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Melukat as a Balinese Spiritual Cleansing Ritual: Its Potential Role in Complementary Care for Cancer Patients - A Literature Review

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Abstract

Melukat, a Balinese spiritual cleansing ritual, is traditionally practiced for purification, psychological balance, and spiritual renewal. Recently, it has been recognized for its potential role in wellness and complementary therapies. For cancer patients, who often experience psychological distress and spiritual challenges, *Melukat* may serve as a culturally grounded supportive practice. This review explores the potential of *Melukat* as a complementary approach in cancer care by synthesizing evidence on its psychological, spiritual, and socio-cultural impacts. Eleven peer-reviewed articles published between 2022 and 2025 were analyzed. The studies consistently show that *Melukat* reduces anxiety and emotional distress, promotes mindfulness and catharsis, and strengthens spiritual balance. Mental health professionals acknowledge its value as a supportive, not substitutive practice. Its appeal across cultural and religious groups and its integration into wellness tourism, further emphasize its adaptability and inclusivity. *Melukat* demonstrates promise as a complementary practice in cancer care by addressing psychological burdens, enhancing spiritual resilience, and improving well-being. Although further oncology-specific research is needed, current evidence supports its relevance for holistic, culturally sensitive cancer care.

Keywords: *Melukat*, complementary care, cancer

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INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020, or nearly one in six deaths. The most common cancers are breast, lung, colon, rectum, and prostate cancer (WHO, 2025). Cancer is a non-communicable disease (NCD) listed as a fundamental health issue, both globally and in Indonesia (S. U. Dewi et al., 2024). Diagnosis and medical treatment for cancer usually cause great physical and emotional distress and add stress to cancer patients' lives (Lee, 2019a). Cancer remains one of the leading causes of mortality worldwide and continues to pose significant physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges to patients and their families. Beyond the medical burden, cancer patients often experience profound psychosocial distress, which extends to their caregivers, creating a complex biopsychosocial and spiritual impact (Putri, 2024). Family members, as primary caregivers, are not only confronted with physical and emotional exhaustion but also engage in spiritual coping strategies to endure the uncertainty and emotional strain associated with cancer care. These coping mechanisms are deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual practices, reflecting the holistic dimensions of health and healing.

Spirituality has been increasingly recognized as a critical component of holistic nursing care for individuals with life-threatening illnesses such as cancer. It encompasses the search for meaning, purpose, and connection to a higher power, enabling patients to cope with the uncertainty of illness and treatment. Evidence suggests that patients with higher levels of spiritual well-being report better quality of life, lower levels of depression and anxiety, and greater resilience throughout the cancer trajectory (Lee, 2019b). Integrating spiritual care into nursing practice is essential to address the holistic needs of cancer patients.

In the Balinese cultural context, spiritual rituals such as *Melukat* a traditional water purification ceremony play a significant role in promoting emotional and spiritual cleansing. *Melukat* is believed to purify the mind and soul, reduce negative energies, and provide psychological comfort, offering a potential complementary approach to conventional cancer care. Incorporating such culturally rooted spiritual practices into nursing care may help improve psychosocial and spiritual well-being, thereby supporting a more comprehensive model of cancer care.

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METHOD

This study employed a literature review approach to explore the potential role of *Melukat*, a Balinese spiritual cleansing ritual, as a complementary care strategy for cancer patients. The review process involved a systematic search and selection of relevant literature from several academic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, and Garuda Ristikbrin.

The keywords used in the search included: *Melukat, complementary care, Balinese purified tradition, mental health, health, cancer*. Boolean operators such as *AND* and *OR* were applied to combine search terms and broaden the scope of relevant studies.

Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the selection of relevant literature:

1. Articles published between 2010 and 2025 to capture recent evidence.
2. Studies focusing on cancer patients, caregivers, or families in relation to spirituality, spiritual well-being, or complementary care.
3. Literature discussing Balinese cultural practices, particularly Melukat, or other comparable spiritual cleansing rituals in the context of health and well-being.
4. Peer-reviewed journal articles available in English or Indonesian.
5. Both qualitative and quantitative studies, including systematic reviews and narrative reviews.

