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The Effectiveness of Spiritual Counseling in Improving Holistic Well-Being in Female Students at An-Nahdloh Islamic Boarding School, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Female students in Islamic boarding schools often face academic, social, and psychological challenges that may affect their holistic well-being, highlighting the need for spiritually grounded interventions. The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of spiritual counseling in improving holistic well-being in female students at the An-Nahdloh Islamic Boarding School in Malaysia. This study involved 21 female students with a pre-experimental design without a control group. The results showed an increase in scores between before and after the intervention. Descriptive statistics showed that the average score increased by 8.94 points, from 64.44 to 72.94. These results indicate that spiritual counseling can help people feel better in general, but the degree of improvement varies from person to person. This study emphasizes the importance of implementing spiritual counseling in Islamic boarding schools to improve holistic well-being, including physical health, mental health, and financial health. Further research with a larger sample size, involving a control group, and longitudinal assessment is recommended to ensure the sustainability of the beneficial effects and its applicability across contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Holistic well-being encompasses physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of an individual's life, which are essential for optimal personal development (Fitriyah et al., 2021), (Fitriyah et al., 2020). In the context of Islamic education, particularly in boarding schools, holistic well-being plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and overall quality of life. Female students in boarding schools face unique challenges, including academic stress, social pressures, and identity formation, which may adversely affect their well-being (Anggraeni, 2011) Luthfiyana et al., 2021; Romdloni et al., 2024). Therefore, interventions such as spiritual counseling, grounded in Islamic values, are considered relevant to enhance students' comprehensive well-being.

At An-Nadloh Islamic Boarding School, Malaysia, female students live in a highly structured educational environment that combines academic responsibilities, religious learning, communal living, and character development activities. While this environment provides significant opportunities for personal growth, it also presents several challenges that may affect students' holistic well-being.

Informal observations and discussions with school administrators indicate that some students experience difficulties in managing academic demands, adapting to communal living arrangements, coping with homesickness, regulating emotions, and maintaining psychological balance while fulfilling religious and educational obligations. These challenges may influence not only their psychological well-being but also their social relationships, spiritual engagement, and overall quality of life within the boarding school environment.

The partner institution has expressed concerns regarding the limited availability of structured counseling programs specifically designed to address students' psychological, social, and spiritual needs in an integrated manner. Existing support mechanisms primarily focus on academic supervision and religious instruction, whereas systematic interventions aimed at strengthening emotional resilience, coping strategies, self-reflection, and spiritual growth remain limited. As a result, students who encounter adjustment difficulties or psychological distress may not receive adequate assistance to effectively manage these challenges. This situation highlights the need for evidence-based interventions that can support students' holistic development while remaining consistent with Islamic values and the educational philosophy of the boarding school.

Previous studies indicate that spiritual counseling can significantly improve psychological and spiritual outcomes. For instance, counseling interventions have been shown to reduce stress and enhance life satisfaction among students in higher education settings (Hilmi et al., 2020). Moreover, Islamic-based counseling programs have been reported to foster gratitude, optimism, and life satisfaction among female students in Islamic boarding schools, thereby contributing to their subjective well-being.

In Malaysia, particularly at An-Nadloh Islamic Boarding School, spiritual counseling programs have been implemented to support female students' holistic well-being. However, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions in improving comprehensive well-being remains limited. Studies in Indonesian boarding schools reveal that students' subjective well-being ranges from moderate to high, with optimism and gratitude serving as critical predictors, while social and psychological support remains necessary to mitigate academic and social stressors (Febriana et al., 2025).

Additionally, research indicates that female students' subjective well-being in Islamic boarding schools is positively correlated with mental health, optimism, and gratitude, although self-esteem may not always show a significant association (Febriana et al., 2025). These findings emphasize the importance of structured, spiritually grounded interventions that address psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions concurrently, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to well-being. Implementing such interventions

can strengthen female students' resilience, coping strategies, and overall life satisfaction within the boarding school environment.

The urgency of this program lies in the increasing need to provide preventive and developmental mental health support for female students in boarding school settings. Without appropriate interventions, psychological stress, social adjustment difficulties, and reduced spiritual engagement may negatively affect students' academic performance, personal development, and long-term well-being. Furthermore, there is currently limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of Islamic spiritual counseling within Malaysian boarding schools, creating a gap between practice and research. Evaluating the effectiveness of spiritual counseling at An-Nadiah Islamic Boarding School is therefore essential to determine whether such interventions can effectively enhance students' holistic well-being and provide a replicable model for other Islamic educational institutions.

Based on this background, the present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of spiritual counseling in improving holistic well-being among female students at An-Nadiah Islamic Boarding School, Malaysia. This research is expected to provide empirical evidence supporting Islamic-based spiritual counseling as an effective intervention to enhance physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of students' well-being, thereby offering practical guidance for educational institutions seeking to promote comprehensive student development. The research hypothesis for this purpose is "The Spiritual Counseling effectively Improve the Holistic Well-Being in Female Students at An-Nadiah Islamic Boarding School, Malaysia".

