



The Role of Counselors in Spiritual Counseling to Reduce Bullying Trauma among Students in Islamic Higher Education Institutions

Hengki Yandri¹, Dosi Juliawati²

^{1,2} Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci

Abstract. This study aims to examine the role of counselors in providing spiritual counseling services to reduce bullying trauma among students in Islamic higher education institutions. The research design employs a quantitative approach using a survey method. The participants are lecturers from the Islamic Education Guidance and Counseling Department at State Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Data collection instruments include a questionnaire measuring lecturers' readiness and understanding in implementing spiritual counseling. The data analysis technique used is descriptive analysis. The findings indicate that the majority of lecturers feel prepared to provide spiritual counseling services, as reflected in their experience, knowledge, and confidence in integrating Islamic values into the counseling process. However, there is a subset of lecturers who are not fully prepared, highlighting the need for ongoing professional training and support. Despite a high interest in spiritual counseling, its implementation in practice, particularly in addressing bullying cases, remains suboptimal. These findings suggest a gap between interest and practice, emphasizing the importance of developing relevant and practical spiritual counseling models. Overall, the results reinforce the argument that Islam-based spiritual counseling, which incorporates values such as patience, sincerity, reliance on God, and self-purification, can be an effective approach to mitigating the psychological impacts of bullying.

Keyword: Spiritual Counseling, Bullying, Trauma, Islamic Higher Education, Readiness.

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Correspondence Author: Hengki Yandri, hengki.kons@gmail.com, Sungaipenuh-Jambi, Indonesia.



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Introduction

Bullying is a persistent social phenomenon that continues to attract attention in higher education institutions across various countries. Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI) reported alarming data regarding the prevalence of bullying in Indonesia throughout 2023, recording approximately 3,800 cases (Elaine, 2024). In 2024, about 35% of 114 reported bullying cases occurred within educational institutions, with 46 cases involving children who ended their own lives (KPAI, 2024). These findings align with previous studies, where nearly half of respondents reported having experienced bullying (Kartal et al., 2019; Rayner, 1997). Among the types of bullying, verbal bullying is the most commonly reported, followed by physical, emotional, racial, and sexual intimidation (Moura et al., 2011; Ningrum, 2018; Yandri et al., 2024). Certain characteristics—such as being male, hyperactive, and

having difficulties in peer relationships—are associated with a higher likelihood of being bullied (Moura et al., 2011; Sujadi et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, although awareness of bullying at the school level has increased, similar phenomena in higher education—particularly within Islamic Higher Education Institutions—remain underexplored in a systematic manner. Previous studies indicate that some students at Islamic universities report experiencing various forms of bullying, including verbal harassment, social exclusion, and group pressure based on religious identity and socio-cultural background (Galán et al., 2021; Laeheem, 2013; Safdar et al., 2024). Bullying in higher education is predominantly perpetrated by seventh-semester students, accounting for 83.9% of cases, with verbal bullying being the most frequent type at 73.5% (Putri & Silalahi, 2017). In carrying out bullying behavior, perpetrators often play mutually reinforcing roles. Among 307 student respondents, 49% were identified as bullies, 45% as assistants, 52% as followers, and 75% as defenders of bullying behavior (Hapsari & Purwoko, 2016). These dynamics present a serious risk of psychological trauma that may hinder both the academic and spiritual development of affected students.

Within the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions, spiritual counseling emerges as a highly relevant approach to addressing the issue of bullying. This approach not only focuses on the psychological recovery of individuals but also emphasizes the reinforcement of spiritual and religious values, which are believed to enhance students' mental resilience and emotional regulation. Spiritual-based interventions have been shown to positively affect stress, anxiety, and depression across various contexts. These interventions often provide comfort and improve psychological well-being by integrating spiritual practices into therapeutic settings. Evidence from multiple studies suggests that spirituality can serve as a valuable component in mental health care, offering a holistic approach to treatment (Khosravi et al., 2022; Nuraini et al., 2024; Yandri et al., 2024). However, research specifically examining the effectiveness of counselors in applying spiritual counseling to reduce bullying-related trauma within Islamic Higher Education Institutions remains limited.

