

## OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND COPING STRATEGY HARMONY BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC THEORY AND ISLAMIC TEACHINGS AND PRACTICE

**Ratri Atmoko Benedictus**

Human Factor Engineering Dept., Hochschule Niederrhein, Germany  
Faculty of Psychology, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia  
ratrie.benedictus@atmajaya.ac.id

### *Abstract*

*As a country with the largest Moslem population, the workplace in Indonesia generally provides a place and time for the workers to perform their religious obligation, mainly for performing Sholat. The purpose of this literatures study was to probe several aspect of Islamic teaching and ritual from the scientific perspective which is then able to be optimized its benefit for the work, in addition for religious intention, mainly in the management of occupational stress. Stress itself arises in the interaction between people and their environment, and coping strategy will determine how well they manage the stress. In summary, the result show that the types of stress according to the theory of Lazarus can be harmonized with the coping strategy based on Islamic teachings in Al Quran, especially in the Surah Al-Inshirah verses 1 through 8. Another important finding was that Sholat activity provides two physiological benefits, i.e. stimulates the relaxation of brainwaves and increase the muscle flexibility. Whereas, the suggestion to perform Sholat berjamaah or praying in group is in harmony with the collective culture of Indonesia, especially related to the value of silaturahmi or friendship and hospitality. Therefore, performing Sholat berjamaah during work is also able to strengthen the relationship between employees which might be utilized to express their emotion or even psychological burden. However, study in this area still need to be improved to find other alignments that can optimize the role and benefits of religious activity in the workplace.*

**Keywords:** *Al Quran, Sholat, Silaturahmi, Occupational Stress, workplace*

### **Definition of (Occupational) Stress**

Stress mean many things to different people and even defined in many different terminologies by scholars in psychology. Commonly, people define stress as pressure, tension or unpleasant external stimulus or as an emotional response. The concept of stress then fostered and involves multi-dimensional, such as biochemical, physiological, behavioral, and psychological. Selye (1955) initially introduced linking

stress and disease. He then described stress as physical, mental and behavioral excessive reaction of a person to adapt to internal and external pressures. In general, the theory of Lazarus then utilized as the main reference in research on stress. Lazarus introduced the concept of transactional to describe how individuals react and respond to psychologically stressful situations or environments.

