



ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNSELOR IN RELIGIOUS SOCIAL GUIDANCE FOR THE ELDERLY

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Article Info

Submitted: December 1, 2023, Studies on the structured process of Islamic religious counseling for the socio-religious development of the elderly remain limited, particularly

Revised: February 12, 2024, regarding counseling mechanisms and social interactions within routine preaching activities. This study examines the role of Islamic religious

Accepted: April 7, 2024, counselors in supporting the spiritual and social development of the elderly to become more independent, spiritually active, and mentally healthy. Using

Keyword: Counseling, Islam, Mental Health, Elderly. A qualitative descriptive method, this field research collected data through interviews, observations, and analysis to conclude. The findings reveal that Islamic religious counseling at Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa is conducted in a structured and systematic manner, with the strategic role of the ustadz who integrates the dakwah methods of Bil-Hikmah and Mauizhatul-Hasanah. This approach effectively enhances the spirituality and mental health of the elderly. Additionally, elderly motivation, positive social interactions, and engaging preaching methods are key factors supporting the success of socio-religious development in the elderly, which have been underexplored in previous research on religious counseling for seniors. In conclusion, religious counseling for the elderly includes sholawat, dzikir, sermons, pilgrimages, and the strengthening of spirituality and social interactions within the religious community.

Abstract

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A. INTRODUCTION

The natural process in human life known as aging is marked by physical, mental, and social decline, such as the appearance of gray hair, sagging skin, reduced hearing and vision, slower body movements, and decreased fitness that leads to dependence on others and increases susceptibility to various illnesses (Widiyanti & Fuad, 2023). The Central Bureau of Statistics recorded that Indonesia's population growth rate in 2023 reached 1.13%, the lowest in the last 8 years, with the proportion of those aged 0–14 decreasing from 24.56% in 2020 to 19.61% in 2045, while the population aged 65 and older is increasing. Demographically, elderly women are more dominant, as observed in the An-Nisa religious study group, where most participants



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are women over 60.

Religious development in the elderly is important as it provides life meaning, emotional support, and helps in facing death, while also enhancing religiosity through social religious activities (Afiva et al., 2025; Muktafa, 2023). Religious education guidance for the elderly is essential for strengthening the soul, improving worship, and preparing for death, as indicated by improvements in ideological aspects, worship practices, and religious consistency (Zunaida & Sahrandi, 2021; Zakiyah & Darodjat, 2020). An institutional approach to religious guidance for the elderly includes worship activities, lectures, and counseling, aiming to form small, disciplined groups, strengthen character and worship spirit, draw closer to God, and reinforce faith (Habibullah, 2021; Fitriani, 2021; Hendriyenti, 2022).

Spiritual practices among the elderly, both religious and non-religious, increase with age and offer benefits, although some negative impacts may arise in certain patients. Therefore, healthcare professionals should consider spiritual beliefs in holistic care (Bengtson et al., 2021; Lucchetti et al., 2019). Spirituality and religiosity can improve the quality of life in the elderly, reduce chronic illness, and support successful aging, while faith-based therapy has positive effects through disengagement, reengagement, and activity (McManus, 2024; Noronha, 2015). Spirituality becomes a priority in old age; however, facilities for religious activities in nursing homes are still inadequate, even though the elderly identify three core themes related to religion, control, and faith in end-of-life decisions (MacUh & Raspor, 2018; Geros-Willfond et al., 2016).

A review of spiritual life helps the elderly understand the role of religion in their life history, with sensitivity to the importance of spirituality or religion for elderly clients before assigning spiritual tasks (Bischof & Helmeke, 2014). Spiritual care in nursing homes focuses on finding meaning and the well-being of residents, with qualitative research evaluating the benefits of mindfulness meditation for spiritual growth, although spiritual care needs are often unmet (Steller, 2023; Britt et al., 2023). Elderly individuals generally agree with community-based social support, feel accompanied by neighbors and friends, and engage actively to overcome hardship, reduce loneliness, and appreciate life despite limited activities (Marzuki et al., 2023; Ikeorji et al., 2024).

Community-based social prescription interventions involving the elderly improve well-being and quality of life, reduce isolation and loneliness, and support healthy aging through various social activities and psychological therapies (Sadio et al., 2024; Paquet et al., 2023). Elderly participants experience significant increases in quality-of-life scores after six months, with excursion-based and intergenerational programs enhancing well-being, social connectivity, and realistic perceptions of aging (Siette et al., 2022; Domènech-Abella et al., 2022). Life experience perspectives are analyzed to design community-based interventions focusing on duration, intensity, implementation strategies, and partnerships to address health inequities and improve elderly life quality (Ganann et al., 2022; Demirel & Ayaz-Alkaya, 2024).