This study aims to analyze the role of counselors in spiritual counseling as an effort to reduce trauma caused by bullying among students in Islamic Higher Education Institutions. The primary focus of this research is to assess the extent to which spiritual counseling practices provided by counselors impact the reduction of trauma levels experienced by students who have been victims of bullying, as well as to identify the key dimensions of the counselor's role that most significantly contribute to the recovery process.

This research is crucial given the growing need for counseling approaches that are not only clinical in nature but also grounded in religious values aligned with the characteristics of faith-based institutions. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of guidance and counseling, particularly in developing contextually and culturally grounded spiritual interventions. In addition, the results may serve as a foundation for designing counselor training programs within Islamic Higher Education Institutions to better address bullying cases that affect students' mental health.

The uniqueness of this article lies in its specific focus on examining the role of counselors in the practice of spiritual counseling to reduce trauma caused by bullying within the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Most previous studies on spiritual counseling tend to be conceptual in nature. For instance, Akbar and Silvianetri (2023) explored spiritual values in Islamic counseling processes for perpetrators of bullying, while Pratama et al. (2023) examined students' experiences in receiving religion-based cyber counseling. However, both studies do not provide empirical data that test causal relationships between spiritual counseling practices and the level of trauma experienced by students who have been bullied. Furthermore, no prior research has explicitly centered its analysis on Islamic Higher Education Institutions as a unique socio-religious context, despite the fact that students in these institutions differ significantly from those in secular institutions in terms of values, norms, and spirituality.

The novelty of this article lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which integrates perspectives from counseling psychology, Islamic spirituality, and the dynamics of religious campus life. This approach reveals the role of counselors in trauma recovery through a contextual and spiritually grounded framework—an aspect that has not yet received significant attention in the academic literature on guidance and counseling in Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study expands the scholarly landscape of spiritual counseling by employing a quantitative, data-driven approach and offers practical, applicable solutions within the context of Islamic higher education. This represents a significant scientific contribution and distinguishes this research from previous studies, which have largely remained within theoretical or narrative frameworks.

Methods

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach, aimed at obtaining an empirical overview of the role of counselors in spiritual counseling to reduce trauma caused by bullying among students in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions. This approach was chosen because it allows for an objective description of the studied phenomenon based on numerical data.

The subjects of this study consist of 30 lecturers who are either actively involved in or have an academic background in the field of Guidance and Counseling within State Islamic Higher Education Institutions located across various regions of Indonesia.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	F	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	18	60%
	Female	12	40%
Occupation	Lecturer in the Department of Guidance and Counseling (Counselor)	12	40%
	Lecturer in the Department of Guidance and Counseling (Non-Counselor)	13	43.3%
	Psychologist	5	16.7%
Certification Status	Holds counselor certification	12	40%
	Does not hold counselor certification	18	60%

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria comprising lecturers who are actively teaching in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at State Islamic Higher Education Institutions and have experience in providing counseling services to students. Participant recruitment was conducted through collaboration with the Association of Islamic Guidance and Counseling Lecturers and via academic communication networks among universities. Participants were contacted online via email and were provided with detailed information regarding the research objectives, benefits, and procedures before giving their informed consent to participate.

The research instrument was developed in the form of a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to assess the role of counselors in spiritual counseling. It covered five main dimensions: counselor profile, role, knowledge, interest in providing spiritual counseling services, and the use of spiritual counseling in addressing bullying issues.

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution, to describe participants' perceptions of the counselor's role in spiritual counseling and the effectiveness of this approach in reducing trauma caused by bullying.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into how counselors at State Islamic Higher Education Institutions can integrate spiritual approaches to assist students affected by bullying. These findings also contribute to the development of more holistic and contextually relevant guidance and counseling services within religious-based higher education settings. Through this research, a deeper understanding was gained regarding counselors' profiles, their roles, knowledge of spiritual counseling, as well as their interest in and application of such services in the context of bullying, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Counselors' Roles in Spiritual Counseling (N = 30)

Readiness Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very well-prepared	10	33,33%
Prepared	12	40,00%
Unprepared	8	26,67%

