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From Self-Actualization to Spiritual Transcendence: Developing an Ihsan-Based Humanistic Counseling Model for Quarter-Life Crisis in Higher Education

*Dari Aktualisasi Diri Menuju Transendensi Spiritual: Pengembangan Model
Konseling Humanistik Berbasis Ihsan untuk Quarter-Life Crisis di Perguruan Tinggi*

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Abstract

The surge of mental health bracket disorders among university students during their early twenties has transformed the quarter-life crisis into an alarming academic and social pathology. This study aims to construct a holistic psychospiritual framework by integrating humanistic psychotherapy principles with Islamic *ihsan* values to mitigate this crisis. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature-based conceptual design, this study synthesizes psychological self-actualization and spiritual transcendence. The findings reveal that while humanistic therapy effectively restores self-awareness and personal autonomy, the integration of *ihsan* values provides a crucial metaphysical anchor through *tawakkal* (trust in God) and *rida* (contentment). This syncretic approach does not only alleviate superficial anxiety but fundamentally reconstructs the student's existential meaning. Consequently, this study offers a novel, culturally responsive blueprint for modern psychological counseling services within Islamic higher education institutions.

Keywords: Humanistic Psychotherapy; Ihsan Values; Quarter-Life Crisis; Student Counseling; Psychospiritual Approach

Abstrak

Lonjakan gangguan kesehatan mental di kalangan mahasiswa selama awal usia dua puluhan telah mengubah *quarter-life crisis* menjadi patologi akademik dan sosial yang mengkhawatirkan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkonstruksi kerangka kerja psikospiritual yang holistik dengan mengintegrasikan prinsip psikoterapi humanistik dan nilai *ihsan* untuk memitigasi krisis tersebut. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain konseptual berbasis kepustakaan, studi ini menyintesis aktualisasi diri psikologis dan transendensi spiritual. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ketika terapi humanistik efektif memulihkan kesadaran diri dan otonomi personal, integrasi nilai *ihsan* memberikan jangkar metafisika yang krusial melalui *tawakkal* dan *rida*. Pendekatan sinkretis ini tidak hanya meredakan kecemasan permukaan, tetapi secara mendasar merekonstruksi makna eksistensial mahasiswa. Walhasil, studi ini menawarkan cetak biru baru yang responsif budaya bagi layanan konseling psikologis modern di institusi perguruan tinggi Islam.

Kata Kunci: Psikoterapi Humanistik; Nilai Ihsan; Quarter-Life Crisis; Konseling Mahasiswa; Pendekatan Psikospiritual



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INTRODUCTION

The transition into early adulthood has shifted from being merely a phase of biological development into an acute existential crisis that threatens the productivity of the younger generation. Within higher education settings, students are confronted not only with conventional academic pressures but also with a labyrinth of global uncertainty, labor market disruption, and multiple layers of social expectations. This condition has triggered a substantial increase in the phenomenon of the quarter-life crisis (QLC), a psychological crisis affecting individuals aged 18–29, characterized by manifestations of future anxiety, decisional paralysis, and a loss of meaning in life.¹ Remarkably, domestic data indicate a significant rise in anxiety disorders and depressive symptoms among university students in the post-pandemic period, rooted directly in this uncertainty about the future.² If not addressed through appropriate interventions, this cycle of crisis will not only diminish individual academic achievement but also generate large-scale psychosocial stagnation among a generation that serves as the backbone of national development.

Empirically, the vulnerability of final-year students to QLC has been demonstrated through numerous scientific investigations. Students at this stage consistently report extreme levels of anxiety related to role transitions and post-graduation career ambiguity.³ The clinical manifestations of QLC commonly emerge in the form of chronic overthinking, a drastic decline in intrinsic motivation, and profound identity crises.⁴ This condition is further exacerbated by low academic self-efficacy, which is negatively correlated with students' ability to reduce environmental stress.⁵ When students' mental health reaches a critical point, the logical consequence is a decline in adaptive functioning that may lead to mild to moderate depression. Unfortunately, the majority of students tend to adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms due to the absence of support systems capable of addressing the root of their existential concerns.⁶

