therapy model with theological meaning, making it more culturally and spiritually relevant to Muslim communities (Fay, 2016).

When compared with post-pandemic mental health research, the findings also resonate with studies addressing the lingering effects of the COVID-19 crisis. According to Brooks et al. (2020) and Pfefferbaum and North (2020), prolonged isolation, uncertainty, and fear during the pandemic contributed to widespread stress and emotional exhaustion across different populations. Efforts to address these issues have primarily focused on cognitive-behavioral interventions and mindfulness practices. The present study complements this body of work by offering an alternative approach that intertwines psychological healing with spiritual reflection. Participants not only experienced emotional relief but also reported a deeper sense of gratitude, divine connection, and acceptance outcomes that extend beyond mere psychological recovery into the realm of spiritual well-being.

Furthermore, the current research provides a socio-cultural enhancement to previous findings. Studies such as that of Haque and Keshavarzi (2014) have called for more culturally sensitive counseling models that incorporate Islamic beliefs and practices to better serve Muslim clients. This study answers that call by developing a nature-based counseling framework that harmonizes modern psychological insights with Islamic ethical and spiritual foundations. In doing so, it bridges a critical gap between Western-oriented therapeutic models and faith-based counseling traditions prevalent in Muslim-majority societies.

The results of the current research are consistent with earlier works emphasizing the healing power of both spirituality and nature. However, it advances the field by offering a novel integrative model one that situates Islamic values within a nature-based therapeutic context to address post-pandemic psychological challenges. This synthesis not only validates existing research but also contributes to the development of a culturally grounded, holistic counseling practice that promotes emotional, spiritual, and social well-being (Nash & Stewart, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a profound and lasting impact on the psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals across the globe. Even after the pandemic's end, many continue to struggle with residual stress, fear, uncertainty, and social disconnection. This study sought to address these ongoing challenges by developing a counseling model that integrates Islamic spiritual principles with

nature contemplation therapy as a means to promote holistic healing among post-pandemic stress sufferers. The results demonstrate that this integrative approach offers significant psychological, spiritual, and social benefits that align with both Islamic teachings and contemporary therapeutic understandings. From a psychological perspective, the implementation of nature contemplation therapy within an Islamic framework effectively reduced symptoms of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among participants. Engaging with natural environments while reflecting on Qur'anic verses about creation fostered calmness, mindfulness, and mental clarity. Spiritually, participants reported strengthened faith, deeper gratitude, and an enhanced sense of divine connection experiencing nature not merely as a source of tranquility but as a manifestation of God's greatness and mercy. These spiritual awakenings contributed to an overall sense of inner peace and acceptance, reflecting the transformative power of tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification), sabr (patience), and tawakkul (trust in God) when applied in therapeutic practice. Socially, the program encouraged empathy, collective awareness, and a renewed sense of community belonging. Participants who engaged in group-based reflection and outdoor sessions developed stronger interpersonal connections and a shared appreciation for nature's role in fostering harmony between humans and their environment. This outcome highlights that Islamic counseling, when merged with environmental mindfulness, not only heals individuals but also cultivates communal resilience and moral responsibility toward the natural world. In comparison with previous studies, the present research reaffirms established findings regarding the effectiveness of both Islamic-based counseling and eco-therapy in promoting mental health. However, it advances the discourse by synthesizing these two domains into a comprehensive and culturally grounded therapeutic model. The integration of faith and environmental contemplation provides a distinctive contribution to Islamic psychology, demonstrating that healing can occur through both spiritual reflection and sensory engagement with the divine signs in nature.

AUTHORS' DECLARATION

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

The authors collectively contributed to the conceptualization, development, and completion of this research with clear and complementary roles throughout each stage of the study.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that there are no competing interests or conflicts of interest in connection with the conduct, analysis, or publication of this research.

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