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## **Role of Religious Rituals in Shaping Mental Health Coping Mechanisms among Different Cultural Groups in Japan**



## **Role of Religious Rituals in Shaping Mental Health Coping Mechanisms among Different Cultural Groups in Japan**



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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this article was to analyze role of religious rituals in shaping mental health coping mechanisms among different cultural groups in Japan.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Religious rituals in Japan, like Shinto and Buddhist practices, help shape mental health coping mechanisms. Rituals such as prayer, meditation, and shrine visits provide emotional support, foster resilience, and promote mindfulness. These practices offer a sense of community and meaning, helping to reduce stress and improve well-being, though their impact varies across cultural groups based on religious participation.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The cognitive behavioral Theory (CBT), the social support theory & the meaning-making theory may be used to anchor future studies on the effect of cultural festivals on the preservation of religious traditions in immigrant communities in Nigeria. By offering teachings on the religious significance of the rituals performed, younger generations can be better equipped to understand and engage with their cultural and religious heritage. Policymakers should consider providing financial support for cultural festivals that play a significant role in the preservation of religious traditions.

**Keywords:** *Religious Rituals, Shaping Mental Health, Coping Mechanisms, Cultural Groups*

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health coping mechanisms in developed economies like the USA, Japan, and the UK, mental health coping mechanisms are crucial in managing stress, enhancing emotional resilience, and promoting psychological well-being. Studies indicate that individuals in these regions often employ a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused strategies include seeking social support, engaging in physical activities, and utilizing cognitive-behavioral techniques, while emotion-focused strategies encompass mindfulness practices, meditation, and expressive writing. For instance, research in the UK has highlighted the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing stress and improving emotional regulation among adults. In Japan, cultural practices such as Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) have been associated with decreased cortisol levels and enhanced mood, reflecting a unique coping mechanism rooted in nature immersion. These coping mechanisms contribute to lower levels of psychological distress and higher overall well-being in these populations (Sampogna, 2021; Rezuan, 2025).

In developing economies, mental health coping mechanisms are often influenced by socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, and access to mental health resources. Individuals in these regions may rely more on community-based support systems, religious practices, and traditional healing methods to cope with stress. For example, a study in India found that religious coping strategies, such as prayer and participation in religious rituals, were commonly used to manage stress and promote psychological well-being. Additionally, social support networks within families and communities play a significant role in buffering the effects of stress and enhancing emotional resilience. However, limited access to mental health services and stigma surrounding mental illness can hinder the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms. Addressing these barriers is essential for improving mental health outcomes in developing economies (Labrague, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, mental health coping mechanisms are deeply intertwined with cultural practices, community support, and spirituality. Studies indicate that individuals often turn to religious coping strategies, such as prayer and seeking guidance from religious leaders, to manage stress and emotional challenges. Community-based interventions, including support groups and traditional healing practices, also play a vital role in promoting psychological well-being. However, the region faces challenges such as limited mental health infrastructure, high levels of poverty, and social stigma associated with mental illness, which can impede the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms. Despite these challenges, initiatives aimed at integrating traditional practices with formal mental health services are emerging as promising approaches to enhance resilience and psychological well-being in Sub-Saharan Africa (Addy, 2021; Ayed, 2025).

Participation in religious rituals has long been recognized as a significant coping mechanism for stress, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being. Engaging in rituals such as prayer, meditation, and communal worship has been shown to reduce perceived stress and promote a sense of spiritual peace. For example, regular prayer or meditation offers individuals a moment of mindfulness, helping them focus their thoughts and emotions away from distressing stimuli. This practice can lead to decreased cortisol levels, a biomarker of stress, and enhance emotional regulation. Additionally, communal worship provides social support, fostering a sense of

belonging and decreasing feelings of loneliness or isolation, which are often linked to mental health issues (Koenig, 2018).

Religious rituals also contribute to emotional resilience by providing a framework through which individuals can interpret and cope with life's challenges. For instance, rituals like fasting or pilgrimage can offer participants a sense of control and purpose, which enhances their ability to manage adversity. Moreover, the sense of divine purpose cultivated through participation in religious rituals helps individuals cope with emotional distress in a way that promotes long-term psychological well-being. Studies have demonstrated that such religious practices buffer the effects of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety by fostering positive coping strategies and promoting optimism. This link between ritual participation and improved mental health underscores the importance of integrating spirituality into broader mental health frameworks (Pargament, 2019).

