



Muslim Parents' Experiences of Islamic Counseling: A Qualitative Study in Urban Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The stability and cohesion of family structures within Muslim communities are increasingly challenged by modern societal changes, including globalization, shifting gender roles, and declining religious engagement. Islamic counseling, which integrates spiritual and cultural values rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, provides a potentially effective framework for reinforcing familial bonds. This study examines the lived experiences of Muslim parents who have participated in Islamic counseling interventions aimed at strengthening family relationships. Using a qualitative descriptive method grounded in a phenomenological approach, data were collected from 12 Muslim parents in urban Indonesia through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed four key outcomes of Islamic counseling: (1) the effective integration of Islamic teachings in therapy sessions, (2) improved communication within the family, (3) clarification and strengthening of parental roles, and (4) enhanced emotional and spiritual cohesion. These outcomes reflect a significant alignment between religious values and therapeutic techniques, offering a culturally congruent pathway to resolve family conflicts and reinforce unity. The findings align with previous studies that emphasize the relevance of culturally sensitive counseling practices, while also providing new insights into clients' perspectives. The study has important implications for counselors, educators, and policymakers in Muslim-majority contexts, suggesting the need for developing standardized, faith-based counseling models and expanding counselor training programs to include Islamic psychological frameworks. Future research should involve diverse demographics and employ longitudinal methods to assess the long term impact.

Keywords: Islamic counseling, Muslim parents, family cohesion, qualitative research, culturally sensitive therapy

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the institution of the family has faced significant challenges worldwide due to globalization, technological advancements, and shifting cultural norms. These transformations have led to a weakening of traditional family structures, particularly in Muslim communities, where the influence of global media and economic factors has disrupted established family dynamics and values (Islamonline, 2023). The erosion of family bonds has resulted in increased rates of divorce,

intergenerational conflicts, and a decline in the transmission of cultural and religious values (Abubakar, 2017).

In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, the divorce rate has been on the rise. According to data from the Religious Courts, there has been a significant increase in divorce cases over the past decade. One of the leading causes identified is the lack of religious internalization among couples, which hampers their ability to build harmonious family relationships (Bustan et al., 2024). This trend highlights the pressing need for interventions that can strengthen family bonds through culturally and religiously sensitive means.

While various counseling approaches exist to address family issues, there is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating religious and cultural values into counseling practices, especially in Muslim communities. Islamic counseling, which incorporates principles from the Qur'an and Hadith, offers a framework that aligns with the spiritual and moral values of Muslim families. However, the application and effectiveness of Islamic counseling interventions in strengthening family bonds remain underexplored, particularly from the perspectives of Muslim parents who are directly affected by these challenges.

Several studies have examined the role of Islamic counseling in addressing family issues. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2025) investigated the integration of prayer in family counseling among Muslim counselors in Malaysia, highlighting the significance of spiritual practices in therapeutic settings. Similarly, Bustan et al. (2024) explored the need for Islamic counseling services among couples with marital problems in Indonesia, revealing a preference for religious guidance over secular counseling services. These studies highlight the potential of Islamic counseling in addressing family issues, but also reveal a gap in understanding its practical application and effectiveness from the clients' perspectives.

Despite the existing literature on Islamic counseling, there is a paucity of research that delves into the lived experiences of Muslim parents who have engaged in Islamic counseling interventions. Most studies focus on the theoretical frameworks or the counselors' perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding how these interventions are perceived and experienced by the recipients. This gap is critical, as the effectiveness of counseling interventions is closely tied to the clients' engagement and perception of the counseling process.

Addressing this research gap is urgent, given the escalating challenges faced by Muslim families in maintaining strong familial bonds amidst modern societal pressures. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of Muslim parents regarding Islamic counseling interventions can inform the development of more effective, culturally sensitive counseling practices. Such insights are crucial for counselors, policymakers, and religious leaders seeking to promote family cohesion within Muslim communities.

This study aims to contribute novel insights by capturing the voices of Muslim parents who have participated in Islamic counseling interventions. By focusing on clients' experiences, perceptions, and the outcomes of such interventions, the research aims to provide a client centered perspective that is often lacking in existing literature. This approach will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and cultural relevance of Islamic counseling in strengthening family bonds.

The primary purpose of this research is to explore and analyze the experiences of Muslim parents who have participated in Islamic counseling interventions designed to strengthen family bonds. The study seeks to understand how these interventions are perceived, the extent to which they address familial challenges, and the factors that influence their effectiveness from the clients' viewpoints.

