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# Spiritual Rehabilitation: Islamic counseling approach in addressing Pre-Marital Pregnancy Among Malay-Muslim Girls in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Discussion about sexuality is still considered taboo in the ethnic Malay-Muslim society and is never openly talked about. Thus, a comprehensive educational approach needs to be integrated into the school syllabus and taught at home by parents to meet the long- and short-term needs of the girls' growth and development. Simultaneously, religious and cultural approaches are most applicable to Malay-Muslim ethnicity since religiosity and cultural values in this cohort are intertwined. This concept aligns with the religious-cultural counseling approaches in facilitating this group of young women to self-develop. Based on qualitative research utilizing the phenomenological interpretative design that highlighted the experience of counselors in handling pre-marital pregnancy cases among ethnic Malay-Muslim girls in the Klang Valley, good progress was observed after counseling sessions using conventional techniques along with various *modus operandi* and skills of the Islamic and cultural approach by counselors. Therefore, the adoption of Islamic and cultural approaches, such as recitation of Quranic verses, *salawat*, *zikr*, prayers, and stories of the prophets and *sahabah*, has a positive impact on self-awareness, self-control, self-healing, and knowledge of sexual education for self-development. A Comprehensive Islamic Counseling service has drawn a framework for our Muslims counselors to practice in the counseling setting, to address not only the case of unved pregnancy, which consists of the role of professional counsellors, *shifa' an nafs* intervention, elements of unconditional positive regard and

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counseling therapy in helping clients to become in line with Aqidah, syariah, and akhlaq

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Issues of moral decadence involves sexual behaviour, reproductive issues among women are increasing especially issues like sexual misconduct, sexual abuse, and rape among adolescents. At times, these issues lead to unwanted pregnancy cases, which affect future generations and Malaysian adolescents in general (Yasin, Abdullah, Roslan, Wahat & Saharudin, 2021). It is an alarming situation in Malaysia today, where the number of young unwed mothers is increasing due to ignorance, negligence, misconduct, and high-risk behaviors. Citing data from the Ministry of Health, the Women, Family and Community Development Minister noted that 44,263 teenage pregnancies were recorded over the past five years, with 17,646 involving unmarried teens (Abd. Majid, Azman & Marlon, 2020). Moreover, there have been 9,737 births by unmarried girls aged 10 to 19 over the last five years, says the Women, Family and Community Ministry, as Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri said these births are recorded at the Health Ministry's health facilities (Wen, Tan & Gimino, 2025)

As such, helping professionals, in particular counsellors, need to take an active role in spreading knowledge to society to curb the problem. The role of counselors as one of the helping professions is vital. In brief, counselors act as mediators in helping young mothers cope with unwed pregnancies to create a new narration of their future and instill hope in their lives. Additionally, rehabilitation institutions and correctional centers in Malaysia play a significant role by inducing and implementing Islamic rehabilitation programs through various modules and activities, with the aim of restoring the physical and spiritual welfare of young mothers (Ibrahim, Mansor & Md Yusoff, 2020., Mohd Jodi & Mansor, 2019). In these programs, counselors and social workers are essential to actualize the implementation of the module and ensure its success.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Islamic Counseling for Young and Unwed Mothers**

This research aims to study how effectively counselors have supported young mothers when they face a possible risk of developing mental health problems along with medical and physical (Khan & Idris, 2023). Moreover, it is important to carefully identify steps for psychosocial support by considering how these mothers perceive their situation and plan for their future lives. Any factor that contributes to pre-marital pregnancy can cause a crisis for teenagers, whether they are considering abortion or not. According to Jaladin & Mudayat (2016), this situation places a crucial responsibility on counselors. The counselors must understand the client's rights, the rights of the child's parents to access certain information, ethical issues, laws related to pre-marital case, parental legal consent, and the process and procedure to hold counseling sessions to assist the pregnancy issues. These are divided into three aspects, namely, i. To help the client

understand the options and facilitate making the right decision to move on with life; ii. To give moral support to the client, to prioritize making a functional plan for life, and iii. To provide a constant counseling service and structured support for the client

The rationale for providing counseling assistance to young, unwed mothers is that they are adolescents who are facing emotional turbulence at a very young age (Jaladin & Mudayat, 2016). They experience feelings of guilt, anxiety, cluelessness, and frustration as they are not prepared to become pregnant and are uncertain about their baby's future. Counsel professionals and health professionals should facilitate and help this group cope with their current situation by providing self-direction and self-awaken assistance.

## **2.2 Islamic Approach to Counseling**

Spiritual development, as upheld in religion, has been incorporated into psychological theories by prominent psychologists, such as Jung (1993), as cited in Kelly (1995). Jung believes that religion provides a legitimate expression of spiritual meaningfulness that can help individuals understand and express their psychological and spiritual potential. This includes resolving interpersonal conflicts and dynamic forces such as the ego and the personal unconscious. When religion adequately expresses the inner spiritual search, it brings the inner God of self into the outer world. He emphasized that a counselor could assist the client in understanding the therapeutically relevant impact of the spiritual or religious dimension in the client's life by exploring the depth of humanness of the counseling relationship across four significant dimensions. These dimensions that guide clients toward the full realization of human potential are personal and relational awareness, benevolent connectedness, interpersonal and relational awareness, and transcendent meaningfulness.

