

Psychological Approach to Islamic Studies

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ABSTRACT

The integration of psychological approaches in Islamic studies has gained significant attention in recent years, emphasizing the understanding of human behavior, mental processes, and emotions through both scientific and Islamic perspectives. This paper explores how Islamic teachings, particularly from the Quran and Hadith, align with modern psychological principles, offering a comprehensive framework for mental health, personal development, and emotional well-being. The application of concepts such as nafs (self/soul), fitrah (innate nature), and ruh (spirit) are discussed in relation to psychological theories of personality, motivation, and mental health. By bridging these fields, the study seeks to demonstrate how psychological tools and therapeutic techniques can be adapted within an Islamic framework to enhance spiritual and mental well-being, addressing issues like anxiety, depression, and personal growth. This interdisciplinary approach not only enhances the relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary mental health discussions but also offers new perspectives for understanding human nature through a spiritual and scientific lens.

Keywords: Islamic studies, psychology, mental health, interdisciplinary approach

ABSTRAK

Integrasi pendekatan psikologis dalam studi Islam telah mendapatkan perhatian yang signifikan dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, dengan menekankan pada pemahaman tentang perilaku manusia, proses mental, dan emosi melalui perspektif ilmiah dan Islam. Makalah ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana ajaran Islam, khususnya dari Al-Quran dan Hadits, selaras dengan prinsip-prinsip psikologi modern, menawarkan kerangka kerja yang komprehensif untuk kesehatan mental, pengembangan pribadi, dan kesejahteraan emosional. Penerapan konsep-konsep seperti nafs (diri/jiwa), fitrah (sifat bawaan), dan ruh (roh) dibahas dalam kaitannya dengan teori-teori psikologi tentang kepribadian, motivasi, dan kesehatan mental. Dengan menjembatani bidang-bidang ini, penelitian ini berusaha untuk menunjukkan bagaimana alat psikologis dan teknik terapeutik dapat diadaptasi dalam kerangka kerja Islam untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan spiritual dan mental, mengatasi masalah seperti kecemasan, depresi, dan pertumbuhan pribadi. Pendekatan interdisipliner ini tidak hanya meningkatkan relevansi ajaran Islam dalam diskusi kesehatan mental kontemporer, tetapi juga menawarkan perspektif baru untuk memahami sifat manusia melalui lensa spiritual dan ilmiah.

Kata kunci: Studi Islam, psikologi, kesehatan mental, pendekatan interdisipliner

1. Introduction

Religion is one of the greatest achievements in the history of humankind, apart from society, morals, and philosophy. Religion has a great influence on how humans act and behave. According to Zakiah Darajat, religion greatly influences a person's behavior (Darajat, 1982). Religion provides values and norms that guide one's behavior and actions. Religion also provides various forms of support to

encourage positive behavior and discourage harmful behavior. Religion also provides practical encouragement for people to take appropriate actions, such as practicing worship and respecting the norms of social life. Religion can also be a source of inspiration and motivation for a person to achieve their goals.

Allah SWT created humans from clay and underwent a perfected process before being infused with a soul. Clay and soul form an inseparable unity. In the perspective of the Qur'an, as understood by Imam Al-Ghazali, humans possess aspects that can be distinctly differentiated into three parts, yet these aspects are inseparable (Fuad Nashori, 2005: 111).

The three aspects are as follows: first, the physical aspect (*jasad*), which encompasses the entirety of the physical-biological structure, such as cells, glands, and the nervous system (physiological psychology). Second, the psychological/mental aspect (*jiwa/psikis*) represents human-specific qualities, including thoughts, emotions, and willpower (humanistic psychology). Third, the spiritual-transcendental aspect (*ruh*) refers to the higher psychic potentials of humans (transpersonal psychology). In line with Al-Ghazali, Baharuddin also categorizes the aspects of humans into *jismiah* (physical), *nafsiah* (psychological), and *ruhiah* (spiritual) aspects (Baharuddin, 2004, p. 160). Together, these three aspects form the totality of a human being.

Thus, the purpose of human creation is to worship the Creator and to serve as a steward (*khalifah*) on Earth. This responsibility is not excessive because these three aspects are unique to humans and are not possessed by other creatures. This task reflects an integral relationship between nature, humanity, and God. Therefore, integrating these three psychological aspects is essential to fulfill the purpose of human creation and achieve the status of *Insan al-kamil* (the perfect human).

