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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AL-GHAZALI COUNSELING: A SPIRITUAL-BASED APPROACH IN ADDRESSING VARIOUS CLIENT ISSUES

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Abstract: Al-Ghazali's counseling approach is one of the important Islamic counseling concepts to be applied and developed. This spiritually-based approach has a positive impact on resolving various client problems. Previous studies have demonstrated that this approach can serve as an alternative solution for counselors. This study was conducted to comprehensively explore the effectiveness of Al-Ghazali's counseling approach in addressing various client issues. The research method used in this study is a Systematic Literature Review. Of course, the process was integrated and followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) protocol. The study's results concluded that Al-Ghazali's counseling approach is effective for addressing various client problems. In the process, spirituality is the main aspect that plays an important role in resolving client problems. Various issues that can be addressed with this approach include transforming a negative mindset into a positive mindset, reducing anger levels in individuals, preventing and addressing substance abuse and drug addiction, and addressing mental health issues. Therefore, the researcher recommends that future researchers further develop this approach by examining and implementing it to address other issues, such as academic stress, depression, and anxiety in various forms. Additionally, issues related to addiction, such as alcohol addiction, ecstasy addiction, or pornography addiction.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali, Counseling, Spiritual, Approach

Introduction

Guidance and counseling have been present and contributing in Indonesia for around six decades. They play a role as a unit that provides services with the aim of assisting clients to achieve optimal development, make choices, and take responsibility for their own decisions. Along with scientific developments, guidance and counseling models in Indonesia have developed significantly and become more diverse. One of these is a counseling model based on Western theories¹. As stated by Sarmani & Ninggal, Western theories remain the primary reference in the counseling process worldwide², including in non-Western countries³. For example, in Malaysia, counseling practices over the past six decades have consistently relied on Western approaches and theories⁴.

Seeing this phenomenon, it is necessary to explore counseling from an Islamic perspective. This is because Islam clearly has a significant essence for humans in their existence. It also clearly teaches us how to behave in all aspects of life in terms of morals and law⁵. Moreover, in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, it is important to know and understand how counseling is based on Islamic teachings. In Islamic counseling, counseling and therapeutic practices are integrated with spiritual aspects⁶. Spirituality is a significant factor that impacts and holds the essence of human life. Evidence from research conducted over the past decade concludes that when spiritual counseling techniques are implemented in clinics following proper procedures, they have a positive impact on clients' mental health and well-being⁷.

The spiritual role is very important in various problems in an individual's life, which has also been pointed out by many experts. According to Hamjah, including spiritual aspects in counseling is important⁸. Similarly, Carl Jung, based on his extensive therapeutic practice, observed that when clients faced problems, the solutions often ultimately pointed to spiritual aspects, particularly those related to life and religion⁹. Even Turnbow's opinion states that in various practices, counselors and clients agree that the spiritual aspect plays a significant role in determining the success of counseling¹⁰.

Regarding the role of spirituality in general, to reinforce the importance of this aspect, we can refer to previous empirical studies from various scientific fields. A study conducted by Sajadi et al. on 42 female cancer patients involved spiritual counseling as an intervention to improve spiritual well-being. The results of the study indicated that spiritual counseling significantly improved the spiritual well-being of female cancer patients¹¹. Additionally, an experimental study conducted by Zamaniyan et al. on 24 breast cancer patients at Amir Hospital and Omid Hospital in Iran provided spiritual group therapy to improve the quality of life and spiritual well-being of breast cancer patients. The experimental results showed that this intervention could improve

both variables. The conclusion of the study is that spiritual group therapy can be applied in efforts to improve the quality of life and spiritual well-being of breast cancer patients¹². Another study conducted by Noghani et al. involved 100 patients undergoing hemodialysis in Iran. The study administered nine sessions of spiritual therapy intervention to the patients. The results of the study concluded that spiritual therapy is an effective and cost-effective intervention in improving the hope and self-efficacy of hemodialysis patients¹³.

