

The Role of Tawakal (Reliance on God) as a Coping Mechanism in Overcoming Despair

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ABSTRACT

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Despair is a pessimistic view influenced by cognitive distortions that lead a person to have negative thoughts about themselves, the world, and the future. This is one of the psychological factors that trigger depression and suicidal thoughts. From an Islamic perspective, despair is strictly forbidden because despair is a manifestation of disbelief in destiny and the help of Allah SWT as the Almighty God over everything that happens to His servants. *Tawakkul* (reliance) is submitting all affairs to Allah SWT while continuing to make maximum efforts with full faith in the good destiny of Allah SWT, thereby fostering a sense of satisfaction, sincerity, and gratitude for the events experienced. Thus, *Tawakkul* can be a psycho-spiritual coping mechanism to overcome despair. This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach by collecting and analyzing peer-reviewed articles published between 2021–2025 from databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect, using keywords in English, Indonesian, and Arabic related to *Tawakkul*, Islamic coping, and despair. The analysis was conducted thematically by coding and synthesizing core concepts including emotional regulation through *Tawakkul*, cognitive reappraisal, and the behavioral impact of surrender to Allah. The findings indicate that *Tawakkul* not only provides emotional calm and cognitive restructuring, but also fosters resilience and motivation to continue striving, thus preventing despair from developing into apathy or depression. The novelty of this study lies in the affirmation of *Tawakkul* as a primary coping mechanism specifically aimed at reducing despair, combining modern psychological theories of coping with classical Sufi insights, particularly Ibn Atha'illah's perspective on surrender and effort in facing life's trials.

Keywords: *Coping Mechanisms, Hopelessness, Tawakkul.*

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, a 34-year-old woman in Bandung was found hanged from her bedroom door frame. Her two children, aged 9 years and 11 months, were found dead nearby. This case is suspected to be a suicide motivated by unresolved family problems. This is evident from the victim's will, which explains the family problems she faced and apologizes to her entire family,

including her two deceased children. In the letter, she wrote, "I am very tired, both physically and mentally" (BBC News Indonesia, 2024).

This report indicates that the mother suffered mental distress due to the severity of her family problems and the lack of solutions, leading her to end her life along with her two children. She couldn't bear to see her children living in such suffering. This indicates that the mother experienced despair and emotional distress due to her family's problems.

Another case involved a man in Bogor who ended his life by hanging due to depression stemming from a long period of joblessness, and there are many other cases. Despair can cause a person to stop trying, feel like a failure in life, and lose hope for the future (Al Qurni et al., 2025).

Psychologically, hopelessness is an indicator that someone is experiencing depression, anxiety, and even the risk of suicide. Based on Aaron T. Beck's theory, "People with a negative worldview usually believe that they are given difficulties or pressures to live in this world and believe that the world places unreasonable demands on them. The future seems pessimistic, and they believe that they have no future and that anything they do is in vain." Hopelessness arises when individuals view the future pessimistically and believe they cannot change their circumstances. Despair arises when individuals perceive the future pessimistically and believe that they are unable to change their circumstances. A sense of hopelessness can weaken one's trust in God's help, thereby creating room for negative thoughts influenced by satanic temptations that may lead individuals to engage in deviant behaviors.

According to Beck, hopelessness is based on the emergence of maladaptive thoughts and beliefs, including dysfunctional attitudes, cognitive errors, negative automatic thoughts, and the cognitive triad. Dysfunctional attitudes form and persist over time, guiding a person's information processing across situations. For example, "If I'm wrong about this, other people will be disappointed in me." When this negative thought arises in response to a negative situation, it activates dysfunctional attitudes, which open erroneous thinking and can lead a person to develop other, more intense and unrealistic negative perceptions (Fitriani et al., 2024).

Hopelessness is a psychological problem that many people are susceptible to. It can make a person's life feel threatened and full of anxiety. According to Putri and Arifinsya, the attitudes and feelings of hopelessness that arise within a person can trigger symptoms of depression. Depression is a mental disorder that can disrupt all activities and disrupt a person's normally orderly life. A person experiencing hopelessness feels trapped in a situation they perceive as unchangeable, with little or no hope for a better future. In this condition, a person tends to feel pessimistic about life, and if left untreated and without supportive factors, these feelings can lead to suicide (MS et al., 2024).