Humans consist not only of a physical body; they are also spiritual beings with emotions and intellect. Unlike physical illnesses, spiritual sickness is considered more perilous because it can cause a person not to function normally. Sufism, particularly through Al-Ghazali's perspective, sheds light on human psychological nature. Al-Ghazali, a profound Sufi scholar, taught that the essence of man originates from the heart (Qalb), which controls both organic and functional aspects of the body. The heart complements other functions such as the soul (ruh), desire (hawaish), and intellect (aql) (Vahab, 1996). Furthermore, the condition of the soul can be presented at different levels of a nafs (Self). For instance, nafs Al Ammarah, which is prone to evil and blameworthy, if not checked and controlled, will lead to sinful damnation. In comparison, Lawwamah is the part of the soul that is conscious and responsible for resisting sinful actions and seeking Allah's forgiveness and pardon after repentance. Nafs Al Mutmainnah, on the other hand, aims to reach the highest level of the nafs to find tranquility and happiness in life. At this level, emotions are under control, and one is close to the Creator, Allah SWT, as stated in Surah Ar-Ra'd, verse 28:

“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Verily, by the remembrance of Allah, hearts are assured.”

Thus, spirituality in counseling relationships gives a holistic view that not only focuses on the problem solution but also on building the meaning of life. Counseling is a process that consists of several aspects, such as *muroqabah* (awareness), *muhasabah* (audit and reflection), *mu'aqobah* (punishment), *mujahadah* (dedicated) and *mu'atabah* (belief and taubat). These aspects can be illustrated in 5 stages, which have been further explained by Ibrahim, Wan Razali & Osman (2011) in the self-rehabilitation process called

tazkiyyatunnafs or soul-purifying. In the meantime, Ibrahim et al. (2006) emphasized that counselors need to understand that clients will come with two types of problems: ikhtiariyyah and kauniyyah. Ikhtiariyyah refers to the problem where the client is given choices to solve the problem according to his or her intellectual mind, ability, chance, time, and ni'mat, which Allah SWT has bestowed. In contrast, *kauniyyah* is where a person cannot decide or have control over what Allah has destined.

According to Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi, treatment of the Soul or spiritual healing can be addressed through internal and external methods (Badri, 2024). First is Internal, where a person is fighting psychological distress from within by developing opposing thoughts (therapeutic thoughts) that neutralize negative symptoms and desensitize their provocation. Secondly, the external, seeking outside help through advice or counseling from others, which calms the agitated soul and treats its abnormality. It is necessary to take care of the health of the soul, which is vital to prevent negative psychological symptoms from dominating life, as severe psychological symptoms can eventually lead to bodily disorders. However, not all people can do it by themselves, rather to get external professional help such as a therapist and counselor, which is more effective for physical ailments for example such as dietician or physiciant, external benefit from advice and counseling is more useful for psychological disorders than a person's own internal attempt at treatment. Badri (2024) highlighted that is primarily due to two reasons; People generally accept from others what they don't accept from themselves, as their own reasoning is often mixed with passion. Meanwhile, a person suffering from painful psychological symptoms is too preoccupied and overwhelmed to clearly think of a way to overcome them. They need others to show them the path to recovery, much like a sick physician needs another doctor to treat them.

The text concludes by citing the example of wise rulers who appoint special advisors to help manage their psychological symptoms (calm anger, tranquilize fears), emphasizing their appreciation for the external benefit of both medical and psychological healing. As a helping profession, Islam views counseling as a process of reverting to fitrah, or one's natural state, i.e. 1. Muhasabah or self-reflection, 2. Taubat or asking for forgiveness from Allah and regret for past deeds, 3. Learn from mistakes and 4. Make a move to change the attitudes through the four attitude rehabilitation processes as shown in Figure 1 below, whereby a counselor can implement for crisis intervention as described further by Ibrahim et al. (2006):

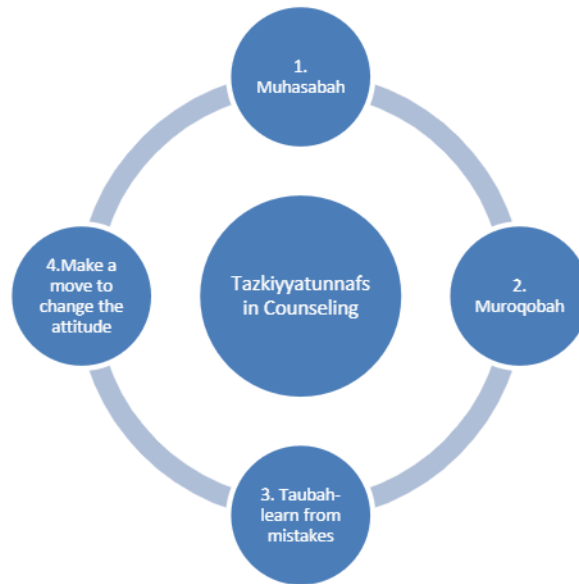


Figure 1: *Tazkiyyatunnafs* (Self-rehabilitation framework) in counseling (Ibrahim et.al,2011)

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This research used a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenological research design gives a deep and robust understanding of the meaning, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things (Berg & Lune, 2017) through participant observation, depth interview and field notes. This research study approach interprets the experiences and perceptions of the informants regarding adolescent unwed pregnancy and how they handled these cases.

