

The Melukat Culture in Bali as an Effective Coping Strategy for Dealing with Anxiety

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Abstract. This research aims to explore the role of the Melukat culture in Bali as an effective coping strategy for dealing with anxiety. Anxiety is a common emotional experience faced by many individuals in their daily lives. The Melukat culture in Bali holds deep spiritual value and has been an integral part of Balinese society for centuries. This study applies a narrative literature review type literature study method to five reference sources indexed in Google Scholar with a span of the last ten years. Melukat is a spiritual cleansing ritual deeply rooted in Balinese culture. It involves prayer, meditation, and sacred practices believed to offer psychological benefits. This practice not only serves as a religious act but is hypothesized to alleviate anxiety and foster emotional well-being.

Keywords: Culture, Coping, Anxiety, Melukat

1 Introduction

In modern society, anxiety has become a widespread issue, with around 8 million cases in Indonesia alone in 2018, a number that continues to rise annually [1]. Anxiety, a normal response to perceived threats, can lead to negative emotions [2], and although it heightens awareness of potential dangers, excessive anxiety harms physical and mental health [3].

Bali is known as a place with well-preserved traditions and culture and has a high level of tolerance for various religions, thus providing freedom for people of all religions to be accepted with hospitality [4]. In Bali, Indonesia, melukat, a cultural practice, is widely used to address anxiety. This spiritual cleansing ritual, which involves bathing in sacred water sources such as rivers or springs, is not only a form of physical cleansing but also a way to purify the mind and soul from negative energies that contribute to emotional distress [5]. The term "melukat," derived from "sulukat" meaning purification, is led by a traditional leader [6].

While Bali maintains a cultural stigma surrounding mental health, preventing some individuals from seeking medical treatment, melukat serves as a form of social and spiritual support. It reflects Balinese Hindu beliefs and is increasingly popular among both locals and tourists, offering a blend of religious activity and spiritual tourism [7]. This article explores how melukat functions as an effective coping strategy, addressing its spiritual, psychological, and social benefits for individuals facing anxiety.

2 Method

The narrative literature review approach is used to analyze previously published articles, avoid plagiarism, and explore new areas within the field that have yet to be investigated. This study uses a narrative literature review methodology to identify and summarize existing research, avoiding duplications and exploring new areas not yet addressed (Ferrari, 2015). The focus is on "Melukat as an Effective Coping for Anxiety." The research examines studies conducted by various scholars on similar topics. Data is primarily collected from the Google Scholar database.

3 Anxiety and coping strategies

Anxiety is a negative emotion involving fear, physical symptoms like rapid heartbeat, sweating, and difficulty breathing, and concerns about future dangers [8]. It is often associated with feelings of worry, fear, and stress, which can vary in intensity [9]. Gunarsa (1989) defines it as unclear stress, and Kartini (1981) adds it involves fear and uncertainty with negative impacts [10], [11]. Anxiety can be cognitive (restlessness, fear of future events) or somatic (physical symptoms like dizziness) [9]. Excessive anxiety can affect daily life, causing psychosomatic issues such as muscle tension and cardiovascular problems [12]. According to Patimah et al. (2015), anxiety triggers the sympathetic nervous system, altering bodily responses [13]. The research of Dordinejad et al. (2011), concluded that severe anxiety has potential harm to the mental and physical health of the individual. Therefore, it is important to develop the right strategies to deal with it in the face of excessive anxiety [14].

Coping strategies are deliberate efforts to manage stress, either by focusing on the problem (problem-focused coping) or emotional responses (emotion-focused coping) [15]. This coping strategy is used strategically to manage, accept, tolerate, and overcome stress or changes that occur in daily life that can be used to reduce stress and demands that cause stress [16]. This view is also reinforced by Friedman (1998) who stated that coping strategies are individual behaviours in adapting to conflicts or pressures faced [17]. Problem-focused strategies aim to reduce anxiety by changing the situation, while emotion-focused strategies help control emotional reactions through social support or activities like sports [18], [19], [20].

