Volume 4 Number 2 (2026)
July-December 2026
Page: 2422-2436

EDUJAVARE: International Journal of Educational Research
ISSN: 3031-2884
https://edujavare.com/index.php/edujavare
DOI: 10.70610/edujavare.2251

Spiritual Bypass in Muslim Religious Life: A Narrative Literature Review

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Article history

Submitted: 2026/11/01; Revised: 2026/11/06; Accepted: 2026/11/09

Abstract

Spirituality and religiosity are widely recognized as psychological resources that support well-being. However, transpersonal psychology indicates that spiritual practices may also be used defensively to avoid unresolved psychological issues, a phenomenon known as spiritual bypass. This article maps the concept of spiritual bypass and examines its relevance to Muslim religious life through a narrative literature review. Literature published mainly between 2016 and 2026 was retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, PubMed/PMC, Garuda, and Sinta, alongside foundational conceptual works. The review covered the development and measurement of spiritual bypass, cross-cultural research, studies involving Muslim populations, and Islamic religious coping practices such as dhikr, sabr, and tawakkul. The findings indicate that research explicitly connecting spiritual bypass with Islamic religious practices remains limited. Existing Islamic psychology studies tend to emphasize the adaptive functions of religious practices and rarely examine their possible defensive use. The article proposes an integrative framework in which spiritual bypass may emerge when Islamic spirituality is used prematurely or defensively, with religious literalism, mental health stigma, social support, and theological understandings of divine decree as contextual moderators. The review offers a conceptual basis for future empirical research and culturally sensitive, Islamically informed counseling.

Keywords

Islamic spirituality; mental health; narrative literature review; religious coping; spiritual bypass

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population, places religion and spirituality at the center of everyday life. Pew Research Center (2020) reported that most Indonesians consider religion important in daily life and that many people turn to prayer, worship, and religious communities when facing difficulties. Consistent with this observation, Koenig (2012) noted associations between religiosity and spirituality, greater hope, improved stress-coping capacity, and a lower risk of depression. Religion and spirituality are therefore often regarded as important protective factors for the mental health of Muslim communities.

Despite these protective functions, transpersonal psychology cautions that

spirituality does not always produce adaptive outcomes. Welwood (1984) introduced the term spiritual bypass to describe the use of spiritual ideas and practices to avoid, or prematurely transcend, unresolved psychological needs, emotions, and developmental tasks. The concept was later operationalized by Fox, Cashwell, and Picciotto (2017) through the Spiritual Bypass Scale-13 (SBS-13), which identifies two principal dimensions: Psychological Avoidance and Spiritualizing.

A similar phenomenon may occur in Muslim religious life. Expressions such as "one only needs to be patient and sincere," "everything is Allah's decree," or "what matters is that one has prayed" may strengthen faith and provide inner comfort. Yet, when used prematurely to close off sadness, anger, or unresolved trauma, such expressions may also prevent healthy emotional processing. Initial evidence comes from Ahmad, McLaughlin, and de Weisman (2023), who found that spiritual bypass moderated the relationship between religious coping and psychological distress among Muslims living in the United States.

Research on spiritual bypass has nevertheless been dominated by Western and Christian contexts, with more recent extensions to Hindu communities in India (Patel & Kumar, 2026b) and Muslim-majority Türkiye (Kasapoğlu, 2026). Ahmad et al. (2023) remains the only quantitative study identified in this review that explicitly targeted a Muslim population, while comparable research in the Indonesian Muslim context has not been identified. Meanwhile, Islamic psychology literature on dhikr, sabr, and tawakkul, including Sabki et al. (2025), Ayun, Taufik, and Ruhaena (2024), and Nurul Alfi Laili and Haryanto (2018), consistently emphasizes their adaptive functions without exploring possible defensive uses. This conceptual gap provides the starting point for the present article.