Psychology is a branch of science that studies the human mind, behavior, and emotions. Psychology tries to understand how thoughts, behaviors, and emotions work and influence individuals and how they work and interact with the environment that surrounds them. Psychology also investigates how thoughts, behaviors, and emotions work and interact between individuals and how individuals interact with others, such as family, friends, and the environment. (Connolly, 2001).

Given the close links between religion, emotions, and behavior, psychology has emerged as a viable approach to the study of Islam. According to Peter Connolly (2001), in studying religion, insiders generally need to learn how to step outside the box and look imaginatively at what outsiders might think. Meanwhile, the outsider must imagine what it might be like if the sacred reality were actual. Furthermore, Connolly explains that the psychological approach to religious studies was born in America. Most emerged from religious studies in the US or the UK, not psychology.

2. Method

This research adopted a library-based research approach, utilizing various references and documents as primary data sources (Kowalski, M., 2019). These sources included classical Islamic texts such as the Quran and Hadith, contemporary psychology literature, journal articles, books, and relevant case studies. The research process involved systematic identification, selection, and review of materials directly relevant to integrating psychological approaches in Islamic studies. The data were processed through a descriptive-analytical method, which involved a multi-step process of describing the concepts, documenting their interpretations, analyzing their intersections, and interpreting their implications in the context of mental health and personal development. The approach ensured a balanced consideration of traditional Islamic principles alongside modern psychological theories to achieve a comprehensive and nuanced understanding.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Development of Psychological Approaches in the Study of Religion

The age of psychological approaches in the study of religion is almost as old as psychology (Connolly, 2001, p. 138). Wilhelm Wundt is often credited with making psychology a separate discipline by establishing a psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1879. In 1979, the American

Psychological Association supported this opinion by releasing a silver medal with Wilhelm Wundt's portrait and name on one side and a century of scientific psychology' on the other. However, when it comes to the use of psychology in the study of religion, William James is considered the pioneer.

William James stated that religion is a social institution that can lead humans to develop their potential to get closer to God. Through his personal experience, humans can see a great power in it: God's power as the creator. With this provision, humans will research it, approach it, believe it, and practice it until it penetrates their souls and manifests in every behavior in their lives as religious people.

Besides James, there was Sigmund Freud, a psychologist popular for his theory of psychoanalysis. He argued that human religion results from the combination of human interaction with his personal experience and society's experience. This can be observed and will give rise to psychological symptoms that can distinguish the human being concerned from other humans who are not religious. Freud offers a simple analogy, namely, when a child has a perception of the controller of the world, which he then attributes to his father.

In the next stage, the community extends this perception to a broader context, integrating it into the cultural system of society. Eventually, the perception of the father as a representation of God emerges, becoming a deeply rooted collective awareness within the community. This process illustrates how religion takes shape. According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, religion plays a significant role in shaping an individual's internal experiences. Freud suggested that religion helps individuals regulate emotions and thoughts that may lead to psychological instability. Additionally, it provides a framework for understanding the more mysterious aspects of life, such as loneliness, death, and loss. Recognizing these functions of religion helps us appreciate its role in enhancing mental well-being.

The history of the development of psychological approaches in Islamic studies begins with medieval Islamic thoughts on Islamic intellectualism, which emphasized using rational methods to understand the Qur'an. This thinking became the basis for modern approaches in psychology and was expanded with empirical research on spiritual behavior and experiences. In the 1960s and 1970s, psychologists began to research religion in greater depth, using empirical science approaches to understand how religion affects people's behavior and thoughts. Since then, psychological approaches have become an important part of Islamic studies.

The key figures who contributed to developing the falsafi (philosophical) psychology approach include Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Sina (980–1037), a philosopher and medical expert, is renowned for his contributions to the 'philosophy of al-Nafs,' a philosophical approach to understanding the psyche and the soul. Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), a philosopher and theologian, explored philosophical psychology through his works. Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), a historian and sociologist, integrated philosophical psychology into his broader 'philosophy of al-Tajdid,' emphasizing renewal and understanding of human behavior.

In the broader context of Islamic scholarship, other notable figures such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Maskawih, al-Razi, the Ikhwan al-Safa group, Ibn Tufail, Ibn Majah, and Ibn Rushd are also recognized for their contributions. However, these individuals are often more celebrated as philosophers than psychologists. This distinction arises because, during their time, disciplines were not separated, and much of their philosophical inquiry included psychological themes. The concept of the soul (al-nafs or al-ruh) was central to their discussions, which formed a significant part of their philosophical discourse and laid foundational ideas for understanding human psychology within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

One of the key figures in falsafi psychology, Ibn Sina, is well-known for his contributions to the philosophy of al-Nafs. He emphasized the importance of using rational methods to understand human behavior and thought processes. Ibn Sina classified the soul into three distinct categories: the vegetative soul, which governs growth and reproduction; the animal soul, which governs movement and sensation; and the rational soul, which is unique to humans. According to Ibn Sina, the rational soul is further divided into two components: theoretical reason, which deals with abstract and intellectual pursuits, and practical reason, which relates to moral and ethical actions (Najati, 2013; Mujib, 2001).

