

A Qualitative Study on Belief, Perception, and Health Effects on Standing Zikr Among Thai Muslims in Nakhon Nayok Province

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Many Muslims residing in Nakhon Nayok province state the importance of Standing Zikr as a common ritual activity which has been associated with Muslims' health and wellbeing. This study aimed to explore belief, perception, and health effects regarding Standing Zikr. Fifteen Muslim participants who had been practicing Standing Zikr for at least one year were interviewed. Data was collected by conducting face-to-face in-depth interview at participants' home and analyzed using the content analysis method of qualitative analysis. Based on our result, Standing Zikr was practiced since childhood with the support of family members and Muslim coordinators well-versed in the practice Standing Zikr. Amongst our Muslim participants, they had perceived benefits on physical and mental health, with reports of improved quality of life. There were some concerns in applying Standing Zikr for religion-related exercise (e.g., comparable sensitivity between exercise and Zikr). We conclude that Standing Zikr had positive outcomes on physical and mental health, while also improving the quality of life of Muslim participants. Applying Standing Zikr had a high sensitiveness. Hence, understanding the belief, perception, and health benefits of Zikr are needed to enhance the relationship between healthcare providers and Muslim patients.

Keywords: Zikr, Standing Zikr, Muslim, belief, cross-cultural medicine, qualitative research

Introduction

Religiosity/spirituality has been connected with all dimensions of human life such as physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. Recently, many studies demonstrated that religiosity/spirituality has been associated with physical health, mental health, and optimism and negatively with pessimism, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and ego-grasping (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2007; West, 2000). Additionally, religiosity/spirituality will lead respecters to a physical, mental, and spiritual calm, peaceful and with congruence in their heart and mind. (Hinnells, 2005; Paloutzian & Park, 2014).

In Thailand, Muslims are distributed all over the country, particularly in central and southern Thailand.

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The national statistic of 2005 reported that Islam, one of common spirituality, was the second rank of popular religion in Thailand with 2.2 million people or 4.5 percent of the population, while Buddhism was the most popular religion with 46.9 million people or 94.8 percent (National Statistic Office, 2005). Six years later, a survey study found that 4.6 percent of the Thai population were Muslims, while 94.6 percent were Buddhist (National Statistic Office, 2012). Interestingly, the ratio of Muslims is likely to increase in Thai population. One of the most historic areas of Muslim community is located at Onkarak district, Nakhon Nayok Province which is 50 kilometer northeast of Bangkok. In 2009, a district survey showed that the Muslim population was 59,320 people, or 23.32 percent compared with other religions in the area.

Clearly, the percentage of the Muslim population in Onkarak district is higher than the average number of the entire country. This area has a unique ritual activity, Zikr (or “Dhikr”) which is related to their health.

Zikr is an activity of Muslim meditation for the remembrance of Allah (Syed, 2003), the founder of Islam. Muslims are able to practice Zikr in any place and at any time. Generally, Zikr has been divided to many types such as standing, sitting, and banding Zikr (Binmarakina, 2011). Muslims who believe in Zikr will practice twice a day, in the morning and evening, in any place based on their resources. Muslims in Onkarak district will sometimes practice Zikr after Prayers, meetings, weddings, and funeral ceremonies.

In this setting, Muslims practice Zikr with a unique set of posture and standing positions, generally classified as Standing Zikr. Theoretically, it will have a distinctive pattern as a band or group which is separated into a male and a female group. The steps of Zikr practice start with the prayer ceremony focusing specifically on Allah for 10 minutes. Then, they turn off the lights before practicing the next posture with standing and swinging of their arms, for approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Afterward, they will turn on the lights and finish the practice with sitting posture similar to the starting point for 10 minutes. The most fascinated part of the Zikr practice occurs during the standing. Muslims who practice Standing Zikr will stand up right with wide-based feet and continue the rhythmic swinging of their arms with the harmonic singing to Allah surrounding the area (Syed, 2003). This practice is similar to the well-known Arm Swing Exercise (ASE), an uncomplicated workout which is recommended by the Thai Health Promotion Fundamental as the means to promoting physical activity, which can be done at any time without any equipment (Division of Physical Activity Health, 2013).

