



# A Trance Case Report with *Ruqya* (Exorcism) Approach in Aceh

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## Abstract

Trance disorders or possessed spirit is a form of invisible control over human beings and they also have an influence on the mind, five sense organs, and body functions, which have similar symptoms to Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). However, *Ruqya*, also known as Islamic exorcism, is a practice of exorcism in the form of incantations or spell recitation from the Qur'an and hadith. It is a great hope in Islamic society used as a form of treatment according to the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed. A 53-year-old businessman suffering from psychological problems brought by his 48-year-old wife to a *raqi* (*ruqya* practitioner) after being treated by a general medical practitioner for several months was presented. The *ruqya* procedure was conducted several times which shows an improvement in his mental state.

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## Introduction

The idea that people can be possessed by spirits is found in many religions and cultures around the world. Although there are differences between traditional remedies for the condition, which often involve exorcism rituals, that are performed to exorcise the spirits from the mind or body. In psychiatry, the same afflictions may be attributed to mental disorders and treated by psychotherapy [1]. The developments of therapeutic treatments have encouraged spiritual elements to produce healing effects on patients with mental problems. The most common component associated with spiritual elements of treatments is religion [2].

The possession of the evil spirit in an individual diagnosed with psychiatric disorders is known as the initial demonological phase. Society believes that people with psychiatric symptoms are possessed by demonic spirits and exorcism is needed to overcome the condition. Exorcism is a process of expelling evil spirits using spells or ritualistic torture, which is known as *Ruqya* in Islam [3]. Kurtz and Ketcham explain that spiritual elements indeed exist, and they are not determined by humans, conversely, these elements define people. Therefore, the interpretation of spiritual elements in Islam mainly refers to Al-Quran and Sunnah [2].

In all religions, as well as Islam, there is a trance/possession disorder, which is a condition when an individual consciousness is taken over by a genie or *jinn*, that affects the mind, sensory power, and body functions in various ways [3]. Possessed individuals may exhibit symptoms similar to mental illnesses, such as psychosis, hysteria, mania, Tourette syndrome, epilepsy, schizophrenia, or dissociative identity disorder which includes involuntary or unconscious actions. Spiritual possession is a cultural way of explaining symptoms of psychosis, dissociation, social anxiety, etc. [4], [5], [6], [7], [8].

In psychiatry, the condition of the possessed individuals is divided into two. The person does not have power against it. Such symptoms are part of the division of mind content, which is the characteristic of schizophrenia, and such a form of belief is called insight. Second, individuals who are possessed, experience a total metamorphosis, they consider themselves to be with other people or certain things. The symptoms are often similarly observed in people with dissociation disorders [3].

Since the beginning of 2003, *Ruqya* has become popular in Indonesia through organizations, digital mass media, and non-digital publications, and it later becomes a great hope as a source of treatment for people [5]. Arifuddin *et al.* reported that *ruqya* significantly reduces anxiety and depression [6]. Alshammary *et al.* stated that cancer/terminal disease

patients show positive results toward *ruqya* and believe that spiritual management is important as well as physical and medical care, and the patients drastically feel better after conducting *ruqya* [7].

*Ruqya* is a traditional therapy, which influences mental, spiritual, moral, and physical conditions by the guidance of the Qur'an and As-Sunnah [4]. Furthermore, it increases physical, mental, social, and spiritual welfare and plays a role in reducing the exacerbation of mental illness. Practically, *ruqya* is a healing effort carried out by Muslims by pleading with Allah for healing either for themselves or others by reading verses of the Holy Qur'an [2].

## Case Report

A 53-year-old old businessman was accompanied by his 48-year-old wife, to attend a *raqi* (person who performs *ruqya*). The couple has been married for 30 years and has two grown children.

A few months earlier, the husband complained of experiencing trouble while sleeping and restlessness, followed by problems at work. The simple problems started to bother him and had a significant effect on his marital relationships, such as being irritable and violent towards his children and wife. He consulted a general practitioner and was given alprazolam but the symptoms were significantly reduced. Afterward, he started having nightmares and felt as if someone was strangling him and woke up in a sweat. The husband was known as a respected man from a religious family, and they have no reported history of psychiatric disorder.

The husband's family was certain that it was a spiritual problem related to Satan and jinn. The condition was validated by his wife's statement, she mentioned that her husband become agitated after reading the Qur'an as a sign of jinn possession. Later on, an Islamic scholar advised her to recite particular verses of the Holy Qur'an and then blow some water and instructed the family to drink the water for a week.

After consultation with the *raqi*, he recommended that the husband should take olive oil. By reciting the verses of the Qur'an to him, the spirit revealed itself and decisively agreed to leave him. The recitation was repeated several times, and the husband and wife reported improvement in his mental state.

From an Islamic perspective, the anger triggered by the recitation of the Qur'an reinforces the diagnosis of jinn possession. *Ruqya* and ingestion of olive oil are common treatments for this condition.

## Discussion

It is a challenge to determine the condition of spirit possession and exorcism in scientific studies. There is a broad range of symptoms that can be attributed to impulsive spirit possession and, they are not used in any psychiatric disorder [1], [3].

