

# Measuring the Spirituality in Group Addiction Counseling Using Sandtray Therapy

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## ABSTRACT

The element of spirituality plays an important role in addiction counseling and recovery of an addict. The purpose of this study was to examine the differences on spirituality level before and after intervention using sandtray therapy. This study was a quasi-experimental repeated-measure design utilizing the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES). A total of 32 recovering adolescent addicts were involved in six sessions of group counseling at a government-linked drug treatment and rehabilitation facility in Malaysia. The result shows that there was a significant difference in the mean scores for pre- and post-tests. However, there was no significant difference between pre-test and post-test after having the group counseling sandtray intervention ( $t = -0.538$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The discussion of findings, study implication and future direction were also discussed. This study proposes to involve the control group in a follow-up study to examine the differences on the element of spirituality between control group and treatment group.

**Keywords:** *Addiction counseling, sandtray therapy, spirituality*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The drug addiction problem in Malaysia has been a cause for concern. Based on statistics released by the National Anti-Drug Agency (*Agensi Anti-Dadah Kebangsaan, AADK*), in 2017 alone, the number of addicts was 18 440, with 7 842 relapse cases. 80% of the cases involved Malay and Muslims. The implications of drug abuse are not only to personal health and safety, but impact the family and social systems, and the country's economy. Worse, drug addiction is increasingly affecting teenagers too, and not just adults. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have initiated residential and community rehabilitation for drug addicts through a range of modalities, from biopsychosocial to spiritual approaches in order to combat this growing menace.

In Malaysia, there are 11 treatment centers that utilise psychosocial therapy methods based on Islamic teachings. The use of Quranic verses, *zikr*, the application of the Sunnah, the concept of appreciation, and treatment processes differ from center to center. The use of different Quranic verses has different effects on an individual. According to a study by Ahmad Termizi on the effectiveness of religious programs on recovering drug addicts at Cure & Care Clinic (CnC) Karangan and Inabah 1Malaysia, Kedah, he found that religious programs were more effective than *Zikrullah*, which is the practice and approach of the Thariqat

Qadiriyyah Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) (Abdul Halim, 2014).

There is a study by Selamah Maamor et al related to hard core drug addicted. AADK is a rehabilitation institution which established by Malaysia Government to rectify the drug addict by using conventional approach. AADK can be found everywhere in every state of Malaysia. While, AADK-i is similar institutions as AADK but implement more Islamic teaching and culture. This kind of AADK-i is just established in last five years and can only found in some states in Malaysia. Pondok Inabah is a rehabilitation institution to rectify the drug addict by using spirituality approach. Inabah located at Kuala Nerang which is small part of Kedah state located at northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. Malaysia is located at a central of Southeast Asia, with Thailand in the North, Singapore and Indonesia to the South and the Philippines to the east. Malaysia also famous with its uniqueness where it has multi-ethnic comprised of three major ethnic groups which are Malay, Chinese and Indian. Although recent studies on the comparison of trainees at AADK, AADKi trainees and Inabah Centre (PI) show that higher readiness levels for treatment motivation compared to AADK and AADK-I trainees. The result means that PI children are better prepared and believe that God is always with them. They believe that God's view is more important than the human view. Everything is for Allah and they try to apply the

concept of tawakal. Hence, more than 70 percent will recover and succeed in their lives (Maamor, Wahab, Ghani, & Aziz, 2017).

In Malaysia, counseling with a focus on spiritual therapy is not very popular. According to Suhaya et al, (2017) this is because a religious approach is considered as mystical, its success to prove quantitatively is difficult, and there is a lack of research in this area. Furthermore, many counsellors lack training, skills and the experience of conducting spiritually-induced counseling.

Numerous literature recognizes religion – or lack thereof – as a contributory factor for the recreational abuse of drugs (Khalid, 2008). Spirituality is an important aspect in the life of a recovering addict (Isa et al, 2018). In order for a person to recover from addiction, there is simply the need to be something bigger than oneself. The integration of spirituality into mental health treatment is accepted and widely used in addition to traditional therapeutic models. Addicted clients need to find something that buoys them up in daily living and keeps their spirits alive (Miller, 2015). There are also studies on the healing of drug addiction using Quranic verses in treating physical and metaphysical illnesses (Andriawan, 2013).