This article aims to: (1) map the concept and development of spiritual bypass research; (2) examine its relevance to Muslim religious practices; (3) identify similarities, differences, strengths, limitations, and research gaps in relevant previous studies; and (4) formulate a conceptual framework for future empirical research. It seeks to make an initial theoretical contribution to a more critically reflective Islamic psychology and to offer counselors and psychologists a basis for distinguishing healthy spirituality from defensive spiritual practices.

METHODS

This article adopts a narrative literature review because its purpose is conceptual and integrative: to bridge two bodies of literature that have largely developed separately, namely Western transpersonal psychology on spiritual bypass and Islamic psychology on religious coping. A narrative approach enables thematic synthesis across disciplines whose research questions and study designs are not sufficiently homogeneous for a conventional systematic review.

Literature searches were conducted in Scopus, PubMed/PMC, Google Scholar, and the Indonesian national databases Garuda and Sinta using combinations of the terms "spiritual bypass," "spiritual bypassing," "religious coping," "Islamic psychology," "dhikr," "sabr," and "tawakkul." Inclusion criteria were: (a) scholarly journal articles published mainly within the ten-year period 2016–2026; (b) explicit discussion of the spiritual bypass construct or conceptually relevant Islamic religious coping and spiritual practices; and (c) availability of the full text or abstract. Foundational conceptual sources outside this period, including Welwood (1984) and Cashwell, Bentley, and Yarborough (2007), were retained because of their formative role in defining spiritual bypass. Sources discussing spirituality in general without a connection to psychological avoidance, as well as non-academic sources, were excluded from the analysis.

Analysis employed thematic synthesis. Findings were grouped into three broad themes: the concept and history of spiritual bypass; its cross-cultural development; and spirituality and Islamic religious coping. The studies were then compared in terms of similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations to identify the research gaps that inform the conceptual framework presented below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Concept and Historical Development of Spiritual Bypass

The term spiritual bypass was first introduced by Welwood (1984), a transpersonal psychotherapist, to describe the use of spiritual ideas—such as transcendence, non-attachment, or unconditional love—as a means of avoiding emotional work and necessary psychological development. Cashwell, Bentley, and Yarborough (2007) expanded the concept, arguing that spiritual bypass occurs when individuals attempt to heal psychological wounds exclusively at the spiritual level while avoiding important, albeit difficult and painful, work at cognitive, physical, emotional, and interpersonal levels.

An important development occurred when Fox, Cashwell, and Picciotto (2017) developed the Spiritual Bypass Scale-13 (SBS-13), the first psychometric instrument designed to measure spiritual bypass with demonstrated validity and reliability. Through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, they identified two dimensions: Psychological Avoidance, or the tendency to avoid difficult psychological experiences by focusing on spirituality; and Spiritualizing, or the tendency to interpret everyday problems solely through a spiritual lens in ways that dampen their emotional impact. The instrument paved the way for subsequent quantitative studies, including Fox and Picciotto (2019), who found that the two dimensions mediated the relationship between spirituality and depression, anxiety, and stress among 783 general-population

participants.

Qualitative research has also enriched understanding of spiritual bypass. Picciotto and Fox (2018) conducted conventional content analysis of clinical experts' perspectives and identified characteristics of spiritual bypass in counseling practice. Picciotto, Fox, and Neto (2018), meanwhile, conducted a phenomenological study of eight individuals who had directly experienced spiritual bypass. Their analysis generated ten categories of causes and consequences, including the desire to escape reality and the influence of communities or religious leaders who may perpetuate avoidance patterns.

Cross-Cultural and Interreligious Research on Spiritual Bypass

After becoming established in Western contexts, spiritual bypass research expanded to different cultural and religious settings. Picciotto, Fox, Cashwell, and Neto (2018) adapted the SBS-13 for Brazil and found that its two-factor structure remained stable, with religious affiliation, age, and gender serving as significant predictors of spiritual bypass levels. Motiño et al. (2021) compared Spain and Honduras and found that determinants differed by cultural context: community religiosity was more prominent in Honduras, whereas engagement with religious texts was more prominent in Spain. These findings indicate that spiritual bypass is contextually shaped rather than universal.