#### **3.2 Participants**

Seven counsellors who agreed to participate were interviewed. These counsellors are currently handling or have experience handling cases of rape and teenage pregnancy. The locality of these respondents was not to be disclosed for private and confidentiality protocol, which must be observed by the researcher.

#### **3.3 Trustworthiness and genuine authentication**

Interview questions were selected particularly according to the research questions. All the questions have been gone through a checking process from the academic supervisors. The accuracy of the data and questions have been determined by three inter-raters from the expertise in counselling field based on their years of practicing experience in different settings.

### 3.4 Data collection procedure

In-depth interviews have been conducted for two phases: the first one is the preliminary interview, where the participants were screening for their experience for handling the teenage pregnancy cases. Second phase was to interview with set of questions prepared by the researcher after being validated by experts. However, due to the code of counselling ethics, some of the conversation and the documented data to support this were not being reported for observing confidentiality of the cases.

### 3.5 Thematic analysis

The data collection was analysed by transcribing the interviews manually verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes, creating a coding and categorization scheme to interpret the findings. As Creswell (2017) stated, "A thematic analysis approach includes an extensive discussion about the major themes that arise from analysing the qualitative database". The analysis followed a rigorous, non-linear path that moved from raw data to the development of a conceptual framework.

**3.5.1 Phase 1: Data Familiarization and Open Coding:** The process began with "immersive reading" of interview transcripts from counselors in the Klang Valley. This led to Open Coding, where data segments were broken down into distinct concepts and broad thematic domains. For instance, initial codes likely identified specific Islamic interventions like *zikr* and *solawat*.

**3.5.2 Phase 2: Axial Coding and Theme Searching:** In this stage, the researchers moved from broad codes to identifying relationships between them. This Axial Coding helped determine how various counseling techniques (conventional vs. Islamic) intersected to influence client outcomes.

**3.5.3 Phase 3: Selective Coding and Theme Refinement:** Through Selective Coding, the themes were refined into a cohesive story. This involved reviewing potential themes to ensure they accurately represented the counselors' experiences and effectively addressed the research questions.

#### 3.5.4 Outcomes of the Analysis

The thematic exploration resulted in a Comprehensive Islamic Counselling framework designed to help young mothers align their lives with *Aqidah* (faith), *Syariah* (law), and *Akhlaq* (morality). Key thematic findings included:

- (i) **Spiritual Interventions:** The analysis highlighted the efficacy of the *shifa' an nafs* (healing of the soul) approach, which utilizes Quranic recitation, prayers, and stories of the prophets to foster self-healing and self-awareness.
- (ii) **Psychosocial Support:** Themes emerged regarding the counselor's role in providing "unconditional positive regard" and helping clients navigate emotional turbulence, such as guilt and anxiety, through both internal and external spiritual healing methods.
- (iii) **Educational Integration:** The findings underscored the need for a "religious-cultural" approach to sexual education, acknowledging that for Malay-Muslim girls, religiosity and cultural values are deeply intertwined.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Comprehensive Islamic Counselling Service

Young mothers who have experienced unwed pregnancies have been able to envision a better future with a more hopeful and enlightened perspective through an interwoven Islamic approach. This approach brings back the essence of being human, which is to serve Allah, and helps them gain a clear understanding of their life purpose, despite the iniquitous deeds and unforgettable experiences they have endured, the root is to come back to the creator and belief in Allah's merciful where each one of us must hope and seek for the forgiveness from HIM, and repent process, to change for a better life is open until the last breath. The counsellors reported adhering to all their counselling procedures, protocols, and assessments in accordance with ethical standards. In summary, incorporating Islamic values in the intervention, such as prophetic and Sahabah moral stories from Sirah (Islamic history), self-practice in spiritual enhancement (zikrullah), regular prayers, Quranic recitation, and revision of the Rukun Islam and Iman (Islamic Pillars and beliefs), has had a tremendously positive effect on the spiritual well-being of the clients. As stated by the counsellors:

*"That's the thing. Right now, because I explained Surah Al-Fatihah to her, she reached out to me saying, "Sir, can you explain more about Islam? I still feel broken inside." This awareness is important. We are not just counselors; we are also preachers, teaching others. Alhamdulillah, Allah has taught me so much through these experiences. (RNAZ)*

*"We still maintain our own principles, using an Islamic approach. In our counseling sessions, we rely on the Quran and Hadith. That's why I'm very happy to use the Islamic approach. At the end of each session, depending on the issue discussed, I emphasize practices such as zikr, reciting Surah Yasin, Quranic verses, Ayat Kursi, and the four Quls. I remind and encourage clients to incorporate these practices into their daily lives. (RRINI)*