Similarly, like meditation in other religions, Zikr is a form of meditation which has many health benefits. For physical health, Zikr will elicit the physiologic relaxation responded by Benson’s theory (Benson, Greenwood, & Klemchuk, 1975). These have the opposite effect of the well-known fight-or-flight response. In this state, the blood pressure is lowered, and heart rate, breathing rate, and metabolic rate are decreased (Syed, 2003). For mental health, during practice Zikr, thinking and feeling will be stated in pure mind, decreased mental and emotional negativity, independence from fatigue, agitation, anxiety, and depressive mood. Moreover, focus on breathing, relaxation while practicing and awareness on meditation will be directly emphasized with Allah without any distraction (Syed, 2003). Hence, Zikr practice is a spiritual guide leading Muslims who believe in Zikr to be closer and directly communicate with Allah. Faithfully, Muslims believe that believing in Allah will help them to avoid their suffering, disregarding any problems or illnesses. Furthermore, it will help them get stronger in their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Standing Zikr has also been recently applied as a therapeutic intervention known as Zikr therapy (Mardiyono, Songwathana, & Petpichetchian, 2011) and Islamic supplication (Hosseini, Salehi, Fallahi Khoshknab, Rokofian, & Davidson, 2013) on health outcomes. In the studies, Muslims patients undergoing

abdominal surgery applied Zikr practice required to focus on Allah. The studies found that Zikr therapy could alleviate psychological problems, preoperative anxiety (Mardiyono et al., 2011) and postoperative pain (Sitepu, 2009). The study explained that the brain will ameliorate painful feelings by blocking pain signals from the dorsal horn to the spinal cord and brain stem. These neurological processes will decrease pain signals to the brain reducing the pain perception (Sitepu, 2009). Moreover, according to genetic medicine, Zikr is one of spiritual interventions described to reduce cell proliferation in breast cancer patients by changing dopamine receptor gene expression (Akbari, Kashani, Ahangari, Pornour, Hejazi, Nooshinfar, Lotfi, & Hosseini, 2016; Hosseini, Kashani, Akbari, Akbari, & Mehr, 2016) related to the study reported that chronic stress demonstrates dopamine concentration increases leading to an inhibitory effect of T-cells which in turn expands cancer (Mancino, Ametller, Gascón, & Almendro, 2011). Thus, these studies showed that Standing Zikr is a spiritual intervention which can improve in many health outcomes.

However, there are currently minimal studies about working with Muslims in primary care, public, and global health, particularly in Zikr. In this study, the main purpose was to understand belief and perception of the Standing Zikr which affected health among Thai Muslims in Nakhon Nayok Province, Thailand.

Methods

Study Design

Investigators conducted the study through the in-depth interview which included any Muslims aged 15-year-old or over, who currently had been practicing Standing Zikr for at least one year before the date of interview and had voluntarily participated in the study. Exclusion criteria consisted any Muslims who refused to be a participant in the study or had a problem with communication such as aphasia, profound hearing impairment and language barriers.

The study was conducted from October 1st, 2014 to June 30th, 2015 in Muslim communities, primary healthcare facility of Onkarak district, Nakhon Nayok Province. Interviews for data collection were conducted after written informed consent had been provided. The interviews were conducted by an investigator who had experience in qualitative studies and no prior relationship with the participants in the participant's home.

We used an unstructured interview strategy. Open-ended questions without ordering were asked (Table 1), starting from establishing comfort in the discussion, establishing the relationship, and moving on to the central aspects of the issues related to Standing Zikr.

Table 1

Questions for Interviews

The following questions were focused to explore the answer:

Belief and perception of Standing Zikr:

1. How and when did you start to recognize and perform Standing Zikr, and who had the most influence on your Zikr belief?
2. What is your belief in Standing Zikr, and what is Standing Zikr in your perspective?
3. Are there any taboos, prohibitions, or limitations for anyone who wants to practice Standing Zikr (If yes, how)?
4. How often do you perform Standing Zikr and how?
5. During the performance of Standing Zikr, how do you feel?
6. What are your expectations from Standing Zikr practicing?

Effects of Standing Zikr on health and application:

7. Do you think that Zikr and Standing Zikr have impact on your health (If yes, how)?
8. Do you think we could apply Standing Zikr for religion-related conventional exercise (If yes, how)?

After the interviews had been completed, the contents of the interview recordings were transcribed and categorized from subsequent data analysis. Data collection was finished when the data was considered saturated, which occurred when the themes derived from the data analysis appeared repeatedly in subsequent rounds of analysis. Saturation was reached after conducting interviews with 15 participants with the average time for interviewing of 35 minutes for a participant.

Analysis and Findings

The collected interview data was analyzed via a content analysis which was conducted by repeatedly reading the data until thoroughly understanding its contents and then collecting significant or relevant statements (Bengtsson, 2016). Following this, themes were derived from the collected data. For this purpose, two researchers who were the first and second author independently extracted meaningful statements from the recorded transcripts. The statements have coded straight into themes. Then, each of theme was devised to sub-themes and grouped into more appropriate themes. Before the themes categorization, the third researcher who is Muslim deliberately ascertained an agreement which had a few statements needed to be resolved. Statements that were consistently selected were further examined. These statements were then classified into sub-themes and re-named under broader theme umbrellas. The total number of meaningful statements was 78, which were grouped into three broad themes and nine subthemes (Figure 1).