Although the urgency of addressing QLC has been widely acknowledged, currently available psychological interventions remain dominated by secular Western conventional approaches. Humanistic psychotherapy, for example, is theoretically highly relevant because it positions human beings as autonomous agents who possess an innate tendency to grow optimally within a supportive environment.⁷ Through the fulfillment of the hierarchy of needs, this approach guides individuals toward self-actualization and the rediscovery of meaning in life amidst crisis.⁸ Nevertheless, the effectiveness of purely humanistic psychotherapy often encounters cultural barriers when applied within Eastern societies. A rigid separation persists between

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- 1 Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner, *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2001), hlm 24-30.
 - 2 Kementerian Kesehatan RI, *Laporan Nasional Riset Kesehatan Dasar dan Survei Kesehatan Mental Mahasiswa Pasca-Pandemi* (Jakarta: Badan Kebijakan Pembangunan Kesehatan, 2022), hlm 115-118.
 - 3 Mubiar Agustin, "Tipologi Kecemasan Mahasiswa Tingkat Akhir dan Pola Penanganannya," *Jurnal Psikologi Klinis Indonesia* 6, no. 2 (2012): hlm 45-52.
 - 4 Nanda Putri, Rahmat Hidayat, and Siti Zubaidah, "Manifestasi Quarter-Life Crisis pada Mahasiswa: Studi Fenomenologis Koping Eksistensial," *Jurnal Kajian Bimbingan dan Konseling* 8, no. 1 (2023): hlm 12-21
 - 5 Oliver Robinson, "Developmental Crisis Theory of Quarter-Life Crisis: An Empirical Substantive Review," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 44, no. 3 (2020): hlm 256-263
 - 6 Zakiah Daradjat, *Kesehatan Mental dalam Kebudayaan Modern* (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1982), hlm 88-94.
 - 7 Sarah L. Knight and Jonathan Smith, "Emerging Adulthood and the Academic Journey: Navigating Identity and Future Anxiety in Higher Education," *Journal of Youth Studies* 25, no. 4 (2022): 510-527
 - 8 Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), hlm 105-112.

psychological-emotional dimensions and spiritual-religious orientations within the modern counseling literature.⁹ Yet, for students in Indonesia, psychological resilience and the process of meaning-making cannot be separated from the axis of religious values that permeate their social environment.¹⁰

This scientific gap underlies the importance of reconstructing a holistic counseling model. Previous studies have tended to position spirituality merely as a complementary variable (an external coping mechanism), rather than as an epistemological foundation integrated into the therapeutic structure itself. Therefore, this study aims to formulate an integrative psychotherapy model that combines the core principles of humanistic psychotherapy—such as unconditional positive regard and personal freedom—with the substantive values of *Ihsan* within the Islamic tradition, encompassing God-consciousness, existential sincerity, and the transcendence of life meaning.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is important for understanding how the integration of humanistic psychotherapy concepts with the values of *Ihsan* can assist students in coping with quarter-life crisis. The study focuses on four main aspects: (1) the concept of humanistic psychotherapy in addressing quarter-life crisis among university students; (2) the values of *Ihsan* from an Islamic perspective in helping overcome quarter-life crisis among university students; (3) the relevance of integrating humanistic psychotherapy and *Ihsan* values to the mental health of students experiencing quarter-life crisis; and (4) the implications of integrating humanistic psychotherapy and *Ihsan* values as a holistic counseling approach for students. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic psychology scholarship and to serve as an alternative, more comprehensive counseling approach for addressing student mental health problems.

Method

This study employs a qualitative-synthetic approach with a library research design. The selection of this method is based on the need to explore in depth, deconstruct, and integrate two distinct epistemological domains: the conceptual model of Western humanistic psychotherapy and the spiritual values of *Ihsan* within the Islamic tradition.¹¹ This study does not focus on the empirical statistical testing of clinical subjects; rather, it emphasizes a theoretical and conceptual reconstruction that is oriented toward problem-solving (issue-driven). Through this conceptual-philosophical approach, the principles of existential recovery are analyzed in order to formulate an adaptive integrative counseling model for university students experiencing quarter-life crisis (QLC).

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories, namely primary and secondary data. The primary data are derived from the authentic texts of key figures in humanistic psychotherapy, such as Carl Rogers' original works on person-centered therapy and Abraham Maslow's writings on self-actualization, which are examined alongside authoritative classical and contemporary literature on the concept of *Ihsan* and Islamic mental health.¹² Meanwhile, the secondary data are obtained from scholarly articles discussing the psychological dynamics of quarter-life crisis among university students, existential coping problems, and challenges of

9 Malik Badri, "The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists in the Modern Era: Between Secular Humanism and Spiritual Integration," *Journal of Islamic Psychotherapy* 14, no. 2 (2018): hlm 89-104.