A total of 10 lecturers reported being very well-prepared to provide spiritual counseling services. They indicated having substantial experience, knowledge, and confidence in integrating spiritual approaches to help students cope with bullying-related trauma. These respondents also emphasized that spiritual counseling constitutes a vital component of their professional practice. Meanwhile, 12 respondents stated that they were prepared, meaning they possessed a reasonable level of interest and basic knowledge in spiritual counseling. However, they acknowledged the need for further training or methodological reinforcement to enhance the effectiveness of their services. The remaining 8 respondents reported feeling unprepared to apply spiritual counseling in practice. Although they recognized the importance of such an approach, they admitted to lacking the necessary competence, confidence, or experience to implement it directly in cases of bullying.

Table 3. Counselors' Knowledge of Spiritual Counseling (N = 30)

Knowledge Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strong understanding	9	30,00%
Understanding	14	46,67%
Don't understand	7	23,33%

A total of 9 respondents demonstrated a strong understanding of the concepts, principles, and practices of spiritual counseling, including its integration with Islamic values in addressing psychological trauma such as bullying. They were generally accustomed to applying this approach in their counseling services. Furthermore, the majority of respondents, 14 individuals, fell into the "understanding" category. They grasped the fundamentals of spiritual counseling and were able to explain its general application, but they had not yet fully delved into it or frequently practiced it in a professional context. Meanwhile, 7 respondents admitted they had not fully comprehended spiritual counseling. They required further knowledge, training, or mentorship to effectively apply it in assisting students who have experienced trauma due to bullying.

Table 4. Interest in Providing Spiritual Counseling Services (N = 30)

Interest Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very high interest	11	36,67%
Strong interest	13	43,33%
Moderate interest	6	20,00%

A total of 11 respondents expressed a very high interest in providing spiritual counseling services. They stated that this approach aligns with their personal and religious values, and is highly relevant for addressing psychological issues such as trauma resulting from bullying. Next, 13 respondents were categorized as having a fairly strong interest. They were open and positive toward the use of spiritual counseling, but still required more practical experience or institutional support to consistently apply it effectively. Meanwhile, 6 respondents expressed moderate interest. They acknowledged the importance of spiritual counseling, but it had not yet become a priority in the counseling services they provided. This could be attributed to limited knowledge, experience, or a preference for other counseling approaches.

Table 5. Use of Spiritual Counseling for Bullying Issues (N = 30)

Use Spiritual Counseling Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Ever used	10	33,33%
Had never used	20	66,67%

A total of 10 respondents reported having used spiritual counseling specifically to address bullying. They typically integrated religious values such as patience, sincerity, trust in God (tawakal), and the approach of tazkiyatun nafs (spiritual purification) in the counseling process to help students recover from psychological trauma. Meanwhile, 20 respondents admitted they had never used spiritual counseling in handling bullying cases experienced by students. Some of them relied more on general psychological approaches or were not yet convinced of the effectiveness of the spiritual approach. This highlights the need for enhanced understanding and practical training on the application of spiritual counseling in addressing psychosocial issues such as bullying.

The findings of this study reveal that spiritual counseling plays a crucial role in supporting students who experience trauma due to bullying, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions, which are rich in religious values. Therefore, it is essential to make concerted efforts to strengthen counselors' knowledge and skills in providing effective spiritual counseling services. With better integration between psychological and spiritual counseling, it is hoped that a more positive impact can be made on the recovery of trauma experienced by students.

The results of this study indicate that the majority of lecturers in Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions expressed high readiness and interest in providing spiritual counseling services to address trauma resulting from bullying among students. This readiness is closely related to personal competence, experience, and the understanding of spiritual values that are ingrained in their professional practice. Previous studies also emphasize that lecturers or counselors with high spiritual integrity are more capable of guiding students in overcoming psychological crises (Koburtay et al., 2023; Stephens, 2020). Spiritual counseling is considered effective in rebuilding the meaning of life and strengthening the resilience of bullying victims (Dille, 2023; Koenig, 2018). In this context, Islamic values such as patience, gratitude, trust in God (*tawakal*), and *tazkiyatun nafs* provide an essential foundation in the mental recovery process of students (Faiz et al., 2019; Sihombing & Alamsyah, 2024; Yandri et al., 2022).