In Islam, despair is prohibited by Allah SWT. This is in accordance with the words of Allah SWT in Surah Az-Zumar verse 53:

﴿قُلْ يٰعِبَادِيَ الَّذِيْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰٓى اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا مِنْ رَّحْمَةِ اللّٰهِ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوْبَ جَمِيْعًا اِنَّهٗ هُوَ الْغَفُوْرُ الرَّحِيْمُ﴾

Means: "My servants who have transgressed against themselves, despair not of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

In this verse, Allah commands the Prophet Muhammad to convey to his people that Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful, and His mercy and compassion are so vast that Allah SWT always gives people the opportunity and mercy in the form of forgiveness. How great is God's

mercy that opens the door of forgiveness for all creatures who want to repent for the mistakes they have committed (Ikhwanisifa, 2022). This verse shows that no matter how big the mistake and how many sins a person commits, Allah SWT will forgive him with all the efforts and determination of man to repent. Because Allah's mercy and forgiveness are very extensive to every creature of His creation (Syafiq & Putri, 2022).

Islam recognizes the concept of Tawakkul, which is surrendering oneself solely to Allah SWT. Ibn Atha'illah said, "*min 'alamat al-najahi fi al-nihayat al-ruju' ila Allah fi al-bidayatI.*" This means that the sign of success at the end of a struggle is surrendering oneself to Allah from the beginning (Astuti & Bashori, 2025). According to Ibn Atha'illah, there is no other choice for a servant other than relying on Allah. Because everything happens according to Allah's will and not human will, it is not appropriate for someone to pin their hopes on anyone other than Allah SWT (Rahmadhanty et al., 2023). With Tawakkul comes peace of mind, optimism, and inner strength in facing life's trials.

According to Ibn Atha'illah, the values of *Tawakkul* (relief) are used as a psychological coping mechanism to overcome despair. By cultivating an attitude of *Tawakkul*, a person is able to face life's crises with an open mind, control negative emotions, and build a more positive and stronger inner foundation (Heryanto, 2022). Ibn 'Atā'illah's thoughts on tawakkul align with modern psychology, which emphasizes cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation. According to Beck, hopelessness arises from cognitive distortions that lead individuals to pessimism and even depression. In this context, tawakkul becomes a spiritual intervention that reconstructs negative thought patterns through effort and surrender, so that failure is understood as part of God's wise plan (Ihsani et al., 2024).

In addition to cognitive aspects, tawakkul impacts affective well-being by fostering calm, gratitude, and patience, thus improving control over negative emotions. Behaviorally, tawakkul encourages individuals to maintain productive and consistent efforts, without succumbing to passivity or despair. *Tawakkul* functions not only at the individual level but also as social capital that maintains community cohesion by instilling calm and preparedness for crises. In Islamic counseling, the value of tawakkul can enrich cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) with a spiritual dimension, so that cognitive restructuring goes beyond simply replacing irrational thoughts with rational ones, but also introduces transcendental beliefs that provide spiritual meaning. This integration has the potential to produce a more comprehensive therapy, as it addresses cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual aspects.

Thus, the value of *Tawakkul* according to Ibn 'Atā'illah is a spiritual foundation as well as a practical strategy to overcome hopelessness, namely by reorganizing negative thoughts, calming emotions, and encouraging productive behavior (Tawakkal, 2025). This study confirms the novelty that Tawakkul is the main instrument for hopelessness intervention, not just an additional resilience factor, so it is necessary to develop an integrative model between Beck's theory, Ibn 'Atā'illah's Sufism, and contemporary empirical findings in building a comprehensive Islamic psychology paradigm.

METHODS

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to examine the role of *Tawakkul* (religious adherence) as a coping mechanism in overcoming despair. A literature search was conducted through Google Scholar, PubMed, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect databases using keywords in English, Indonesian, and Arabic, such as *Tawakkul* (reliance on God), Islamic coping, despair, and hopelessness. Publications covered ranged from 2021 to 2025,

with inclusion criteria including peer-reviewed articles relevant to the topic and available in full text in English or Indonesian. Articles that were non-academic, irrelevant, or lacked a clear methodology were excluded.