Patel and Kumar (2026b) further challenged the individualistic assumptions underlying the spiritual bypass construct in their analysis of Hindu women in India. They argued that assumptions about freedom to choose spiritual practices, an individuated self, and the intrapsychic nature of bypass do not necessarily apply in collectivist societies. They proposed an alternative assessment framework based on Agency Gradient, Functional Directionality, and Archetypal Identification versus Individuation. Similarly, Patel and Kumar's (2026a) meta-ethnographic synthesis of five cross-cultural qualitative studies, including Muslim American and African American Pentecostal participants, concluded that spiritual bypassing may be better understood as a contextually adaptive response to psychological suffering sustained by social-structural mechanisms, rather than simply as an individual deficit.

Findings directly relevant to Muslim populations come from two directions. First, Ahmad, McLaughlin, and de Weisman (2023) found that spiritual bypass moderated the relationship between religious coping and psychological distress among Muslims living in the United States. This is the only quantitative study identified here that explicitly places spiritual bypass within a Muslim population. Second, Kasapoğlu (2026) examined the mediating role of spiritual bypass between spiritual orientation and psychological well-being among young adults in Türkiye, whose population is predominantly Muslim. The study found that spiritual bypass does not always have negative effects: in a cultural context that values tawakkul (reliance on Allah's will), a

pattern ethically described as "avoidance" may function as a culturally legitimate emotion-regulation strategy. This supports the argument that behavior labeled avoidance in individualistic societies may serve different regulatory functions in collectivist and religious societies (Motiño et al., 2021).

Spirituality, Religious Coping, and Worship Practices in Islam

Unlike spiritual bypass literature, which explicitly addresses the dysfunctional side of spirituality, Islamic psychology literature on religious coping and worship tends to emphasize protective and adaptive functions. Sabki, Sa'ari, Syed Abdul Rahman, Che Nordin, and Muhamad (2025) psychometrically validated the Malay version of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE) among Malaysian Muslim university students. Their study highlighted the importance of distinguishing positive and negative religious coping but did not address the possible use of spirituality as an avoidance mechanism. In Indonesia, Ayun, Taufik, and Ruhaena (2024) conducted a scoping review of religious coping and psychological distress among university students and found a generally positive association between religious coping and psychological well-being. Nurul Alfi Laili and Haryanto (2018) likewise reported a positive relationship between religious coping and psychological well-being among adolescents memorizing the Qur'an.

Regarding specific spiritual practices, dhikr is often studied as a strategy for calming the mind and reducing anxiety among university students, with findings generally indicating positive and significant effects on inner tranquility. In the field of addiction recovery, Bensaid, Machouche, and Tekke (2021) reviewed how Islamic spirituality can support addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. They also emphasized that Islamic spirituality should not be treated as a stand-alone therapeutic modality detached from other empirical methods. Nevertheless, none of these studies explicitly investigated whether dhikr, sabr, or tawakkul, when used prematurely or imposed without adequate emotional processing, might function as spiritual bypass.

Synthesis of Previous Studies: Similarities, Differences, Strengths, and Limitations

Several fundamental similarities can be identified across the reviewed studies. First, they recognize spirituality and religiosity as valuable psychological resources, whether within the framework of positive religious coping (Pargament, 1997) or through the risk-focused perspective of spiritual bypass. Second, there is methodological convergence between quantitative psychometric approaches, including the SBS-13 and its adaptations, and qualitative-phenomenological approaches that explore subjective spiritual experiences. Third, recent studies (2021–2026) consistently emphasize cultural sensitivity in interpreting spiritual bypass, indicating a shift from universal-etic models toward contextually grounded emic approaches.