Exclusion criteria included:

1. Articles not related to health, nursing, or complementary care.
2. Studies focusing solely on medical or pharmacological treatments without psychosocial or spiritual aspects.
3. Non-academic sources such as blogs, opinion pieces, or unpublished theses.
4. Duplicate studies found across databases.

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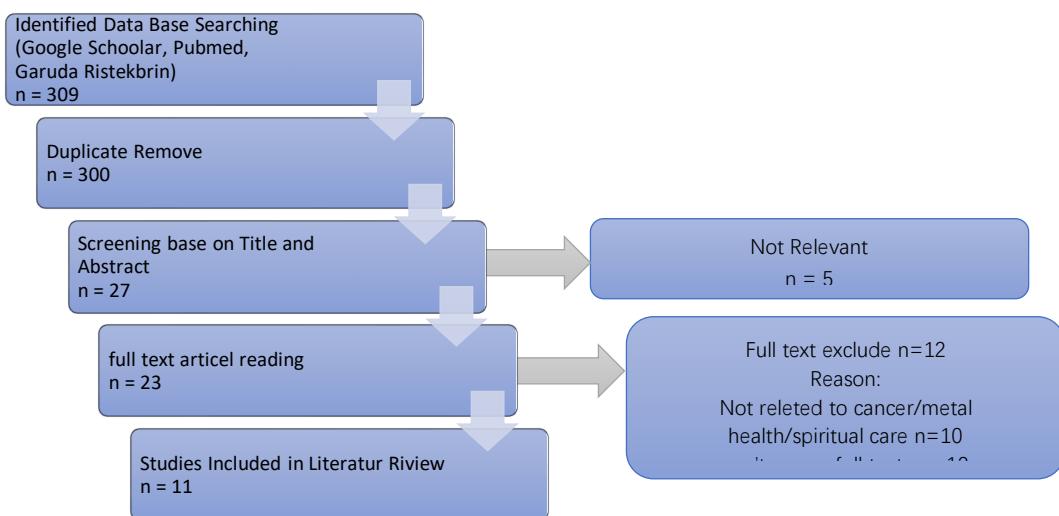
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The initial search yielded a wide range of articles, which were screened by title and abstract to assess relevance. Full-text reviews were conducted to determine eligibility according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Ultimately, the selected studies were synthesized to identify recurring themes regarding the integration of spirituality, complementary care, and the potential role of *Melukat* in cancer care.



Picture 1. PRISMA flowchart

RESULT

This literature review analyzed eleven studies exploring the *Melukat* ritual as a Balinese spiritual cleansing practice and its relevance to psychological well-being, cultural preservation, and integration into modern health and complementary care. The findings can be organized into four thematic domains: psychological and emotional benefits, cultural and religious significance, health tourism and wellness development, and integration with modern healthcare and counseling.

1. Psychological and Emotional Benefits

Several studies highlighted the psychological impact of *Melukat* in reducing stress, anxiety, and emotional burdens. *Melukat* functioned as an effective coping mechanism for individuals experiencing anxiety, offering relief through prayer, meditation, and water purification (Milanisty, 2025). One research reported a significant reduction in anxiety among pregnant women after undergoing *Melukat*, with statistical analysis confirming its effectiveness as a

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complementary intervention during pregnancy (Sukawati et al., 2022). Further emphasized that *Melukat* facilitated the release of negative emotions and enhanced feelings of renewal and calmness (Sharmistha & Yuwanto, 2024). Collectively, these studies provide evidence that *Melukat* can serve as a non-pharmacological approach to addressing anxiety and stress, which may be particularly relevant in cancer care contexts where psychological resilience is crucial.

2. Cultural and Religious Significance

Melukat is deeply rooted in Balinese Hindu philosophy, emphasizing harmony between body, mind, spirit, and the universe. There are roles in cultivating values of purity, selfdiscipline, and leadership within Balinese education (Kamvysselis, 2023). Aulia & Badruzaman, (2020) examined the phenomenon from an Islamic theological perspective, noting that while *Melukat* is a Hindu ritual, its adoption by Muslims and other groups reflects its perceived universal spiritual value. Importantly, the study found that participation in *Melukat* does not diminish one's faith, but instead fosters tolerance and intercultural dialogue. This underscores *Melukat* as both a religious and interfaith practice that transcends doctrinal boundaries.