*"She feels calmer and more peaceful. For example, there was a case of a person with a mental disorder who came to me with his parents. He understood the importance of seeking help and knew he could call me whenever needed. I told him to stay calm and pray first. I asked if he had taken wudhu (ablution), and he said yes. I then asked if he had prayed, and he confirmed he had. I said, "Okay, now do you feel calm?" He responded, "Yes, I feel calm." It's like that. (RNISA)*

*"Ha, it's like that. I do whatever I can to help. I told him, "Okay, now put your things aside and take wudhu." He did it. Yes, solah is always the first step. (RNISA)*

*"At the same time, I explained the importance of wudhu'. It is very important. Whatever the situation, even when we are angry or feel like we are about to explode, we should go and take wudhu'. (RNISA)*

*"So, when we ask the client to do this, they follow and feel the benefits. For example, if a client feels sad, they will take ablution and pray Tahajjud, Hajat, or another prayer. This brings them a sense of peace (RSURI)*

Table 2: Usefulness of Islamic intervention in the counseling session and the client's progress

Usefulness of Islamic intervention in the counselling session	The progress of clients by using Islamic spiritual intervention
Basic Islamic Teaching and Practices	Client's readiness to change
Prophetic and messengers' history	Calmness with wudhu' and solat therapy
Using an Islamic teaching booklet	Destress with Zikr and Quranic recitation
Quranic Recitation	Knowing purpose in life
Azan	Believe in Allah's mercifulness and love
Zikr	

In a nutshell, the combination of all these graphical illustrations will highlight the connection towards Islamic intervention counselling that “channel” into the healing of the soul (Shifa an Nafs). In the realm of Comprehensive Islamic Counselling Service framework, generated from the findings of this research endeavour, is to highlight the foundation of integrated approach within the foundation of Tawhidic epistemology. The role of professional counsellors here is the key point to combine the whole concept to create a comprehensive Islamic Counselling service. Counsellors must possess the knowledge of counselling, mastering the counselling skills and techniques, be trained and certified to become qualified in the profession and competent professional. A Muslim counsellor, who possesses the qualification in counselling will integrate the Islamic knowledge and practices in the approach of counselling, where the base in to bring the soul of a person to come back to his fitrah or nature. Human being is kind in nature, the main purpose is to serve the Creator and to seek His blessing, by using the framework of tazkiyatunnafs or a process of clarity of a soul, which can only happen by succumb and find a salvation from Allah SWT, the Creator and the One and Only God who can safe and heal a human soul. It is like a process of realigning a car, which has an off-track system due to an accident of mishap, to bring it to the hand who can fix and re-function. The role of a counsellor as a mediator, helps a person to find their own true journey and get back on track again, therefore he will not fall into an astray way of life.

The attitude of counsellors comes hand in hand with the quality of the counselling service. It will determine the outcome and the responds of a client, in finding a way to resolve an issue. In denoting the role and attitude of the counsellor with Islamic foundation, apparently the attitudes of Rasullullah, SAW the messenger of Allah, in helping people to resolve their problem were tremendously consist of all the attitudes of counselors should have. Amanah with people's trust, Truthful who only says the truth and does things that he promised, Respectful and respect others with his kindness and wisdom, care and mercifulness to others, and the most is to listen to others with patience and empathy. These made Rasulullah SAW with his incredible knowledge granted by Allah, to complete the best attitude and akhlaq, made the best counsellor that Muslim counsellor should master and practice throughout their services. He will help people according to their needs and purpose. Even though he has access to practice his power, he still respects other opinions and plans, as he wants to understand and be open for any idea, because we have our own limitations and weaknesses. He gained respect as he accepts anyone without judgement due to the respect,

because he has the heart to help others, even non-Muslims or foes. The positive attitude and functional behavior will give hope and an inspirational model to the clients, as there is still a beautiful hope and a conducive place to change provided by the counsellors, who are the helping professionals with social responsibilities, and in the meantime, an agent or mediator of Allah, to help others, by enjoining the Ma'ruf and forbidding the Munkar.

#### **4.2 Counselling, Counsellors, and the Islamic Paradigm**

Muslims counsellors are considered a medium or a helping agent for clients in developing their spiritual well-being, to restore the psychological well-being through the values and culture, i.e., the domains that affect their developmental, as well as in terms of the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions including spiritual dimensions as an addition from the Islamic point of view. By creating the new perspective for clients, Muslims counsellors acknowledge that the faculty of human cognition on cognitive theory is a significant element of positive psychology which consists of the subjective well-being theory on the interpretation of the human being of life events with a positive perception (Compton & Hoffman, 2013), which is also called 'top-down theory'. This approach brings a person to look inside him or her by examining personality traits, attitudes, and cognitions as to carry the perspective towards a positive interpretation. The focus is on changing people's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, or personality traits towards increased positive moods and emotions such as happiness.