At the same time, important differences remain. Early studies (Fox et al., 2017; Picciotto & Fox, 2018; Fox & Picciotto, 2019) were based on Western samples dominated by Christian and secular backgrounds, whereas later studies extended to Catholic Brazil (Picciotto et al., 2018), Hindu India (Patel & Kumar, 2026b), and Muslim populations (Ahmad et al., 2023; Kasapoğlu, 2026). Their conclusions also differ: some studies position spiritual bypass as consistently maladaptive (Fox & Picciotto, 2019; Picciotto & Fox, 2018), while newer studies in religious-collectivist populations find that its effects are contextual and may even be functional in the short term (Kasapoğlu, 2026; Motiño et al., 2021). Islamic religious coping literature, in contrast, generally treats worship practices as protective variables without examining possible dysfunctional dimensions.

Psychometric studies using the SBS-13 and its derivatives offer instruments with validity and reliability evidence across several languages and cultures, enabling systematic quantitative comparisons. Qualitative studies and meta-ethnography (Picciotto et al., 2018; Patel & Kumar, 2026a) provide emic depth that closed-ended instruments cannot capture. Major limitations include: (a) almost none of the SBS instruments have been validated in Indonesian or within the cultural context of the Nusantara Muslim community; (b) the only quantitative study of a Muslim population (Ahmad et al., 2023) used a Muslim diaspora sample in the United States whose socioreligious characteristics differ significantly from those of a Muslim-majority country such as Indonesia; and (c) Islamic psychology literature on dhikr, sabr, and tawakkul, although methodologically strong, has not conceptually integrated the spiritual bypass perspective and may therefore produce an overly positive account of Islamic spirituality without acknowledging possible dysfunction.

Table 1. Comparison of Previous Studies on Spiritual Bypass and Religious Coping

No.	Author (Year)	Research Focus	Approach/Method	Context/ Population	Main Findings	Limitations
1	Fox, Cashwell, & Picciotto (2017)	Construction and measurement of spiritual bypass	Quantitative; EFA/CFA (SBS-13)	General U.S. sample	Identified two dimensions: Psychological Avoidance and Spiritualizing	Western sample; not validated across non-Christian religions
2	Picciotto & Fox (2018)	Experts' perspectives on spiritual bypass	Qualitative; content analysis	Expert clinicians/counselors	Identified clinical characteristics and effects of spiritual bypass	External expert perspective, not accounts from individual

						s experiencing it
3	Picciotto, Fox, & Neto (2018)	Phenomenology of spiritual bypass experiences	Qualitative; phenomenological interviews	Eight participants	Generated 48 codes and ten categories of causes and consequences	Small sample; limited generalizability
4	Picciotto et al. (2018)	Cross-cultural adaptation of SBS-13	Quantitative; scale validation	Brazilian population (Christian)	Replicated two-factor structure; age, gender, and religious affiliation were significant predictors	Christian Brazilian context; does not address Islam
5	Fox & Picciotto (2019)	Mediating effects of spiritual bypass on depression, anxiety, and stress	Quantitative; parallel mediation	783 general-population participants	Psychological Avoidance and Spiritualizing mediated links between spirituality and distress	Cross-sectional design; no longitudinal evidence
6	Fox et al. (2020)	Religious commitment, views of God, and spiritual bypass	Quantitative; correlational	Religious U.S. population	Spiritual bypass was associated with religious commitment and help-seeking attitudes	Does not address non-Christian or Muslim contexts
7	Motiño et al. (2021)	Cross-cultural analysis of spiritual bypass	Quantitative; two-country comparison	Spain and Honduras	Determinants differed by cultural context (individualistic vs. collectivist/religious)	Does not include Muslim populations; limited cultural settings
8	Hie	Spiritu	Quantita	Young	Spirit	Doe