Based on various studies conducted by practitioners, it can be observed that spirituality plays a significant role when included in interventions for various types of problems. Therefore, this study proposes to examine the Islamic spiritual counseling approach, namely Al-Ghazali's counseling approach. The Al-Ghazali spiritual counseling approach is one of the most well-known and frequently used approaches by researchers and practitioners. Imam Al-Ghazali is renowned worldwide for his contributions to various aspects of life¹⁴, including psychology and counseling. In the field of counseling, he integrated spiritual and religious aspects based on Qur'an and Hadith¹⁵. This is highly aligned with the values and socio-cultural context of Indonesian society, which is predominantly Muslim. Al-Ghazali's spiritual concepts differ from other concepts. The concepts discussed are related to Nafs, Qalb, Ruh, and 'Aql, which will also be examined in this study.

Research and scientific development related to counseling integrated with a spiritual approach by Al-Ghazali is currently still very minimal when compared to the application of Western counseling concepts and theories, such as psychoanalysis, cognitive behavior therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy, gestalt, and so on. Therefore, it is still very necessary to see how this approach can be developed in the future as a form of counseling intervention for various individual problems. This study will intensively examine the effectiveness of implementing Al-Ghazali counseling in addressing various client issues over the past five years. The findings, synthesis, and analysis of the research results, along with credible evidence, will recommend opportunities for further research and development regarding Al-Ghazali's counseling approach in the future. To date, no systematic and comprehensive study has been conducted on the effectiveness of this counseling approach in addressing clients' issues. This represents a novelty and will contribute to the field of guidance and counseling, particularly Islamic guidance and counseling. Through this research, it will be possible to identify issues that can be addressed or resolved using this counseling approach. This will open up broad prospects for future researchers in applying and developing Al-Ghazali's spiritual counseling methodology in the future.

Method

The method used in this study is a systematic literature review (SLR). A systematic literature review is a research method that involves collecting, identifying, critically analyzing, and presenting the results of available research¹⁶, such as articles, conference proceedings, books, and others, through systematic steps¹⁷. This method is effective in synthesizing findings from a collection of relevant research on a particular question, which can then provide evidence that can be used as a basis for practice and policy¹⁸. In addition, this research has a solid foundation for use in significant theory development based on the synthesis of these findings¹⁹. Research using this method has been recognized by various disciplines, becoming a strong research method in evidence-based decision making and producing a high level of confidence in answering hypotheses²⁰.

This systematic literature review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) standards, which aim to improve the quality, transparency, clarity, and value of reports. The stages of this review are identification, screening, suitability, and inclusion²¹. The literature required for analysis in this study is related to the effectiveness of implementing Al-Ghazali counseling in addressing various client problems. To enhance the credibility of the research, the literature analyzed systematically consists of articles published in reputable international journals. Several inclusion and exclusion criteria will be presented as follows.

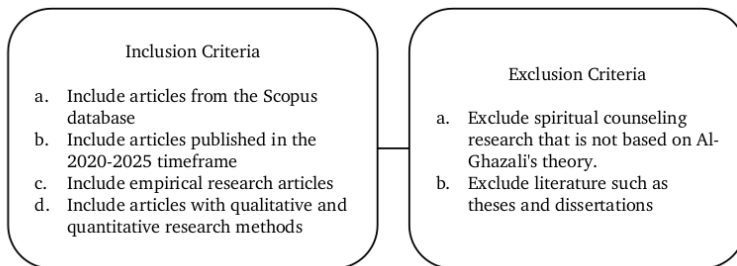


Figure 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Furthermore, the stages in conducting a systematic literature review are explained in detail in the following flowchart.