Islam believes in helping clients or patients in the same way that if a sick person needs medication for either internal or external treatment. A counselling client needs to get treatment for a positive change and this therapeutic process can only take place in an effective counselling procedure (Ismail, Mahat & Hassan, 2008). Four factors must present throughout the sessions which are model, techniques, therapeutic alliance, and hope/expectancy to make a change (Thomas, 2006). The guideline for therapeutic treatment is holistic, focusing on the soul (spiritual) dimension, human cognition as well as emotional, to be interpreted and mirrored by the physical action, such as behaviour and personality. In the traditional counselling procedure, all will be assessed by the mental health professionals through the diagnostic system during the initial process according to the categories such as personality disorders, adjustment reactions, schizophrenic processes, mood disorders, addictive disorders or organic and somatic complaints, based on the DSM-IV (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) (Kottler, 2002).

In pastoral counselling, the spiritual direction mode will be introduced to the client with two conditions which is 1) is the person truly aware of God in his life and committed to a deeper relationship with Him, and 2) is the person sufficiently free from major psychopathology to pursue a sustained life of prayer, meaning the client is aware of his or her relationship with God and devoted or willing to be committed with prayers to find a solution as well as working on a resolution of the main issue (Culligan, 1991). In comparison, Islam emphasises the spiritual direction in what is referred to as Islamic guidance and counselling, a different paradigm based on the references of Al-Quran and Sunnah as the guidance and guidelines implemented during the healing or treatment strategies. The primary provided strategies help the client based on the nature of human, being first and foremost to improve their relationship with Allah by finding the way back to Allah and to serve Him (Ibrahim, Wan Razali & Osman, 2011), in recognition of Him as the Creator and the best helper as well as the best healer who knows what is best for His servants. The secondary strategies are utilised from the integration of contemporary Western counselling and

psychology theories and therapies (Elias, 2008).

Morality is seen to have a strong relationship with values in the religious and spiritual realms because to achieve the moral end and perfection, Man must build up good characters which comprises all virtues, particularly the love of God (Nik Yaacob, 2008). Such a level can be achieved through Islamic fundamental and religious education, training, and practical application until it is evident that the lifestyle of a Muslim is making a person become a religious, moral being. Islam sees a client in counselling as a whole physical being with a soul, gifted with tremendous faculties and given a purpose to live in this world in the service of Allah as the One and Only God. This purpose is stated in surah Ad-Dharyat verse 56,

*وما خلقت الجن والإنس إلا ليعبدون*

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me”.

Muslims need to strive for excellence and thrive in life with the goal of the last abode in the hereafter since this world is a temporary destination in life’s journey. This world can be a field for harvesting ‘amal and ihsan (doing righteous and getting rewards from Allah). It can also become a place to enjoy without any God-consciousness, where one ends up among the ghafileen and khasireen (the heedless people and losers) with the goal only for the attainment of worldly rewards and triumphs. Al-Ghazali in his book *Ihya’ Ulumuddin* (1987) explained that the concept of *tawbah* or repentance is significant for each Muslim. The Prophet, peace be upon him, encourages Muslims to perform self-reflection and to return to the straight path by asking for forgiveness, and following such acts by becoming a good person and leaving all the bad deeds with hope and prayer to Allah SWT to be guided and protected from wrongdoings, sins, and mistakes. A human being, in fact, cannot avoid continually making mistakes, as mentioned in hadeeth as below:

*كل ابن آدم خطاء، وخير الخطائين التوابون*

“Every son of Adam sins, the best of the sinners are those who repent.”

(Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 2499)

In the context of counselling regardless any issue, a person is believed to have a potential to improve one’s functioning and to solve problems and change for better, in his or her own capacity and ability, to some extent to the fullest of capability, either the problems related to disorders of thinking, emotional suffering, or problems of behaviour as well as spirituality incompetent. Spirituality is everything in the life of Muslims. It relates to the experience of *ruh* or spirit and the act of ‘*ibadah* (Islamic Rituals) and the development of the inner strength of human beings through spiritual training such as prayers and fasting, Quranic recitation, or *zikrullah* (remembrance of God) (Manaf, 1995., Sarmani & Ninggal, 2008., Ibrahim et al., 2011.) Evil deeds cause diseases in the heart which lead to worries, anxieties, and grief due to the loss of blessings, which are like a poison that weakens the spiritual side of a human. Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah wrote that the greatest spiritual diseases or illnesses come from desire, where the remedies are none other than seeking access to God to gain mercy, beneficence, and forgiveness. Once the heart knows and realises the wrongdoing, it is obliged to love and glorify Him and profess to His unity, thus attaining delight, pleasure, and salvation (Johnstone, 1998).

Karzon (2010) emphasized the role of *salat* or prayer, where he described it as the most tremendous salvation to the human soul and having a high purifying impact. It is the highest level of *ibadah*, which can give an extraordinary effect and strengthen Muslims’ faith and belief, educating them and generating the concept of worship, where it is enhancing the relationship between man and Allah, the One and Only God

to be worshipped. Muslim counsellors are trained to see that each client has the potential to fix themselves, to make a positive change, and to view that each human being is born pure, righteous, and having a high dignity (Ibrahim, Wan Razali & Osman, 2006). Muslims counsellors are supposed to be trained by the idea of Elias (2008) as he clarified that for effective therapy with Muslim clients through worshipping Allah. This idea fits into two basic requirements of Islamic counselling principles which are first related to the goal and strategies explained below:

- (i) The overall goals of counselling should be to help clients become better Muslims, that is to lead their life according to the Shariah principles.
- (ii) The strategies, intervention and techniques should not deviate from the principles of shariah law.