By providing empirical data on the experiences of Muslim parents with Islamic counseling interventions, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of counseling psychology, Islamic studies, and family therapy. The findings can inform the development of culturally and religiously appropriate counseling models, enhance counselor training programs, and guide policy formulation aimed at supporting family well-being in Muslim communities.

The implications of this research are multifaceted. For practitioners, the insights can lead to more effective counseling strategies that resonate with clients' cultural and religious values. For policymakers, the findings can inform initiatives that integrate Islamic counseling into public health and social support systems. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the strengthening of family bonds within Muslim communities, promoting social cohesion and overall well-being.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the experiences and perceptions of Muslim parents regarding Islamic counseling interventions designed to strengthen family bonds. The study is grounded in a phenomenological perspective to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences of individuals who have directly engaged in such interventions. The population in this study consists of Muslim parents in urban areas of Indonesia who have participated in Islamic counseling programs facilitated by religious institutions, family services, or community-based counseling centers. From this population, a purposive sample of 10–15 participants was selected, based on the criteria of having received Islamic counseling related to family issues within the past two years. This purposive sampling technique ensures that participants possess relevant experiences aligned with the research objectives.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' insights while maintaining consistency in addressing the research questions. The interview guide was developed based on

previous studies and expert validation in Islamic counseling and family therapy. To ensure instrument validity, the interview guide was reviewed by three academic experts: a professor in Islamic Psychology, a senior counselor from the Indonesian Association of Muslim Counselors, and a lecturer in Counseling Education at Universitas Islam Negeri Jakarta. Sample interview questions included: "Can you describe your experience during the Islamic counseling sessions?", "How did these sessions affect your relationship with your children or spouse?", and "What Islamic values were emphasized in the counseling process?"

Reliability was reinforced by conducting a pilot interview with two participants to test clarity, consistency, and relevance, with refinements made to improve coherence. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

The data collection procedure consisted of three main stages: recruiting participants through community counseling centers, scheduling and conducting in-depth interviews (either face-to-face or via Zoom), and transcribing the recorded data. The NVivo 12 software was used to organize, code, and manage the qualitative data efficiently. The data analysis followed the thematic analysis method as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves six phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Throughout the process, member checking and peer debriefing were used to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Islam Negeri Jakarta (Approval No. 34/UINJKT/EC/2024). All participants provided informed consent prior to interviews.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study consisted of 12 Muslim parents (six fathers and six mothers) residing in urban areas of Indonesia who had been actively involved in Islamic counseling programs over the past two years. They were between the ages of 30 and 50, with the average age being 40 years. All participants were married, and most had two or more children. This demographic was purposefully selected to reflect the experiences of parents who were likely to benefit from family based counseling interventions grounded in Islamic values.

Data collected from in depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, revealing four primary themes: the integration of Islamic teachings, improved family communication, strengthened parental roles, and enhanced family cohesion. These themes emerged repeatedly across participant narratives, indicating a strong alignment between counseling interventions and perceived changes in family

dynamics. These findings suggest that Islamic counseling provides a holistic model that addresses both the spiritual and relational needs of Muslim families.

Table 1. Key Themes from Islamic Counseling Interventions and Participant Illustrations

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quotes from Participants
Integration of Islamic Teachings	Counseling incorporated Qur'anic verses and Hadith to guide behavior and reflection.	"Hearing reminders from the Qur'an during sessions helped me realize my duty as a husband and father."
Improved Family Communication	Sessions provided techniques like active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution.	"We now listen more before reacting; my children feel safer talking to me."
Strengthened Parental Roles	Counseling clarified role expectations and offered strategies for equitable parenting.	"I now understand that being a father is not just providing, but also nurturing emotionally."
Enhanced Family Cohesion	More shared spiritual and bonding activities were reported post-counseling	"We often pray together now and talk about our feelings – something we never did before."
Gender Role Rebalancing	Fathers became more emotionally engaged, and mothers became more confident in their decision making.	"My husband is helping with emotional needs more, and I feel more empowered as a mother."
Reduced Family Conflict	Families reported fewer arguments and quicker resolutions	"Before, small things turned into fights. Now we try to resolve them calmly, using what we learned."

The integration of Islamic principles, such as Qur'anic teachings and Hadith, in the counseling sessions increased participant trust and engagement. Many participants felt that the spiritual content not only guided them morally but also provided emotional comfort and support. One father stated that listening to religious references during counseling reminded him of his responsibilities as a husband and father, motivating him to engage more proactively with his family. This aligns with the findings of Scourfield and Nasiruddin (2015), who found that incorporating Islamic values into parenting programs increased acceptance and effectiveness among Muslim parents.