Table 2

Example of How Codes Were Translated Into Theme

Statement	Codes	Coding from researchers	The third researcher opinion	Theme categorization
“It’s very good that we have a <u>chance to exercise</u> . It makes our <u>health to be better</u> . It’s like, <u>feeling fatigue is gone</u> .” (Participant 2nd)	Opportunity to exercise Health benefit Reduced fatigue	1st author: Health benefits and impact on health	Partially resolved the statement and theme	Theme: Perceived health benefits of the Standing Zikr Subtheme: Impact on health of the Standing Zikr
		2nd author: Health benefits		

To ensure the quality of the research, the following four criteria were considered: reliability, auditability, transferability, and confirmability (Sandelowski, 1986). To ensure the reliability of the analysis, two researchers independently analyzed the data and then compared their results. These results were verified by another researcher to further ensure the reliability of the analysis. Auditability was established by analyzing the data according to the content analysis and presenting the raw data regarding each theme. Transferability in this study involved ensuring the applicability of the collected data for other similar studies. This was partially achieved by collecting data such as sex, age, education, occupation, marital status, and health information. Using the above methods for establishing reliability, transferability, and auditability, neutral results unaffected by the researchers’ prejudices or biases could be obtained. Through this process, confirmability was ensured. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at our institution (IRB No: MURA2014/509/N1). Furthermore, the paper has been written up in relation to COREQ to ensure that the paper has been reported in all of the important aspect of qualitative study (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007).

Research Team and Reflexivity

The research team of this study was composed of three researchers; the first researcher was a male family physician working in an academic hospital, Bangkok. He graduated from three-year residency training program

in Family Medicine with an experience of qualitative thesis about Muslims. He had some experiences to exam Muslim patients, but had never exposed the Standing Zikr before. The main responsibility is to conceptualize the study, interview participants, record participant's voice to audio files, and create the recorded transcripts. The second researcher was a male community physician engaging in the study setting more than 10 years. Even healthcare and community workers in the study setting had been a good relationship with him, he had never related with the Standing Zikr before. For his training, he graduated from the doctoral degree of Nottingham University in Public Health. The third researcher was a female Muslim working as a nurse practitioner in a community hospital, Onkarak district. She had been interacting with Muslims, particularly Zikr believer in the community. We understand some of the participants know her personal goals in the paper. However, she was not present at any of the interviews, to reduce any potential influence which could have had on the participant's responses. The main of her duty is to find a final agreement of statements needed to be resolved (Table 1).