Thus, the role of the counsellor is to assist a person who comes with the issue in viewing his or her potentiality and possibilities in handling the problems and to find a way out or look forward to other ways for a solution. A Muslim counsellor has no other difference role and credibility but with an added value that focuses on spiritual training and development, which aligns with the ultimate reference of the Book of Allah and Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in helping people to solve their issues. Faith can make someone become a righteous person with a God-consciousness insight, by knowing the meaning and purpose of life, having high self-esteem and resilience in positivity. These changes are due to the faith and a concept of iman known as redha, to accept things that happened are beyond human knowledge and capacity and that Allah is the most powerful who controls everything. Humans can always pray, asking, requesting Allah for guidance and answer our prayers as He is the All-Knower and He knows the Best. Prayer and praying can develop a person's self-consciousness about his or her individual wishes and point of view, as well as a recognition of the self-conscious imaginative act as a self-limitation when compared to the will of God (Scarlett, 2006).

The basic principle of Islam that every single Muslim is obliged to internalize and believe in is through the belief in Allah alone, in his book, the messengers of Allah, angels and the day of judgement as well as the destiny (qada' and qadr). The principle is manifested through some methods and ways to clarify the faith and God-consciousness (iman and taqwa) to Allah SWT in the acts of ibadah such as prayers, fasting, zakat, performing hajj and 'umrah in the Bait Allahilharam. These acts of salvation are to train the spiritual realm of human nature, where the hope, trust, and worries are to be put in Allah SWT. The heart finds its only rest in the remembrance of Him and in strengthening the relationship with Him to establish wonderful salvation. Elias (2008) has highlighted the process of Islamic Spiritual practices, in which a counsellor or therapist can implement and practice together to directly help a person to improve his or her relationship with Allah SWT, as follows:

- (i) Both counsellors and clients make full use of the spiritual triggers of change, such as using dua, hajat prayer, and reading the Quranic verses
- (ii) Counsellors and clients search for wisdom from Quranic verses and hadith
- (iii) Traditional tasawwuf training from the Sufis
- (iv) Counsellors train clients to integrate counselling with the overall Islamic practice of 'ibadah, zuhd training, or Sufism training.

Counselling is all about guidance, consultation, testing, helping an individual to solve problems and plan for the future. Therefore, the concept of counselling in Islam is no different from the contemporary approach where it involves help and healing which come from the interaction between the counsellor and client to know about themselves, to deal with the environment, by knowing their roles, responsibilities, and potential and to utilize them to the maximum by removing the hindrance to deal with their issues and emotional disturbances to become a balanced and functional person. However, Nik Yaacob and Yusof (2013) suggested a more notable and applicable approach of Islamic counselling as advising, directing, reminding, reforming, recommending, and modelling or exemplifying, with further details as follows:

- (i) *Nasihah* means sincere advice, friendly admonition and friendly reminder
- (ii) A reminder, such as a client who is depressed over the death of a loved one can be soothed by being reminded that God is the owner of our lives
- (iii) Directing the client to the right path for example if the client is a stray from religion, he should be directed to the correct path, where the counsellor needs to bring back the client to realise his existence in this world and the role he should possess in relation to God and other mankind, by giving *tazkirah* from hadeeth or Quranic verses and other technique such as cognitive therapy
- (iv) Reform or *Islah* is to change clients' perception, behaviour and mind to a better state
- (v) Recommendation or *tausiyah* to the client might be in terms of skills, activities, exercises, or information
- (vi) The counsellor must be a good exemplar or Qudwah who possesses qualities, characteristics and akhlaq to follow the best role model, Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Counselling is considered as an ibadah in helping others and a profession that is fard kifayah. The Islamic perspective views counselling profession as 'Amr bi Al-Ma'ruuf is an Nahyu 'an al' munkar, where counsellors are also a khalifah of Allah who enjoins goodness and promotes good deeds by assisting the clients to solve their issues and prohibits wrongful and sinful acts (Ibrahim, Wan Razali & Osman, 2006), as mentioned in Surah Al-Maidah verse 2, as Allah SWT says:

وتعاونوا على البر والتقوى، ولا تعاونوا على الإثم والعدوان.....

...And cooperate in righteousness and piety, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression...

Moreover, Ibrahim et al. (2006) underlined the core conditions and characteristics of Muslim counsellors as helpers:

- (i) Sincerity: it is a manifestation of Syahadah, and it means to do every single deed for the sake of Allah SWT and to do things sincerely as Muslims. In the counselling context, counsellors must have a sense of sincerity to help the client to find a solution to the problem they are facing. It is a catalyst for the counsellors to be highly committed to doing counselling work.

