

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AS A MECHANISM FOR ADDICTION RECOVERY AMONG INDIVIDUALS IN PESANTREN-BASED

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Abstract

This research aims to explore spiritual experiences as an addiction recovery mechanism in individuals undergoing pesantren-based rehabilitation. This study uses a qualitative approach with an *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) design to understand the life experiences of participants in interpreting the recovery process. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations, and field records of individuals who are undergoing or have completed pesantren-based rehabilitation programs. The results show that spiritual experiences play an important role as an important mechanism in addiction recovery through four main dimensions, namely: spiritual awareness as a turning point for change, spiritual practice as a means of self-regulation against craving and prevention of relapse, religious community as a source of recovery support, and identity reconstruction as part of recovery transformation. These findings suggest that addiction recovery in the context of pesantren-based rehabilitation is not only related to the cessation of substance use, but is a psychospiritual process that involves a change in the meaning of life, self-control, communal support, and the formation of a new identity. This study proposes the concept of *spiritual recovery mechanism* as a theoretical contribution to expand the perspective of *recovery capital* in the study of addiction recovery.

Keywords: spiritual experience, addiction recovery, pesantren-based rehabilitation, spiritual recovery mechanism

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengalaman spiritual sebagai mekanisme pemulihan adiksi pada individu yang menjalani rehabilitasi berbasis pesantren. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) untuk memahami pengalaman hidup partisipan dalam memaknai proses pemulihan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan catatan lapangan terhadap individu yang sedang menjalani atau telah menyelesaikan program rehabilitasi berbasis pesantren. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman spiritual berperan sebagai mekanisme penting dalam pemulihan adiksi melalui empat dimensi utama, yaitu: kesadaran spiritual sebagai titik balik perubahan, praktik spiritual sebagai sarana regulasi diri terhadap craving dan pencegahan relapse, komunitas religius sebagai sumber dukungan pemulihan, serta rekonstruksi identitas sebagai bagian dari transformasi recovery. Temuan ini

menunjukkan bahwa pemulihan adiksi dalam konteks rehabilitasi berbasis pesantren tidak hanya berkaitan dengan penghentian penggunaan zat, tetapi merupakan proses psikospiritual yang melibatkan perubahan makna hidup, kontrol diri, dukungan komunal, dan pembentukan identitas baru. Penelitian ini mengusulkan konsep spiritual recovery mechanism sebagai kontribusi teoretis untuk memperluas perspektif recovery capital dalam kajian pemulihan adiksi.

Kata kunci: *pengalaman spiritual, pemulihan adiksi, rehabilitasi berbasis pesantren, spiritual recovery mechanism*

INTRODUCTION

Addiction is still a complex and multidimensional global health problem because it is not only related to biological dependence on substances, but also involves psychological, social, moral, and existential problems of individuals. In recent decades, the addiction recovery paradigm has shifted from a purely abstinence-oriented approach to a recovery-oriented approach that views recovery as an overarching transformation process that involves the formation of a new identity, the restoration of meaning in life, social reintegration, and the sustainability of behavior change (Best & Laudet, 2010; Costello et al., 2020). In this paradigm, recovery is no longer understood simply as quitting substance use, but as the process of becoming personally and socially recovered.

In line with these developments, recent studies have shown that successful recovery is not only influenced by clinical and psychological interventions, but also by various personal and social resources known as recovery capital (Hennessy, 2022). The concept of recovery capital emphasizes the importance of internal and external capital such as social support, hope, positive identity, self-efficacy, and including spirituality in supporting long-term recovery. Within this framework, spirituality is increasingly understood not only as an additional factor, but can function as a resource as well as a mechanism that facilitates the recovery process (Lyons et al., 2010).

In the last five years, attention to spirituality in addiction studies has increased. Various studies have found that spiritual experiences can contribute to recovery through increased self-regulation, strengthening the meaning of life, reducing psychological distress, increasing hope, and preventing relapse (Snodgrass et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2020). Spirituality is even seen as playing a role in identity transformation, which is a change in the way individuals view themselves from addicts to individuals who are recovering (Best et al., 2010). In this context, recovery is understood not only as a clinical process, but also as a process of profound inner change.