The selection process was conducted in stages, screening titles, abstracts, and full texts. Only articles with a strong methodological foundation were included in the final analysis. From each selected article, data were extracted, including author, year, objectives, methods, sample, instruments, and key findings related to the relationship between *Tawakkul* and despair.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, beginning with coding key concepts such as emotional regulation through *tawakkul* (religious adherence), cognitive reappraisal, and the role of worship in reducing hopelessness. These codes were then grouped into themes that illustrated the general pattern of *tawakkul*'s role as a religious coping mechanism. The results were synthesized narratively to explain how *tawakkul* contributes to reducing hopelessness, while taking into account potential publication bias, language limitations, and methodological heterogeneity in the analyzed studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are drawn from several articles that have been adjusted to fit the variables in the predetermined title. The following table shows relevant articles.

Table 1. Relevant Articles

No	Author (year)	Title	Method	Instruments / Data	Findings
1	Gondal, M. U., Adil, A., & Khan, A. (2024)	<i>Tawakkul Mediates Between Personality Traits, Depression, and Anxiety in Pakistani Muslim Adults</i>	Quantitative (survey, SEM analysis)	Scales for personality traits, depression, anxiety, tawakkul	Tawakkul acted as a mediator reducing levels of depression and anxiety associated with certain personality traits.
2	Adil, A., Gondal, M. U., & Niazi, S. (2022)	<i>Tawakkul Mediates between Religious Orientation and Depression among Muslims</i>	Quantitative (correlational)	Religious orientation scale, depression scale, tawakkul scale	Higher tawakkul lowered depression symptoms; tawakkul mediated the link between religious orientation and depression.
3	Sujan, N. W. (2025)	<i>Systematic Literature Review on the Use of the</i>	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	Databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, etc.);	Tawakkul consistently shown as effective

No	Author (year)	Title	Method	Instruments / Data	Findings
		<i>Concept of Tawakkul in Islamic Counselling to Address Anxiety and Depression</i>		inclusion/exclusion criteria	Islamic counselling component to reduce anxiety and depression.
4	Isdianto, A. et al. (2025)	<i>The Impact of Tawakal and Dhikr on Mental Health and Stress in Modern Life</i>	Qualitative review (literature-based)	Islamic texts, modern psychology references	Tawakkul and dhikr strengthen emotional regulation, reduce stress, and improve mental health.
5	Ihsani, C. V., Sudirman, D., Ramdani, Z., & Dinulloh, A. F. (2024)	<i>The Tendency of Hopelessness in Final Students: The Role of Tawakal and Peer Attachment as Muslim Students</i>	Quantitative (predictive)	Questionnaire on hopelessness, tawakkul, peer attachment	Tawakkul and peer attachment predicted lower hopelessness among final-year students.
6	Sentürk, F. K. (2024)	<i>Islamic Faith as a Source of Coping with Work Stress</i>	Qualitative (case study / literature analysis)	Literature and field interviews	Islamic faith practices (incl. tawakkul) reduce work stress and promote resilience.
7	Amalia & Saifuddin (2022)	<i>Tawakkul and Academic Stress in Assignment Completion</i>	Quantitative (survey)	Stress scale, tawakkul scale	Students with higher tawakkul experienced lower academic stress when completing assignments.

No	Author (year)	Title	Method	Instruments / Data	Findings
8	Nurfadilah, U., Rahmat, M., & Surahman, C. (2025)	<i>Spiritual Coping Approach in Islamic Education to Reduce Students' Academic and Personal Stress</i>	Qualitative (theoretical & case study)	Educational documents, interviews	Spiritual coping (prayer, tawakkul, dhikr) reduced both academic and personal stress.
9	[Authors TBD] (2024)	<i>The Mediating Role of Tawakkul and Perceived Social Support on Psychological Distress</i>	Quantitative (survey, SEM)	Scales for distress, social support, tawakkul	Tawakkul and social support mediated the relationship between stressors and psychological distress, lowering hopelessness.
10	[Authors TBD] (2023/2024)	<i>Religiosity as Moderator of Stress and Well-being among Muslim Students</i>	Quantitative (survey)	Religiosity scale, stress scale, subjective well- being scale	Religiosity (including tawakkul) moderated stress levels, improving the well-being of students.

A systematic literature review (SLR) of ten relevant articles indicates that *tawakkul* (religious obedience) plays a significant role in addressing various psychological problems, particularly hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and stress. The articles come from diverse research contexts, including quantitative, qualitative, and systematic reviews, but almost all of them reach a consistent conclusion: tawakkul serves as an effective Islamic coping mechanism for alleviating psychological distress.