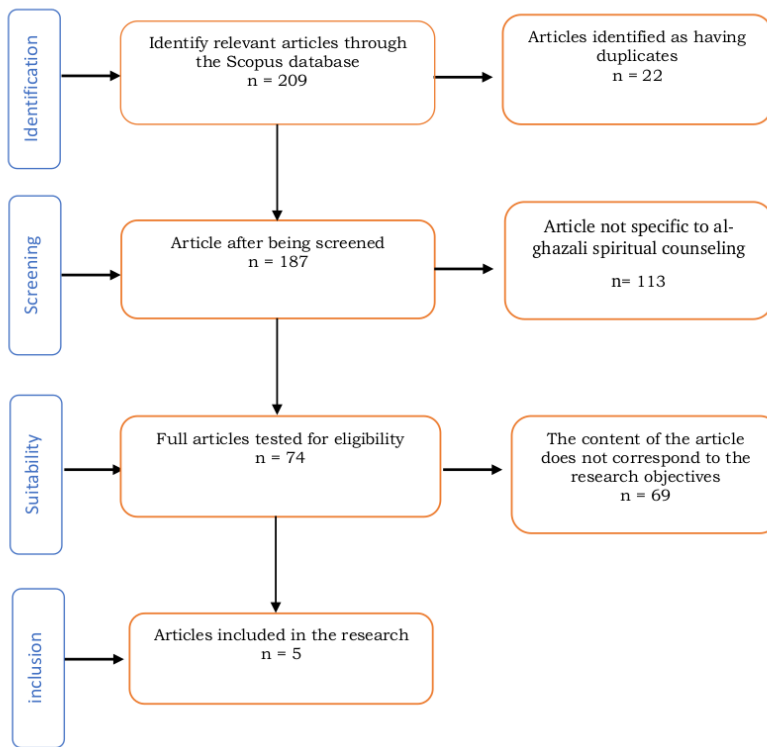


Figure 2. Flow chart systematic literature review

Results and Discussion

Result

Based on the results of a search of the Scopus database, which has the highest credibility. After the researchers conducted a serious process of identification, screening, and suitability, they decided to include the following articles in this study

Table 1. Articles included in the study

No	Researcher	Year	Country	Results
1	Hamjah, H. Mohd Arifin, Z. Ismail, K. A. Mastor, Mohamad Rasit, and Rahman Zaizul	2020	Malaysia	Al-Ghazali's counseling with the tazkiyatun nafs approach can help counselors successfully change clients' thoughts and psychology to be more positive
2	Muhammad, H. Sakari, Nor Shakirah and Omar, Syed Hadzrullathfi	2022	Malaysia	Psychospiritual intervention is effectively implemented to reduce anger among delinquent adolescents.
3	Abidin, M. Saiful Amri Zainal, M. Zohdi M. Amin, Abdulloh Salaeh, 25 Fatimah Zahra' W. Yusoff, and Salmah Fa'atin	2022	Malaysia	Islamic psychospiritual therapy has been proven to effectively help drug addicts recover, especially in overcoming addiction relapse among Muslims.
4	Shafie, Amin Al Haadi, Durrath Athirah Walid, Abdul Rashid Bin Abdul Aziz, Nurhafizah Mohamad Yassin, Dini Farhana Bt Baharudin, Khatijah Othman, Rafidah Aga Bt Mohd Ja'ladin, Salleh Amat, and Suzaily Wahab	2023	Malaysia	A spirituality module for effective drug abuse prevention keeps teenagers from getting involved in substance and drug abuse.
5	Zin, Nor Asliza Mohd, Ku Suhaila Ku Johari, Abu Yazid Abu Bakar, and Mohd Izwan Mahmud	2024	Malaysia	The Spiritual Counseling Intervention Module that was developed effectively reduced depression levels in clients and helped improve emotional intelligence.

To provide a more detailed overview of several articles included in this study, the following chart is presented.