Unconsciousness, a non-permanent changed in consciousness, identity, behavior, attributed to possession by a spiritual entity, should be proven by at least two of these conditions such as: (1) Single or episodic replacement of the usual sense of identity; (2) stereotyped determined behaviors due to the possession identity; and (3) full or partial amnesia of the moment [1].

People under possession conditions sometimes experience symptoms that are similar to mental illnesses. In DSM-5, possession was enlisted as part of dissociative identity disorder, although it is not considered as a disorder if it is "a normal part of a generally accepted cultural or religious practice" [1], [2], [8].

Possession is a terminology of etiology in psychiatric medicine, while exorcism is a management system for individuals with the symptoms attributed to spirit possession [2]. Furthermore, it is an effort to cast out the spirits from the body or mind in such a way that the mischievous influence of the supernatural being, whether destructive or harmful, will be liberated [1], [3].

This explains the correlation between jinn possession and mental illness among Muslims in Aceh. Much research is needed to explain the area in which the supernatural being is invoked at times of mental illness relapse. Physicians, especially psychiatrists, must be aware of the symptoms that come up with patients with spirit trances. It is necessary to collaborate with the religious leaders (*imam*) in the provision of holistic mental healthcare in biological, psychological, and spiritual aspects [5], [6], [8].

The psychiatrist knows how to teach the *imam* to recognize mental illness. In turn, religious leaders can educate psychiatrists regarding the importance of religious factors in psychiatric disorders [3], [4]. Psychiatrists need to distinguish precisely between the cultural belief in mental trance and obvious psychotic symptoms in such a way that the patient is not unnecessarily treated with antipsychotics. In addition, clinicians must be aware and should not assume that every exceptional belief in a patient from an unfamiliar culture is culturally sanctioned. Finally, the clinician should emphasize the illness of the patient in such a way that they can comply with taking medication. The development of complementary treatment alternatives such as *ruqya* will help and possibly increase patient's well-being [2], [4], [6].

Basically, *ruqya* is a technique of restoring an individual mind and soul according to the Islamic

method [2], [7]. The process includes the step of giving mineral water, which has to do with reading the verses of the Qur'an, or zam-zam water, and leaves of *Ziziphus mauritiana* (sidr), black cumin oil, and honey [4], [7]. However, Masaru Emoto, a Japanese scientist, conduct research on water crystallization patterns according to the sound of the surrounding. Sound influences the electromagnetic fields of the water molecules. Some particular tones make the patterns more regular [4], [7]. It is related to the human body which is made up of 70% water. A sound that humans perceive affects the regularity of water molecules in the cells. It is believed that recitations of the Qur'an on the water affect the water, which can reinforce the healing process [7], [9].

Another case report of *ruqya* in Malaysia record that some patient was taught the incantations and was encouraged to practice by themselves [9]. The *raqi* or *imam* provide great highlight on Islamic basic principle during the treatment period such as the attributes of God, the concept of illness in Islam, and the prospect that the illness is possibly a test of faith and result in forgiveness from Allah. Furthermore, no herbs were used, however, they encouraged patients to consume the medications prescribed by the general practitioners or psychiatrists. The results showed that the psychotic symptoms improved [9].

Collaboration between the psychiatrist and religious leaders is being looked forward to improving health care. Further objective and empirical research should be initiated to explore the benefits of *ruqya* as complementary management for mental disorders [6], [7]. The effects of *ruqya* can be explained in three possible ways in this case such as: 1) A direct therapeutic result (the mechanism is still unknown); 2) an indirect placebo effect; and 3) by increasing the likelihood of getting treatment and maintaining compliance [2], [9].

During *et al.* analyzed the data of 402 patients diagnosed with Dissociative Possession or Trance Disorder (DTD) from a critical review regarding trance and possession disorders from 1988 to 2009. In addition, 7% of patients that received exorcism as treatment resulted in mixed reports of efficacy, 59% of patients that received some form of psychotherapy experienced symptom relief after completing the treatment [1]. In addition, they recommend that there is a necessity for future treatments of dissociative trance and possession disorders. The psychiatric and sociocultural aspects must also be taken into account as factors that have a strong influence on the patient's condition. It is also better to combine psychotherapy, traditional healing methods, and medical intervention altogether as a holistic treatment [1], [8].

At least the medical community sees exorcism or even the *ruqya* in a more positive way. This may be an effective alternative treatment for some trance-like symptoms and disorders [8]. There are issues associated with the use of *ruqya* as a therapy for

psychological suffering, such as possible exacerbation of symptoms and interference with conventional psychiatric treatment. Apart from this, there are some views that exorcisms can improve symptoms and others advocate integrating faith healing approaches such as *ruqya* in the treatment of psychiatric disorders [1], [8], [9].

## Conclusion

In this study, a case of an anxiety disorder was presented in which the patient did not feel better after taking an oral medication, and therefore went to a *raqi*, a spiritual practitioner that provides *ruqya* treatment. The symptoms seemed to have improved; therefore, the patient stopped receiving treatment. Despite the favorable outcome, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the patient's reasons for illness to receive treatment from a mental health practitioner. Furthermore, *raqi* can also encourage patients to maintain good medicine and spiritual medicine. Embracing free treatment options such as *ruqya* will aid engagement, conformity, and possibly improve patient well-being.

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