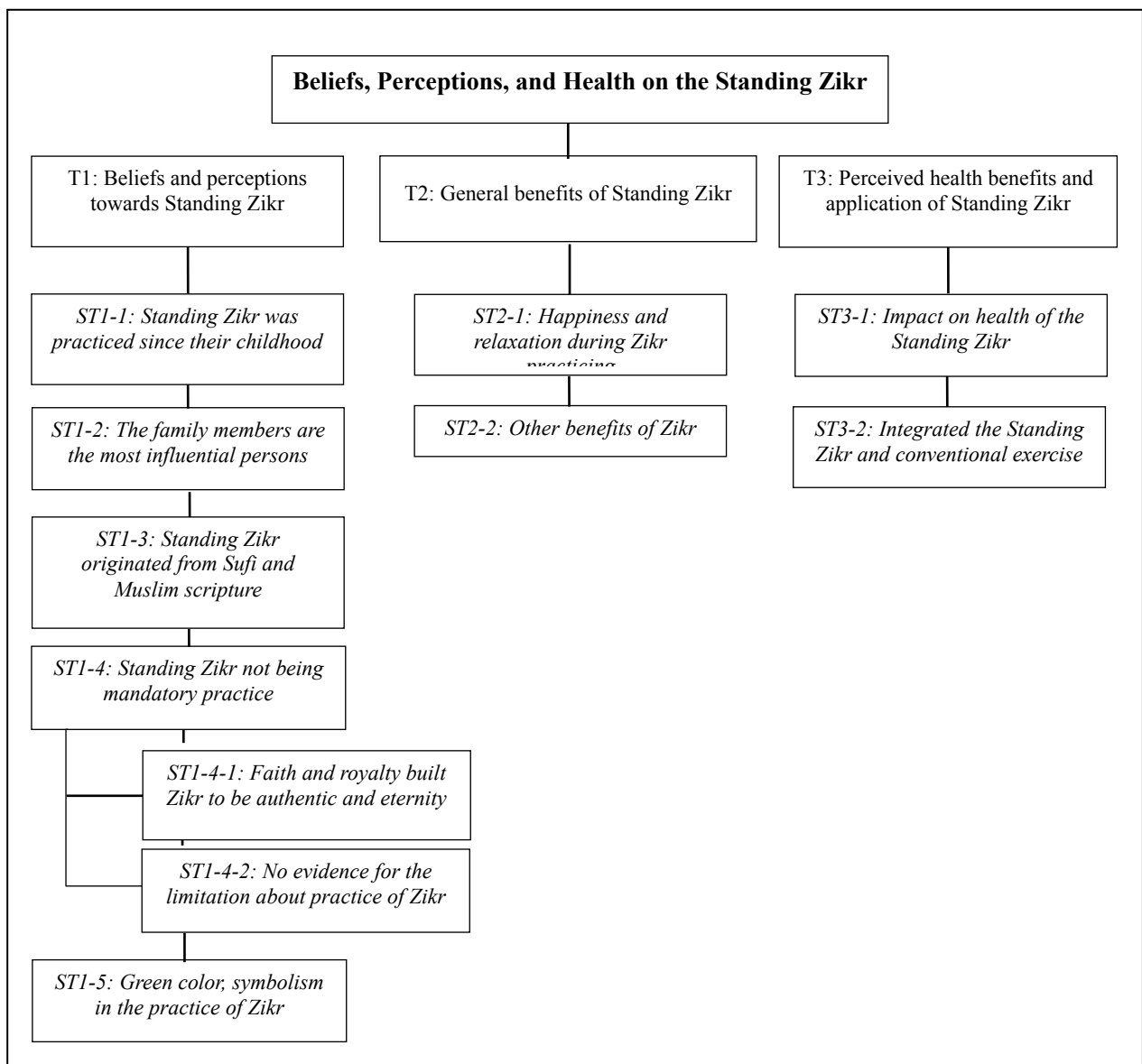


Figure 1. Coding tree.

Results

General Characteristics of the Study Participants

Fifteen participants, including seven males and eight females aged between 32 and 81 years old (mean, 69 years) were enrolled. Detailed demographic information about these participants, including as sex, age, level of education, occupation, marital status, and health information, is provided in Table 1. Among participants of the study, the majority were aged more than 60 years old, originally were Muslim since birth, graduated from elementary school, married, having a chronic disease and regular exercise.

Table 3

General Characteristics of the Study Participants

ID	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital status	Chronic disease	Regular exercise
1	Female	79	Elementary school	Farmer	Married	Yes	Yes
2	Male	87	Elementary school	Farmer	Married	Yes	Yes
3	Female	60	Elementary school	Unemployment	Married	Yes	No
4	Male	39	High school	Own business	Married	Yes	No
5	Female	45	Bachelor degree	Professional	Married	No	No
6	Female	74	Elementary school	Farmer	Married	Yes	Yes
7	Male	63	Elementary school	Own business	Married	Yes	Yes
8	Female	80	Elementary school	Unemployment	Widowhood	Yes	Yes
9	Male	67	Elementary school	Own business	Married	Yes	No
10	Female	87	Elementary school	Own business	Widowhood	Yes	No
11	Female	60	Elementary school	Unemployment	Married	No	Yes
12	Male	70	Elementary school	Unemployment	Married	Yes	Yes
13	Male	81	High school	Ritual teacher	Married	Yes	Yes
14	Female	78	Elementary school	Ritual teacher	Married	Yes	Yes
15	Male	65	Elementary school	Ritual teacher	Married	Yes	Yes

T1: Beliefs and Perceptions Towards Standing Zikr

ST1-1 Standing Zikr was practiced since their childhood. In the participant population, they mostly started to practice Standing Zikr since childhood with 85.7, 75, and 80 percent in male, female, and both groups, respectively. Most participants remembered the Standing Zikr since they were young and sleeping on the baby bed at home. For example, one participants demonstrated:

Since I was born. I remember that I was sleeping in a cradle and I heard my mom sang “lah-e-lah lah-e-lah-lah”.
(Participant 3rd)

In this study, there was some Muslims who had not exposed this activity before until their life status were changed such as marriage with a Muslim who has been practicing Zikr. These gave an opportunity to some inexperienced Muslims to get automatically closer in Zikr practicing. For example, one participant stated:

For me, when I was a kid, I heard from somebody said there was something weird about the standing and body shaking performance which was called the Dance of Arab. I did not understand, had no interest and not even glance at it, just indeed laughing. Until one day, I got married for only seven days, my grandfather’s wife had died. Then, the Standing Zikr was performed for his funeral at this home. That was the first time I recognized authentic Zikr... (Participant 4th)