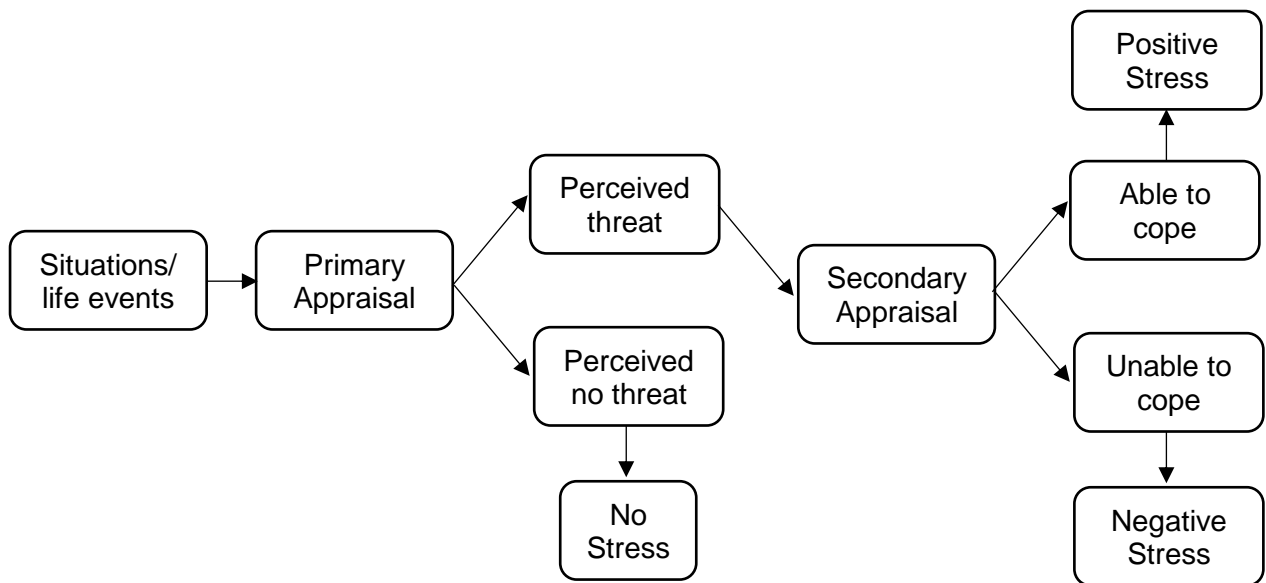


Figure 1. Types of appraisal process on the Lazarus theory

Krohne (2002) then assumed that the point of person-environment transaction is defined in two processes as central mediators, namely cognitive appraisal and coping. Whereas, Matthie & Ivanoff (2006) tried to integrate the three main process on the person-environment transaction, namely stress, appraisal and coping. From the various processes that emerged in the Lazarus theory, the process of appraisal is a key factor for understanding stress-relevant transaction due to emotional processes, including stress, are dependent on actual expectancies that persons manifest with regard to the significance and outcome of a specific encounter (Krohne, 2002). Furthermore, this concept is determined by a number of personal and situational factors. The most important on the personal factors are motivational dispositions, goals, values

and generalized expectancies. Otherwise, factors of situational parameters are predictability, controllability, and imminence of a potentially stressful event. Figure 1 describes the integrated process of two appraisals in Lazarus theory.

In the context of workplace, Melin and Lundberg (1997) argued that the too low job demands might induced (psychological) stress. For example, assembly work and data entry had high problem of musculoskeletal disorder. Moreover, workers at risk for musculoskeletal disorders are also characterized by lack of unwinding and elevated physiological arousal in non-work situation. Melin and Lundberg defined it at Figure 2 as unpaid domestic workload, such as household work, child care, et cetera.

