# THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN MAINTAINING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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***Abstract:*** *Anxiety disorders in Generation Z students have increased significantly due to academic pressure and the influence of social media, with Riskesdas 2023 data showing a high prevalence at the age of 15-24 years. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic religious practices as a coping strategy in maintaining the mental health of Muslim students of Generation Z. The research uses a qualitative approach with a dual case study method on three students of UIN Palangka Raya through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, nonparticipant observations, and documentation, with validity guaranteed through triangulation and member examination. The results show that religious practices play an important role in bringing mental calm, reducing anxiety and overthinking, and strengthening resilience to academic stress. Prayer is the main coping mechanism, dhikr and Qur'an recitation function as a spiritual relaxation technique, strengthened by social support from families and campus communities. Religious practices are effective because they provide a framework of existential meaning that helps students reinterpret academic stressors in a broader spiritual perspective, while also activating physiological relaxation responses. These findings provide practical implications for the development of spiritualbased counseling programs and campus policies that integrate religious support in student mental health services*
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**INTRODUCTION**

Mental health is a crucial issue among Generation Z, especially students who face intensive academic pressure and the negative influence of social media. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health's Basic Health Research show a significant increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression disorders in the 15-24 year age group, reflecting the urgency of developing effective coping strategies. Generation Z born between 1997 and 2012 grew up in the midst of a digital era with unlimited access to information, but despite the huge opportunities offered by technology, this generation is faced with serious challenges related to mental health.

Research shows that Generation Z students in the UIN Palangka Raya environment have a high preference for the use of digital technology in learning, but this condition demands attention to their psychological balance and mental health. Social pressure, academic demands, and constant social media exposure make levels of stress, anxiety, and depression increase. The American Psychological Association survey in 2023 even noted that 91% of Gen Z experienced at least one significant stress symptom in the past month[5]. Previous research by Ria and Surawan shows the need to transform learning methods that adapt to the digital preferences of Generation Z, while Aqila et al emphasize the importance of the role of Islamic religious education in improving the mental health of this generation.

Islamic religious practices such as prayer, dhikr, and Qur'an recitation have great potential as adaptive mechanisms in managing stress and maintaining the psychological balance of Muslim students. Worship recommended by Allah SWT such as prayer, fasting, prayer, dhikr, and reading the Qur'an has a positive impact on Generation Z by presenting the effect of calmness, security, and istiqamah in the way of Allah SWT[6]. Prayer is one of the sacred ways to connect with God, where one can feel His presence. In addition, prayer functions as a form of therapy that can bring happiness during its implementation through peace of mind and a positive attitude in facing challenges[7]. This

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[5] Sofieta Ria dan Surawan, "Transformasi Metode Pembelajaran Pendekatan Psikologi Pendidikan untuk Menyesuaikan Preferensi Digital Generasi Z pada Mahasiswa IAIN," *Edunova: Journal of Education and Innovation Advancement* 1, no. 2 (2025): 35
[6] Muhammad Sulthon Rifqi dkk., "Urgensi Kegiatan Keagamaan dalam Menjaga Kestabilan Iman pada Generasi Z," *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Kajian Islam dan Pendidikan* 17, no. 1 (2025): 340.
[7] Anis Sintya dan Ike Utia Ningsih, "Peran Sholat dalam Mengurangi Stres dan Kecemasan," *Journal of Psychology and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2025): 64.

spiritual activity is not just a religious ritual, but can serve as a source of resilience and emotional regulation that supports mental health.

Previous research has shown a positive correlation between religiosity and psychological well-being, but it is still limited in exploring the subjective experiences of Generation Z that have unique characteristics in interpreting religious practices. The study by Rahmawati and Fauji highlights the role of contextual Islamic education in supporting adolescent mental health [8], while Rahayu et al. examine the role of Sufism in improving the spirituality of Generation Z[9]. However, the local context at UIN Palangka Raya with the socio-cultural dynamics of Central Kalimantan has not received adequate academic attention, even though this context offers unique characteristics as an Islamic university that has not been widely researched.

