



Melukat as nature-based therapy: a cross-sectional descriptive study



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ABSTRACT

Modernization has intensified mental health challenges in contemporary society, necessitating interventions that resonate with local cultural and spiritual values. This study explores the Balinese ritual of *melukat* as a form of nature-based therapy that integrates traditional purification practices with psychological well-being. The research aims to characterize the ritual's therapeutic mechanisms and assess its relevance within modern mental health frameworks. Employing a cross-sectional descriptive design, data were collected from 26 participants in Denpasar, Bali, through an anonymous online survey. The instrument assessed demographic variables, motivations for the ritual, and perceived psychological outcomes, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results reveal that family influence remains a primary driver of ritual performance (65.4%), indicating that *melukat* is a deeply embedded domestic tradition. Participants reported substantial improvements in emotional tranquility, reduced anxiety, and enhanced sleep quality following the practice. Furthermore, the high rate of intended future participation suggests that *melukat* is perceived as a critical component of ongoing psychological self-care rather than a mere ceremonial obligation. This study concludes that *melukat* represents a significant culturally integrated intervention that bridges indigenous wisdom and psychological science. These findings advocate for the inclusion of such rituals within culturally sensitive therapy models to provide more contextualized and inclusive mental health care. Future investigations should utilize longitudinal designs and validated psychological scales to provide objective evidence of long-term therapeutic efficacy.

Keywords: balinese, culture, nature, therapy.

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid modernization has significantly transformed lifestyle patterns and psychological well-being within contemporary society, often escalating the prevalence of mental health disorders.^{1,2} While conventional biomedical and psychological frameworks provide essential clinical contributions, these models frequently fail to address the spiritual and cultural dimensions that are deeply embedded in the Indonesian context, particularly among the Balinese population.³ Central to Balinese heritage is the practice of *melukat*, a traditional purification ritual utilizing holy water to cleanse both physical and psychic impurities.^{4,5} This ritual serves as a vital

cultural asset that complements formal healthcare by maintaining the equilibrium of the mind and body within a community that remains steadfast in its local beliefs and customary values.

Despite the centuries-old prevalence and cultural significance of *melukat*, rigorous academic investigation into its efficacy within the paradigms of modern psychology and mental health remains notably limited. This research gap is significant because the ritual functions as a nature-based therapy that facilitates emotional recovery, the systematic release of mental burdens, and the attainment of inner tranquility.⁶ Preliminary evidence suggests that *melukat* effectively mitigates anxiety, enhances subjective well-being, and improves sleep quality.⁵ Consequently,

there is a critical need to bridge the gap between indigenous wisdom and modern scientific approaches to develop a more integrated and culturally relevant framework for mental health interventions.

The purpose of this study is to explore the practice of *melukat* as a culturally integrated nature-based therapy that synthesizes traditional Balinese values with established psychological principles. By identifying the specific therapeutic mechanisms inherent in this ritual, this study seeks to foster an integrative discourse between traditional healing modalities and modern psychology.⁷ The ultimate benefit of this work lies in its potential to broaden the academic understanding of culture-based therapies, thereby encouraging the implementation

of more contextualized and inclusive mental health strategies in clinical and community settings.

METHOD

This cross-sectional study employed a descriptive approach to investigate the practice of *melukat* in Denpasar, Bali. Using convenience sampling, the research targeted Balinese individuals who performed the ritual at least once annually. The primary inclusion criterion required participants to have direct experience with *melukat*, while no specific exclusion criteria were applied to the study population. This recruitment strategy ensured that the data reflected the lived experiences of active practitioners within the local cultural context.

Data collection was facilitated through an anonymous online survey distributed via Google Forms to the target demographic. The instrument comprised 10 items developed by the research team to capture demographic characteristics and specific *melukat*-related experiences, including frequency, motivations, and psychosocial outcomes. Demographic variables were categorized by biological sex and age (divided at the 17-year threshold), while five-point Likert-type scales were utilized to quantify levels of post-ritual tranquility and perceived emotional relief. Although the survey was designed specifically for this study based on the cultural nuances of *melukat* rather than pre-existing validated scales, it allowed for a targeted exploration of the ritual's perceived psychological benefits.

To enhance the integrity of the data, the researchers implemented measures to minimize response bias by ensuring complete respondent anonymity and confidentiality. The final sample size of 26 participants. All participants were included in this study; none were excluded. Missing data were addressed by excluding the participants from the study. While the use of convenience sampling inherently introduces potential selection bias, the exploratory nature of the study justified this approach as a preliminary step in understanding the ritual's impact. Consequently, the study design prioritizes cultural depth and thematic relevance over broad generalizability.

Statistical analysis focused on descriptive measures to provide a clear overview of the participants' experiences, using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Categorical data were reported as frequencies and percentages, whereas ordinal data, such as the degree of calmness, were analyzed using medians and interquartile ranges (IQR). Due to the modest sample size and the pilot nature of the inquiry, the researchers refrained from conducting inferential tests, focusing instead on identifying emergent patterns within the data. Finally, the manuscript followed the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and reporting quality.