	bler-Ragger et al. (2016)	ality, attachment, and mood pathology	tive; correlational	adults in Austria	uality moderated the relationship between insecure attachment and mood pathology	s not directly measure spiritual bypass
9	Hiebler-Ragger et al. (2020)	Cross-cultural validation of existential well-being and attachment	Quantitative; cross-cultural validation	Young adults in India	Relationships between spirituality and attachment varied across cultures	Focuses on existential well-being, not spiritual bypass
10	Ahmad, McLaughlin, & de Weisman (2023)	Spiritual bypass as moderator of religious coping and distress	Quantitative; moderation analysis	Muslims in the United States	Spiritual bypass moderated the relationship between religious coping and psychological distress	Only explicit Muslim quantitative study identified; U.S. diaspora sample
11	Kasapoğlu (2026)	Mediating role of spiritual bypass between spirituality and well-being	Quantitative; SEM	Young adults in Türkiye (Muslim-majority)	Partial mediation; tawakkul may be interpreted as a culturally shaped process, not merely dysfunction	Sample dominated by women and one city; discriminant validity remains unclear
12	Patel & Kumar (2026a)	Synthesis of lived experiences of spiritual bypassing	Qualitative meta-ethnography	Five studies; 55 cross-cultural participants, including Muslim Americans	Spiritual bypassing may be contextually adaptive and sustained by structural mechanisms	Limited primary studies; minimal Muslim and Indonesian representation
13	Patel & Kumar	Culturally situated assessment of	Conceptual; immanent critique	Indian women (Hindu)	Proposed Agency Gradient,	Conceptual and not

	(2026b)	spiritual bypass among Indian women			Functional Directionality, and Archetypal Identification vs. Individuation	empirically tested; Hindu rather than Muslim context
14	Sabki et al. (2025)	Psychometric validation of Malay Brief RCOPE	Quantitative; EFA	144 Malaysian Muslim university students	Malay Brief RCOPE validly measures positive and negative religious coping	Does not measure spiritual bypass; focuses on religious coping generally
15	Ayun, Taufik, & Ruhaena (2024)	Religious coping and psychological distress	Scoping review	University students (Indonesian literature)	Religious coping generally associated with lower psychological distress	Does not discuss dysfunctional or defensive religious coping

Source: Synthesized by the author from the studies reviewed.

Research Gap and Original Contribution

Three major research gaps emerge from the synthesis in Table 1. First, a population gap: among the fifteen studies reviewed, only one quantitative study (Ahmad et al., 2023) and one mediation study (Kasapoğlu, 2026) explicitly addressed Muslim populations. Both were conducted outside Indonesia, in sociocultural contexts that differ from Indonesia as the world's largest Muslim-majority country. Second, a conceptual gap: Islamic psychology literature on dhikr, sabr, and tawakkul (Sabki et al., 2025; Ayun et al., 2024; Nurul Alfi Laili & Haryanto, 2018; Bensaid et al., 2021) consistently emphasizes their adaptive functions without exploring whether premature, socially imposed, or emotionally unprocessed use may constitute spiritual bypass. Third, an instrument gap: no adaptation of the Spiritual Bypass Scale into Indonesian, or comparable instrument developed emically from the values of Indonesian Islam, was identified. Such an instrument could specifically accommodate concepts such as sabr, ikhlas, ridha, and tawakkul.

These gaps establish the article's original contribution as an initial conceptual effort to connect the rapidly growing international literature on spiritual bypass with the rich field of Islamic psychology, which has not yet critically examined the potential dysfunction of spirituality. The article does not seek to replace positive understandings of Islamic spirituality, but to complement them with a more balanced and critically

reflective perspective, consistent with recent calls for cultural sensitivity in interpreting spiritual bypass (Kasapoğlu, 2026; Motiño et al., 2021; Patel & Kumar, 2026b).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is built on three main theoretical foundations. First, Welwood's (1984) transpersonal theory views spiritual bypass as a psychological defense that emerges when individuals use spiritual ideas to bypass emotional developmental tasks that need to be addressed. Second, Fox, Cashwell, and Picciotto's (2017) two-dimensional Spiritual Bypass Scale-13 distinguishes Psychological Avoidance and Spiritualizing as two operational pathways of spiritual bypass. Third, Pargament's (1997) religious coping theory distinguishes positive religious coping, characterized by collaborative and integrative meaning-making with God in the face of life difficulties, from negative religious coping, characterized by passive surrender or avoidance of personal responsibility. These theories are integrated with a cultural-contextual perspective (Motiño et al., 2021; Kasapoğlu, 2026), which emphasizes that the effects of spiritual bypass are not universal but are moderated by local cultural and religious norms.