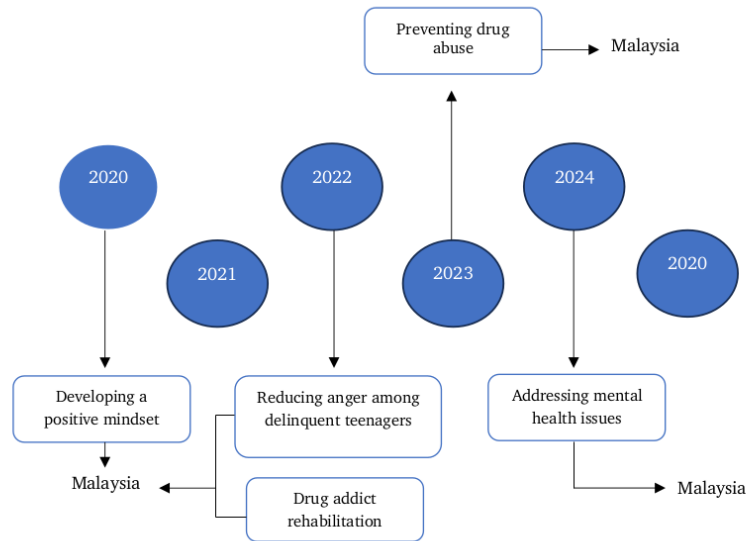


Figure 3. Articles included in the study

Spirituality in the perspective of Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali is one of the most famous²² Islamic scholars²³, the most influential in history²⁴ and highly respected²⁵. The most striking aspect of his life was his extraordinary contribution to science²⁶ and Islam²⁷. Because of his contributions, he is well known throughout the world with the title Hujjatul Islam²⁸. Even his thoughts have influenced some of the most important thinkers in the Western world, either directly or indirectly²⁹. This includes his various thoughts on personality psychology and spirituality, which have been studied using comparative methods with Western thought by several researchers around the world.

The discussion of spirituality in counseling is a complex study because there is no single agreement on the meaning and concept of spirituality³⁰. The concept of spirituality varies greatly because each individual has slightly different emotional needs, desires, and goals³¹. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, spirituality within humans is composed of four components known as Al-Nafs, Al-Qalb, Al-Ruh, and Al-'Aql³².

These components must not be ignored or omitted when examining spirituality from Al-Ghazali's perspective.

The first component of spirituality is nafs, which has two meanings according to Al-Ghazali³³. The first meaning is that nafs is human desire, which includes lust or human nature. Sufi scholars usually use this definition because it is the main cause of reprehensible human behavior. The second meaning is nafs as the essence of humanity itself, or in other words, the essence of humanity that possesses various qualities, depending on circumstances. Therefore, if we summarize, nafs in the first meaning refers to the blameworthy desires. The second meaning refers to the praiseworthy desires, which are the essence of the human self as a being that knows Allah with all His attributes.

In this case, Al-Ghazali divides the nafs into three levels. The first is the lowest level, called nafs al-ammarah, which is the nafs that drives humans to evil³⁴, such as greed or anger³⁵. The second level is nafs al-lawwamah, which is the soul that regrets itself³⁶, and then begins to realize its mistakes. However, this soul does not feel complete peace³⁷, because within it, there is still a struggle between good and evil³⁸. The highest level is called nafs muthmainnah, which means a peaceful and whole self³⁹. This describes a state of the soul that is calm, peaceful, content, happy, and free from all worries and doubts⁴⁰. To achieve this state of mind, individuals must perform the greatest jihad⁴¹ or fight against their despicable desires, and ultimately acknowledge the oneness of Allah.

Next is a component that also has two meanings in Al-Ghazali's view, namely Qalb. The two meanings referred to are the meaning of the heart as something physical, namely a lump of flesh, while the second meaning is the heart as something spiritual⁴², the place of human love for Allah, which is also the place where the human mind strives to control the heart against the desires⁴³. It functions as a component that drives and controls other parts of the body⁴⁴. In this case, it can direct humans upward toward knowledge of Allah, or conversely, direct humans downward toward worldly pleasures⁴⁵.

Then, another important spiritual component is 'Aql, which is the cognitive aspect of the heart⁴⁶. In this case, humans acquire knowledge through 'aql, which is influenced by physical growth and changing stimuli, and also acts as a catalyst to encourage humans to act⁴⁷. In the book *Ihya'*, Al-Ghazali divides 'aql into four meanings⁴⁸: a) as something that distinguishes humans from animals; b) 'aql is the knowledge possessed by discerning children, such as knowledge of numbers; 'aql is knowledge derived from human experience; d) 'aql helps humans to know the consequences of an event based on their considerations. Therefore, 'aql is one of the most important components, because with 'aql, humans can be directed upward or downward⁴⁹, toward knowledge of Allah, or fall into worldly pleasures.

The final spiritual component in spirituality is called the soul, which, according to Al-Ghazali, has two meanings. The first meaning is the center of movement of all blood vessels, which then travel throughout the human body and ultimately, with the permission of Allah, enable humans to breathe, move, feel, see, and hear as living beings⁵⁰. According to Al-Ghazali, the journey of the spirit within the human body provides the light of life, like the light of a lamp illuminating a house. Second, the spirit is something subtle and contained within humans that enables them to know things. The spirit is something extraordinary that cannot be understood by the human mind to reveal its essence⁵¹.