METHOD

Design

This study was a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of spiritual counseling in improving the holistic well-being of female students at the An-Nadiah Islamic boarding school in Malaysia. This design also examined changes in participants' well-being before and after the spiritual counseling intervention, without a control group, making it suitable for settings where random assignment is not possible.

Participants

The participants consisted of 21 female students (*santriwati*) from An-Nadiah Islamic Boarding School, Malaysia. The average age of the participants ranged from 11 to 15 years, representing early adolescence. Participants were selected purposively based on their willingness to engage in the spiritual counseling

program. Inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled full-time in the boarding school and available for both pretest and post-test measurements.

Procedure

Prior to the intervention, all participants completed baseline assessments measuring holistic well-being across physical, psychological, and financial domains. The spiritual counseling intervention consisted of structured sessions incorporating Islamic values, Qur'anic reflections, and practical strategies to enhance gratitude, optimism, and resilience. The program was delivered over a specified period, with each session lasting approximately 60 minutes. After completing the counseling sessions, participants completed the same holistic well-being assessments to determine changes in outcomes.

Instrument

Holistic well-being was measured using a self-developed questionnaire consisting of 15 items, divided equally across three dimensions:

1. Physical Health (5 items): Assessed perceived vitality, energy levels, and general physical condition.
2. Psychological Health (5 items): Evaluated emotional balance, stress management, and overall psychological well-being.
3. Financial Well-Being (5 items): Assessed perceptions of financial security, ability to manage daily living needs, and self-efficacy in financial decision-making.

All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater well-being.

Table 1. Holistic Well-Being Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I feel more physically fit after regularly attending spiritual counseling.				
2	I am more motivated to maintain a healthy diet and sleep pattern.				
3	I have enough energy to carry out daily activities.				
4	Spiritual counseling has made me more aware of my physical health.				

- 5 I am more aware of the importance of exercise and personal hygiene.
 - 6 I feel calmer and more at peace after a spiritual counseling session.
 - 7 I can manage stress and pressures better.
 - 8 I feel more positive about myself.
 - 9 Spiritual counseling helps me deal with anxiety or fear.
 - 10 I have hope and enthusiasm for life.
 - 11 Spiritual counseling has made me wiser in managing money.
 - 12 I have become more frugal and less consumptive after attending counseling.
 - 13 I learned the importance of saving and avoiding debt.
 - 14 I feel more responsible in my personal finances.
 - 15 Spiritual values help me distinguish between needs and wants.
-

The questionnaire was validated by three experts in psychology and educational counseling to ensure content validity, confirming that all items adequately represented each dimension of holistic well-being. A pilot test conducted with 10 female students from a similar boarding school showed good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.82 for physical health, 0.85 for psychological health, 0.80 for financial well-being, and 0.88 for the overall instrument, indicating that the questionnaire is reliable for measuring holistic well-being in this population.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed to determine the effectiveness of the spiritual counseling intervention on holistic well-being. First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) were calculated for the total of dimension of holistic well-being: physical health, psychological health, and financial well-being.

To examine the changes in well-being before and after the intervention, the N-gain analysis was conducted to describe the change between pretest and post-test. As the research data did not meet the parametric analysis standard, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied. These analyses allowed comparison of pretest and post-test scores to determine the magnitude of change attributable to the spiritual counseling program.

Effect sizes were calculated to assess the practical significance of the changes. Rank-Biserial Correlation was used to define the effect size as interpreted on small (0.2), medium (0.5), and large (0.8) effects. The main hypothesis then determine from the p-value score. This approach ensured a rigorous evaluation of the intervention's impact on the physical, psychological, and financial dimensions of holistic well-being among female students at An-Nadiah Islamic Boarding School.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Descriptive Results

The data showed an increased score of holistic well-being after the counseling sessions. The detailed of the score of pretest and posttest described in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive results of the Pretest and Posttest Score

	Pretest	Posttest
N	21	21
Mean	64.444	72.937
Std. Error of Mean	2.333	2.07
Range	40.000	36.667
Std. Deviation	10.689	9.485
Coefficient of variation	0.166	0.13
Shapiro-Wilk	0.963	0.949
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	0.581	0.322

Based on Table 2, the Mean of pretest and posttest was increased at 8.943 points. Even score had Shapiro-wilk at normal ($p > 0.05$), the participants were not sufficient for parametric analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing measured from N-gain analysis and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The N-Gain analysis results described in Fig 1 and Table 3. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test described in Table Z.