4 The history and meaning of melukat culture

Melukat culture in Bali, rooted in Hinduism, emphasizes water's spiritual and physical healing properties, and has become part of "tirtha tourism" or "melukat tourism," reflecting changing attitudes toward water [25]. Reverence for nature, as practiced in traditional societies, sees water as vital for life and purification (Soemardjo, 2002). In Hinduism, melukat is a ritual for spiritual cleansing, believed to purify negative influences and achieve balance with nature, gods, and ancestors [26].

The cultural significance of melukat in Bali reflects the concepts of cleanliness and harmony in Hinduism. The holy or spring water used in melukat is believed to possess sacred powers, capable of purifying physical and spiritual impurities [27]. Melukat also expels negative energy, enhances spiritual connection with gods, and promotes mental tranquility (Suatama, 2021) [28].

4.1 The culture of melukat in relation to anxiety

Melukat is a spiritual cleansing ritual in Bali, involving bathing in sacred water to purify the mind, body, and soul from negative energies such as anxiety and emotional disturbances [29]. Melukat is a religious tradition of the Hindu community in Bali, which is part of the Tirtayatra

ritual [30]. Although this tradition is a religious activity for Hindu followers, Hindu priests do not prohibit anyone who wants to participate in the melukat ritual [31]. Consequently, the tradition's popularity has increased, as it is accessible to everyone and practiced not only by Hindu followers but also by visiting tourists.

This is evident from the increased visits of tourists interested in melukat activities at Pura Dalem Pingit, Desa Pakraman, Sebatu Gianyar, as tourists actively participate from the beginning in the melukat process and not just as spectators. This melukat activity is suitable for those who want a momentary break from the hustle and bustle of the city for refreshment and healing [32]. After performing this ritual, tourists will feel refreshed and calm. The melukat ritual is done through prayer and contemplation while listening to stories from nature, which will immerse visitors in a solemn atmosphere. Currently, the concept of melukat has two understandings: first, as a mandatory ritual that requires prayer ceremonies and Hindu priests at specific times, and second, as a tourist attraction that always involves appropriate offerings and priests on duty [33].

Therefore, melukat can be an effective coping strategy in dealing with anxiety. This practice not only provides space to divert attention from worries and troubling thoughts, but also creates a calming experience and strengthens social and spiritual connections. Melukat is not only a religious ritual but also holds psychological value. It helps reduce anxiety by cleansing the body, mind, and soul, promoting relaxation and calming restless thoughts [24]. This practice serves as a form of meditation, allowing individuals to redirect focus from troubling thoughts and achieve emotional healing [7]. Melukat also helps individuals overcome feelings of guilt or regret, offering a way to seek forgiveness for past mistakes and alleviating psychological burdens [22].

Furthermore, it strengthens social bonds by creating solidarity and emotional support, especially during communal ceremonies that involve singing, dancing, and prayers, which enhance connections with others and the spiritual world [22]. Through a combination of psychological and social aspects, melukat culture provides a comprehensive approach in dealing with anxiety. This practice not only allows individuals to calm their minds and bodies, but also facilitates spiritual growth and strengthens social bonds. In the context of Balinese society, melukat is regarded as an element related to their daily life and the culture they adhere to.

5 Conclusion

The melukat tradition in Bali offers a unique coping strategy for anxiety. While there is no direct scientific evidence linking melukat to anxiety reduction, it provides an emotionally healing experience, offering a retreat from stress and an opportunity to connect with nature and achieve peace of mind. Originally a Hindu religious practice, melukat now attracts both Hindus and tourists seeking spiritual experiences. Future research should explore its psychological and physiological impacts, comparing it with other anxiety-reduction methods and conducting cross-cultural analyses for broader insights. Melukat combines spirituality, nature, and meditation, promoting inner peace and strengthening the connection with the universe, making it an intriguing alternative for those seeking tranquility in a high-pressure world.

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