ST1-2 Some of the family members are the most influential persons on Zikr believing. Many participants of the study were mostly influenced by some of their family members or relatives, more than ritual

teachers and themselves with 46.7, 33.3, and 20 percent, respectively. They were likely to practice Standing Zikr followed by the most respected person in their family. For example, one participant stated:

Since I was born, my parents had performed Zikr. So, I started to practice it too. We followed my grandparent to practice “Zikr Arab”. (Participant 6th)

ST1-3 Standing Zikr originated and applied from Sufi and Muslim scripture. Some explained that the Standing Zikr was established by Sufi who has always been focusing on getting closer to Allah. Moreover, Muslims who practice Zikr believe that Standing Zikr has a clear evidence from Al-Quran and insist that anybody is able to literally take proof from it. For example, one participant stated:

Zikr, Al-Quran was written about whether do we stand as a circular band or not? It wrote that (picked a book and read) all of Muslim whose remembrance of Allah in standing, sitting and sleeping in one’s side condition can do it. As the same as the prayer ceremony, if you are unable to standing, you can be sitting. If you are unable to sit, you can lay down and do it. (Participant 13th)

ST1-4 Standing Zikr not being mandatory practice. Mostly, participants recognized that the Standing Zikr is an optional ceremony for Muslims who prefer to get closer to their god. It is not a mandate ritual activity of Islam. However, when you practice Zikr, it will definitely be a good deed.

You have no need to do. It is not your sin. But when you practice, it would be your advantage in the forthcoming days... (Participant 3rd)

ST1-4-1 Faith and royalty built Zikr to be authentic and eternity. Muslims who devote themselves in order to be able to practice Zikr, need to follow the rules and conditions which was nothing changing from the past through the present, particularly the posture and performance of Standing Zikr with many reasons as follow.

(1) Children and youths are commonly influenced to pledge themselves to be a member of Zikr believers by their parents and/or a hierarchy person of their family. The most hierarchy person of each family such as parent or an elder, tends to persuade their offspring and family members to get a green fabric which is a symbolic of Zikr believers from the ritual leader, with generation to the next generation. For example, one participant stated:

When my grandchildren studied grade two in the elementary school, I led them to get a green fabric. My all of twelve grandchildren got their green fabrics. Just remained only two who did not get it right now, but I will let them go to get it soon. (Participant 14th)

(2) Yearly, Muslims who are Zikr believers not only in the study area but also entire the country will assemble to make merits together at the center of Zikr believers (Figure 1). This is the most important festival ceremony of the year which would be held after Ramadan as Islam’s calendar. All Muslims who practice Zikr from all over the country will join for making merits and practicing Standing Zikr together at the center of Zikr believers, so-called “Ban Yai (a big house)” in Bangkok. This is the homeland of ritual leader who is the most respected person among Zikr believers.

(3) A group of ritual experts and the committee has entitled to check, correct, and maintain the Zikr principle. Whenever they are notified that somebody or some group who has been trying to change, violating or practicing differently from the principle, they will considerably eliminate those persons out of the member of the Zikr believers.

We have a group of people who has a main duty to maintain and preserve our knowledge and fundamental principle of Zikr for consistency and sustainability. If anybody who does not follow our practice, they are not our alliance.... (Participant 4th)

(4) Anybody who wishes to be a ritual teacher and student of Standing Zikr must specifically accept and be approved from the ritual leader. Investigators noticed that when participation in the study was not sure and not be able to answer about Standing Zikr, they were likely to refuse for answering and suggesting to ask experts who were approved for teaching by the ritual leader. The main reason was that they scared to tell something wrong about Zikr which could jeopardize their life. Similarly, anybody who desires to study Standing Zikr must have to approve from the ritual leader whether the person is sincere to be a student.

(5) Feeling pride and prestige to be a Muslim who has a unique symbol and principle. They believe that Zikr is one of the most specific activity of Islam which will bring them to get closest to their God during alive. The process of admission is difficulty. Applicant must show their physically and mentally performance to the ritual leader to get an admission. They must to be summoned and pledged before getting a green sacred fabric, a symbol of Zikr believer from the ritual leader. When they are given an approval, they will be able to be a student and study in the core principle of Zikr. Therefore every Muslims who pass to be ritual students will be pride, joyful, and happy similarly passing an exam in the famous university.