A study was conducted by Isa et al (2018) that used a spiritual counseling module on drug addiction participants. The module that included seven steps to recovery comprised of a series of guidelines for facilitators to aid in the rehabilitation of a drug addict. These seven steps were: 1) Talking about preparing for recovery through a self-acceptance process, where individuals who wanted to recover are guided and taught to accept themselves and the mistakes that they have made in their lives, 2) Talk about self-surrender to God as a step to recovery, 3) Help the client to know himself and confess to God his past weaknesses, errors, and believe that with God's help, he will be able to fix it, 4) Bring about a sense of responsibility to God, oneself, one's family and to society, 5) To convey the concepts and practices in the efforts towards self-purification, and the notion of tawakkal (surrender), 6) To focus on self-strengthening to Allah, and 7) Focusing on retaining the knowledge and improving strength, hope and practices.

On the other hand, Gorski suggested that there are 6 stages of treatment. The 6 stages are the transition stage, stabilization stage, early recovery stage, middle recovery stage, late recovery stage and maintenance stage.

It is important to note that recovery is a process of personal growth in which each stage has its own risks of relapse and its own developmental tasks to reach the next stage (Steven, 2015). The stages of recovery are not the same length for each person, but they are a useful way of looking at recovery and teaching recovery to clients.

The sandtray therapy approach as an intervention to measure spirituality is still a novel idea, especially in Malaysia. This approach which uses miniatures as non-verbal mediums, is an expressive and proactive psychotherapy to explore interpersonal and intrapersonal issues. It gives clients the freedom to create a world related to the events encountered in the real world using miniatures arranged in the sandtray (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2016). This form of 'play' can be applied to teens, adults, couples and families.

Monakes et al. (2011) conducted a counseling session with drug addicts using sandtray therapy to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of drug addicts on cognitive treatment and client behavior. The study reported that participants had a positive experience with sandtray therapy. According to Ramsey (2014), sandtray therapy is also one of the effective methods for counsellors to explore the client's inner world as well as interpretations of their real life and relationships through the symbols exhibited within the sandtray. Hwan Shin and Mikyung Jang (2016) assert that sandtray therapy is a natural therapy that allows an individual to express his or her internal conflict. As addiction counseling requires an approach where addicts feel safe and comfortable in sharing their experiences and innermost thoughts, it is only fitting that sandtray therapy be used to facilitate spiritual counseling during sessions.

This study aimed at measuring the spirituality level in addiction counseling through the use of sandtray therapy. The objective of this study is to examine the differences in spirituality before and after the intervention, by using sandtray therapy.

## 2. METHOD

This study is a quantitative study conducted on recovering adolescent addicts at the Cure and Care Clinic in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. This study employs a quasi-experimental research design approach using pre and post - test group design. A total of 32 (n = 32) respondents from a total population of 70 (N = 70) addicts at the centre were selected. Inclusion criteria for this study are - 1) respondents between the ages of 13 to 17 years old, 2) have a good mental health level, 3) have used at least 1 drug type, 4) have a good level of treatment compliance, and 5) agree to undergo a counseling session using a sandtray as determined by the researchers.

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) was used to measure pre-test and post-test results to determine the effect of spirituality counseling. This sixteen-item self-report measure together with a brief introduction is designed to measure ordinary spiritual experiences (not dramatic mystical experiences such as near death experiences or hearing voices or seeing visions). It measures experiences of relationships with,

and awareness of, the divine or transcendent, and how beliefs and understandings form part of moment-to-moment features of life from a spiritual or religious perspective (Lynn G. Underwood, 2011). The DSES was constructed as a scale that allows for an “overlapping circles” concept of religiousness/spirituality. It was consciously constructed to have deep relevance for those comfortable with theistic religious language, but also to provide opportunities to respond for those who are not comfortable with a theistic view. The word ‘spirituality’ in the context of this scale refers to aspects of personal life that include the transcendent, divine or holy; “more than” what we can see or touch or hear.

Participants underwent treatment with a spirituality module using play therapy during counseling sessions. In this module, participants will be able to 1) choose a miniature to imagine the divine 2) compose a miniature depicting divinity 3) explore their feelings towards the Creator 4) explore their own life with the Creator, and 5) identify his or her distance with the Creator through a depiction with miniatures in a sandtray.