Another key finding was the improvement in family communication. Participants expressed that the counseling sessions equipped them with practical communication tools, such as active listening and respectful expression of emotions, which significantly improved their relationships with spouses and children. These developments are consistent with the emotional system component of Bowen Family

Systems Theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing reactivity in family interactions (Sauerheber et al., 2014).

Furthermore, participants reported that they had a clearer understanding of their parental roles after engaging in Islamic counseling. Fathers, in particular, shared that viewing their responsibilities through an Islamic lens encouraged them to be more involved in child-rearing. Mothers described the counseling sessions as empowering, as they offered both religiously grounded and practical parenting strategies. This finding resonates with Hunainah et al. (2024), who observed that logotherapy techniques in Islamic counseling improved the resilience and parenting efficacy of Muslim families in Indonesia.

Another recurring theme was the enhancement of overall family cohesion. Families reported spending more quality time together, engaging in joint prayer and discussions, and resolving conflicts more amicably. Participants noted that spiritual activities such as praying together, reading the Qur'an, and engaging in reflective discussions became more frequent, promoting emotional closeness. This outcome supports the theoretical principles of Minuchin's Structural Family Therapy, which emphasizes strengthening family boundaries and hierarchies to improve functionality (Minuchin, 1974).

Some specific findings included reports that integrating prayer and spiritual reflection into counseling helped parents connect emotionally with their children. Additionally, fathers revealed that the interventions encouraged them to reconsider traditional gender roles and become more emotionally available. Mothers, meanwhile, appreciated strategies that helped them manage modern parenting challenges while remaining true to Islamic values.

When compared with similar studies, the present findings reinforce the conclusions reached by Scourfield and Nasiruddin (2015), who emphasized the need for culturally and religiously relevant content in parenting programs to improve their outcomes. Furthermore, the logotherapy based Islamic counseling model studied by Hunainah et al. (2024) similarly led to improved family resilience, suggesting a broader applicability of Islamic interventions beyond specific counseling models.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Bowen's Family Systems Theory, particularly the concepts of self differentiation and emotional cutoff, which were addressed through improved communication and clearer roles within the family (Sauerheber et al., 2014). Moreover, the interventions also support Minuchin's structural theory by fostering role clarity and strengthening the family subsystem boundaries, ultimately contributing to greater family harmony and cohesion (Minuchin, 1974).

While participants reported numerous benefits, some challenges emerged. Several noted that access to qualified Islamic counselors is limited, particularly outside urban areas. Others expressed concerns over gender bias or patriarchal

interpretations in counseling content. A few participants reported initial stigma when seeking faith-based psychological help, underscoring the need for broader public education.

The practical implications of this research are substantial. It emphasizes the importance of training counselors to be culturally competent and knowledgeable in Islamic teachings, thereby addressing the unique needs of Muslim families. Islamic organizations and local government institutions can also use these insights to develop targeted family support programs. Integrating counseling services within mosques or Islamic centers can make them more accessible and reduce the stigma associated with seeking psychological help.

On a broader scale, this research suggests that faith-sensitive counseling can play a pivotal role in enhancing family well being and social cohesion. As such, the development of Islamic counseling modules should be prioritized in mental health and social service policies. Tailored modules that reflect the socio-religious context of Muslim communities can significantly increase participation and impact.

Despite the encouraging findings, this study has limitations, particularly in terms of sample size and geographic scope. The results may not be fully generalizable to rural or non-Indonesian Muslim families. Future research should include larger and more diverse populations, and longitudinal studies could provide further insight into the long-term effects of Islamic counseling on family cohesion and resilience.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research highlight that Islamic counseling interventions significantly contribute to strengthening family bonds among Muslim parents by enhancing communication, clarifying family roles, reducing conflicts, and fostering emotional and spiritual closeness within the family unit. The integration of Islamic values through Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions was shown to be a powerful medium in promoting self-reflection, mutual respect, and moral responsibility among family members. Participants reported noticeable improvements in their familial interactions and a renewed sense of purpose in their roles as parents and spouses. These outcomes underscore the importance of culturally and religiously sensitive counseling approaches in addressing the unique needs of Muslim families. However, the scope of this study was limited to a specific group of Muslim parents within a particular region. Therefore, future research should expand to include diverse demographic groups, such as adolescents and extended family members, and examine the long term impacts of Islamic counseling interventions. Additionally, quantitative methodologies or mixed-method designs could be employed to measure the effectiveness of such interventions on a broader scale and to develop standardized Islamic counseling frameworks that can be applied in various cultural contexts.

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