We have to study to be specialized in this field. Similarly, you are a doctor, you need to wear a white coat. Soldier have to wear a dark green suit. It is a symbol... (Participant 3rd)

ST1-4-2 No apparently evidence for the limitation about practice of Zikr. Many participants stated that they had never found any taboo or limitation of Zikr practicing. They thought that anybody is able to practice Zikr without any restriction. Moreover, most of the participants believe that there is no literal evidence to record which characteristics or any specific persons who are not able to practice Zikr in Quran. However, there are some concerns for Muslims whether they are able to practice Zikr. These regulations look similar to Prayer ceremony. For example,

(1) Pure and clean entire body and mind. Before any Muslims are going to practice Zikr, they will have to make sure that their physical and emotional state are not tainted or contaminated by any flaws and ready to practice Zikr with pure heart and mind. Anyone who ignore the rule, they will have to face something horrific. For example, one participant told:

For me, when I had a period but did not tell anyone. Then, I went out to practice Zikr. Unbelievable, sticky rice streamed on clay pot at the stove immediately exploded and shattered all around... (Participant 6th)

(2) Do not practice Zikr during Ramadan. Some participants mentioned about prohibition of Zikr that they will not practice Zikr during Ramadan period because Zikr practice needs to burn lots of energy. Therefore it might not be proper to practice on the holy month.

(3) During Standing Zikr practicing, it is courteous and good etiquette to respect each other. Standing Zikr is a kind of meditation. Bothering each other during Standing Zikr practicing could lead other people distraction and ruin their concentration.

(4) Gender separation during Zikr practicing. Some participants mentioned about gender separation among male and female band that there is no literally record about gender separation during Zikr practice. However, they are supposed to do to prevent sexual harassment. Moreover, it is also the way to maintain the

discipline of ritual ceremony.

(5) Arguing among participants about whether female Muslims are able to practice the standing Zikr. Some participants stated that no clear evidence showed whether females are able to do the Standing Zikr, even in the Quran. Most of the participants believed that females are able to practice because there are no literal recordings in the ritual book or scripture. However, some participants concerned about etiquette issues.

ST1-5 Green color, symbolism in the practice of Zikr. Before Muslims become a member of Zikr believer, they must swear and faith with their own a green fabric which was given on the orientation by the ritual leader with strictly keeping promises to ultimately protect their cloth forever. A green fabric is one of a representative symbol of the group. They believe that whenever anyone neglect their promises, they would be cursed and would face something terrible in their life. For example, one participant expressed:

... One day, I met somebody who missed their promises. After she was giving birth, she applied a green fabric to be a diaper. After that, she got convulsion and fell from her bed with a lot of scratch wound on her body. Actually, she respected the sacred fabric but she did not follow her promises. Finally, she suffered from her misfortune. It's a truth. There was nobody to tell me, I saw her with my eyes. (Participant 6th)

Moreover, Muslims who practice the Standing Zikr will apply green color with their belongings to be the symbol of Zikr believer such as a green Muslim hat (Kufi). They believed that green color implies as the paradise, immortal and eternity. In usual, they dress and apply it when they have an important ceremony such as weddings, funerals, or making a merits. For example, one participant stated:

Regarding the Standing Zikr, green color is shown an alive. Yellow is shown almost died, isn't it? When you notice leaves on a tree, if it becomes yellow, it means almost fall from a tree, but green is always alive, no death, it is the color of alive. But, yellow color on a tree is going to be die. It is almost a time to cut it out, right? (Participant 3rd)

T2: General Benefits of Standing Zikr

T2-1 Happiness and relaxation during Zikr practicing. All of the participants totally agreed that Standing Zikr made them feel prosperous, happy, and relaxed because they believed that this ceremony is the best way to bring them to stay close to their God. Moreover, Zikr allows them to concentrate during the moving of their body as an exercise and meditation at the same time. For example, two participants expressed:

I felt like my hairs were standing up, my body was floating in the air. I can imagine on that moments. I had my feeling like endorphin was releasing...The Prayer has just five minutes but Zikr spends an hour. It made me boost my energy up, feel likes crying. (Participant 4th)

It makes me stronger and looked like when we exercise, we'll do it properly and see how much we could tolerate for it. If we feel unhealthy, we will slowly increase tone and follow with others. Somebody had shown loss of themselves during the standing Zikr. Somebody continue to do whilst others stopped....Continue to do the standing Zikr and let other people think we are crazy, that is great! (Participant 13th)

T2-2 Benefits of Zikr beyond relaxation and happiness. Participants believed that beyond relaxation and happiness, there were several advantages from the standing Zikr as follow.

(1) To collect merits. Merit is a kind of good deed. One of the main reasons for Zikr practicing is to collect merits for the next life. In addition, many participants compare Zikr with a quantitative measurement that Zikr will provide uncountable merits to them increasingly as much as the number of practicing.

(2) To get forgiveness from God. When they made something mistakes and had felt guilty, they hoped that Zikr will closely stay and summon with God in order to ask forgiveness. Moreover, they also hope that Zikr has

not only provided mercifulness to them but also their relatives.