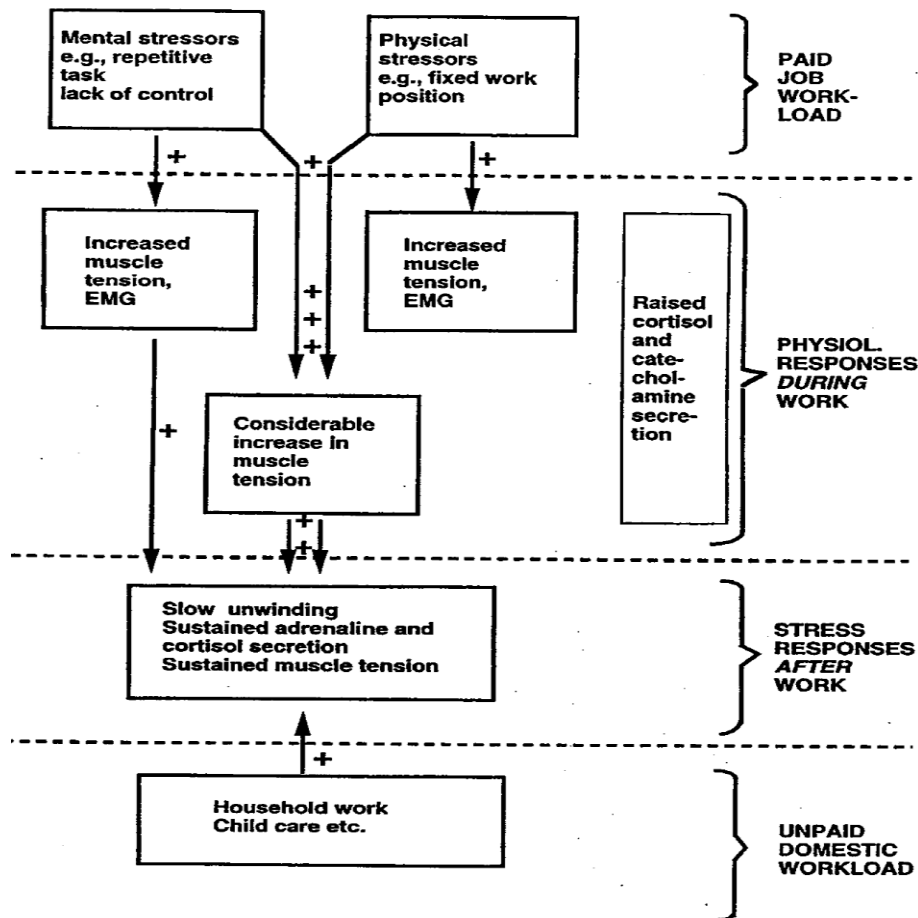


Figure 2. A Descriptive model of how mental and physical stressors may affect hormonal stress responses and muscle tension ( Melin & Lundberg, 1997).

The study of stress at workplace mainly performed to reduce the cases of work-related illness, although Ogden (2007) confirmed that there is no straightforward relationship between stress and illness. She further suggested that several factors might moderate the stress-illness link, such as exercise, coping style, social support, type of personality, and perceived control. On her article about Health Psychology, Ogden (2007) summarized stress as negative emotional experience resulting from a mismatch between the individual's appraisal that the stressor is stressful and their ability to cope with and therefore reduce their response to it. Furthermore, stress can trigger physical illness through two pathways. First, behavioral pathways, like sleep disorder, unhealthy food consumption, smoking addiction, and alcohol consumption. Second,

physiological pathways which including sympathetic nervous system activation that lead to the catecholamine and then causes increasing blood pressure and heart rate, and including hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical activation that decrease immune function and damage the neurons in the hippocampus.

Beside psychologically and biologically symptoms, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of USA (2001) stated that occupational stress simply felt by the workers through common physical symptom that are associated with work-related low back pain, mainly with musculoskeletal disorders. Larsman et al. (2004) reported that variable of perceiving work demands, mainly factor of time pressure and unevenly distributed

workload, is mediated feeling of stress and then triggered to neck/shoulder musculoskeletal symptoms. That finding then affirmed by study of Bugajska (2013) that classic dimensions of Karasek's stress model predict the prevalence of musculoskeletal complains, mainly dimension of psychological job demand. One of strategy to deal with musculoskeletal problem, Wahlström (2005) Suggested to take integrated action that should be directed to both physical/ergonomic factors, work organizational and psychosocial factors. Hägg (*see in Rissen, 2006*) introduced the Cinderella Hypothesis as an analogy for the motor unit that constantly active as long as the muscle is contracting and are shut off only during complete relaxation.

### **Occupational stress Issues in Indonesia**

In Indonesia, people easily judge a person with stress symptoms is regarded as a person with mental illness like schizophrenia. They commonly use the word of stress for the person who expresses their feelings of discomfort, namely sadness and anger. Data about occupational diseases in Indonesia annually released by the Ministry of Health of Republic of Indonesia (Infodatin, 2015) and reported that 14,3% of the number of workers suffering from common diseases in the workplace in 2013. From 57,929 cases of work-related disease in 2011, the number had rapidly increased and reached to 97,144 cases in 2013. While in the middle of 2014, the number was 40.694 cases. Three prevalence disease are 26.6% of Obesity, 25.8% of Hypertension and 3.8%. of chronic lung disease. Whereas, the factors of risk resulted occupational disease are the lack of physical activity with 52.8%, smoking with 21.2% and lack consumption of fruit and vegetable with 10.7%.