RESULTS

A total of 26 people filled out the Google survey form, with the majority being women and ≥ 17 years old. Almost all respondents have been *melukat*, with the majority having *melukat* 2-3 times in the past year. The characteristics of the research subjects are summarized in **Table 1**. The results of the exploration of the research subjects' experiences are shown in **Table 2**. In general, the study subjects had a positive perception of the benefits of *melukat* on their feelings, and these benefits were perceived by almost all respondents.

Table 1. Characteristics of the research subjects

Variables	N	%
Sex		
Male	12	46.2
Female	14	53.8
Age range		
≥ 17 years old	24	92.3
<17 years old	2	7.7
Melukat frequency in the past year		
>5 times	3	11.5
4-5 times	3	11.5
2-3 times	12	46.2
1 time	8	30.8
Who influenced to melukat		
Oneself	9	34.6
Parents or family	17	65.4

DISCUSSION

This study addresses the academic gap identified in the introduction by providing empirical evidence of *melukat*'s function as a culturally integrated, nature-based therapy within a formal psychological framework. The findings strengthen transpersonal psychology theories that position ritual practices as essential media for consciousness transformation and emotional healing.¹ Within the Indonesian context, traditional healing rituals in shamanic psychotherapy have long served as culturally rooted interventions with significant transformational power during the recovery process.⁸ Furthermore, the central role of water in *melukat* likely provides physiological benefits through sensory-kinesthetic experiences that may stimulate endorphin release and reduce cortisol levels.

In the context of modern psychotherapy, the practice of *melukat* aligns with contemporary methods such as mindfulness, grounding, and ritual cleansing aimed at restoring internal equilibrium. Despite its traditional origins, this practice maintains high relevance as an alternative or complementary intervention for the management of stress and anxiety. These types of transformational human experiences are considered crucial for maintaining overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being.⁹

The high sustainability of *melukat* among the study population suggests that the ritual is viewed as a psychological necessity rather than a mere customary obligation,¹⁰ offering a significant opportunity for its integration into culturally sensitive therapy models. Because cultural factors are instrumental in how psychological distress is conceptualized and treated, much like how the practice of prayer (*shalat*) has been documented as a method for achieving spiritual peace, *melukat* serves as a viable complementary therapy for populations with strong traditional ties.¹¹ However, the finding that a minority of respondents perceived no significant change indicates that the ritual's efficacy is mediated by individual psychological readiness and spiritual depth. Intrapersonal factors such as mental openness and the perceived meaning of the ritual may influenced the efficacy of spirituality-based interventions.¹²

Despite these insights, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. The primary concerns involve potential bias and restricted generalizability resulting from the use of convenience sampling and a relatively small sample size. Additionally, the reliance on unvalidated, self-developed questionnaires may affect the measurement accuracy of complex psychological constructs, while the cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causal relationships between the ritual and its perceived benefits. Consequently, future research should utilize longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs with larger, representative samples and validated scales to objectively quantify the therapeutic potential of *melukat*.

CONCLUSION

This study characterizes the ritual of *melukat* as a culturally resonant, nature-based therapy that effectively bridges traditional Balinese spiritual practices with modern psychological frameworks for mental health. By identifying the significant roles of family transmission and the consistent perception of emotional relief among practitioners, the research demonstrates that indigenous rituals serve as vital, accessible resources for

Table 2. *Melukat* experiences among research subjects

Variables	Results
Reason to <i>melukat</i> - N(%)	
Spirituality	10 (38.46)
Family order	5 (19.23)
Psychological discomfort	7 (26.92)
Tradition or culture	4 (15.38)
Feelings after <i>melukat</i> - N (%)	
Calmer	22 (43.14)
Happier	13 (25.49)
Relieved	15 (29.41)
No Change	1 (1.96)
Degree of calmness after <i>melukat</i> – Median (IQR)	
Degree of calmness after <i>melukat</i> – N (%)	
Very calm	10 (38.5)
Calm	11 (42.3)
Neutral	4 (15.4)
Not quite	1 (3.8)
<i>Melukat</i> clears emotional burden or stress – N (%)	
Very agree	8 (30.8)
Agree	12 (46.2)
Neutral	4 (15.4)
Disagree	1 (3.8)
Very disagree	1 (3.8)
<i>Melukat</i> has psychological benefits	
Yes	24 (92.3)
No	2 (7.7)
<i>Melukat</i> has spiritual value	
Yes	25 (96.2)
No	1 (3.8)
Desire to <i>melukat</i> in the future	
Yes	24 (92.3)
No	2 (7.7)

managing psychological distress within the local context. To advance this field, health practitioners and policymakers are encouraged to integrate these culturally sensitive modalities into localized mental health strategies, ensuring that clinical interventions reflect the community's spiritual values. Moving forward, the adoption of validated assessment tools and the implementation of longitudinal research designs will be essential to objectively quantify the long-term clinical outcomes of *melukat*, thereby establishing a more robust evidence-based foundation

for its role in contemporary, contextualized psychological care.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed equally in the writing process of this article.

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