The findings of Jadid et al. (2022) indicate that the spiritual needs of Muslim older adults encompass religious needs, the search for meaning in life, and the need to connect with nature and others to achieve peace and balance. Furthermore, Moeini et al. (2016) found that an Islam-based religious program significantly improved the spiritual well-being of elderly patients with hypertension, particularly in the religious and existential dimensions, compared to a control

group without intervention. Additionally, Daher-Nashif et al. (2021) explain that Islamic texts such as the Quran and Hadith serve as foundational guidance for dementia care, emphasizing the importance of compassion and respect for the elderly, which are implemented in social practices and caregiving within Arab-Muslim communities. Collectively, these studies underscore the vital role of Islamic values in addressing the spiritual and health needs of older adults.

The research gap highlights a lack of comprehensive studies examining the structured processes and stages involved in Islamic religious counseling for the socio-religious development of the elderly in local contexts, particularly within the routine activities of Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa. While previous research has addressed the spiritual needs of older adults, the effects of religious programs on spiritual well-being, and the role of Islamic texts in mental health care for the elderly, they have not sufficiently detailed the counseling mechanisms and social interactions present in regular preaching practices. The novelty of this study lies in its thorough description of counseling activities such as dzikir, tahlil, mauidzah, and spiritual pilgrimages, emphasizing the crucial role of religious leaders in enhancing elderly spiritual and social well-being. By integrating social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions, this research significantly advances both theoretical and practical aspects of religious counseling and preaching tailored for older adults. Ultimately, the study aims to reveal structured counseling processes that support socio-religious growth and improve the quality of life of the elderly through holistic approaches.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted among the elderly at the An-Nisa Study Group in Ambokulon Village. It employed a field research design, where the researcher collected data directly from sources in the field. The method used is qualitative research with a case study approach, aiming to investigate, gather information, and describe phenomena or events occurring among individuals or groups of elderly participants in the study group. This research aims to understand the conditions and dynamics experienced by the elderly in a socio-religious context. The research subjects include elderly participants and male and female Islamic instructors (ustadz and ustadzah) at the An-Nisa Study Group. In contrast, the research object is the role of Islamic religious counselors in the socio-religious development of the elderly in the group.

Data for this study were collected using three primary techniques: interviews, observation, and analysis to obtain relevant findings. The data collection techniques involved three primary methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. The researcher used observation to directly observe the activities and interactions at the An-Nisa Study Group, particularly in the context of socio-religious guidance for the elderly. Interviews were conducted with elderly participants and the instructors to explore the role of religious counselors in these activities. Documentation included collecting written data or archival materials, such as activity records, reports, or instructional materials used in socio-religious guidance.

The data processing technique in this study involved three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the condensation stage, the researcher filtered the data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation to select information relevant to the research focus. Data was presented by organizing the selected



information into narratives, tables, or charts to facilitate understanding and analysis. In the final stage, the researcher concluded by analyzing the presented data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Islamic religious counselors in the socio-religious development of the elderly and their impact on their well-being at the An-Nisa Study Group.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Process of Islamic Religious Counseling in Socio-Religious Development for the Elderly

According to the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs (PMA) No. 80 of 2022, a religious counselor is required to have professional knowledge, skills, and attitude. However, in practice, there is often a lack of skills, discipline, and adherence to these standards, which decreases public satisfaction. Practical activities, whether individual or group-based, require a specific sequence or stages to ensure success. This principle applies to the routine study sessions at Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa, where each phase is carefully organized to maintain a structured and goal-oriented program. These sessions begin at 5:30 AM after the Fajr prayer and are held every Sunday, attended explicitly by elderly residents of Ambokulon Village. The religious counseling activities during these sessions are systematically conducted to support the spiritual and social well-being of the participants.

First, Mrs. Siti Aisyah, the founder of Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa, leads the collective recitation of sholawat, a form of dzikir that offers numerous significant benefits. Sholawat is believed to reduce anxiety, calm the mind, and alleviate stress, thereby contributing to the establishment of a peaceful life, especially for the elderly who often experience high levels of anxiety. Spiritually, sholawat serves to soothe the souls of Muslims as religious beings, as this practice has been proven to provide positive effects and inner tranquility (Nisa' & Oradana, 2023). Terminologically, sholawat carries various meanings, ranging from prayers to forms of praise. According to Al-Qurthubi, sholawat signifies Allah's forgiveness and mercy, while Al-Baidhawi interprets it as kindness and gentleness. The sholawat of Allah upon the Prophet represents mercy and blessings, whereas the sholawat of angels and believers signifies honor and supplication for forgiveness (Iman, 2023).