(3) For the next life. In common, Muslims strongly believe that the next life is real. Zikr practicing is a practical ceremony to get closer with their God during the life on the earth. When they die, their spirit will be back with their God who had created them to live on the earth. Merits which collect in this life will be effectively transferred to the next life as well.

(4) To fulfill one's wishes. In usual, before they completely finish from practicing Zikr, they will pray and ask Allah to fulfill their wishes. For example, one participant demonstrated:

I do always ask Allah to be healthy, having money and good luck. When I got a severe illness, I asked Allah to let me have a good death, not much of suffering. When Allah promises, he won't deny our pray... (Participant 10th)

(5) To predict our fortune. Some participants believe that when they practice Zikr regularly, they are able to predict their future for their own awareness and preparation. For example, one participant stated:

When we drive a car, we are able to do Zikr. For example, my friend's son, he is a teacher. He practices Zikr and tried to check himself during his driving every single minutes. Now, he is able to predict his fortune where could possibly have an accident. So, he could alert himself before it happen. (Participant 3rd)

(6) To be healthy. Many participants believe that Zikr practicing could make them healthier, as well as a kind of remedy. Investigators will provide the detail in the next theme (See at T3).

(7) Emotional maturity. Zikr practicing is a kind of Muslim's meditation. They believe that it could provide them peace and easily help control their emotion. For example, one participant demonstrated:

In the past, I was an aggressive and hot temper person. I had many terrible experiences from my workings. When I found Zikr, it made me steady and calm. I was testified by Allah to control myself, get over it. (Participant 4th)

(8) Social acceptance. Some participants perceive that Zikr practicing allows them to meet and discuss ritual issues with many famous people in Islamic society. These will make them feel proud to get acceptance from others.

(9) Family reunion. When they have a plan to practice Zikr in their home, a host will have to invite many Muslim neighborhoods from many places to be their guests. The main responsibility of host is to prepare food, beverage, and an area for Zikr practicing. This will be a great opportunity to allow many Muslims meet and share with each other after they have not seen one another for a long period of time.

T3: Perceived Health Benefits and Application of the Standing Zikr

T3-1 Impact on health of the Standing Zikr. Every participant agreed that the Standing Zikr helped them be healthier, not only in physical health but also mental health. Moreover, they had been trying to connect between Zikr and exercise. For example, two participants stated:

It's very good that we have a chance to exercise. It makes our health to be better. It's like, feeling fatigue is gone. (Participant 2nd)

I've mixed Standing Zikr, exercise and meditation together. When I stay at home, I've been doing it with wearing only one bra and having lots of sweat. If I didn't do it, I won't feel good. If I did, it's always good. My blood sugar level will have to be better. (Participant 3rd)

ST3-2 Integrated the Standing Zikr and conventional exercise. Participants were given a challenging question about whether Standing Zikr is able to apply with conventional exercise to be a modern

religion-related exercise. Most of the participants were likely to support Standing Zikr for the religion-related exercise. For example, one participant expressed:

Zikr is basically an exercise. Arms have to swing all the time. My elder son, he's almost leaping. (Participant 6th)

Although, the majority of participants agreed to apply Zikr and conventional exercise for a modern religion-related exercise, they had some concerns to apply it with Zikr. First, beware to compare between exercise and Zikr. Generally, Muslim who practiced Zikr believe that this is the best way to be sacred and ultimately closed with God. Somebody may possibly not understand the main purpose of the activity. Second, we need to seek some Muslim experts who can explain the reason of the activity for general Muslims. Third, if we want to apply Standing Zikr with exercise, personal practice will be easier than practicing as a group. Fourth, some participants are concerned with some words on lyrics in a song which is referred to the name of Allah. During exercise, we can apply arm-swinging, but it is quite sensitive to apply lyrics in Zikr Singing. Lastly, one participant suggested that applied Zikr is more suitable to practice in the night time. Because daytime period may have too much obviously see from other Muslims who may not understand. They may potentially be against and condemn the practicing. For example, one participant states:

I think it could be done if we don't connect between applied Zikr and exercise to our group. In fact, aerobic dance is generally accepted because it's universal. In Zikr, arm-swinging is not difficult, but whenever the singing in Zikr is very important, how could we do it as an original pattern? (Participant 4th)