- (ii) **Patience:** a counsellor must have the perseverance to face the complexity of human beings to be dealt with in the counselling process. Patience is also considered as ibadah as enjoying good things has a positive impact on the counselling sessions.
- (iii) **Knowledge and skills:** a counsellor must be qualified through formal professional training. Islam encourages Muslims to be professional, committed, and to become an expert in any field they are involved in.
- (iv) **Trust:** the counselling profession is trust from Allah like all other professions. Every single person will be questioned on the Day of Judgement about the trust and responsibility they have been given. Thus, a counsellor must be very particular, dedicated, and responsible for helping the client, as counselling sessions will affect the client.

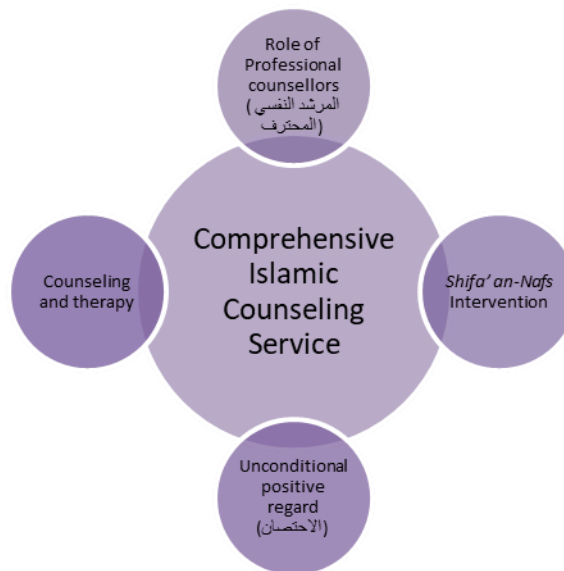


Figure 2: Comprehensive Islamic Counselling Service

### **4.3 Multicultural Consideration as Professional Counsellors**

There is an ethical guideline in dealing with clients from different religious values and beliefs in the counselling procedure, specifically, the 2005 ACA Code of Ethics. Counsellors must be aware and learn about handling issues related to religious values and tradition which relate to one's culture, beliefs, and norms. Basic rapport-building involves the counsellor making the client trust him or her as an understanding and helpful party who will ensure that the process proceeds smoothly and effectively. Counsellors need to unconditionally accept the client who comes in with personal issues and have a positive belief in the potential of the client. Following the Rogerian approach, counsellors must provide a warm atmosphere for the client to trust the counsellor and feel confident in themselves in making a move towards betterment.

Counsellors should bear in mind that they cannot impose their values, especially in terms of religious values. In some cases of premarital pregnancy among teenagers, a counsellor might be seeing clients from different religious and racial backgrounds where certain values may not be considered mutually important. Thus, the objective and goal of the counselling must be made clear from the beginning as to which agreed-upon issues both parties (client and counsellor) should address and deal with without bringing in their moral values into the session. Welfel (2006) presented the ethical issues for counsellors on diversity from the 2005 ACA Code of Ethics, section A, which stated:

“The Counselling Relationship: counsellors encourage client growth and development that foster the interest and welfare of clients and promote the formation of healthy relationships, with an attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients, while exploring the counsellors' own cultural identities and how these affect their values and beliefs about the counselling process”. Also highlighted in the 2002 APA Ethical Principles is Principle E about Respect for People’s Rights and Dignity, which states:

“Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality and self-determination. Psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual and role differences including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language and socioeconomic status and consider these factors when working with members of such groups.”

Hence, these aspects must be taken into consideration when dealing with clients in a multicultural society, to respect their cultural sensitivities and to counsel them regardless of stigma. Professional counsellors who have multicultural competency are aware of other people’s values and beliefs, does not negatively judging of the client’s worldview and cultural diversity, and use skills and develop counselling interventions that are appropriate for diverse clients. Ingersoll (1995) listed three ways to enhance the counselling process for counsellors working with clients who are committed to a particular spiritual or religious belief:

- (i) Affirm the importance of the clients’ spirituality in their lives.
- (ii) Attempt to enter client worldviews with congruent vocabulary and imagery in conceptualizing problems and treatments.
- (iii) Counsellors need to be willing to consult with other ‘healers’ in clients’ lives such as clergymen or folk healers.

However, Counsellors can take the common values, such as in pastoral counselling, to deal with issues of an unwanted pregnancy involving Christian teenagers. The focus should be on crisis intervention by facilitating feelings of hope in a person, where religious beliefs are a source of comfort and hopefulness in the problem-solving process, and to ask questions about the meaning of life no matter what personal faith struggle. The role of the counsellor is to signify a belief in the transcendental; a beneficial action of God in human narration (Callahan, 1991).