To clearly observe how these four components are formed into spirituality within humans, refer to the diagram provided below.

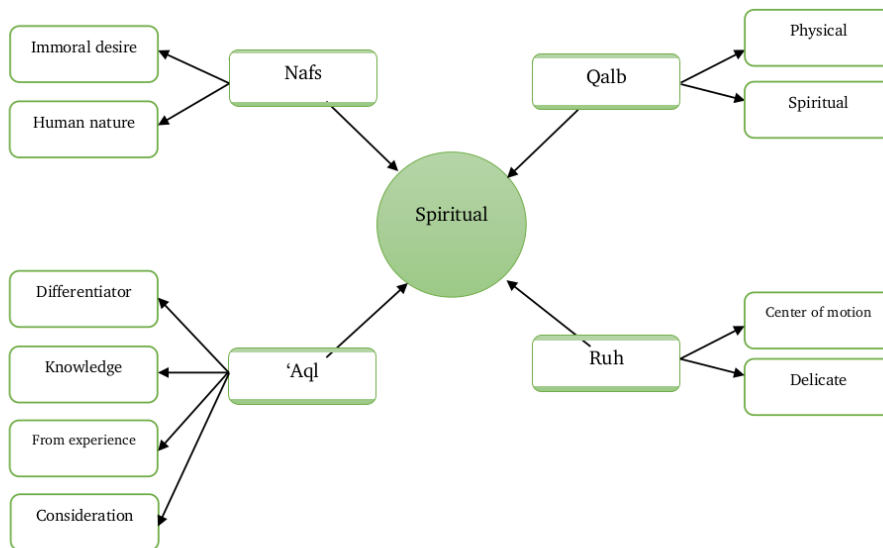


Figure 4. Spirituality in the view of Al-Ghazali

The process of implementing Al-Ghazali counseling

Al-Ghazali does not directly explain the definition of counseling, but counseling in his view is the result of his examination of various works that use the term *al-irsyad*. Spiritual counseling in Al-Ghazali's view is a way of guiding, teaching, or providing a means to achieve a goal or lead to goodness that is relevant to Islamic teachings⁵². The process focuses on the four spiritual aspects mentioned earlier. Unlike other types of counseling, this approach is not merely about solving human problems, but goes deeper, namely for the sake of happiness in this world and the hereafter.

This counseling also has its own characteristics and advantages. Several stages of Al-Ghazali counseling are: a) establishing a warm and good relationship with the client; b) recognizing oneself and examining the causes of the problem; c) implementing *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) with the principles of *mujahadah al-nafs* (*takhalli*); d) implementing *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) using the principle of *riyadah al-nafs* (*tahalli*); e) assessment and happiness. To facilitate better understanding, a flow chart related to the implementation process of Al-Ghazali counseling is presented.

