

## **THE APPLICATION OF SPIRITUAL COUNSELING TO OVERCOME GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD): A CASE STUDY ON CLIENT “I” FROM GOMBAK, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA**

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### **Abstract**

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a mental disorder involving excessive and uncontrollable fear, anxiety, and worry. Referring to this research, the focus of the study is related to the description of client “I”’s GAD, such as factors, symptoms, and level of GAD anxiety disorders. This research also explains how the spiritual counseling approach can overcome client “I” ‘s GAD problem based on Surah Al-Ma'arij from verses 19 to 32. Client “I” is the main source for this research. Therefore, this research was carried out in three meetings from 03 September 2023 to 10 January 2024 according to the type of research using field research with qualitative methods. The data from this research were obtained from interviews and observations and used data analysis for case studies that had been developed by Robert K. Yin, namely pattern matching, explanation, and time series analysis. The results of the study showed that there was a significant impact on the symptoms of anxiety disorder in a client “I”. Apart from that, the GAD level of client “I” also showed a positive change from a score of 14 to a score of 11 using the GAD-7 Rating Scale. In conclusion, a systematic spiritual counseling approach guided by the verses of the Qur'an has been proven to bring positive changes and overcome Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD).

**Keywords:** Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Spiritual Counseling

### **Abstrak**

*Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) atau juga disebut sebagai gangguan kecemasan menyeluruh merupakan gangguan jiwa melibatkan rasa takut, cemas dan khawatir yang berlebihan dan tidak terkendali. Merujuk kepada penelitian ini, fokus kajian tertumpu kepada bagaimana gambaran gangguan kecemasan GAD klien “I” seperti faktor, gejala dan tingkat gangguan kecemasan GAD klien “I”. Kemudian, penelitian ini juga menjelaskan bagaimana pendekatan konseling spiritual mampu mengatasi permasalahan gangguan kecemasan GAD klien “I” dengan berdasarkan Surat Al-Ma’arij dari ayat 19 hingga 32. Klien “I” merupakan narasumber utama bagi penelitian ini. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian jenis lapangan dengan metode kualitatif yang telah dilaksanakan selama tiga pertemuan bermula 03 September 2023 hingga 10 Januari 2024. Data dari penelitian ini diperoleh dari hasil wawancara dan observasi dengan menggunakan analisis data bagi studi kasus yang telah dikembangkan oleh Robert K. Yin yaitu penjadohan pola, eksplanasi dan analisis deret waktu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ada dampak yang signifikan terhadap gejala gangguan kecemasan klien “I”. Selain itu, tingkat gangguan kecemasan GAD klien “I” juga mengalami perubahan positif dari skor*

14 kepada skor 11 dengan menggunakan Skala Penilaian GAD-7. Kesimpulannya, pendekatan konseling spiritual yang sistematis dengan berpedoman pada ayat Al-Quran terbukti mampu membawa perubahan positif yang efektif dalam mengatasi gangguan kecemasan jenis Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD).

**Kata kunci:** Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Konseling Spiritual

## INTRODUCTION

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), also known as a widespread anxiety disorder, is a mental disorder characterized by excessive, uncontrollable, and unclear feelings of fear, anxiety, and worry that manifest as uncertainty and helplessness (Ulfi Putra Sany, 2022). Additionally, indecisiveness is a key aspect that distinguishes generalized anxiety disorder from other anxiety disorders. This is because individuals with GAD experience such high levels of indecision that it makes it difficult for them to manage themselves effectively (Kin, Lucas, and Michaelle, 2019). Anxiety symptoms arise when social functioning fails and daily routines are disrupted (Al Mokhtar, J. M. Jbrael & Azab Elsayed, 2019). According to Gail W. Stuart (2006), there are three observable aspects of anxiety symptoms: behavioral, affective, and cognitive, such as restlessness, heightened vigilance, frequent accidents, hyperventilation, impatience, frequent guilt, easy distraction, fear of injury, repetitive thinking (preoccupation), feeling threatened, difficulty making judgments, and more (Dona Fitri Annisa & Ifdil, 2016). Furthermore, anxiety symptoms can also impact somatic aspects, such as tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing, and dizziness (Yustinus Semiun, 2016).

Globally, anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders affecting teenagers (Munir, 2019). According to a 2019 World Health Organization (WHO) report on mental disorders, “around 301 million people were living with an anxiety disorder, including 58 million children and adolescents,” meaning that 301 million people were living with anxiety disorders, including 58 million children and adolescents (Newsroom World Health Organization, June 8, 2020). The CBHSQ (Center of Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality) report also shows that 4.3 million adults experienced anxiety disorders due to poor lifestyle choices (The CBHSQ Report, 2015). In addition, since 2019, records indicate that anxiety disorders among adults have risen dramatically, with 301 million people from diverse backgrounds, both rural and urban, affected (Newsroom World Health Organization, September 27, 2023). This is not a normal occurrence for the global population, especially for young people.