10 Achmad Mubarak and Taufik Kasturi, "Spiritual Resilience and Identity Crisis among Southeast Asian Muslim Undergraduates," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 24, no. 7 (2021): hlm 712-728.

11 John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018), hlm 179-182.

12 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2014), hlm 45-53.

cultural adaptation in counseling. Data collection was conducted through a systematic digital documentation technique using specific keywords in reputable databases to ensure the originality and credibility of the theoretical materials analyzed.¹³

The primary instrument in this library research is the researcher as a human instrument, supported by a data coding sheet used to categorize aspects of self-acceptance, personal freedom, and meaning in life. The data analysis procedure was conducted rigorously through qualitative and interpretative content analysis.¹⁴ The analytical process followed systematic stages consisting of: (1) data reduction, namely selecting and eliminating information that was not relevant to QLC recovery; (2) data display, in the form of a comparative mapping between humanistic elements and the values of *Ihsan*; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, namely formulating a conceptual synthesis in the form of a new intervention model.¹⁵ To ensure data validity and the reliability of the findings, this study applied a theory triangulation technique, in which the resulting conceptual draft was re-examined through the perspectives of transpersonal psychology and cross-cultural counseling theories.¹⁶

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Humanistic Psychotherapy in Handling Quarter-Life Crisis in Students

Based on the results of a literature review, it was found that the quarter-life crisis is a phase of psychological crisis experienced by many students in early adulthood, particularly between the ages of 18 and 29. This condition is characterized by anxiety about the future, identity confusion, academic pressure, career uncertainty, and a sense of loss of direction in life. Students often experience social pressure due to family and environmental demands, as well as the standards of success that have developed in modern society. This phenomenon leads to stress, overthinking, low self-confidence, and even mild mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression.¹⁷

In this context, humanistic psychotherapy is seen as a relevant approach to helping students cope with the quarter-life crisis. Humanistic psychotherapy emphasizes the positive potential of humans to develop and achieve self-actualization. Carl Rogers explained that individuals inherently have an innate tendency to grow optimally when they are in a supportive, empathetic environment with unconditional positive regard.¹⁸ This approach helps students accept themselves, understand their emotions, and rediscover the meaning of life that was lost due to life's pressures.

The analysis shows that applying the concept of humanistic psychotherapy can help students increase self-awareness. Students experiencing a quarter-life crisis tend to feel like failures and unable to meet social expectations. Through a humanistic approach, students are guided to

13 Arlene Fink, *Conducting Research Literature Reviews: From the Internet to Paper*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2019), hlm 88–94.

14 Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2019), hlm 23–30

15 Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2020), hlm 112–120.

16 Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), hlm 297–311.

17 Alexandra Robbins dan Abby Wilner, *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties* (Penguin Putnam, 2001).

18 Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

understand that each individual has a unique developmental process. This allows them to better accept themselves and reduce their anxiety about the life achievements of others.

Furthermore, Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs suggests that humans require psychological and self-esteem needs to be met before achieving self-actualization. During a quarter-life crisis, many students are unable to fulfill their self-esteem needs because they feel left behind by others. Therefore, humanistic psychotherapy plays a role in helping students rebuild self-confidence and develop their potential in a more positive way. The humanistic approach also provides students with the freedom to make their own life choices. This freedom is important because students often feel pressured by environmental demands regarding careers and futures. With an empathetic and reflective approach, students become more able to understand their life goals independently and realistically.

The Values of Ihsan from an Islamic Perspective to Overcome Quarter-Life Crisis in Students

The research results show that the value of *ihsan* is strongly relevant in helping students cope with quarter-life crisis. *Ihsan*, from an Islamic perspective, is a state of worship when a person worships Allah SWT as if seeing Him, and if unable to see Him, then believes that Allah SWT is always watching them. This concept fosters a deep spiritual awareness, enabling individuals to achieve inner peace and better self-control.