Occupational stress also inspired Indonesian scholars to conduct study on it in the context of Indonesia. Unfortunately, only one publication is existed on the database of psychological journal under High Education Directorate of Republic of Indonesia, namely

research of Apreviadezy & Puspitacandri (2014), that was utilized the Indonesian concept to design its work stress measurement. Whereas, many others Indonesian scholars refer to the Western theory following its measurements about work stress, such as Moorhead and Griffin (Bachroni & Asnawi, 1999), Behr and Newman (Sagala, 2013; Mahardayani & Dhanial, 2014; Wulandari & Wibowo, 2013), Selye (Hidayati, Purwanto, & Yuwono, 2008), Palmer, Cooper and Thomas (Mahdia, 2014), Robbins (Safaria, 2011), NIOSH (Widhiastuti, 2002), Spielberger (Widodo & Djalali, 2011), Cooper and Straw (Prasetyo & Nurtjahjanti, 2012; Prasetyo, Nurtjahjanti, Fauziah & Kustanti, 2016), and Greenberg (Lubis & Budiman, 2014).

### **Indonesia as a religious country**

Commitment as a religious country declared simultaneously with the establishment of Indonesia as a state in 1945 by decided that Indonesia follow the monotheism as its belief system. Political ideology of Indonesia later also accommodated communism to counter liberalism of USA and re-colonialism of Dutch until 1965 while a coup that led to the prohibition of communism ideology in Indonesia. Triggered by those national tragedy, pro communism and also atheistic then socially unacceptable. Even they would be subjected to threats and have to be arrested by the police.

Survey of Gallup on 2009 placed Indonesia on fourth position as the most religious country in the world. 99% of Indonesian people considered religion being an important and influential factor in their daily lives (Crabtree, 2010). As a Moslem world's largest democracy country, survey of Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, 2013) reported that if given any option, 72% of Indonesia's Moslem population would favor an Syariah or Islamic Legal Code of Conduct pointed as the official law of the country. From those number, only 22% who agreed

that the Indonesian law should strictly follow the Quran. Whereas, mostly agreed for following on the values and principles of Islam, but not strictly follow. Nanggroe Aceh Darusallam Province, where lived

95% population is Muslim, was the only province in Indonesia that is permitted by the Indonesian government to implement Islamic *Sharia* law for its administration.



Photo 1. A Masjid or Mosque at a depth of 1,700 meters below the ground level in the area of PT Freeport Gold Mining in Papua, Indonesia (Source: suaramasjid.com)

Therefore, it can be said that understanding Indonesian people should not be separated from the religious context. The scope of behavioral studies in Indonesia even are still inclined to impose Western theoretical standpoint than focus on the importance of religiosity in determining the behavior of Indonesian people. Since Psychology as a science realizes that it should not being culturally blind, therefore it is necessary to consider the local and indigenous context to understand a person, a group of people, or even a nation. On the other hand, globalization has reduced human boundaries and barriers to interact each other in which a process of assimilation of values emerges and influences each other. Thus, the purpose of this article is to identify the integration of conceptual framework about work stress theory as a scientific paradigm and Islamic virtues that strongly hold by religious nation like

Indonesia as the largest Islamic country in the world.

### **Conceptual Harmony on Stress and Coping**

Krohne (2002) wrote on his article about stress and coping theories that both specific appraisal on the Lazarus theory (picture 1) lead to different kinds of stress which distinguished into three types. The first type is *harm* that refers to the psychological damage or loss which already happened. The second type is *threat* that being identified as the anticipation of harm that might be imminent. The third type is *challenge* which is resulted from the demands that a person feels confident about his or her mastering the problem. These different types are embedded in specific types of emotional reactions which distinguished by Lazarus in 15 basic emotion and divided into negative emotion (anger, fright, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy and disgust),

positive emotion (happiness, pride, relief and love), and mix valence (hope and compassion).