3. Health Tourism and Wellness Development

Several articles addressed the growing role of *Melukat* within Bali's health and wellness tourism. Psychological motivations as key drivers for tourists engaging in *Melukat*, with participants reporting emotional restoration and balance (Ngarbingan et al., 2024). *Melukat* and other traditional healing practices are increasingly integrated into medical wellness tourism packages (R. D. C. Dewi, 2025; Suwantana, 2025). These studies showed that the ritual has become a trend in interfaith tourism and was even showcased internationally during events such as the World Water Forum. This highlights its potential as a cultural asset that not only promotes individual well-being but also strengthens local economic development.

4. Integration with Modern Healthcare and Counseling

Several studies argued for the integration of *Melukat* into modern therapeutic frameworks. Clinical psychologists view *Melukat* as a beneficial adjunct to psychotherapy, particularly for stress reduction and mindfulness (Pristiyanti & Yuwanto, 2025). *Melukat* could be incorporated into multicultural counseling practices, fostering emotional catharsis, mindfulness, and meaning-making (Nursani et al., 2025). These findings align with global trends in holistic and culturally sensitive care, where traditional practices complement biomedical approaches. Such

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integration is particularly relevant for cancer care, where patients often seek meaning, spiritual support, and psychological healing alongside clinical treatment.

The reviewed studies converge on the view that *Melukat* is more than a religious ritual, it is a culturally embedded therapeutic practice with tangible psychological, emotional, and social benefits. It alleviates anxiety and stress, fosters spiritual resilience, and promotes holistic well-being. Its increasing acceptance among diverse populations, including tourists and non-Hindu communities, demonstrates its universal appeal. Moreover, its incorporation into counseling and wellness tourism underscores its adaptability to modern contexts. These findings suggest that *Melukat* has strong potential to be positioned as a form of complementary care for cancer patients, particularly in addressing their emotional and spiritual needs.

Table 1. Reviewed Studi Of Melukat

No	Author's (Year)	Aim	Method	Result	Relevance to Complementary Cancer Care
1	Milanisty (2025)	To examine <i>Melukat</i> as a coping strategy for anxiety	Qualitative	Reported reduction in anxiety and improved emotional balance through ritual purification	Suggests potential role in reducing cancer-related distress
2	Pristiyanti & Yuwanto (2025)	To explore psychologists' perspectives on <i>Melukat</i>	Qualitative interviews with mental health professionals	Psychologists acknowledged calming and reflective benefits but emphasized it as complementary to therapy	Supports integration of <i>Melukat</i> alongside psychotherapy for cancer patients
3	Ngarbingan & Akbara (2024)	To analyze factors influencing tourist participation in <i>Melukat</i>	Quantitative survey	Psychological motives (emotional well-being, renewal) dominated over cultural motives	Indicates broad applicability of <i>Melukat</i> beyond Hindu context for emotional healing
4	Suwantana (2025)	To study <i>Melukat</i> within traditional Balinese healing	Literature review	Positioned <i>Melukat</i> as part of holistic healing (<i>usada</i>) promoting balance of body, mind, and spirit	Aligns with holistic cancer care that addresses physical and spiritual dimensions
5	Sharmistha & Yuwanto (2024)	To evaluate psychological benefits of <i>Melukat</i>	Qualitative study	Participants reported calmness, freshness, and emotional cleansing	Useful for emotional release and trauma healing in cancer patients

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6	Kamvysselis (2023)	To explore educational significance of purity in <i>Melukat</i>	Ethnographic analysis	<i>Melukat</i> promotes values of discipline, reflection, and leadership	Encourages resilience and positive coping in long-term cancer care
7	Sukawati et al. (2022)	To measure impact of <i>Melukat</i> on anxiety in pregnancy	Quantitative experimental study	Significant reduction in anxiety levels after ritual	Demonstrates measurable stress reduction, transferable to cancer care contexts
8	Nursani (2025)	To integrate <i>Melukat</i> with counseling guidance	Conceptual paper	Highlights catharsis, mindfulness, and meaning-making through ritual	Supports multicultural counseling and emotional support in cancer care
9	Dewi (2025)	To assess development of medical wellness tourism through <i>Melukat</i>	Case study	<i>Melukat</i> positioned as wellness tourism asset, part of medical tourism trends	Opens possibilities for structured complementary programs for cancer survivors
10	Aulia Badruzaman (2022) &	To analyze <i>Melukat</i> from Islamic theological perspective	Library research	Found ritual widely practiced beyond Hinduism; not contradictory to Islamic faith	Supports interfaith inclusivity in spiritual care for diverse cancer patients
11	Suwantana (2025)	To revitalize Balinese healing for modern healthcare	Conceptual study	Advocated scientific validation of <i>Melukat</i> as a healing practice	Strengthens argument for institutional integration into complementary care