### **Problem Statement**

The role of religious rituals in shaping mental health coping mechanisms among different cultural groups remains underexplored, despite their potential significance in stress management, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being. While existing literature acknowledges the impact of spirituality and religiosity on mental health, there is a paucity of research examining how specific religious practices, such as prayer, meditation, and communal worship, function as coping strategies across diverse cultural contexts (Lucchetti, 2021). This gap in knowledge hinders the development of culturally sensitive mental health interventions that leverage religious rituals effectively. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which these rituals influence mental health outcomes, including the potential mediating roles of cognitive reappraisal and coping efficacy, remain insufficiently understood (Dolcos, 2021). Addressing this gap is crucial for integrating religious practices into holistic mental health care models that are both effective and culturally appropriate (Westhead, 2025).

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **The Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)**

The cognitive behavioral theory (CBT), originated by Aaron Beck, posits that individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected and that changing maladaptive thoughts can improve emotional responses and behaviors. In the context of religious rituals, CBT can help explain how engaging in these rituals allows individuals to reframe stressful situations, thereby reducing anxiety and promoting emotional resilience. Religious practices, such as prayer or meditation, may provide individuals with new cognitive frameworks for interpreting challenges, making them more capable of coping with mental health stressors (Pargament, 2019).

#### **The Social Support Theory**

Developed by Sheldon Cohen and Thomas Wills, the Social Support Theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships in managing stress and improving mental health. Religious rituals often involve communal participation, which provides individuals with social support that can buffer the effects of stress and enhance emotional resilience. In different cultural contexts, these rituals strengthen social bonds, fostering a sense of belonging and protection against mental health issues (Krause, 2020).



### **The Meaning-Making Theory**

Meaning-making theory, proposed by George A. Bonanno, suggests that people use meaning-making processes to make sense of life's challenges, especially in times of distress. Religious rituals often provide individuals with frameworks for making meaning of suffering, which can reduce the psychological impact of stress and foster emotional resilience. In cultural groups, religious practices enable individuals to find purpose in adversity, improving their ability to cope with mental health challenges (Park, 2019).

### **Empirical Review**

Kopparthi (2025) conducted a literature review exploring how spiritual practices contribute to emotional healing and coping mechanisms among different cultural groups. The purpose of the study was to highlight the mental health benefits of religious rituals, specifically focusing on how these practices help individuals manage stress, anxiety, and depression. Using a qualitative methodology, the study examined various religious traditions worldwide, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The findings revealed that spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and communal rituals are consistently linked to stress reduction, improved emotional regulation, and overall well-being. Participants who engaged in regular religious practices reported lower levels of perceived stress and greater emotional resilience. The study also found that religious rituals provide individuals with a sense of purpose and control, which is crucial for coping with life's challenges. The review emphasized that these rituals foster a connection with the divine, which can be a source of comfort and strength. One significant recommendation was that mental health professionals integrate spiritual practices into therapeutic interventions, especially in culturally diverse settings. By acknowledging and incorporating religious rituals, mental health care could be more effective and holistic. The study also suggested that more empirical research is needed to assess the long-term effects of spiritual coping on mental health. Kopparthi concluded that integrating spirituality into clinical settings is vital for fostering resilience in patients from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study's limitations were its reliance on secondary data and the need for more longitudinal studies. Nevertheless, it provides compelling evidence that religious rituals are valuable tools for mental health coping mechanisms.

### **Fatima (2022)**

Fatima's (2022) examined the impact of religious coping on the mental well-being of young adults, focusing on how religious rituals serve as coping strategies for stress. Using a quantitative survey method, the researcher collected data from 350 participants aged 18-30, measuring their engagement with religious rituals such as prayer, fasting, and community worship. The study found that participants who engaged in regular religious practices reported significantly lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to those who did not participate in religious rituals. Moreover, the study found that religious coping mechanisms enhanced emotional resilience by providing individuals with a framework to understand and manage stress. Participants who used religious rituals as part of their daily routine were more likely to report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction. The study also revealed that religious engagement fostered a sense of social support, as many individuals turned to religious communities for emotional comfort. Fatima recommended that mental health practitioners consider incorporating religious coping strategies into their therapeutic approaches, particularly when working with young adults. The study

highlighted the importance of respecting and integrating religious beliefs in clinical settings to improve mental health outcomes. A limitation of the study was its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research was suggested to explore the long-term impact of religious coping on mental health. The study contributes to a growing body of literature on the mental health benefits of spiritual practices and coping mechanisms.