Furthermore, some studies show that spiritual experiences often serve as a turning point in the recovery process, especially when individuals experience existential awareness, repentance, or a reconstruction of the meaning of life after the addiction phase (Gutierrez, 2019; Thompson et al., 2026). Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, dhikr, religious reflection, and involvement in religious communities have also been reported to help individuals manage cravings, reduce impulsivity, and strengthen self-control (Hai et

al., 2021). The findings suggest that spirituality not only serves as a coping strategy, but can work as a recovery mechanism itself.

However, most studies on spirituality and addiction are still centered in Western contexts, such as the Twelve-Step program, Narcotics Anonymous, or faith-based recovery approaches based on pastoral care (Kelly et al., 2020). In many of these studies, spirituality is generally positioned as an intervention component or a variable supporting the success of recovery, rather than being studied as a life experience that works through specific psychospiritual mechanisms. As a result, there is still a limited understanding of how spiritual experiences are subjectively interpreted by individuals in recovery and how those experiences operate as a mechanism of change.

This gap becomes even more important when looking at the context of Islamic-based rehabilitation, especially pesantren-based rehabilitation, which is developing in Indonesia as a model of religious community-based rehabilitation. Pesantren-based rehabilitation has distinctive characteristics through the integration of addiction recovery with spiritual disciplines such as dhikr, congregational prayer, repentance, moral development, kiai assistance, and ukhuwah-based communal life. Recovery is understood not only as the release from dependence on substance, but also as a process of tazkiyatun nafs, self-purification, and moral-spiritual transformation.

Some research is beginning to show that Islamic spiritual approaches have significant potential in supporting addiction recovery. Bensaid et al. (2021) show that Islamic spiritual practices can contribute to strengthening self-control, moral restructuring, and the formation of new meanings in recovery. Other research has also shown that a collective religious environment can strengthen social support and positive identities that are essential for the sustainability of recovery (Lovett & Weisz, 2021; Muswerakuenda et al., 2023). However, research on pesantren-based rehabilitation is still dominated by normative studies on the effectiveness of spiritual approaches as an intervention method, while exploration of the spiritual experiences of addiction survivors as a recovery mechanism is still very limited.

In fact, understanding spiritual experiences from the perspective of individuals undergoing recovery is important because the recovery process often involves profound subjective changes—such as experiences of repentance, self-awareness, reconstruction, or identity transformation—that cannot be fully explained through behavioral indicators or clinical approaches alone. In addition to the empirical gap, this research also seeks to fill the conceptual gap. The recovery capital literature has so far alluded to spiritual capital, but it has not explained much about how spiritual experiences work as a mechanism that connects spiritual capital to sustainable recovery. Thus, this study not only describes the role of spirituality, but seeks to explain the psychospiritual recovery mechanism that works in the context of pesantren-based rehabilitation.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore spiritual experiences as an addiction recovery mechanism in individuals undergoing pesantren-based rehabilitation.

Specifically, this study examines how individuals interpret spiritual experiences during rehabilitation, how these experiences contribute to self-regulation, reconstruction of meaning in life, and how spiritual experiences support sustainable recovery. This research is expected to contribute to the development of the study of addiction recovery, especially through the offer of a perspective of spiritual recovery mechanism in the context of Islamic psychospirituality which is still relatively underexplored in contemporary literature.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design to explore spiritual experiences as a mechanism for addiction recovery in individuals undergoing pesantren-based rehabilitation. This approach was chosen because the IPA focuses on a deep understanding of participants' life experiences, specifically how they interpret spiritual experiences in the addiction recovery process (Smith et al., 2021). This approach is relevant to use because addiction recovery is not only concerned with changes in substance use cessation behavior, but also involves subjective, emotional, moral, and existential transformations that can only be understood through the individual's own experiences. Using science, this study not only seeks to describe the spiritual experiences experienced by participants, but also interpret how these experiences function as a psychospiritual mechanism in shaping self-regulation, reconstructing the meaning of life, and supporting the sustainability of recovery.