Discussion

The finding from this qualitative study demonstrated that Standing Zikr is a religious activity for remembrance of Allah which is deep-rooted in Muslims who believed in Zikr at Nakhon Nayok Province of Thailand with many generations. The longevity of Standing Zikr within the community has been maintained due to faith, belief, and health benefits. In health context, the perception of Standing Zikr provided several positive experiences on physical health, mental health, spirituality and quality of life. With physical health, the majority of the participants claimed that Standing Zikr made them feel healthier and stronger even though they had some symptoms of illness or diseases. In this study, some participants mentioned that the Standing Zikr was able to help them reduce serum blood glucose and improve many indicators of diabetes. For mental health, many participants implied that Zikr diminishes their anxiety and improves their personality. These results are similar with some of the previous quantitative studies. For example, many trial studies recently conducted Muslims religious/spirituality interventions including Zikr which were able to reduce the effect of anxiety, negativity, and distress in several groups of the population such as Muslim patients undergoing CABG surgery (Hosseini et al., 2013), patients who met DSM-IV criteria for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) (Koszycki, Raab, Aldosary, & Bradwejn, 2010), patients who had early stage breast and prostate cancer patients (Carlson, Specia, Patel, & Goodey, 2003), people with HIV/AIDS (Ironson, Solomon, Balbin, O'cleirigh, George, Kumar, Larson, & Woods, 2002), and elder people (Phillips, Paukert, Stanley, & Kunik, 2009). Moreover, according to many systematic reviews of original data-based quantitative research, it demonstrated a positive effects of religion/spirituality both mental health and physical health (Koenig, 2012; Meraviglia, 2006; Reich, Lesur, & Perdrizet-Chevallier, 2008). It can be concluded that Zikr is a religious activity associated with religious/spirituality intervention in many previous studies which could be addressing the negative feelings and supporting the positive outcomes.

However, the integrated of Standing Zikr with conventional exercise is a contentious topic within the community. Although there are more of participants who support more than oppose for applying Zikr to be a modern of religion-related conventional exercise, the process of application in any believing issues is not the same as voting in democratic referendum or statistical test in the quantitative study. Investigators are not be able to claim the victory of the majority and ignore the minority opinion according to the imperative of qualitative data for each of the participants. On the one hand, reasons of the minority are also important for consideration in any change or application. Otherwise, it might potentially induce some conflict among Muslims who have embraced their religion individually—intrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967). Hence, the result of the study will be benefit for physicians and healthcare providers who work with Muslims believing in Zikr to motivate them to change their lifestyle and health behavior by Standing Zikr. For the application of Standing Zikr, it might be possible to apply Standing Zikr for an individual exercise. However, it is still inconclusive for applying as a group or band.

The strengths of the study have a couple prominent points. First, data was collected at home of participants, meanwhile investigators visited participants' home as a guest. Therefore participants were likely to relax during the interview and reduce any potential influence when asking questions about sensitive issues. Second, investigators had a good relationship with healthcare providers in the setting. For the data collection, investigators were assisted by nurse practitioners who engaged in the study setting for more than a decade. The personal relationship between nurse practitioners and each of the participants have been cordially intimate. Thus, during interviews, building a relationship between investigators and each of the participants was not complicated.

Potential limitations of the study including the participant representative of the study, participants aged more than 60 years old was a background characteristic of the study which could affect the study result. However, investigators tried to balance the number of participants in the gender difference for the most possible homogeneity of the study. Second, the applicability of this study cannot be determined in other Muslim neighborhood. Even though Zikr practice is distributed around the country, but the number of Zikr believers has never been counted. Some believe that they are still a minority group of Muslims within the population of Thailand. Thus, other healthcare providers who are interested in Zikr should be aware to the application due to its sensitivity. However, keeping in mind for cultural-sensitive is invaluable for healthcare providers, particularly working in the Muslim community.

Nevertheless, there are many challenges for physicians and healthcare providers who are interested in Standing Zikr and health-related issues in Muslims, including comparison between two groups among Muslims who practice and do not practice Standing Zikr and look forward to statistically testing the different biological outcome between both groups. Moreover, other areas of physical, neurological health related to Zikr, and genetic issues in term of qualitative and quantitative research will increase understanding the association between Zikr and health outcomes, particularly, Muslim physicians who are interested in Zikr and Standing Zikr. They will be more comfortable to access health-related issues in Muslim populations.

Conclusions

The Standing Zikr was practiced since childhood with the support of family members and Muslim coordinators. In this study, there was several positive experiences on physical health, mental health, and quality of life among the Thai Muslims in the study area. However, it was a very sensitive issue to apply the Standing

Zikr as a conventional religion-related exercise regarding to the meaning of Zikr practicing that it is an ultimate activity to get closest to their God while they are alive on earth. Thus, physician and healthcare providers should understand belief, perspective, and health effects on Standing Zikr which not only enhances the relationship between both of them, but also helps our patients to increase their motivation for changing the health behavior according to holistic medicine.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interest.

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