Following Ibn Sina, other scholars advanced psychology within an Islamic context, particularly through the lens of *tasawwuf* (Sufism). Key figures include Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah,

Dzun Nun al-Misri, Abu Yazid al-Bustami, al-Hallaj, Ibn 'Arabi, 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jailani, al-Suhrawardi, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah. These scholars approached psychology as part of spiritual and moral refinement. For example, Al-Ghazali divided the science of the soul into two categories: the study of animal and human soul powers, including sensory and motivational faculties, and mental science, which addresses cognitive processes, therapeutic techniques, and moral enhancement.

In recent years, the development of psychological approaches within the study of Islam in Indonesia has grown significantly. Research on Islamic psychology in Indonesia now spans diverse topics, including theoretical concepts, the structure of religious experiences, and the influence of religion on human behavior. Indonesian scholars have developed Islamic psychology models to understand better and enhance human well-being. Prominent pioneers include Zakiah Daradjat, whose works *Ilmu Jiwa Agama* (1970) and *The Role of Religion in Mental Health* laid foundational frameworks. Jalaluddin, with his seminal text *Psychology of Religion* (1996). These contributions continue to shape Islamic psychology's academic and practical applications in Indonesia.

3.2. Objectives of Psychological Approaches in the Study of Religion

The psychological approach in Islamic studies is built on the basic assumption that human behavior, thoughts, and emotions can be understood through scientific research. This approach seeks to uncover how religion influences behavior, thoughts, and emotions and how religion can improve the well-being and prosperity of the human spirit.

Thus, the formal object of psychological study is the human psyche, and the material object is behavior. However, in Islamic studies, texts can also be the material object as long as they psychologically influence the reader. Using a psychological approach, we can understand how these religious texts can influence human understanding, emotions, and behavior.

3.3. Characteristics of Psychological Approaches in the Study of Religion

Various psychological approaches were developed in accordance with the practical need to observe the individual behavior and experience of a person or group of people and explore the psychological symptoms that occur in humans seeking and leading to their beliefs or religions. The common characteristics seen in these various approaches include:

1. Psychological approaches in the study of religion focus on the internal aspects of religion, such as how people understand and experience religion.
2. This approach emphasizes using empirical methods to observe individual behavior and experiences.
3. It sees religion as a system of thought that differs for each person.
4. It emphasizes understanding the relationship between religion and psychology, such as how religion can affect a person's emotions and thoughts.
5. It also focuses on how people use religion as a motivation to think and act.
6. Because it relies on individual experiences, its observations are often subjective and cannot be generalized.

Several different psychological approaches are often used in the study of religion, including:

1. The structural psychology approach in the study of religion focuses on how the structure of religion affects individual cognition and behavior.
2. The functional psychology approach in the study of religion focuses on how religion and its associated system of values can reinforce or change a person's behavior.
3. The psychoanalytic approach to studying religion focuses on how religion can play a role in a person's internal experience. This approach uses psychoanalytic concepts to understand how individuals can understand and manipulate religion.

3.3. Approaches to Psychology and Islamic Psychology According to Zakiah Daradjat.

According to Zakiah Daradjat, Islamic psychology is a science that examines the influence of religion on a person's attitudes and behavior or the mechanisms that work within a person concerning the way of thinking, behaving, reacting, and behaving, which is inseparable from his beliefs, because the belief is still in the construct of his personality. According to Zakiah Daradjat, the distinguishing aspect between contemporary and Islamic psychology lies in formulating the human concept and its approach.

In contemporary psychology, the focus is primarily on intellectual abilities to discover and understand psychological principles. In contrast, Islamic psychology takes a more holistic approach by integrating reason and faith in its methodology. According to Zakiah Daradjat, contemporary psychology is limited in scope to three dimensions: the physical-biological dimension, the psychological dimension, and the sociocultural dimension. Islamic psychology, however, expands this scope by incorporating the spiritual dimension, which addresses aspects of human existence beyond the material and empirical realms. This spiritual dimension remains largely unexplored and even avoided by contemporary psychology due to fundamental differences in their underlying philosophies.