The research was carried out in a pesantren-based rehabilitation institution that applies a recovery approach through spiritual guidance, religious discipline, and communal life, namely at Inabah Pondok Pesantren Suryalaya. The selection of the location was carried out purposively with the consideration that the institution explicitly integrates Islamic spiritual values in the rehabilitation process. The study participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on certain criteria, namely individuals who are or have undergone rehabilitation for at least four months, have a history of substance addiction, are in the process of recovery, and are willing to share their spiritual experiences and recovery journeys in depth. The number of participants was 8 people according to the characteristics of science research which emphasized the depth of data exploration compared to the large number of participants (Smith et al., 2021). The determination of the number of participants also takes into account the principle of data saturation, which is when the data obtained has reached a saturation point and no longer produces a new theme (Saunders et al., 2018).

The main data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences related to the addiction and recovery journey, spiritual experiences during rehabilitation, the meaning of spiritual practices such as dhikr, prayer, repentance, and religious coaching, as well as how these experiences contribute to craving management, self-change, and relapse prevention. In addition to interviews, the study also utilized limited participatory observations of spiritual activities and communal life in

rehabilitation settings, as well as field records as supporting data to enrich the context and strengthen the interpretation of the findings.

Data analysis was carried out in stages following the science procedure developed by Smith et al. (2021), starting with reading the transcript repeatedly to gain a thorough understanding of each participant's narrative of experience. Furthermore, exploratory recording was carried out on the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual aspects that emerged from the data. From this process, emergent themes are developed in each case, then the relationships between themes are identified to form superordinate themes. After the analysis of each case was completed, a cross-case analysis was conducted to find patterns of shared experiences regarding how spiritual experiences function as a mechanism of addiction recovery. The analysis process is carried out iteratively, reflectively, and interpretively in order to produce a deep understanding of the dynamics of psychospiritual recovery experienced by participants.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses the principle of trustworthiness which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). The credibility of the data is maintained through member checking, which is reconfirming the results of the interpretation to the participants to ensure the suitability of the meaning. Dependability is strengthened through systematic documentation of the research process, while confirmability is maintained through researcher reflexivity and discussion with peers to minimize interpretation bias. The transferability is strengthened by presenting rich contextual descriptions of the research setting and the participants' experiences. In addition, triangulation of techniques and sources through a combination of interviews, observations, and documentation is also carried out to increase the validity of research findings.

This study also pays attention to the ethical principles of research, especially because it involves participants with sensitive experiences and the potential to cause psychological vulnerability. All participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the research and signed an informed consent before the interview was conducted. The identity of the participants is kept confidential through the use of the pseudonym and the participant is given the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. During the interview process, the researcher applied an empathetic and non-judgmental approach to create a safe space for participants to share their spiritual experiences and recovery journeys. With this procedure, this research is expected to be able to produce credible findings and contribute to the development of addiction recovery studies based on Islamic psychospiritual approaches.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study found that spiritual experiences function as an important mechanism in addiction recovery through four main interrelated experiences, namely the emergence of spiritual awareness as a turning point for change, spiritual practices as a means of self-regulation

against craving and the risk of relapse, the experience of religious communal support in the pesantren environment, and identity reconstruction as a part of the recovery transformation. These four themes appear consistently in the participants' narratives and suggest that the recovery they experience is not simply understood as quitting substance use, but as a process of broader inner, social, and existential change.

Table 1. Theme of Research Findings on Spiritual Experience as a Mechanism of Addiction Recovery

MAIN THEME	SUBTHEME	EVIDENCE OF FINDINGS	MEANING OF FINDINGS
SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AS A TURNING POINT OF RESTORATIVE AWARENESS	Self-awareness, repentance, spiritual awakening experiences, the meaning of a new life	"I feel like I've been rebuked by God... From there I started wanting to change." (P3)	Spiritual experiences are a turning point that triggers recovery motivation
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AS A SELF-REGULATION MECHANISM	Dhikr as coping, prayer to calm emotions, worship as craving control	"If you want to use it, I will take ablution and dhikr." (P2)	Spiritual practice serves as self-regulation against craving and relapse
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AS SUPPORT FOR RECOVERY	Ukhuwah, kiai guidance, a sense of acceptance, solidarity among fellow survivors	"Here I feel like I have a new family." (P6)	Recovery is strengthened by communal spirituality and social-religious support
IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS	From the identity of the addict to a new identity, life expectancy, migration	"Now I feel like I'm learning to be a better human being." (P1)	Spiritual experiences encourage identity transformation as part of recovery