**3. RESULTS**

In attaining an indication of the reliability coefficient of the scale used in this study, the researchers conducted a test using the Reliability analysis from Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The result of the reliability statistic test is  $r=0.827$ . Thus, the items for this study are reliable. Table 1 show the reliability of the instrument that been used for this study, which is the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES).

Table 1: Reliability of Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.827	0.826	16

Quantitative statistical techniques were applied to find the research questions of this study. Paired sample t-tests were used to find out the relationship between pre- and post-tests. There was a positive difference in the mean scores for pre ( $M=2.2324$ ,  $SD=0.67019$ ) and post ( $M=2.3262$ ,  $SD=1.17247$ );  $t(31) = -0.538$ ,  $p = 0.595$ . These results suggest that participants had better results in the post-test compared to the pre-test. Specifically, our results suggest that when someone undergoes sandtray therapy, they tend to have a better awareness on the importance of a spiritual aspect in rehabilitation counseling. Sandtray therapy treatment can improve a participant’s spiritual level, as seen through a higher post-test score among the participants

at C&C Kota Bahru. Table 2 shows the mean differences between pre-test and post-test in measuring spirituality in short-term sandtray therapy intervention.

Table 2: Paired Sample T-test Reliability

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	KB pre	2.2324	32	0.67019
	KB post	2.3262	32	1.17247

The mean level of spiritual counseling between pre-test and post-test is 0.595; which is greater than the confidence level of 0.05, ( $k > 0.05$ ). These results show that there is no significant difference on the spiritual level between pre and post-test [ $t(32) = .595$ ,  $k > .05$ ].

Although this showed no significant difference, the mean values for pre-test and post-test did have a positive difference. Post-test results have shown that their awareness in spirituality has improved after undergoing sandtray therapy.

Table 3: Paired Sample T-test

Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
-0.44926	0.2176	-0.538	31	0.595

**4. DISCUSSION**

Sandtray therapy shows positive changes in the level of spirituality among recovering adolescent drug addicts. Although it was only a short-term intervention of two days’ duration, it was effective in increasing the spirituality level of the participants. Counseling sessions utilising the sandtray approach allowed the clients to understand themselves better and enhance their spiritual elements during the exploration process. Exploration of problems using sandtray therapy allowed the clients to visualize problems, feelings, thoughts and experiences through selected miniatures, thereby allowing the use of multiple sensors throughout the session (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2016).

The participants in this study were only in the first stage of recovery. According to Steven (2015), it is commonly held that this stage starts immediately after a person stops using drugs, and usually lasts one to two years. The main focus of this stage is dealing with cravings and to prevent relapse. Spiritual maturity is usually not present at this stage. However, it is important to recognise that having a strong spiritual element at an adolescent age plays a vital role in self-motivation, and not the mere concept of God alone. Many addicts were found to be involved with drug abuse as a result of not leading a strong spiritual life (Muhammad Yusuf Khalid, 2010; Seghatoleslam et al., 2015).

Therefore, the inclusion of a religious aspect in rehabilitation therapy provides effective treatment to

drug addicts and may prevent future relapse (Khalid, 2008). It teaches them the importance of upholding their practice, beliefs and positive attitudes towards life.

As a Muslim, we believe that when we avoid evil doings, we can keep the purity of a person, especially the purity of their hearts. This, in turn, influences their actions, and their physical, mental and emotional well-being. This was also mentioned in a Hadith by our beloved prophet in a hadith “There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good, the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart”.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study focuses on the importance of including a spiritual aspect via sandtray therapy in recovering adolescent addicts. The limitation of this study is that the number of samples is small, and only includes a specific age group. Future research can be undertaken to measure the efficacy of sandtray therapy in the spiritual standpoint at different age groups, and with a larger sample size.

For future research, this study also suggests on the research design which exploring qualitatively. Qualitative study is able to get in depth information of data.

Beside methodology, the implementation of counseling supervision in future study will enhance counsellors’ competency while dealing with recovery adolescents in addiction counseling.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the data analysis and findings presented, this study has succeeded in achieving its objective of examining the differences on spirituality before and after the intervention of group counseling using sandtray therapy.

Researchers have found that sandtray therapy can enhance the spirituality level of an addiction client. Through this method of intervention, counsellors will be able to explore their clients’ subconscious mind easily and effectively.

As the study yielded such promising results, it is hoped that future research be undertaken in order to effectively aid the rehabilitation of drug addicts through creative intervention techniques.

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