Stress Theory of Lazarus had been improved after decades since its initial publication. One of which is input from Folkman who previously had collaborated with Lazarus, about the importance of meaningfulness of a life event in the context of stress and coping (Park & Folkman, 1997). Human's meaning system which centered on the goals of life then manifests in two forms. First form is global meaning that refers to concept of general meaning, including beliefs and goals. The second is situational meaning which refers to the interpretation of people's global meaning in the context of specific events and occurrences. Furthermore, those distinction derives situational meaning into different types, including appraised meaning, the search for meaning (meaning-making coping), and meaning as outcome (changes in global meaning). Park and Folkman also emphasized that meaning associated with attribute within its process, as one of an example of global meaning is religion. Related to stress, people generally uphold religion as a prime of a belief system in order to provide meaning of personal significance, causal explanation, coping and outcome orientation.

Since religion is the most important thing in Indonesia, understanding people of Indonesia properly considers the aspects related to religion and how it influence human behavior, including religious teaching, law, code of conduct, and the contextual interpretation. Haji Rhoma Irama who is known as the King of Dangdut music in Indonesia, popularized the word stress through one of his songs which entitled Stress and had been very popular in Indonesia in 1990s (Falcon, 2013). In one of its lyrics, he wrote that the cure of stress is faith and godly or *taqwa*. Utami (2012) utilized the concept of religious coping as predictors of her research about subjective well-being among college students with Islam religion in Yogyakarta. Utami

utilized the scale of religious coping of Pargament, Smith, Koenig and Perez which obviously performed their research in the context of Christian community.

One of the studies on Islamic teachings and coping of stress is Indirawati (2006). The background of her study argued that Islamic college students should be able to take a role as the *khalifah* of *Allah* or the representation of God in the world. The students are therefore required to have good qualities in their faith and abilities. One of which is in managing and coping with stress. Indirawati then utilized Ibnu Katsir's interpretation of the Qur'an. Ibnu Katsir himself is an Islamic religious leader and scholar who lived in the 8th century and had produced books of interpretation of the Qur'an that are very popular and used up to now, particularly in Indonesia.

Surah (letter) of Al-Inshirah verses 1 through 8 can be interpreted on how a Moslem (follower of Islam) acts when experiencing a problem which is divided into three steps. First step is *positive thinking* which is aligned with the inscription on verses 1 through 6 (Al-Islam.org, 2017):

*"<sup>1</sup>Have We not opened your breast for you (O Muhammad)? <sup>2</sup>And removed from you your burden, <sup>3</sup>Which weighed down your back? <sup>4</sup>And raised high your fame? <sup>5</sup>So verily, with the hardship, there is relief, <sup>6</sup>Verily, with the hardship, there is relief (i.e. there is one hardship with two reliefs, so one hardship cannot overcome two reliefs)."*

Ibnu Katsir (Indirawati, 2006) then interpreted these verses as promise of Allah that in every human problem there is always a way out. Thus, humans do not have to worry about and encouraged to be patient and remain optimistic in the middle of the problems they experienced. The second step is *positive acting* which is aligned with the inscription in verse 7 (Al-Islam.org, 2017):

*“<sup>7</sup>So when you have finished (from your occupation), then stand up for Allah's worship (i.e. stand up for prayer).”*

Ibnu Katsir's interpretation of that verse is that humans need to strive to solve their problems through a real and positive behavior (Indirawati, 2006). It actually is a real encouragement from Allah for humans to not give up in the face of every problems. Moreover, Allah also advises humans to seek help from others to solve their problems. The last step is *positive hoping* which is aligned with the inscription on verse 8 (Al-Islam.org, 2017):

*“<sup>8</sup>And to your Lord (Alone) turn (all your intentions and hopes and) your invocations.”*

These verse then was interpreted by Ibnu Katsir that humans should pray and raise to Allah for the results of all the efforts that have been done.