Most participants described that their recovery process began with a spiritual experience that was transformational in nature and was often interpreted as a turning point in life. These experiences arise through deep reflection, regret for the past, experiences of repentance, and a sense of being brought closer to God while undergoing coaching at the Islamic boarding school. One participant revealed:

"I used to feel like my life was ruined, there was no future. But when I participated in the night muhasabah, I kept crying, as if I felt reminded of Allah. From there I started to think I could still change." (P3)

Other participants stated:

"At first I entered here forced by my family, but after a while there was a sense of calm. When I participated in dhikr and recitation, I felt that there was hope again." (P5)

The narrative shows that the spiritual experience is understood by the participants as a new consciousness that changes the way they view themselves and live. Based on observation notes, moments such as night meditation, congregational dhikr, and religious guidance are often an intense reflection space for rehabilitation participants. Researchers noted that some participants showed deep emotional expressions such as crying, being silent in contemplation, and sharing experiences of regret as part of the process of self-awareness. These experiences are the beginning of a change that drives motivation to recover.

In addition to being a turning point, spiritual experiences are also present in the form of religious practices that participants understand as a way to manage addictive urges and maintain the sustainability of recovery. Practices such as dhikr, congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, and daily worship discipline are said to help them calm their minds, manage emotions, and reduce the urge to return to substance use. One of the participants said:

"If the thought of wanting to use it comes, now I usually take ablution, dhikr, prayer. It makes the heart calmer." (P2)

Other participants revealed:

"In the past, when I was stressed, I ran to drugs. Now if I am anxious, I read the wirid or sit down to participate in dhikr. It feels different, more able to hold back." (P7)

From the researcher's observation, spiritual practices in Islamic boarding schools take place in a structured and disciplined rhythm, starting from congregational worship, wirid, studies, to regular daily activities. This routine appears to form a new, more stable lifestyle and helps participants develop self-control. For participants, spiritual practices are not separated from the recovery process, but rather part of how they survive in recovery.

The experience of recovery is also not only interpreted as an individual struggle, but is closely related to the experience of living together in the religious community of the Islamic boarding school. Most participants emphasized that the presence of fellow rehabilitation participants, companions, and a collective religious atmosphere provided a sense of acceptance, safety, and support. One participant said:

"Here I feel not alone. Everyone has fallen, so we take care of each other." (P4)

Other participants said:

"I used to be shunned by many people. Here I feel like I have a new family." (P6)

Observations show that communal life such as communal meals, congregational worship, religious discussions, and collective work build close relationships among rehabilitation participants. The support they feel is not just ordinary social support, but an experience of togetherness that is full of religious and spiritual values. The community is perceived as a space that helps them survive the recovery process.

All of these experiences ultimately contribute to changing the way participants understand their identity. Many participants described that they no longer saw themselves as addicts, but as individuals who were growing and improving their lives. One participant stated:

"I used to feel that I was broken. Now I feel like I'm learning to be a better human being."
(P1)

Another participant said:

"Now I have a purpose in life again. Don't see myself as I used to." (P5)

These findings show that recovery is interpreted by participants not just to stop using substances, but the process of becoming a new person. Spiritual experiences, religious practices, and community support together form the transformation of identity that is part of recovery.