DISCUSSION

This literature review highlights the multifaceted role of *Melukat*, a Balinese spiritual cleansing ritual, in psychological well-being, spiritual resilience, and holistic healing, with implications for its integration into complementary cancer care. While none of the reviewed studies investigated *Melukat* directly among cancer patients, the evidence strongly suggests that its psychological, emotional, and spiritual benefits can be extrapolated to the cancer care context.

Anxiety and psychological distress are prevalent among individuals diagnosed with cancer, often undermining treatment adherence and quality of life. Several studies reviewed demonstrate the effectiveness of *Melukat* in reducing anxiety and promoting calmness. Milanisty (2025) and Sukawati et al. (2022) reported significant reductions in anxiety following

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Melukat, both in general populations and pregnant women. *Melukat* may serve as a culturally rooted, non-pharmacological intervention to complement conventional cancer care by alleviating stress and enhancing psychological resilience. Cancer is not only a physical illness but also an existential crisis that disrupts patients' sense of meaning and spiritual balance. Studies underscore the centrality of spirituality in *Melukat*, with Suwantana (2025) situating the ritual within Balinese *usada* healing, which emphasizes balance of body, mind, and spirit. Kamvysselis (2023) further demonstrated how *Melukat* instills values of discipline, reflection, and resilience. These dimensions are particularly relevant for cancer patients, who frequently struggle with spiritual distress and the search for meaning. Participation in *Melukat* may help patients reconnect with cultural identity and spiritual beliefs, fostering a sense of peace and acceptance throughout the cancer trajectory.

Aulia & Badruzaman (2020) demonstrated that even from an Islamic theological perspective, participation in *Melukat* does not negate one's faith, emphasizing its inclusivity. (Ngarbingan et al., 2024) found that psychological motivations for engaging in *Melukat* were dominant even among non-Hindu tourists, indicating its universal appeal. This inclusivity strengthens the argument for considering *Melukat* as a complementary practice for cancer patients from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The integration of traditional rituals into modern healthcare is a growing trend in holistic and patient-centered medicine. *Melukat* could be incorporated alongside psycho-oncology interventions, particularly for cancer patients seeking culturally familiar and spiritually meaningful forms of care.

Cancer survivors often seek holistic approaches to recovery that extend beyond hospital-based treatments. The integration of *Melukat* into wellness tourism offers opportunities for structured survivorship programs, where patients and survivors can engage in rituals that promote psychological recovery, spiritual renewal, and social connectedness. This aligns with global trends emphasizing lifestyle, spirituality, and emotional well-being in survivorship care. The synthesis of these eleven studies suggests that *Melukat* holds promise as a culturally grounded, spiritually meaningful, and psychologically supportive ritual that could enhance complementary cancer care. By reducing anxiety, promoting emotional catharsis, strengthening spiritual resilience, and fostering inclusivity across cultural groups, *Melukat* may address unmet needs of cancer patients that are often overlooked in conventional

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biomedical care. Future research should focus on clinical trials and qualitative investigations involving cancer patients to assess the ritual's direct impact on psychological well-being, spiritual health, and quality of life.

CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates that *Melukat*, as a Balinese spiritual cleansing ritual, offers significant psychological, emotional, and spiritual benefits that can be meaningfully applied in complementary cancer care. Evidence from eleven studies shows its role in reducing anxiety, fostering emotional catharsis, enhancing spiritual resilience, and promoting inclusivity across cultural and religious contexts. But *Melukat* should not replace medical treatment, its integration alongside conventional therapies and psycho-oncological interventions has the potential to improve cancer patients' quality of life and holistic well-being. We neeeded to establish empirical evidence directly within oncology settings, yet current findings strongly support *Melukat* as a culturally grounded and spiritually enriching practice with relevance for cancer care for future research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest of this paper.

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