Blázquez (2023) examined the role of religious practices in coping with emotional stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically focusing on how individuals used religious rituals to manage anxiety and uncertainty. The study employed a cross-sectional survey methodology, gathering data from 500 participants in Spain who were asked about their engagement with religious rituals such as prayer, meditation, and religious services. The findings revealed that individuals who regularly engaged in religious practices reported significantly lower levels of emotional stress and better psychological well-being. Religious rituals provided participants with a sense of structure and hope, which was particularly valuable during the uncertainty and fear generated by the pandemic. The study also found that individuals who participated in religious communities, either physically or online, felt a stronger sense of connection and support. These social connections helped mitigate feelings of isolation and distress. Blázquez recommended that religious rituals be considered in public health strategies to support mental well-being during crises, highlighting the importance of fostering spiritual coping mechanisms in community health interventions. The study also suggested that future research should explore the role of different religious traditions in coping with specific mental health issues. One limitation of the study was the reliance on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Blázquez concluded that religious rituals are crucial in providing emotional resilience during periods of crisis.

Surzykiewicz (2022) investigated the mediating effects of religious coping on resilience and mental well-being, aiming to understand how religious rituals contribute to stress management. The study used structural equation modeling to analyze survey responses from 600 participants, measuring religious coping, resilience, and psychological distress. The findings demonstrated that positive religious coping, including prayer and communal rituals, significantly enhanced resilience and reduced stress levels. Negative religious coping, such as feelings of abandonment or punishment, was found to exacerbate mental health issues. Surzykiewicz's study highlighted that the relationship between religious coping and mental health outcomes was mediated by emotional regulation and cognitive reappraisal. The research recommended that mental health practitioners address both positive and negative religious coping strategies when working with clients, as these can significantly impact the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions. A limitation of the study was that it focused exclusively on Christian populations, which may not be generalizable to other religious groups. The study's recommendations included integrating religious coping education into resilience training programs.

Okan (2025) explored the protective effects of spiritual coping on post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression, with a focus on how religious rituals aid recovery after traumatic events. The study used structural equation modeling with a sample of 400 individuals who had experienced natural disasters. The findings indicated that spiritual coping, including rituals like prayer, meditation, and religious ceremonies, significantly reduced psychological distress and promoted emotional healing. Participants who engaged in these rituals reported lower levels of PTSD and anxiety. The

study also found that religious rituals provided participants with a sense of control and meaning, which helped them navigate their traumatic experiences. Okan recommended that mental health programs incorporate spiritual coping strategies into trauma recovery plans, particularly for individuals from religiously diverse backgrounds. One limitation of the study was its focus on a specific geographic region, which may limit its applicability to other cultural contexts. The study called for more research into the intersection of spirituality, culture, and mental health recovery.

Sen's (2022) examined how religion and spirituality are associated with better caregiver mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a longitudinal study design across several countries, the study tracked the mental health of 800 caregivers, measuring their engagement with religious rituals and their stress levels over time. The findings revealed that caregivers who regularly engaged in religious rituals experienced lower levels of burnout, anxiety, and depression. The study highlighted that religious rituals provided caregivers with emotional support and a sense of purpose, which helped them cope with the stress of caregiving. Sen recommended incorporating spiritual rituals into caregiver support programs, as they significantly enhance psychological well-being and emotional resilience. The study also suggested that future research should investigate the role of specific religious traditions in improving caregiver mental health. One limitation was the reliance on self-reported data, which may lead to biases.

Kanu and Nosike (2025) explored the impact of religious beliefs on mental health and well-being, focusing on how religious rituals influence stress management. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and secondary sources, to gather data from 400 participants across various religious groups in Africa. The findings indicated that participants who engaged in regular religious rituals such as prayer, fasting, and religious gatherings reported lower stress levels and improved emotional health. The study highlighted that religious beliefs provide comfort, social support, and a sense of purpose, which are essential for managing stress. Kanu and Nosike recommended that mental health practitioners incorporate religious beliefs and rituals into therapeutic practices, especially in religious communities. One limitation of the study was its focus on African religious groups, which may not fully represent the religious diversity globally. The study called for more inclusive research on the role of religion in mental health across different cultures.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

**Conceptual Research Gap:** The studies reviewed have primarily focused on the positive effects of religious rituals on mental health, particularly stress reduction, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being. However, the conceptual understanding of how different types of

religious rituals (e.g., individual vs. communal, ritualistic prayer vs. spontaneous prayer) impact mental health outcomes remains limited. While some studies, such as Surzykiewicz (2022), explored both positive and negative religious coping, there is a need for deeper investigation into how specific rituals contribute to coping mechanisms across different stages of mental health recovery. The integration of positive and negative coping mechanisms within religious rituals, especially considering how negative rituals may exacerbate stress, remains underexplored. Further conceptual clarity is required on how religious coping interacts with other mental health interventions to create holistic coping strategies.