Table 2. A Model of Spiritual Recovery Mechanisms Discovered

MECHANISM STAGE	PROCESSES THAT OCCUR	IMPACT ON RECOVERY
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING	Awareness, repentance, existential reflection	Triggers motivation to change
SPIRITUAL SELF-REGULATION	Dhikr, worship, spiritual discipline	Managing craving and preventing relapse
COMMUNAL SPIRITUAL SUPPORT	Support for the pesantren community	Strengthen recovery sustainability
IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION	Formation of a new positive self	Encouraging sustained recovery

The findings suggest that spiritual experiences work through interconnected mechanisms, ranging from spiritual awareness that triggers change, spiritual practices that sustain self-regulation, communal support that strengthens the sustainability of recovery, to identity reconstruction that marks the transformation of recovery. Overall, the results of this study show that recovery in the context of Pesantren-based rehabilitation is understood by participants as a holistic psychospiritual process.

The findings of this study strengthen and expand the literature on spirituality-based addiction recovery. Spiritual experiences as turning points of change support studies showing that spiritual awakening can be an important turning point in recovery (Sa'idah et al., 2026; Snodgrass et al., 2024). However, this study shows that in the context of Pesantren-based rehabilitation, the experience does not stand as a purely individual event, but is facilitated by religious practices and communal spiritual culture. This makes a new contribution that the turning point in recovery can be born from the spiritual ecology built by the rehabilitation environment.

The findings regarding spiritual practice as a self-regulation mechanism are also in line with the research of Hai et al. (2021) which shows that spiritual coping contributes to craving management and increased self-regulation. However, this research shows a

broader dimension, namely that spiritual practice is not only a coping strategy, but also a recovery mechanism embedded in daily recovery. In the Islamic psychospiritual perspective, practices such as dhikr, repentance, and worship seem to function as a process of *tazkiyatun nafs* that integrates self-control with inner purification (Abidin et al., 2022; Mansor et al., 2024). These findings enrich the understanding that self-regulation in recovery is not only psychological, but can also be rooted in spiritual practice.

The findings on the importance of religious communities also support the concept of social recovery capital (Bingham & Kelley, 2024; Connolly & Granfield, 2017), but this study shows that social support in the context of pesantren is present through the form of communal spirituality. Recovery support is not only a social relationship, but a relationship mediated by shared religious values. This is an important contribution because it shows that spirituality in recovery is not always individual, but also collective.

Meanwhile, findings on identity reconstruction reinforce the theory of identity recovery that emphasizes identity change as the core of sustainable recovery (Best & Laudet, 2010). However, this study shows that this identity transformation in the context of pesantren-based rehabilitation is closely related to spiritual experiences and religious meanings of the self. A new identity as an individual who is emigrating, repenting, or improving oneself shows that spirituality provides a language as well as a framework of meaning for recovery transformation.

Based on the overall findings, this study proposes the concept of a spiritual recovery mechanism, which is a recovery mechanism that works through the interaction between spiritual experience, self-regulation, religious communal support, and identity transformation. This concept expands the framework of recovery capital that has been placing spiritual capital as a resource for recovery, by showing that spirituality can also be understood as an active mechanism that drives recovery itself. Thus, this study confirms that pesantren-based rehabilitation does not only function as a model of religious intervention, but as an ecology of psychospiritual recovery that offers a holistic approach in addiction recovery. These findings have the implication that the spiritual dimension should not be positioned as an additional element in addiction rehabilitation, but rather as a substantive component in understanding and supporting the ongoing recovery process.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that spiritual experiences play an important role as an important mechanism in addiction recovery in individuals undergoing pesantren-based rehabilitation. Spiritual experience works through four main mechanisms, namely spiritual awareness as a turning point for change, spiritual practice as a means of self-regulation against craving and relapse, support from religious communities as a reinforcement of recovery, and identity reconstruction as part of recovery transformation. These findings confirm that addiction recovery in the context of pesantren is not only a

process of cessation of substance use, but also a psychospiritual process that involves changes in the meaning of life, self-control, and identity.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of the study of addiction recovery through the offer of the concept of spiritual recovery mechanism, which shows that spirituality is not only a recovery resource, but an active mechanism that supports sustainable recovery. Practically, these findings indicate the importance of integrating the spiritual dimension in addiction rehabilitation interventions, particularly in the context of religious communities. This research is limited to specific pesantren-based rehabilitation contexts, so further research is recommended to explore this model in other rehabilitation settings or examine the relationship between spiritual experience and recovery sustainability through a more diverse approach.

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