If the client is a Muslim, the Muslim counsellor can apply an Islamic approach in the session because the clients are Muslims and shares the same values. Mustaffa and Abu Bakar (2009) presented a real case in their book, *Kes Kaunseling: Proses & Rawatan*. It is a real written case on premarital sex issue counselling, where the role of the counsellor is crucial in building a rapport in a congruent, unconditionally positive regard, and empathic, especially at the early stages. As a Muslim counsellor, the first greeting

would be the salam, a warm voice, a welcoming smile, eye contact with the client, and a comfortable position. The session would begin with a recitation of Surah Al-Fatiha, followed by the structuring and counselling process, as well as confidentiality and ethical consideration to keep the client feeling secure. Other than practising the counselling techniques such as questioning, listening, summarizing, asking for an explanation and being supportive. Muslim counsellors can apply the Tawsiyyah technique (Remind) and also the skills of giving direction to the right way (Irshad), leading (Qudwah), reminding (Tazkirah), and advising (An-Nushah). The desire to repent with feelings of regret and awareness needs to be sparked in the heart of the client, enabling them to leave behind the bad deeds and replace them with good deeds consistently. They should also be led to observe the prayers, reading Al-Quran and zikr, as well as understand the concept of Qada' and Qadr (pre-destiny) while accepting the fate with redha (open-heart) and looking forward to a better future (Mustaffa & Abu Bakar, 2009).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Counseling may not be popular in Malaysian society, but it still has an important role in helping people obtain emotional support when facing life issues. Governmental departments, educational institutions, colleges, schools, and some private sectors have acknowledged the importance of counseling and counselors in enhancing attitudes, improving performance, and increasing achievement for their human resources. Counseling and counselors address the subjective side of humanity, with certain skills and therapy for helping people to become emotionally and mentally healthy, which, in turn, generates profit for the organization and the nation in general.

Thus, awareness of this service should be made widespread among the public at every level of the community. People should know how to seek counseling services when needed. Government and non-governmental organizations can take steps to fund and enhance facilities and necessities, campaign for the awareness of counseling in various localities, and offer counseling services in small provinces. Online and teleservice on this issue have also been introduced lately, but they have not been well-received due to the prevailing perception that it is taboo to share deep-seated personal problems and issues with strangers. Campaigns and talks on pre-marital pregnancy prevention should be organized periodically with integrated stages for young people and parents to create awareness about sexual health, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and irregular sexual orientations such as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) from a social perspective to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Teenagers need counseling to voice their concerns if they find it difficult to talk to their parents. Counselors can guide young people to find ways to overcome their issues and learn that they can control their lives and set clear goals. During this stage of life, teenagers are trying to find their own identity and need guidance, information, and knowledge to become contributing citizens and adults who lead a better lifestyle. This issue of pre-marital pregnancy among young Muslim Malay girls can be curbed through counseling by providing professional expertise to help them overcome these challenges. However, this approach can be adapted and adapted to non-Muslim clients, as we find the belief system of the client and accept their culture and practices to suit their spiritual needs, in a multicultural perspective.

Other than the therapy, theories, and skills used in counseling sessions, incorporating an Islamic approach in counseling is also vital for restoring spiritual wellness. Human beings need to care for both their physical and spiritual sides. Basic Islamic teaching and belief can be integrated into counseling through practical tasks for clients to practice and experience for themselves. Practices such as zikir, solat, taking wudhu' or ablution, and Quranic recitation are therapeutic for anxiety. Clients who undergo this form of counseling have reported feeling calmer and more composed when they include these practices in their daily routines. They are taught to keep their hearts in remembrance of Allah and seek His help and pleasure while believing that Allah listens to their concerns and worries. This spiritual connection can gradually rectify their issues, creating ripples of positivity in both their spiritual and physical well-being.

In addition, counselors are also liable to inform clients about certain information and knowledge to guide them from any misleading action and protect the clients from any harm. Ethical standards of counseling state that counselors can report and encourage clients to report to authorities if they find the client to be a victim of any crime. Incest, rape, and unwanted pregnancy are considered sexual abuse, which mandates actions against the perpetrators. The victim should be protected and given proper shelter or placed at a rehabilitation center to prevent the girl from being continuously victimized or becoming pregnant at a young age. These deplorable circumstances can hinder their future progress because, at that stage of life, they should be learning and enjoying their youth instead of caring for a baby and managing a family. Counseling and guidance are needed because of the enormous challenges affecting their spiritual, physical, and mental. The Board of Counselors can produce guidelines for counselors handling cases involving pre-marital pregnancies, benefiting licensed counselors as a reference, training module, and developing effective, well-rounded professionals adept at handling these cases. In addition, ample facilities, training, workshops, counseling techniques, and skills should be provided to help counselors learn and apply the guidelines.

Many aspects of counseling services and skills can be improved. This study focuses on how counseling can help address pre-marital pregnancy among Malay girls in Malaysia, particularly in the Ulu Klang area. As of now, society is facing a rising rate of crimes and delinquency, which reflects the individual's morality. Hence, counseling needs to be understood as a venue for finding problem-solving solutions for people whom the public has stigmatized. This is because stigmatization often makes individuals feel ashamed and afraid to seek counseling. A counselor is a mediator trained to provide psychotherapy services without judgment so that individuals can grow and understand themselves. In a therapeutic environment, a counselor can help an individual realize their potential and develop the capabilities needed to handle their issues. Thus, a counselor is a helper for the soul, not only addressing clients' worldly problems but also renewing their hope for a better life ahead.

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## 7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

## 8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Nursyahidah Khalid: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, and writing-original draft; Nik Ahmad Hisham Ismail: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, and validation; Wan Suraya Wan Nik: Writing- review and editing, and validation.

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