Referring to other studies, anxiety disorders can also be treated with religious methods such as Islamic psychotherapy and understanding Islamic education. This is because these two concepts are not just theoretical understandings but need to be put into practice and become effective treatments for anxiety disorders, not only among academics but also across society, from adolescents to the elderly (Yono, Indriya Rusmana, and Hielda Noviyanty, 2016). This approach contains positive aspects such as the values of faith, and self-confidence, and suggestions for maintaining a positive outlook, which provide mental and emotional peace. Practices such as morning and evening recitations, prayer,

effort, and supplication also help individuals overcome anxiety and increase self-confidence to recover from the disorder. Another study states that in Surah Al-Ma'arij, there are eight methods to avoid anxiety disorders: always praying, giving charity and paying zakat, doing good deeds, fearing Allah's punishment by avoiding sinful acts, protecting oneself from zina (adultery), being trustworthy and keeping promises, being a just witness, and regularly performing prayers according to Islamic teachings (Mohd Nasir, Siti Norlina & Siti Aisyah, 2015).

Thus, this study focuses on the description of GAD and how spiritual counseling approaches can impact anxiety disorder treatment. Spiritual counseling is a process that develops the innate human nature of the client, which includes the values of servitude (faith and spirituality) and religious values (An-Nisa Subroto, Rosiana Wulandari & Suharni, 2017). Imam Al-Ghazali defines spiritual counseling as a process of guiding and teaching, with a mutual understanding between the counselor and the counselee toward goodness (ma'ruf), without neglecting Islamic law (Salasiah Hanim Hamjah, 2018). The implementation of the spiritual counseling approach in this study used six modules outlined by Imam Al-Ghazali, starting with building a good relationship with the counselee, understanding the counselee and their problems, applying the Takhalli approach (an approach that opposes the counselee's bad habits), using specific approaches tailored to the counselee's problems, implementing the Tahalli approach (educating the self and soul with knowledge, worship, and good deeds), and conducting assessments and being grateful for happiness (Salasiah Hanim Hamjah, 2018).

The overall explanation above served as a guide throughout the research process. The levels of anxiety and GAD symptoms were also measured using the GAD-7 assessment scale (Robert L. Spitzer, Kurt Kroenke, Janet B. W. Williams & Bernd Lowe, 2006) and further analyzed through interviews to gain a more detailed understanding of the client "I's" GAD symptoms. Subsequently, the spiritual counseling approach was implemented, focusing on overcoming the client's GAD. The resulting changes indicate that the spiritual counseling approach has the potential to gradually and consistently reduce and help the client "I" overcome their GAD.

## **METHOD**

The implementation of this research is based on field research with a qualitative approach. The findings were obtained through interviews and observations. This can be seen through the implementation of the spiritual counseling approach conducted with client "I" online over five months, starting from September 3, 2023 (first meeting), January 6, 2024 (second meeting), and February 10, 2024 (third meeting). Client "I" is a pseudonym for a 23-year-old Malay Muslim woman living in Gombak District, Selangor, Malaysia, who suffers from Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Every stage and execution of this research was analyzed, evaluated, applied, and carried out with client "I" without coercion, strictly adhering to the principles of openness, voluntariness, and confidentiality. Therefore, client "I" is the primary informant for this research.

Additionally, the scope of the spiritual counseling approach in this study was guided by Surah Al-Ma'arij, verses 19-32, as a therapeutic reference for the client "I'm" GAD. The results of this research were analyzed and developed using specific data analysis techniques for case study research, as outlined by Robert K. Yin, including pattern matching, explanation building, and time-series analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In line with the research title, the findings and discussion of this study will focus on two main aspects: the overall depiction of the client "I'm" Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and how the spiritual counseling approach has proven to be effective in gradually and consistently overcoming Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD).

Depiction of Client "I's" Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

The depiction of client "I's" Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) will begin with an explanation of the changes in the client's anxiety levels, as measured using the GAD-7 Rating Scale. The GAD-7 Rating Scale is a specific assessment tool used to measure anxiety levels exclusively for Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and is not suitable for other anxiety disorders (Robert L. Spitzer, Kurt Kroenke, Janet B. W. Williams, & Bernd Lowe, 2006). Initially, the client's "I's" anxiety level was moderate, with a score of 14. The following research findings describe client "I's" anxiety level as of January 6, 2024. Moderate anxiety, according to the GAD-7 Rating Scale, indicates that client "I's" anxiety is at a near-critical stage, requiring more focused attention from experts and counselors (Robert L. Spitzer, Kurt Kroenke, Janet B. W. Williams, & Bernd Lowe, 2006). However, after undergoing spiritual counseling sessions, client "I" successfully reduced her GAD anxiety level to a score of 11. The following is a reference image of the client's "I's" score.