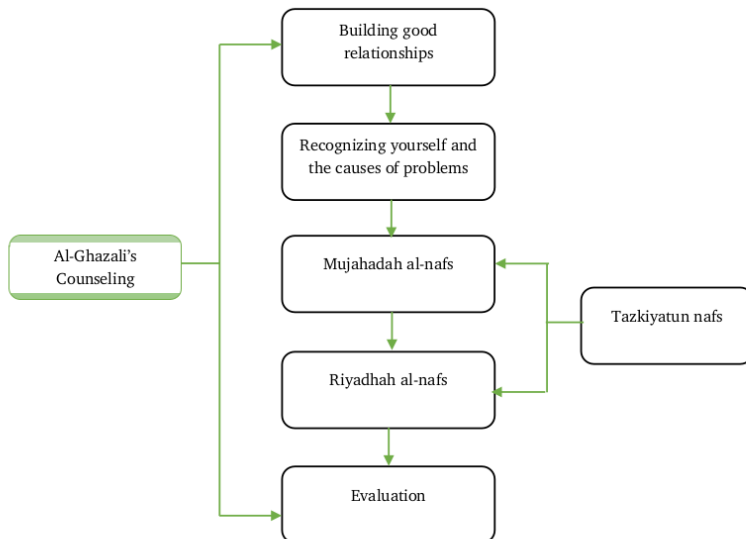


Figure 5. Stages of implementing Al-Ghazali counseling

The Effectiveness of Al-Ghazali Counseling in Addressing Various Client Issues

Al-Ghazali's counseling in developing a positive mindset

In testing the effectiveness of Al-Ghazali counseling, Hamjah et al. conducted research in 2020 on developing a positive mindset in clients using the Al-Ghazali counseling approach with the tazkiyatun nafs technique. This positive mindset is a very important issue to study, as it leads to positive psychological well-being in individuals⁵³. The sample in this study consisted of 58 counselors registered with the Malaysian Counselors Association. They had a minimum of one year of experience in counseling sessions and practiced a religious approach in counseling. The sample consisted of 36 females (62.1%) and 22 males (37.9%), with counseling experience ranging from 6 to 10 years. The instrument used to measure the positive mindset variable was the Client Positive Reflection Instrument. The results of the study indicate that through the tazkiyatun nafs approach, counselors successfully changed clients' thoughts and psychology to be more positive⁵⁴, such as believing that every trial has hidden wisdom and that trials in life are the will of Allah. From these issues, clients became convinced that all problems can be resolved with Allah's permission. The findings of this study are presented in the following chart.

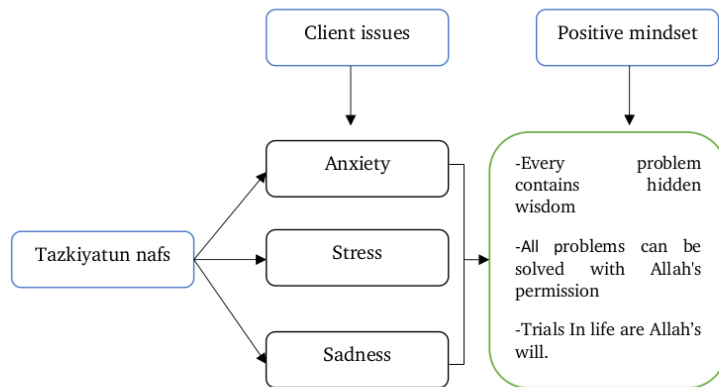


Figure 6. Tazkiyatun nafs in developing a positive mindset

Al-Ghazali's counseling in overcoming the anger levels of delinquent students

Research conducted by Muhammad, H. et al. in 2022 was based on the issue of juvenile delinquency, which remains one of the most critical social problems facing the Malaysian nation. Juvenile delinquency is a serious and widespread problem⁵⁵. This issue has prompted researchers to conduct scientific and empirical studies on the causes, prevention/control, and rehabilitation of juvenile delinquency. It cannot be denied that this occurs primarily due to its continuously rising prevalence. Various theories suggest that this delinquency continues to increase due to various influences, including the characteristics of adolescents, their physical and psychological conditions, as well as family and environmental factors⁵⁶. If not addressed, this problem will have negative impacts on other aspects of adolescents' lives.

Then Muhammad, H. et al. conducted research using a quasi-experimental method on 24 delinquent teenage girls from a correctional and rehabilitation center in Terengganu. The instrument used to measure the students' anger levels was the Clinical Anger Scale (CAS). Psychospiritual counseling interventions were implemented to enhance and improve the spiritual aspects of delinquent adolescents, as well as reduce feelings of distress, anger resulting from failure, self-pity, and other related emotions. Students' efforts to manage anger wisely were supported by the process of tazkiyatun nafs, as conceptualized by Al-Ghazali. Additionally, the process guided students to develop awareness regarding a clear vision and mission in life, with the ultimate goal of living peacefully without anger as their primary objective.

After conducting the intervention process, a post-test was administered to measure the anger levels of the delinquent students. The results showed a significant difference in anger levels before and after the psychospiritual intervention. The anger levels among these delinquent teenagers decreased significantly, with an average difference of 1.523 after the intervention was given. In the pretest, the students' anger scores had a mean of 4.224, and after psycho-spiritual counseling, it decreased to 2.701. This means that the psycho-spiritual intervention was effective in reducing anger among delinquent teenagers⁵⁷.