Second, Ustadz Yazid leads congregational recitations of dzikir and tahlil as a form of communal worship and a reminder of Allah's greatness. This activity aims to purify the heart, calm the mind, and strengthen the faith of the participants. With profound devotion (khusyuk), Ustadz Yazid creates a peaceful atmosphere conducive to spiritual tranquility. The benefits of dzikir include the fulfillment of personal hopes, relief from difficulties, and the reception of Allah SWT's love, ease, and mercy, which bring blessings across various aspects of life (Mardhatillah, 2022). The tradition of tahlilan also encompasses important social and Islamic educational values, such as cooperation, solidarity, brotherhood, empathy, and social welfare. Furthermore, tahlilan teaches dzikrul maut and dzikrullah as reminders of death and the greatness of Allah.

Third, Ustadz Lubis commences Maudzotul Hasanah with prayers and the recitation of Al-Fatihah for Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, companions, the tabi'in, and the tabi'at as part of his preaching method. Subsequently, he invites the elderly to seek forgiveness (istighfar) and recite sholawat before delivering the primary material and concluding with a prayer. Beyond religious studies, Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa organizes

spiritual tourism, such as pilgrimages to the tombs of wali (Islamic saints), including the grave of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, which is held every four months. These pilgrimages help elderly participants to become more acquainted with, reflect on, and learn from the lives of Allah's chosen servants. They provide spiritual and social benefits by calming the mind, strengthening spirituality, and fostering social bonds among participants. Islamic religious counselors play a strategic role in dakwah by guiding communities to perform good deeds, avoid prohibited acts, develop religious facilities, provide premarital education, and resolve social issues through advice directed at individuals or groups, all aiming to improve life in accordance with religious teachings (Amalia & Ziaulhaq, 2022).

Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa adopts dakwah methods in accordance with Surah An-Nahl verse 125, namely Bil-Hikmah and Mauizhatul-Hasanah. Bil-Hikmah refers to inviting people to Allah's path of truth with wisdom, employing humane and ethical approaches. Allah bestows wisdom upon those He wills, enabling the preacher (da'i) to motivate the audience (mad'u) to improve themselves and implement the teachings conveyed. Meanwhile, Mauizhatul-Hasanah involves guiding the mad'u through wise advice, teachings, and narratives drawn from the stories of prophets, messengers, and companions, which serve as role models for elderly participants. In addition, dakwah teaches various forms of worship such as prayer, dzikir, fasting, and almsgiving to bring peace to the heart. Significantly, environmental dakwah is also promoted to raise public awareness about the significance of caring for the earth through education, campaigns, and eco-friendly initiatives, fostering concern for global climate change (Hilabi, 2023).

Religious teachers or counselors (ustadz or penyuluh agama) play a crucial role in enhancing the mental health of the elderly. Mental health is defined as the harmony of psychological functioning, the ability to cope with problems, the experience of happiness, and a positive sense of self-efficacy (Fakhriyani, 2017). Through routine study sessions at Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa, elderly participants learn important spiritual values such as fasting, which cultivates patience; prayer, which prevents immoral behavior; and almsgiving (zakat), which fosters empathy for the needy and purifies the soul. The fundamentals of dakwah are imparted as preaching is an obligation to disseminate Islamic teachings and encourage societal development (Mujahidin, 2021). Besides improving mental health, ustadz also enhances the spirituality of elderly individuals by providing religious knowledge as guidance for life in this world and the hereafter. This mentorship motivates the elderly to attain inner peace through worship and maintain good social relations, thereby drawing closer to Allah and deepening their love for His creation as an expression of devotion to the Creator (Widiyanti & Fuad, 2023).

2. Factors Influencing Religious Social Development in the Elderly

First, the individual self. Elderly individuals play a significant role in shaping and maintaining their spirituality. Self-awareness in strengthening their relationship with the Creator and the desire to continuously improve their quality of life through worship and good character significantly influence their spiritual condition. Discipline, in this context, refers to the willingness to follow rules and prohibitions with full awareness, not merely due to external pressure, but because of an internal understanding of the value and importance of those rules for oneself and the surrounding environment (Marjuki et al., 2022).