SKALA GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)				
PERTEMUAN : <i>Ketiga</i>	PADA : <i>100224</i>	<i>19:00 - 19:52</i>		
Selama 2 minggu, seberapa kerap anda merasakan hal di bawah ini :-	Tiada	Beberapa Hari	Lebih Separuh Hari	Hampir Setiap Hari
1) Merasa gugup, cemas atau gelisah.	0	1	2	3
2) Tidak mampu menghentikan atau mengendalikan kekhawatiran.	0	1	2	3
3) Terlalu khawatir tentang berbagai hal.	0	1	2	3
4) Kesulitan bersantai.	0	1	2	3
5) Menjadi sangat gelisah sehingga sulit untuk tenang.	0	1	2	3
6) Mudah tersinggung atau mudah marah.	0	1	2	3
7) Merasa takut seperti sesuatu yang buruk akan terjadi.	0	1	2	3
Jumlah Skor		4	4	3
Jumlah Keseluruhan Skor			11	
Skor Keparahan Kecemasan GAD-7				
0 - 4	Minimal Kecemasan	10 - 14	Kecemasan Sedang	
5 - 9	Kecemasan Ringan	15 - 21	Kecemasan Parah	

Figure 1 (Client "I's" Level of GAD Anxiety Disorder)

Although client "I's" anxiety level remained moderate, the overall score decreased to 11, and client "I" successfully managed her uncontrollable worry and anxiety, reducing the frequency from almost daily occurrences to once every three days. This is a positive achievement for client "I" in overcoming GAD. Additionally, client "I" showed positive

changes in managing GAD symptoms. She successfully controlled the early symptoms, preventing them from excessively affecting her emotions, thoughts, and physical reactions as they did before. Regarding behavioral aspects, client “I” rarely experiences symptoms such as social withdrawal, speech stammering, avoidance tendencies, difficulty in coordination, and uncontrolled anxiety episodes now occur only once a week. However, client “I” still frequently experiences shortness of breath and remains highly cautious of potential risks that could trigger uncontrolled anxiety.

In terms of affective symptoms, client “I” continues to feel guilty towards others, lacks patience, and tends to get anxious when important tasks are disrupted. Nonetheless, she no longer experiences extreme and uncontrolled emotional disturbances due to anxiety. From a somatic standpoint, client “I” explained that she rarely experiences headaches, chest pain, or uncontrolled body or hand tremors caused by GAD. Furthermore, the cognitive aspects show that client “I” continues to struggle with focusing for extended periods, still fears losing control, repeatedly thinks about worrying matters, frequently forgets things, and finds it hard to make judgments or decisions. However, client “I” has not experienced any major or minor injuries due to anxiety over the past month. Overall, the explanation of these symptoms indicates that client “I’s” anxiety level has reduced.

The discussion of GAD symptoms reveals that client “I” experienced more than three primary anxiety symptoms, including restlessness or feeling on edge, fatigue, difficulty concentrating or blanking out, irritability, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances. This indicates that client “I’s” symptoms meet the specific criteria for GAD (Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition: DSM-5, 2016). Furthermore, client “I’s” anxiety was not triggered by specific factors but rather by various causes, including social issues, workload, and environmental problems. Thus, it can be understood that GAD is subjective, making it difficult for sufferers to manage consistently (Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition: DSM-5, 2016). Additionally, the focus of the anxiety tends to shift from one worry to another (Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition: DSM-5, 2016). This aligns with the symptoms experienced by client “I” with GAD.

### **Spiritual Counseling Approach in Overcoming GAD**

The spiritual counseling approach applied to client “I” in overcoming GAD is based on the treatment from Surah Al-Ma'arij and the implementation of the 6 Modules of Spiritual Counseling by Imam Al-Ghazali, which served as a guide throughout the counseling process. The treatment from Surah Al-Ma'arij provided the client “I” with a new alternative for managing herself and practicing spiritually based treatment that can be applied through acts of worship. The spiritual counseling began with building a close relationship with the client “I” and understanding the issues she faced due to GAD.

### **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study found that the spiritual counseling approach proved effective in reducing the level of anxiety in Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and helped



manage its symptoms. This is evident from the reduction in client "I's" anxiety level over five months, with a score decrease from 14 to 11. Moreover, in terms of anxiety symptoms, client "I" successfully managed several GAD symptoms across affective, behavioral, somatic, and cognitive aspects by regularly practicing spiritual exercises and improving daily self-management routines. However, there are some shortcomings in this study that need improvement. For instance, the references to Quranic verses should be expanded for further guidance and reference in implementing therapy for GAD. Additionally, the guidance for conducting spiritual counseling could be diversified to better suit the client's issues. This way, the scope of spiritual counseling implementation can be broadened and applied not only to GAD but also to other mental disorders.

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