Furlong (see in Park & Folkman, 1997) argued that religion affects and influences individual beliefs about the self, the world and the self in the world. So that, religion

*Table 1. Linked Lazarus' Types of Stress and Religious Coping Strategies*

Types of Stress (Theory of Lazarus)	Coping Strategy (Surah Al-Inshirah verses 1 through 8)
1. <b>Harm:</b> Psychological damage or loss that already happened	<b>Positive Thinking:</b> <i>“<sup>1</sup>Have We not opened your breast for you (O Muhammad)? <sup>2</sup>And removed from you your burden, <sup>3</sup>Which weighed down your back? <sup>4</sup>And raised high your fame? <sup>5</sup>So verily, with the hardship, there is relief, <sup>6</sup>Verily, with the hardship, there is relief (i.e. there is</i>

actually affects the appraised meanings of stressors. Study of Kutcher et al. (2010) indicated that religious practice is related negatively work-related stress and to burnout. In addition, employee who committed to their religion practices had less burnout than those who did not. Study among earthquake victim in Yogyakarta conducted by Amawidyati and Utami (2007) had found that there is positive correlation between religiosity and psychological well-being in which the ability to manage stress actually being its moderator variable, although not measured in that study. 80% of Yogyakarta residents are Muslim and shortly after the earthquake religious ritual became the main way for them to undergo a phase of stress and traumatic grief.

Calhoun, Tedeschi, & Lincourt (see in Park & Folkman, 1997) argued that religious beliefs are relatively stable. Further, people are more likely to change their perceptions of situations to fit their religious beliefs than to change those beliefs. Table 1 shows on how religious perspective could be optimized to perceive and to give meaning to a kind of stressful situation.

	<i>one hardship with two reliefs, so one hardship cannot overcome two reliefs.”</i>
2. <b>Threat:</b> The anticipation of harm that may be imminent	<b>Positive Hope</b> <i>“<sup>7</sup>So when you have finished (from your occupation), then stand up for Allah's worship (i.e. stand up for prayer).”</i>
3. <b>Challenge:</b> The demands that a person feels confident about his/her mastering the problem	<b>Positive Action</b> <i>“<sup>8</sup>And to your Lord (Alone) turn (all your intentions and hopes and) your invocations.”</i>

Linked of stress and coping in table 1 can be regarded as a behavior guidance,

especially in a religious society like Indonesia. Unfortunately, although traditionally these practices exist in the community, but there has been no optimal effort to empower it. Meanwhile, people often interpret it differently where in a stressful situation that actually can be viewed as a challenge, it had been interpreted as a threat or even harm. As a result, the attitude of *pasrah* (resignation) and *narima* (acceptance) that is closely related to positive thinking and hope, is more viscous in the cultural identity of Indonesia, particularly Javanese culture, compared to “do the best” or attitude as positive action.

### Dimension of Ergonomic in *Sholat* as the main ritual in Islam

*Salah* as an obligation under Islamic law is also run by the Indonesian workers as

written as on the Quran, *Surah An-Nisa* verse 4:103: “And when you have completed the prayer, remember Allah standing, sitting, or [lying] on your sides. But when you become secure, re-establish [regular] prayer. Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times”. Therefore, it is common in Indonesia that the company allows its employees to pray during the working hours. Even, the mosque as a place of worship of Islam is easily found in every office building in Indonesia. If the a Moslem (Islamic believer) have to work eight hours per day, from 8 AM to 17 PM, so he/she has to manage his/her working hours for two times of Islamic prayer, namely: *Sholat Dzuhur* at 11.50 AM and *Sholat Ashar* at 15.15 PM.