Second, social interaction with family, neighbors, and fellow elderly individuals. Positive social relationships with family, neighbors, and peers offer essential emotional support. These interactions foster a sense of connection, mutual support, and shared life experiences that can enrich the elderly's spirituality, helping them feel more accepted and appreciated. Social interaction is a common form of social process, while other forms are variations that become the primary key to social life. Without social interaction, communal life would be impossible, as the primary requirement for social activity is the presence of interaction between individuals (Xiao, 2018).

Third, the environment. A supportive environment, both socially and spiritually, significantly influences the spirituality of the elderly. Those who live in positive environments that encourage acts of worship and healthy social interactions are more likely to feel a positive impact on their relationships with others and with Allah SWT. The social environment, which includes family, schools, and society, significantly and positively affects education. The better the social environment, the better the quality of education within that community, since it largely determines its members' development and educational quality (Pakaya et al., 2021).

Fourth, spiritual guidance. Regular religious studies in gatherings such as Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa provide valuable spiritual guidance for the elderly. The presence of preachers (ustadz) delivering sermons and teachings helps the elderly feel calm, comforted, and closer to Allah SWT. This spiritual guidance aids them in overcoming fears related to death and boosts their confidence in facing life. Efforts by spiritual guidance officers (binroh) to foster adaptive spiritual responses are carried out through motivation, suggestion, support, and religious education during illness. This includes practical guidance on prayer, ablution, and tayammum, involving all stakeholders to provide deep spiritual care (Styana et al., 2016).

Fifth, the elderly's willingness to participate in studies. A strong personal motivation to actively engage in religious learning is a key supporting factor. Despite their age, many elderly individuals remain eager to study and deepen their understanding of religion, strengthening their spirituality. Motivation plays a significant role in shaping a person's attitude and desire to achieve planned goals. It also fosters an innovative mindset, strong determination, and a powerful drive to work toward fulfilling set targets (Siregar, 2020). Motivation is a conscious and unconscious drive to achieve specific goals, influencing human behavior in fulfilling individual needs. Behavioral changes are closely related to psychology, which analyzes and modifies human behavior based on specific goals or needs (Abbas, 2023).

Sixth, engaging delivery methods of sermons. Dynamic sermons that invite active participation from the congregation are also an important supporting factor. Preachers who teach engagingly, incorporating humor and inviting the congregation to recite salawat, help maintain enthusiasm and prevent boredom or drowsiness, ensuring the elderly stay actively involved. In formulating preaching methods, a da'i must consider three aspects: *mad'u* (the audience), *maddah* (the content), and *wasilah* (the media). *Mad'u* includes the type and number of the target audience, which influences the method chosen; *maddah* refers to the complexity and relevance of the preaching material; and *wasilah* relates to the media used to effectively deliver the message (Baidowi & Salehuddin, 2021).

D. CONCLUSION

The process of Islamic religious counseling has been carried out effectively, despite challenges such as the physical condition of the elderly and limited accessibility. The stages of the activities from group dhikr to *mauidzotul hasanah* are well-structured and provide significant benefits. These activities enhance spirituality, calm the mind, and strengthen emotional support and togetherness among elderly congregants. The religious counseling process for the spiritual-social development of the elderly at Majelis Ta'lim An-Nisa begins with Ibu Siti Aisyah leading the collective sholawat recitation, which is aimed at soothing the mind and reducing anxiety. This is followed by Ustadz Yazid leading the recitation of *dhikr* and *tahlil* to cleanse the heart and strengthen faith. Ustadz Lubis then delivers a deep and meaningful sermon (*mauidzotul hasanah*). Additionally, every four months, the group organizes religious trips to the tombs of revered Islamic saints (*wali*), such as Sunan Ampel, to reinforce spirituality, bring peace to the soul, and foster emotional and social interaction among elderly participants.

Several key factors support the religious-social development of the elderly. First is the individual, as the elderly play a crucial role in maintaining their spirituality through worship and moral behavior. Second, social interaction with family, neighbors, and fellow seniors provides emotional support and enriches their spirituality. Third, a consistent relationship with the Creator through regular worship offers inner peace. Fourth, a socially and spiritually supportive environment significantly contributes to their well-being. Fifth, spiritual guidance at the *majelis ta'lim* helps the elderly feel closer to Allah SWT. Sixth, a strong willingness among the elderly to attend religious studies supports their spiritual growth. Lastly, engaging and interactive sermon delivery methods help sustain the elderly's enthusiasm in their spiritual development.

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