Based on this theoretical synthesis, when Muslim individuals face unresolved psychological or emotional distress—such as trauma, grief, anxiety, or personal conflict—they commonly engage in religious spiritual practices such as dhikr, prayer (salat), supplication (du'a), sabr, tawakkul, or ruqyah. Two pathways may then emerge. The first is an adaptive pathway, in which spirituality functions as positive religious coping integrated with healthy emotional processing, leading to mature emotion regulation and improved psychological well-being. The second is a defensive pathway, or spiritual bypass, in which spirituality is used prematurely or predominantly to avoid emotional processing. This pathway encompasses Psychological Avoidance and Spiritualizing and may result in emotional suppression, delayed professional help-seeking, and increased psychological distress concealed beneath an outward appearance of high religiosity.

Neither pathway is deterministic. Both are moderated by contextual factors, including religious literalism (the extent to which religious teachings are interpreted literally without personal reflection), mental health stigma in Muslim communities, social and religious-community support, and theological understandings of qada and qadar (divine decree). Figure 1 presents this framework schematically.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Spiritual Bypass in Muslim Religious Practices

UNRESOLVED PSYCHOLOGICAL / EMOTIONAL DISTRESS **(trauma, grief, anxiety, personal conflict, existential crisis)**	
↓	↓
MUSLIM RELIGIOUS SPIRITUAL PRACTICES	

(dhikr, salat, supplication, sabr, tawakkul, ruqyah)	
CONTEXTUAL MODERATORS: religious literalism; mental health stigma; social/religious-community support; theological understanding of qada and qadar; access to psychological services	
ADAPTIVE PATHWAY **Positive Religious Coping (Pargament, 1997)** **Spirituality integrated with emotional processing**	**DEFENSIVE PATHWAY** **Spiritual Bypass (Welwood, 1984; Fox et al., 2017)** **Psychological Avoidance & Spiritualizing**
↓ | ↓	
Healthy emotion regulation; integration of meaning; improved psychological well-being	

The framework emphasizes that spiritual bypass is not an inherent property of a particular act of worship; rather, it concerns how individuals use that practice in responding to psychological distress. The same dhikr, sabr, or tawakkul may function adaptively for one person and defensively for another, depending on whether it accompanies—or replaces—authentic emotional processing. This distinction is important for counseling interventions that do not stigmatize Islamic spirituality as a whole, but help clients differentiate healthy spiritual engagement from avoidant use.

DISCUSSION

Referring to the proposed framework, several worship practices in Muslim life may become vulnerable to spiritual bypass when they are not accompanied by adequate emotional processing. Dhikr, for example, has been empirically associated with reduced anxiety and increased inner tranquility. However, when performed solely as a way to "shut down" negative feelings, without allowing individuals to acknowledge and validate their emotions, dhikr may shift from healthy emotion regulation toward Psychological Avoidance as described in the SBS-13 (Fox et al., 2017).

A similar pattern may occur in relation to sabr and tawakkul. Both are core Islamic values that theologically guide individuals to accept Allah's decree with an open heart. Nevertheless, as Kasapoğlu (2026) found in the Turkish context, surrender to Allah's will that is not accompanied by active engagement in resolving problems—psychologically, socially, or medically—may become Spiritualizing. In this pattern, life problems are interpreted exclusively through a spiritual lens, reducing the perceived need to process their emotional effects fully. Ahmad et al. (2023) also showed that spiritual bypass may moderate the relationship between religious coping and psychological distress in Muslim communities. This suggests that the extent and manner in which religious coping is used determine whether its effects are protective or conceal underlying distress.