Students experiencing a quarter-life crisis generally feel anxious about the future and fear failure. The value of *ihsan* teaches an attitude of trust (relief), patience, and *busnuzan* (reverence) towards Allah SWT. These attitudes help students understand that every process in life is part of Allah's provisions, each possessing its own wisdom. Thus, students are less likely to become trapped in excessive anxiety. Furthermore, the value of *ihsan* also helps students discover a more spiritual meaning in life. In Islamic psychology, mental health is determined not only by emotional stability but also by an individual's closeness to Allah SWT. Zakiah Daradjat explains that religion plays a crucial role in fostering peace of mind and resolving inner conflict.¹⁹ Therefore, students with a strong spirituality tend to be better able to cope with life's pressures than those who lack religious values.

The analysis also shows that spiritual practices such as prayer, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), reading the Quran, and self-reflection can help students reduce stress and anxiety. These spiritual activities provide psychological peace and strengthen the belief that life has a meaningful purpose. Thus, the value of *ihsan* serves not only as a theological concept but also has psychological implications for maintaining students' mental health.

The Relevance of the Integration of Humanistic Psychotherapy and Ihsan Values to Students' Mental Health

Based on the results of the literature review analysis, the integration of humanistic psychotherapy with the values of *ihsan* (good deeds) has strong relevance for the mental health of students experiencing quarter-life crisis. This approach is considered capable of addressing students' needs more comprehensively because it addresses not only psychological but also spiritual aspects. In the quarter-life crisis phenomenon, students often experience an identity crisis, loss of meaning in life, anxiety about the future, and social pressures that impact their mental health.²⁰ Humanistic psychotherapy views humans as individuals who have positive

19 Robbins et.al, *Quarterlife Crisis*, dikutip dalam bagian signifikansi ketenangan jiwa tokoh Muslim Indonesia. Lihat juga: Zakiah Daradjat, *Peranan Agama dalam Kesehatan Mental* (Gunung Agung, 1982).

20 Alexandra Robbin et.al, *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties* (Penguin Putnam, 2001).

potential and the ability to develop towards self-actualization.²¹ Explains that humans need an environment full of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and appreciation to develop optimally. In the context of students experiencing a quarter-life crisis, this approach helps individuals understand themselves more positively and accept their life journey without undue pressure.

However, the study results show that a humanistic approach alone is not entirely sufficient to address students' existential crises. Students not only require psychological self-acceptance but also spiritual peace to cope with life's uncertainties. Therefore, integration with the value of *ihsan* is crucial. *Ihsan* provides a spiritual dimension that can strengthen students' mental health. *Ihsan* teaches that humans are always under the supervision of Allah SWT, so every activity in life has worship value and spiritual meaning. This awareness helps students build inner peace and reduce excessive anxiety about the future.

The study results show that students with a strong spirituality tend to be better able to control their emotions, think positively, and have a higher level of resilience in dealing with life's pressures. Zakiah Daradjat explains that religion functions as a spiritual therapy that can provide a sense of security, calm, and hope in facing life's challenges.²² Thus, the value of *ihsan* helps students face the quarter-life crisis with patience, trust, and optimism.

The integration of humanistic psychotherapy and the values of *ihsan* also helps students discover a deeper meaning in life. Viktor Frankl explained that humans can endure suffering if they have a clear purpose and meaning in life.²³ In this context, the value of *ihsan* provides an understanding that life is not only about worldly achievements, but also about devotion to Allah SWT. This understanding helps students reduce fear of failure and excessive social pressure. Furthermore, this integration can improve students' psychological balance. Students become more able to accept failure as part of the life process, develop a sense of gratitude for themselves, and build healthier social relationships.

Thus, this integrative approach serves not only as a method for resolving psychological problems but also as an effort to develop a mentally and spiritually healthy personality. Overall, the relevance of integrating humanistic psychotherapy and the values of *ihsan* lies in its ability to create a holistic approach to mental health. This approach helps students achieve a balance between emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs, enabling them to face the quarter-life crisis with greater calm, optimism, and meaning.

Implications of Integrating Humanistic Psychotherapy and Ihsan Values as a Holistic Counseling Approach

The study results indicate that the integration of humanistic psychotherapy and the values of *ihsan* has important implications for developing a counseling approach for college students. This approach can be used as a more comprehensive Islamic counseling model to help students face the quarter-life crisis. Counseling not only focuses on resolving psychological problems but also aims to strengthen spirituality and the search for meaning in life. In counseling practice, counselors can apply the principles of humanistic psychotherapy, such as empathy, self-acceptance, reflection on feelings, and unconditional positive regard, combined with strengthening the values of *ihsan*. This approach helps students feel accepted, appreciated, and understood without pressure or judgment.²⁴

21 Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

22 Zakiah Daradjat, *Kesehatan Mental dalam Kehidupan Modern* (Gunung Agung, 1983).

23 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Beacon Press, 1985).