In terms of understanding, the majority of lecturers demonstrated a sufficient level of knowledge regarding spiritual counseling, although some still require further training. This indicates the need for strengthening professional capacity through practice-based training and the systematic integration of Islamic values into the counseling curriculum (Asadzandi, 2020; Sidek et al., 2021). These findings align with the research of Asmita and Irman (2022), which states that a deep understanding of spirituality and religious principles can enhance the effectiveness of psychological interventions. Furthermore, the development of counselors' competencies based on spirituality should be directed toward a holistic approach, combining psychological, social, and spiritual aspects (Abd Razak et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2023). The application of this approach is particularly relevant in Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions, where spirituality is an integral part of the institutional identity (Omar Dev et al., 2018; Syafii & Azhari, 2024).

From a practical perspective, there remains a gap between understanding and the actual implementation of spiritual counseling, particularly in addressing bullying cases. Only one-third of the total respondents have directly applied this approach, while the rest have either not used it or never used it at all. This indicates internal challenges, such as a lack of self-confidence or methodological limitations, as well as external challenges, such as insufficient institutional support and the absence of adequate technical guidelines (Stephens, 2020; Suhartono et al., 2024). Other studies also emphasize that the success of spiritual counseling is highly influenced by the campus climate, which supports the integrative practice of religion and psychology (Elkins, 2005; Hamrick et al., 2002). Therefore, it is crucial for institutions to provide ongoing training, forums for best practices, and policies that encourage the integration of spirituality into counseling services (Dille, 2023; Harahap et al., 2023). This is essential to strengthen the position of spiritual counseling as a valid and scientific alternative

in addressing student trauma, especially those rooted in toxic social relationships such as bullying..

This study offers a novel contribution to the field of spiritual counseling in Islamic higher education, particularly in addressing trauma caused by bullying. Most previous research has focused on the effectiveness of general psychological therapies or spirituality in religious contexts broadly. However, this study specifically explores the readiness, understanding, interest, and actual practices of lecturers in providing spiritual counseling services integrated with Islamic values, including the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs*, in addressing trauma among students who are victims of bullying. Additionally, this study provides a theoretical contribution by mapping the stages of professional readiness among counselors in Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions to internalize the spiritual approach, an area that has rarely been systematically explored in Indonesian academic literature.

The findings of this study support the importance of a holistic and transformative approach in guidance and counseling, which not only relies on cognitive and emotional aspects but also on a strong religious spirituality component. While it makes an important contribution, this study has several limitations. First, the limited number of participants from a single group of lecturers at an Islamic Religious Higher Education Institution means the results cannot be broadly generalized to other institutions, whether religious or secular. Second, the descriptive quantitative research approach with closed-ended instruments limits the exploration of deeper motivations or emotional dynamics among lecturers in spiritual counseling practice. Third, this study did not directly measure the effectiveness of spiritual counseling conducted by lecturers in addressing bullying victims, so the long-term impact of spiritual interventions remains an area for further research. Therefore, future studies are recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach or a longitudinal study to examine the relationship between counselors' readiness levels and the success of students' recovery processes in a more comprehensive manner.

Conclusion

This study shows that the majority of lecturers feel ready to provide spiritual counseling services, as indicated by their experience, knowledge, and confidence in integrating Islamic values into the counseling process. However, there is a group of lecturers who are not yet fully prepared, indicating a need for ongoing professional training and mentorship. Furthermore, the study found that although interest in spiritual counseling is relatively high, its implementation in practice is still suboptimal. Most respondents have not directly applied spiritual counseling, particularly in addressing bullying cases. The gap between interest and practice underscores the importance of developing a relevant and practical spiritual counseling model to be applied to students, particularly in bullying cases. Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the argument that Islam-based spiritual counseling, which involves values such as patience, sincerity, trust in God (*tawakal*), and *tazkiyatun nafs*, can be an effective approach in reducing the psychological impact of bullying.

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