Al-Ghazali's counseling in preventing and treating drug addiction

The experimental study by Shafie, A. et al., conducted in 2023 on 66 individuals registered with a youth organization in the northern state of Peninsular Malaysia, who were then divided into an experimental group and a control group. This study aimed to test a module based on assertiveness, spirituality, and beliefs regarding substance and drug abuse. This study is relevant because the module emphasizes spirituality as conceptualized by Al-Ghazali. The results of the study indicate that the module had a positive impact on the experimental group in terms of average results before and after

the intervention. Improvements in the three variables of spirituality, self-confidence, and belief in the negative effects of drug abuse in the post-study phase can enhance awareness and good coping skills for individuals in preventing and dealing with drug abuse. Therefore, based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that a spirituality module for drug abuse prevention can encourage adolescents to avoid involvement in substance and drug abuse and lead a more positive life in the future⁵⁸.

The results of this study also prove that Al-Ghazali's spiritual counseling can contribute to this very important issue. This is because drug abuse has become an urgent public health problem throughout the world⁵⁹. Even the WHO has long identified substance addiction as a serious problem for global health⁶⁰. Given the high prevalence of substance abuse, it is increasingly important to determine effective screening practices, treatment procedures, and best practices⁶¹. One of the efforts that can be made in substance and drug abuse is prevention. Therefore, it is essential to design and implement prevention programs targeting adolescents⁶². The spiritual-based prevention module developed in the study by Shafie, A. et al. has made a positive contribution to preventing substance abuse and drug use. This is because its feasibility and effectiveness have been empirically tested.

Additionally, regarding the issue of drug addiction, Abidin, M. et al. conducted a study in 2022 in Malaysia using a qualitative approach through interviews with rehabilitation center managers and observations of activities at rehabilitation centers to assess the effectiveness and impact of Islamic psychospiritual therapy in the recovery process of Muslim drug addicts. One of the therapies used here is the concept of Al-Ghazali counseling, namely tazkiyatun nafs. This study was conducted at several government and private drug rehabilitation centers, namely Cure & Care Rehabilitation Center (CCRC) Tiang Dua, CCRC Sungai Ruan, Pondok Remaja Inabah Negeri Sembilan, Teratak Tautan Kaseh Murabbi, and Persatuan Pengasih Malaysia. The results of the study indicate that, based on interviews and observations at several rehabilitation centers, Islamic psychospiritual therapy has proven effective in assisting the government, private institutions, and individuals in achieving the recovery of drug addicts, particularly in addressing relapse in Muslim addicts⁶³. In addition to this therapy, other components that contribute to drug addiction treatment include institutions, peers, the community, and mentors.

The results of this study are relevant to various previous research findings. Bensaid, B. et al. state that Islamic spirituality is incorporated into various religious practices as well as values and norms, which in this case play a major role in the prevention, treatment, therapy, and recovery of addiction among Muslims⁶⁴. Individuals who have recovered from addiction often state that spirituality was a helpful influence⁶⁵. Given the relevance of these research findings to previous studies, it

further strengthens the conclusion that Al-Ghazali counseling has proven effective in addressing drug addiction issues.

Al-Ghazali's counseling in addressing mental health issues

Mental health issues often require various approaches and complex dynamics, and can be described as a complicated problem⁶⁶. It is undeniable that new solutions are urgently needed to address mental health needs⁶⁷. This is especially true in this era of rapid technological development, which can also have an impact on mental health⁶⁸. Globally, it has been observed that approximately 15% of all adolescents aged 10-19 experience mental health problems and poor well-being⁶⁹. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that if mental health issues are not addressed during adolescence, they are likely to persist into adulthood, affecting both mental and physical health, and limiting opportunities to lead active and fulfilling lives as adults⁷⁰.

Regarding this mental health issue, Zin, N. et al., conducted a study in 2024 on high school students in Malaysia. This study was conducted using the design and development research (DDR) method, with the aim of developing a counseling module based on a spiritual approach. The product is named the Spiritual Counseling Intervention Module (MIKS), whose development concept is based on Al-Ghazali's tazkiyatun nafs model, to address students' mental health issues. The use of this approach is based on various opinions regarding the importance of integrating spirituality in addressing client issues. Currently, counseling greatly requires a spiritual approach, as this approach can address client issues more effectively⁷¹.