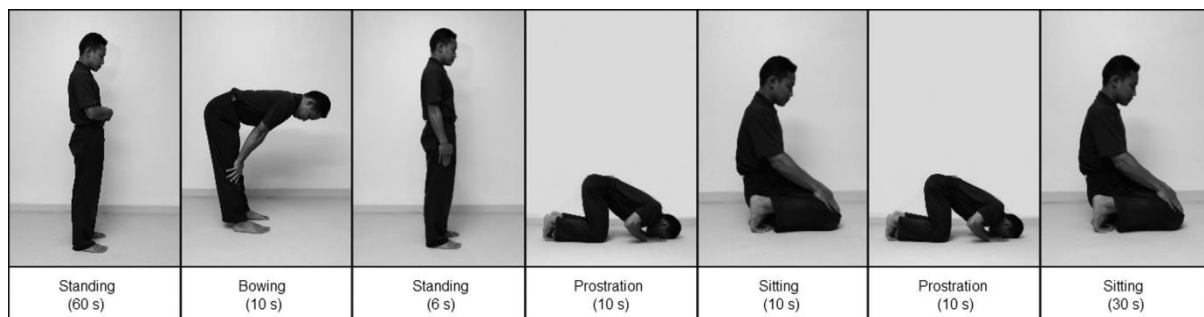


Figure 3. A complete cycle of *Sholat* posture and movement.  
(Resource: Ibrahim et al., 2013)

Many scholars then being interested to conduct more studies on the physical and psychological aspects rather than in the aspect of spiritual and theological. Study of Ibrahim et al. (see in Aziz, (2011) had found two physical advantages of *Sholat* prayer. First, since *Sholat* activity stimulates the brainwaves reach to Alpha level with 8-13 Hz, so the brain is in relax condition. Second finding is viewing *Sholat* as a gymnastic activity which good for muscle relaxation. In an analysis of muscle flexibility, Najib (2016) had found that 1466 times of *sujud* or prostration motion in *Sholat* prayer within a month had increase 4 cm of muscle flexibility. Study of Lestari and Wahyuni (2016) utilized a gymnastic movement to

reduce distress among patients with Diabetes in which inspired by the *Sholat* movement. The experiment study of Safee et al. (2012) had found that it is statistically difference between *Sholat* and specific exercise related to Tibialis Anterior (TA). In human anatomy, Tibialis Anterior is the largest muscle located in the anterior (front) compartment of the leg (Healthline Medical Team, 2015). Its function is to helps with dorsiflexion, which is the action of pulling the foot toward the shin.

### *Sillaturahim* as Context in Collectivist Culture



Although *Sholat* prayer is a personal obligation, but it is recommended to be able to do in *jamaah* or within group. It was written on the Hadith of Ibn Umar verse 13 that doing *Sholat* in *jamaah* is surpassed than alone. This virtue is relevant with the context of Indonesia with a collectivist culture background. It means that high preference for a strongly defined social framework in which individuals are expected to conform to the ideals of the society and the in-groups to which they belong (Hofstede, n.d). In her study on social support and occupational stress among nurse in Indonesia, Armasitoh (2011) had found that the high dual role conflicts and low in social support can lead to higher work stress experienced by nurses. The study of Murtiningrum (2005) had resulted that social support moderates the relationship between work-family conflict and job stress.

In Islamic virtue, social relation or even support can be defined as a *Silaturahmi* or *Silaturahmi* that might increase cohesiveness among employees in this context. *Sholat* in *jamaah* the same time and place within working hours can bring together and connect employees from various positions. Through the spirit of *Silaturahmi*, the communication then developed in informal way and clear boundaries among employees. Bottom-up communication even easily emerged while an employer running *sholat* together with his employee. This clear boundaries communication some how might lead to the positive atmosphere of communication and work climate.

### Closing

The main idea of this article is to integrate immanent religious virtues with the transcendent of science, mainly behavioral study. Harmony between the two is very relevant to understand the behavior of people who uphold religious values, such as in Indonesia. Therefore, religious practices in Indonesia can be optimized as structured and systematic behavior modification programs, especially in developing skills to manage stress effectively and positively. Considering

the country has not been able to provide adequate and humane services for people with mental disorders, then the religious approach can be optimized. This is because religious activities can be easily found throughout Indonesia, even in remote areas.

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