Another dimension requiring attention is the interaction between spiritual bypass and mental health stigma in Muslim communities. Fox, Picciotto, Cashwell, and

Worthington (2020) found that high religious commitment and certain views of God were associated with spiritual bypass and influenced psychological and medical help-seeking. In Muslim contexts, this finding is relevant to the tendency—reported in clinical observations and anecdotal accounts—for some individuals to postpone consulting psychologists or psychiatrists because they believe their problems can be resolved simply by drawing closer to Allah. Patel and Kumar's (2026a) meta-ethnographic synthesis, which included Muslim American participants, reinforces this concern by showing that social-structural mechanisms within religious communities, including pressure to become "sincere" or "move on" immediately, may perpetuate spiritual bypass rather than encourage comprehensive psychological resolution.

Nevertheless, these findings should not be generalized to suggest that Muslim worship practices are inherently maladaptive. As Motiño et al. (2021) and Kasapoğlu (2026) indicate, in societies where religiosity is high and socially integrated, patterns that appear to be "avoidance" from a Western-individualistic perspective may function as culturally legitimate and even adaptive short-term emotion-regulation strategies. Islamic psychology literature (Sabki et al., 2025; Ayun et al., 2024; Nurul Alfi Laili & Haryanto, 2018) consistently reports positive associations between religious coping and psychological well-being. An overly broad generalization about the "danger" of Islamic spirituality would therefore risk reducing the complexity of this phenomenon.

The practical implications point to the need for counseling approaches that are spiritually integrated yet critically reflective. Motivational interviewing adapted to address spiritual bypass (Clarke, Giordano, Cashwell, & Lewis, 2013) offers an initial reference. Rather than rejecting a client's spiritual beliefs, counselors can help clients explore ambivalence between spiritual convictions and unresolved psychological needs. In the Indonesian Muslim context, this approach requires further adaptation to local values such as sabr, ikhlas, ridha, and tawakkul. Counselors can then help clients distinguish authentic spiritual engagement from defensive spiritual engagement without compromising sensitivity to their religious commitments.

CONCLUSION

This narrative literature review shows that the concept of spiritual bypass has developed substantially in international transpersonal psychology, from its initial formulation in Western-Christian contexts (Welwood, 1984; Fox et al., 2017) to cross-cultural extensions in Catholic Brazil, Hindu India, and, to a limited extent, Muslim contexts (Ahmad et al., 2023; Kasapoğlu, 2026). However, research explicitly connecting spiritual bypass with Islamic religious practices—particularly among Indonesian Muslims—remains very limited. Islamic psychology literature on dhikr, sabr, and tawakkul generally emphasizes their protective functions without examining their possible dysfunctional use as psychological avoidance mechanisms.

Based on a synthesis of fifteen previous studies, this article identifies three major research gaps: population, conceptualization, and measurement. The proposed integrative framework positions spiritual bypass as one of two possible pathways through which individuals respond to psychological distress using religious spiritual practices. The adaptive and defensive pathways are moderated by religious literalism, mental health stigma, social support, and theological understandings of divine decree.

As a narrative review, this article is limited by the absence of primary empirical data and by a literature-selection process that was not fully systematic in the manner of a PRISMA review. Its conclusions are therefore conceptual and require further empirical testing. Future research should: (1) develop and validate an Indonesian Spiritual Bypass Scale that accommodates Islamic concepts such as sabr, ikhlas, ridha, and tawakkul; (2) conduct phenomenological qualitative studies with Indonesian Muslims who have directly experienced spiritual bypass; and (3) empirically test the proposed framework through quantitative or mixed-methods designs. In this way, Islamic psychology can continue to develop critically and reflectively while maintaining respect for the spiritual values that form the foundation of Muslim life.

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