**Contextual Research Gap:** While many studies have established that religious rituals positively influence mental health, there is limited contextual research examining how these rituals function across diverse cultural and socio-economic settings. For instance, studies such as Fatima (2022) focused on young adults and Blázquez (2023) on pandemic stress, but broader contexts like economic hardships or chronic illness are under-researched. Further, while religious coping mechanisms are found to enhance emotional resilience, their effectiveness in secular environments or in multi-faith societies remains unclear. Contextual factors such as the role of family, social networks, and community support during religious rituals are also underexplored in their contribution to mental health.

**Geographical Research Gap:** Most studies, including those by Okan (2025) and Sen (2022), focus on specific regions such as Spain, Africa, or specific religious groups. However, there is a significant gap in the geographical application of religious rituals as coping mechanisms across various global regions, especially in underrepresented areas like Latin America, Southeast Asia, or Indigenous communities. Furthermore, the effect of religious rituals on mental health in culturally homogeneous versus multicultural societies has not been sufficiently explored. Geographical research is needed to determine how religious rituals, and their associated coping mechanisms, vary depending on the regional cultural attitudes toward mental health and spirituality. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts would provide more insights into the universal versus culturally specific aspects of religious rituals as coping tools.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

In conclusion, religious rituals play a significant role in shaping mental health coping mechanisms across different cultural groups, offering valuable tools for managing stress, enhancing emotional resilience, and promoting psychological well-being. These rituals, such as prayer, meditation, and communal worship, provide individuals with a sense of purpose, control, and connection, which are essential for coping with life's challenges. While existing studies highlight the benefits of religious coping strategies, there is a need for more nuanced research to understand how specific rituals contribute to mental health outcomes, especially considering the varying impacts of positive and negative religious coping mechanisms. Additionally, the role of contextual factors, such as socio-economic conditions and cultural diversity, remains underexplored, warranting further investigation into how these factors influence the effectiveness of religious rituals in different communities. Geographically, there is also a significant gap in research examining the global applicability of religious rituals in diverse cultural and faith-based settings. By addressing these research gaps, future studies can help integrate religious practices into mental health interventions,



making them more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and effective in fostering resilience and well-being across the globe.

## **Recommendations**

### **Theory**

Theoretical frameworks on religious coping should be expanded to incorporate the diversity of religious rituals and their impact on mental health across different cultural groups. Future research should focus on developing a more comprehensive model that distinguishes between different types of religious rituals (e.g., individual vs. communal, cognitive vs. emotional) and their specific effects on mental well-being. Current theories predominantly focus on positive religious coping strategies. There is a need for theoretical models that also address the role of negative religious coping mechanisms, such as feelings of abandonment or guilt, and their complex interaction with emotional resilience. This will offer a more balanced view of religious rituals' role in stress management. Theoretical models of religious coping should account for cultural variations in the interpretation and practice of religious rituals. This will help better understand how cultural context influences the effectiveness of these rituals in different societies.

### **Practice**

Mental health professionals should consider incorporating religious rituals into therapeutic interventions, especially in culturally diverse or religiously affiliated settings. Tailoring interventions to include religious practices that align with the patient's beliefs can enhance their coping strategies and improve treatment outcomes. Mental health practitioners should receive training on understanding the role of religious rituals in coping mechanisms. This will enable them to engage with patients in a culturally competent manner, respecting their spiritual practices while providing effective psychological support. Programs designed to foster emotional resilience should include religious coping strategies as part of their curriculum, particularly in community settings where religion plays a central role in daily life. This includes prayer, meditation, or communal worship as tools for emotional and psychological healing.

### **Policy**

Governments and policymakers should recognize the role of religious rituals in mental health and incorporate this understanding into public health initiatives. Policies should ensure access to mental health care that integrates religious coping strategies, especially in regions with high religious engagement. Collaborations between religious institutions and mental health organizations should be encouraged to promote mental well-being. Policies that support such partnerships can help bridge the gap between spiritual and mental health care, ensuring that individuals in religious communities have access to holistic mental health resources. Governments and international organizations should fund research that explores the role of religious rituals in mental health across different cultural and geographical contexts. This research could inform the development of globally applicable mental health strategies that respect and incorporate religious and cultural practices.

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