In addition, previous research has observed a relationship between religious and spiritual elements in treating mental disorders that cause depression⁷². For many years, spirituality has been used as an important asset in improving mental health⁷³. This reinforces the module's potential as an alternative solution to mental health problems. The model was developed in three stages: needs analysis, design and development, and evaluation and usability testing. Validity testing was conducted based on evaluations by experts in various fields, including psychologists, guidance and counseling experts, and religious scholars. Reliability testing was conducted on 60 high school students in four schools. This module combines Al-Ghazali's tazkiyatun nafs framework and the REBT framework. Within the counseling framework or stages, it is explained that (A) is an event experienced by the client, which is addressed through Ma'rifah al-Nafs (recognizing the true nature of human events), (B) is an irrational belief identified through Ma'rifah al-Nafs (recognizing the heart), (C) is recognizing the emotional impact or consequences of the event and belief, achieved through Ma'rifah al-Nafs (recognizing the signs of heart disease), (D) is the process of conflict between irrational thoughts through takhalli (cleansing the heart) and tahalli (filling the heart), (E) the formation of a new belief through muhasabah (self-

reflection), and (F) is the effort to build new goals through al-Saadah (happiness in this world and the hereafter). Thus, with these stages or framework, it will have an impact on the psychosocial and mental well-being of students by reducing depression levels and increasing emotional intelligence and coping strategies among high school students. To clarify this framework, the following diagram is presented.

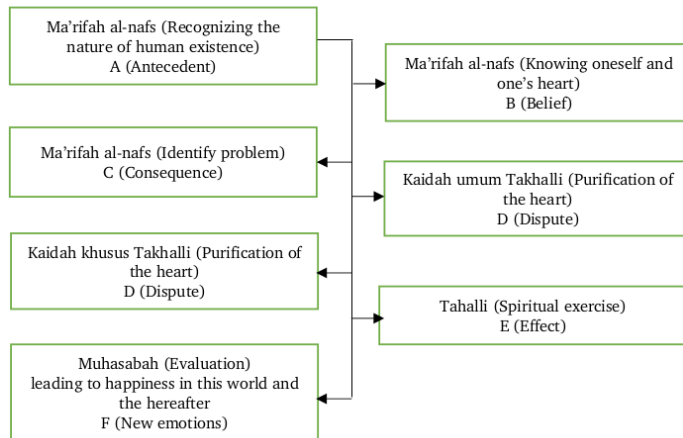


Figure 7. Stages of the Spiritual Counseling Intervention Module (MIKS)

Regarding the testing of this module, it has undergone validity and reliability testing. The results of the expert evaluation show that the total score validity percentage is 88.6 percent. Overall, the expert panel's view is that the content of the Spiritual Approach Short-Term Counseling Intervention Module is acceptable. Therefore, in terms of validity, this module is acceptable and can be considered effective in reducing depression in clients and improving emotional intelligence. Regarding reliability testing, the results are also positive. The overall reliability coefficient value far exceeds the Cronbach's alpha test requirement, at .978. These results are clear enough to conclude that the module has high reliability and is worthy of acceptance. Based on the various tests conducted, it can be concluded that the developed Spiritual Counseling Intervention Module can reduce depression levels in clients and enhance emotional intelligence through coping strategies⁷⁴.

Conclusion

Al-Ghazali counseling is one of the concepts of counseling based on Islamic spirituality, which stands in the midst of the many Western counseling approaches today. The spiritual concepts examined in this approach encompass four elements: nafs, qalb, 'aql, and ruh. Based on a comprehensive systematic literature review, it was concluded that the Al-Ghazali counseling approach is effective for addressing various client issues. In this counseling approach, spirituality is the primary aspect that plays a crucial role in resolving client problems. Various issues that can be addressed through this approach include transforming a negative mindset into a positive mindset, reducing anger levels in individuals, preventing and addressing substance abuse and drug addiction, and addressing mental health issues. Based on the issues that have been addressed, the researcher recommends other issues that have the potential to be addressed through this approach, such as other psychological issues, including academic stress, depression, and anxiety in various forms. Additionally, addiction-related issues that can be addressed through this approach include alcohol addiction, ecstasy addiction, or pornography addiction. Therefore, further research should focus on developing the Al-Ghazali counseling approach by studying and applying it to address the recommended issues

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