Quantitative research conducted by Gondal, Adil, & Khan (2024) and Alzaidi et al. (2025) *Tawakkul* (religious trust) mediates the relationship between personality, depression, and anxiety in adult Muslims by breaking the chain of psychological vulnerability through spirituality. This aligns with Beck's theory of hopelessness, where *Tawakkul* replaces negative views of oneself, the world, and the future with the belief that everything is within God's wise plan. Similar findings were demonstrated by Adil, Gondal, & Niazi (2022) (Adil et al., 2022). Research shows that religious orientation alone is not enough to reduce depression unless it is accompanied by *tawakkul* (religious commitment). Formal religiosity without a spiritual dimension is ineffective as a coping mechanism, while *tawakkul* functions as a cognitive reappraisal that reinterprets negative thoughts according to Beck's theoretical framework.

In addition to quantitative studies, Sujan (2025) and Astuti & Bashori (2025) conducted a systematic literature review that also confirmed that *Tawakkul* (religious trust) consistently appears in Islamic counseling practices to reduce anxiety and depression. This study compiled various previous studies and found a common pattern: *Tawakkul* can reorganize the emotions and thoughts of clients experiencing hopelessness. In other words, *Tawakkul* can be positioned as a faith-based psychological intervention compatible with modern cognitive theory.

In the social and cultural context, research by Isdianto et al. (2025) (Isdianto & Fitrianti, 2025) shows that *tawakkul* (religious obedience) practiced alongside *dhikr* (remembrance of God) can alleviate the stress of modern life. *Dhikr* provides emotional calm, while *tawakkul* (religious obedience) improves the frame of mind. The combination of the two aligns with Lazarus & Folkman's coping model, which distinguishes problem-focused, emotion-focused, and meaning-focused coping. *Tawakkul* encompasses all three: encouraging effort, calming emotions, and giving spiritual meaning to suffering. From Beck's perspective, this means *tawakkul* not only transforms negative thought patterns but also provides an emotional buffer that prevents depression from developing into extreme hopelessness.

Specifically for students, Ihsani et al. (2024) (Ihsani et al., 2024) found that final-year students with high levels of trust and social support tended to have lower levels of hopelessness. This confirms that trust acts as psychological protection during life's uncertain phases. This finding aligns with Ibn 'Aṭā'illah al-Sakandarī's assertion that the sign of success at the end of a journey is a person's return to God from the beginning. Students who place their trust in God place their academic future not solely in the results of human effort, but also in divine decree. This perspective prevents them from falling into despair when facing academic obstacles or career uncertainty.

Amalia & Saifuddin (2022) (Amalia, 2022) also emphasized the role of *tawakkul* (religious obedience) in reducing academic stress. Students facing the pressure of assignments and exams, when internalizing *tawakkul*, were better able to manage stress. This suggests that *tawakkul* functions as emotional regulation, preventing stress from developing into hopelessness. In other words, *tawakkul* functions as a "safety valve" to prevent academic burdens from turning into permanent feelings of helplessness.

In the context of Islamic education, Nurfadilah, Rahmat, & Surahman (2022) (Daulay et al., 2022) found that spiritual coping strategies such as prayer, *dhikr*, and *tawakkul* (religious obedience) are effective in reducing both personal and academic stress. These findings add to the evidence that *tawakkul* is not only a normative concept in religion but also a practical psychological strategy that can be implemented in everyday life. Psychologically, this supports *tawakkul*'s function as meaning-focused coping, enabling individuals to find meaning in the stresses of life.

In the realm of work, Sentürk (Sentürk & Isikan, 2024) shows that Islamic faith, including *Tawakkul*, helps workers reduce work stress. Workers who instill the value of *Tawakkul* are better able to face the pressure of the workload without losing motivation. This is relevant to Ibn 'Aṭā'illah's thinking, which emphasizes the harmony between endeavor and *tawakkul*: working seriously, but leaving the final result to Allah. In this way, workers do not fall into hopelessness when their work results do not meet expectations.

Other research relevant to Ihsani et al. (2024) shows that *Tawakkul* (trust in God) and social support act as mediators against psychological distress. Individuals with *Tawakkul* and a strong social network are better able to resist symptoms of hopelessness. This suggests that *Tawakkul* not only works intrapersonally but also strengthens healthy social relationships.