Including the spiritual dimension in Islamic psychology creates a natural intersection with *tasawwuf* (Sufism), where the focus on inner purification, moral refinement, and the relationship between the soul and the Divine becomes central. This distinction highlights the unique framework of Islamic psychology, which seeks to understand human behavior and cognition and emphasizes spiritual well-being and the pursuit of transcendence. This integrative approach bridges the gap between intellectual inquiry and spiritual understanding, offering a more comprehensive perspective on human psychology.

3.4. Example of Application of Psychological Approach in Islamic Studies

Through observation of the individual experiences of some people who benefit mentally through fasting, Zakiah Daradjat (1990) concluded that fasting can have several functions, namely treatment for mental disorders, prevention of mental disorders, and fostering mental health.

1. Treatment for mental disorders.

According to Zakiah Daradjat, the most effective psychiatric treatment is addressing and eliminating the root causes of mental disorders. Among the primary causes of such disorders are feelings of guilt, sin, and resentment. These emotions, if left unresolved, can lead to psychological disturbances that may manifest physically or alter the trajectory of one's life. Daradjat emphasizes that fasting can be a powerful means of atonement, reaffirmation of commitment, and spiritual surrender. Daradjat illustrates this through the case of an individual whose mental health deteriorated due to guilt. This man, a once-high-performing employee at a company, experienced a significant decline in performance after being compelled to act against his deeply held values. Despite praying and seeking Allah's forgiveness, he struggled to overcome his guilt and regret. Upon consulting a psychiatric advisor, he was reminded of Allah's forgiving and merciful nature. He was encouraged to strengthen his worship, particularly during Ramadan—a month characterized by divine forgiveness and spiritual renewal. After Ramadan, the man returned to his consultant, reporting a significant reduction in his anxiety. He attributed this improvement to his complete surrender to Allah and the belief that his repentance had been accepted. This example underscores Daradjat's perspective that integrating spiritual practices and a faith-centered approach into mental health treatment can effectively address the psychological impact of guilt and foster emotional healing.

2. Prevention of mental disorders.

Fasting can serve as a means of developing self-control over fulfilling biological and psychological needs. According to Zakiah Daradjat, these two types of needs primarily drive human actions, behaviors, and work. Necessities such as food and drink are inherent and unavoidable physical needs humans continuously strive to fulfill for survival. Daradjat explains that fasting involves a temporary restraint on fulfilling these fundamental needs,

cultivating the ability to delay gratification until the appropriate time permitted by Allah. During fasting, individuals abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs from dawn to sunset, adhering to Allah's commandments. This act signifies a person's ability to suppress urgent physical desires, demonstrating self-discipline and self-control. Moreover, fasting during the entire month of Ramadan is expected to instill greater self-control in individuals. Successfully abstaining from immediate gratification for a consecutive month builds resilience and enhances individuals' capacity to regulate their behavior. As Daradjat highlights, fasting is not merely a physical exercise but a spiritual practice that nurtures discipline, patience, and obedience to divine guidance, ultimately leading to improved self-mastery.

3. Mental health development.

Fasting during Ramadan is a powerful practice for enhancing mental health, combining discipline, mindfulness, and spiritual reflection. It promotes self-awareness and prevents unhealthy mental processes like self-denial. Studies show fasting reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, supported by metabolic changes such as ketone metabolism and its anti-inflammatory effects, which stabilize mood and reduce stress. Fasting also improves cognitive function and mental clarity by redirecting energy from digestion to cognitive processes, aided by brain-derived neurotrophic factors that support brain health—spiritually, fasting fosters inner peace, emotional resilience, and a deeper connection to a higher power through acts of worship and reflection. Additionally, fasting enhances self-discipline and empathy, teaching impulse control and compassion for those facing food insecurity. It also encourages emotional regulation through mindfulness practices like prayer, helping individuals manage stress and build resilience. While beneficial, those with pre-existing mental health conditions should consult healthcare professionals before fasting to ensure safety.

4. Conclusion

The psychological approach in Islamic studies offers a rich and holistic perspective for understanding human behavior, mental processes, and emotional well-being. By integrating Islamic teachings such as the concepts of nafs (soul), fitrah (innate nature), and ruh (spirit) with the principles of modern psychology, harmony can be found in efforts to maintain mental health, self-development, and spiritual balance. This study shows that psychological techniques and tools can be adapted within an Islamic framework to address mental issues such as anxiety, depression, and personal growth while adhering to spiritual values. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary mental health discussions and provides new insights into human nature through a spiritual and scientific lens.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest related to this article's research, writing, and/or publication.

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