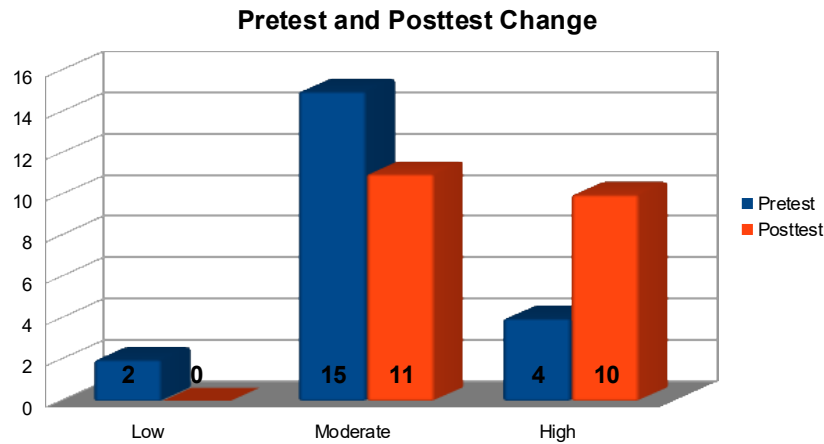


Fig 1. the Pretest and Posttest Change

Based on Figure 1, there are increased of the pretest to posttest change also indicated by the increased number of the high categorized holistic well-being score, and at the same-time reduced low scored.

Table 3. N-gain descriptive results

	N	M	SD	Range
Low gain	15	0.178	0.081	0.233
Moderate gain	6	0.389	0.056	0.148
High gain	0	0	0	0

The minimum of N-gain from the data was 0.062, with the maximum at 0.481. From this data, the general mean was 0.238, with Standard Deviation at 0.122. The specific data at Table Y, it shows that most participants (15) had low-gain change between their pretest and posttest (71.429%). The rest, other participants was at moderate-gain (28.571%), with no one had the high-gain change from their pretest-posttest.

Table 4. Wilcoxon signed-rank test results

Measure (Pretest-Posttest)	Holistic Well-being
W	0
z	-4.015
p	< .001
Rank-Biserial Correlation	-1.000
SE Rank-Biserial Correlation	0.244

From the p-value of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in Table Z, we can assume the significant change (p-value < 0.05) from the participants paired score (pretest-posttest). The rank-biserial correlation also indicate the large effect size at -1.000. Therefore, the main hypothesis was accepted, as the Spiritual Counseling effectively Improve the Holistic Well-Being in Female Students at An-Nadloh Islamic Boarding School, Malaysia.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that spiritual counseling was associated with significant improvements in the well-being of female students. This finding was reflected in the increase in mean posttest scores compared to pretest scores. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test revealed a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest measurements ($p < .001$).

The analysis also yielded a rank-biserial correlation of -1.000, indicating an extremely large effect size. This value resulted from the consistent direction of change across participants, with posttest scores exceeding pretest scores for all participants in the sample. While this finding suggests a strong intervention effect, it should be interpreted with caution because such extreme effect sizes are uncommon in social science research and may be influenced by sample characteristics and study design. Therefore, further studies involving larger samples and control groups are recommended to confirm the robustness and generalizability of these findings.

The normalized gain (N-gain) score was interpreted using the classification proposed by Hake (1998), in which gain scores below 0.30 are categorized as low, scores between 0.30 and 0.70 as moderate, and scores above 0.70 as high.

However, the N-gain analysis revealed that most participants only experienced improvements in the low category (71.43%), while the remainder experienced moderate improvements, with no participants in the high category. This suggests that although the intervention is effective, the degree of change varies

between individuals and may be influenced by several factors such as initial spiritual and psychological well-being, participant readiness, and environmental support (Akib et al., 2025).

The findings of this study align with previous research showing that Islamic psychotherapy interventions consistently improve spiritual well-being in adolescents, particularly in improving their mental health and well-being, although improvements vary across individuals. Furthermore, the positive relationship between spirituality and mental health has been shown to correlate with psychological disorders such as depression and other emotional problems (Cotton et al., 2009), (Fitriyah et al., 2020).

Various responses to interventions are described in the extensive literature, and the results indicate that the effectiveness of spiritual counseling is strongly influenced by the cultural context and the social and structural support available within the environment, such as Islamic boarding schools (Islamic boarding schools) (Djazilan et al., 2020), (Fitriyah et al., 2021), (Gonçalves et al., 2015). Previous research also found that spiritual interventions alone are not sufficient to improve well-being; rather, social relationships and interpersonal needs are essential to enhance their psychological impact (Gaskin-Wasson et al., 2018).

Limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and the experimental design without a control group, which limits the ability to draw strong causal conclusions and generalize to the population. Previous literature also recommends the use of randomized controlled trials to evaluate spiritual or religious interventions to more clearly determine their effects (Akib et al., 2025).

Practical implications of this study suggest that spiritual counseling could be part of a holistic well-being program for female students in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), with consideration for personalized interventions, such as assessing participants' spiritual readiness, providing social reinforcement, and monitoring the sustainability of post-intervention effects. Further research is recommended: in addition to using a control group and a larger sample size in experiments, adding qualitative data might help uncover how participants interpret the intervention, what factors strengthen or hinder change, and how long-term these effects persist.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that spiritual counseling helped the overall health of female pupils at the An-Nahdoh Islamic boarding school in Malaysia. The analysis of the data showed that there were big changes in the scores from the pretest to the posttest. These results show how important spiritual-based therapies are for improving overall health in a boarding school setting. But the fact that different people had

different answers shows that a more tailored approach, a stronger research design with a control group, and long-term evaluation are all necessary to make sure the program works and lasts.

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