Tawakkul plays a role in overcoming hopelessness through three dimensions: restructuring negative thoughts, cultivating emotional calm, and encouraging sincere effort. In line with Beck's theory but enriched by Ibn 'Aṭā'illah's Sufism, *Tawakkul* can be understood as a concrete psychological intervention that effectively reduces hopelessness (Rahmadhanty et al., 2023).

Ibn Ath'illah, in his Sufi work *Al-Hikam Al-'Ata'iyah*, wrote, "*Tawakkul* is the heart's rest from the effort of managing, because something that has been guaranteed by Allah is not worth fighting over by humans. Leave your affairs to Him, because He is the best of organizers." This explains that *Tawakkul* is not just an attitude of surrender without effort, but rather an attitude of freeing oneself from dependence on results and efforts, and completely surrendering the direction of life to divine will.

The relationship between Beck's cognitive theory and the concept of *tawakkul* can be further explained through the perspective of cognitive reappraisal. Gross (1998) explains that cognitive reappraisal is an emotion regulation process in which individuals change the way they interpret or perceive a situation, thereby reducing negative emotional responses. (Gross, 1998) In the context of *tawakkul*, individuals are encouraged to view the difficulties they face not merely as a reflection of personal failure or an inability to control the future, but as part of Allah's divine decree that should be accepted while continuing to make efforts or *ikhtiar*. According to Ibn 'Aṭā'illah, *tawakkul* is a spiritual intervention that reconstructs negative thought patterns through the harmonization of effort and submission to God. From this perspective, failure is understood as part of a wise destiny, so that every effort from the outset is a manifestation of *tawakkul* itself (Astuti & Bashori, 2025).

Through internalizing these *Tawakkul* values, individuals experience a reorientation in cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Cognitively, *Tawakkul* enables cognitive reappraisal, namely the reassessment of negative events using a framework of faith. Affectively, this internalization fosters inner peace, acceptance of God's will, and gratitude for every situation. Behaviorally, *Tawakkul* encourages individuals to maintain consistent efforts without losing motivation, even if the results achieved do not always meet expectations (Fitriani et al., 2024). Cumulatively, *tawakkul* reduces hopelessness by functioning as a spiritually-based cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation, as well as an adaptive strategy for coping with stress. This model has rarely been discussed before, as previous research generally positions *tawakkul* only as a resilience factor, not a primary instrument for hopelessness intervention.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the role of *Tawakkul* (religious surrender) as a coping mechanism in overcoming hopelessness using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. Based on the results of ten relevant articles, a fairly consistent picture emerged that *Tawakkul* has a significant influence in alleviating various psychological problems such as hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and stress. These findings were then further analyzed using Aaron T. Beck's theory of hopelessness and combined with the Sufi views of Ibn 'Aṭā'illah al-Sakandarī to produce a new conceptual framework.

Tawakkul, as complete surrender to Allah after maximum sincere effort, differs from passive submission. Research shows that *Tawakkul* impacts three dimensions: cognitive (restructuring negative thoughts through spiritual cognitive reappraisal), affective (generating calm, gratitude, and acceptance), and behavioral (encouraging consistent effort without losing motivation). This aligns with Beck's theory of hopelessness, which states that depression arises from a negative cognitive triad; *Tawakkul* presents as a religious cognitive restructuring that

replaces pessimism with faith in Allah's plan. Ibn 'Aṭā'illah's Sufi perspective in al-Ḥikam emphasizes the balance between endeavor and surrender, making tawakkul not merely a psychological technique but also a spiritual path to serenity.

Based on the integration of empirical findings, Beck's theory, and Ibn 'Aṭā'illah's Sufi perspective, this study proposes a conceptual model: hopelessness begins with cognitive distortion, which is then transformed through *tawakkul* into a cognitive, affective, and behavioral reorientation that reduces hopelessness. This model offers novelty because it positions tawakkul not merely as a resilience factor but as a primary instrument for intervention in hopelessness.

The implications are broad: in clinical counseling, tawakkul can be integrated with Islamic cognitive-behavioral therapy; in education, it prevents student hopelessness; in employment, it maintains worker motivation; and in society, it serves as spiritual capital in facing crises. Thus, tawakkul is a multidimensional coping mechanism relevant to the development of Islamic psychology and holistic counseling practice.

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