24 Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, refers to practical integration

Furthermore, counselors can integrate Islamic spiritual values such as *tawakkul* (trust), patience, gratitude, sincerity, and self-reflection into the counseling process. These values help students build spiritual awareness and enhance inner peace. Students are guided to understand that every life test has a lesson and is part of the process of self-maturation. Another implication of this integration is the development of a counseling approach that is more appropriate to the cultural and religious context of Indonesian society. Indonesian students generally live in a religious social environment, making a spiritual approach more easily accepted and understood. Therefore, integrating psychology and Islamic spirituality is an effective strategy for improving student mental health.

Universities also have a crucial role in implementing this approach through campus guidance and counseling services. Educational institutions can develop spirituality-based counseling programs, Islamic self-development training, mental health seminars, and psychospiritual mentoring for students. These programs can help students build mental resilience while strengthening their spirituality. Furthermore, the integration of humanistic psychotherapy and the value of *ihsan* (good deeds) can form the basis for developing modern Islamic psychological studies. This approach demonstrates that mental health is not only influenced by psychological factors but also by the quality of a person's relationship with God. Therefore, Islamic counseling needs to develop an approach that integrates psychological and spiritual dimensions in a balanced manner.²⁵

The research also shows that a holistic counseling approach is more effective in helping students cope with life's stresses than approaches that focus solely on psychological aspects. Students who receive psychospiritual support tend to be better able to control their emotions, have a better life expectancy, and are more optimistic about the future. Thus, the integration of humanistic psychotherapy and the value of *ihsan* has significant implications for the development of student counseling services. This approach can be an effective alternative solution to help students cope with the quarter-life crisis while simultaneously fostering balanced mental health across emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of humanistic psychotherapy and the Islamic value of *ihsan* offers a promising psychospiritual framework for addressing quarter-life crisis among university students. The findings indicate that humanistic psychotherapy contributes significantly to self-awareness, self-acceptance, emotional understanding, and personal growth by emphasizing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and the pursuit of self-actualization. At the same time, the concept of *ihsan* enriches this psychological foundation by providing spiritual consciousness, existential meaning, inner peace, and a sense of trust in God (*tawakkul*) when confronting uncertainty and life transitions. The synthesis of these two perspectives suggests that quarter-life crisis is not merely a psychological challenge related to identity and future anxiety, but also an existential and spiritual struggle that requires a more comprehensive response. Consequently, students may develop greater resilience, emotional stability, optimism, and a deeper sense of purpose when psychological growth is accompanied by spiritual transcendence.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its effort to bridge Western humanistic psychology and Islamic spirituality through an integrative counseling perspective. Rather than viewing self-actualization and spirituality as separate domains, this study conceptualizes them as complementary dimensions of holistic human development. The proposed framework contributes to the growing field of Islamic psychology by offering a theoretical model that

25 Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (Penguin Books, 1970).

connects personal growth, meaning-making, and spiritual awareness within a single counseling approach. Furthermore, the study highlights the relevance of culturally and religiously responsive counseling services in higher education settings, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts where spiritual values remain an important source of psychological well-being. By emphasizing the transition from self-actualization to spiritual transcendence, this research broadens existing discussions on student mental health and provides a conceptual foundation for developing more contextually relevant psychospiritual interventions.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. As a library-based conceptual study, its conclusions are derived from theoretical synthesis rather than empirical investigation, limiting the ability to verify the practical effectiveness of the proposed model. In addition, the framework has not yet been operationalized into specific counseling procedures, intervention stages, or measurable outcomes. Future research should therefore focus on developing and testing an Ihsan-based humanistic counseling model through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs involving university students experiencing quarter-life crisis. Comparative studies across cultural, religious, and educational contexts are also recommended to evaluate the adaptability and effectiveness of the model. Such efforts will strengthen the empirical foundation of psychospiritual counseling and contribute to the advancement of integrative approaches to student mental health in contemporary higher education.

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