Mental health can be achieved when a person realizes that there is a higher power than himself, namely God, on which he or she is dependent. Mental health and inner peace can also be obtained through a consistent and regular relationship with God, such as through prayer and prayer [10]. This research is important because it presents novelty in explaining the relationship between religious practices and mental health based on students' subjective experiences. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of Islamic psychological theory and religious copying theory with local qualitative approaches, which have practical value for the development of spiritual-based mental health programs in the Islamic campus environment.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a dual case study method to understand the indepth experience of Generation Z students in interpreting religious practices on mental health. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena in real contexts that cannot be explained through quantitative approaches.

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[8] Umi Habibah Rahmawati dan Imam Fauji, "Peran Pendidikan Islam Kontekstual dalam Mendukung Kesehatan Mental Remaja Generasi-Z," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 2 (2025): 222.
[9] Winda Sri Rahayu, Rosid Bahar, dan Adang Nurdin, "Peran Ilmu Tasawuf dalam Meningkatkan Kesehatan Mental dan Spiritualitas Generasi Z: Studi di Pesantren Idrisiyyah," *Nathiqiyyah: Jurnal Psikologi Islam* 8, no. 1 (2025): 81.
[10] Mas Ayu Ainun Nisa dkk., "Pendidikan Islam Perspektif Buya Hamka: Relevansinya terhadap Penguatan Kesehatan Mental Gen Z," *Al-Fatih: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2024): 175.

The research subjects consisted of three UIN Palangka Raya students who were included in Generation Z and were selected through purposive sampling techniques based on the following criteria: aged 18-25 years, actively performing five prayers, routinely dhikr and reading the Qur'an, and willing to become research participants. The selection of this criterion is intended to obtain informants who have consistent experience in religious practices so that they can provide rich and in-depth data.

Data was collected through three main techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore participants' subjective experiences of undergoing religious practices and their impact on their mental state. Second, non-participant observation to see the worship behavior and daily activities of the participants in their natural context. Third, documentation in the form of field notes, interview recordings, and supporting literature relevant to the research topic.

The collected data is then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through several stages. First, a verbatim transcription of all the interview results. Second, encoding the data to identify relevant units of meaning. Third, the categorization of these codes into broader themes. Fourth, the interpretation of the theme to find the patterns and meanings underlying the participants' experiences.

The validity of the research results is ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, namely by comparing data from various sources and different data collection techniques. In addition, member checking is carried out by asking participants to verify the results of the researcher's interpretation to ensure that the meaning captured matches their actual experience.

**RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, the three participants had a fairly consistent pattern of religious practice in daily life. Participant 1 prayed five times in congregation at the mosque and routinely read the Qur'an every morning for 15-30 minutes. Participant 2 preferred to dhikr every night before going to bed as a form of relaxation and self-reflection. Meanwhile, Participant 3 actively participated in campus studies twice a week and had the habit of praying before and after studying. This religious activity is not just ritual, but also a means of mental strengthening when facing academic and social pressure. Participants acknowledged that worship routines have a calming

effect, help them control their emotions, and foster gratitude and optimism. This data shows that consistent religious practices can serve as an effective spiritual coping strategy for Generation Z Muslim students.

**Psychological Aspects**

Religious practices such as prayer, dhikr, and reading the Qur'an have been proven to help students in bringing peace of mind while maintaining emotional stability. All three participants admitted that the worship activities made them better able to reduce anxiety, control overthinking, and stabilize their moods that were often disturbed by academic demands and social problems.

This is in line with the findings that spiritual values in Islamic education contribute to the emotional stability and mental well-being of adolescents [11]. In addition, research emphasizes that prayer can serve as spiritual therapy in reducing stress and anxiety. These findings are reinforced by Sintya and Ningsih's study which shows that prayer plays a role in reducing stress and anxiety through physiological and psychological relaxation mechanisms.[12]

The psychological mechanism that occurs in religious practice involves cognitive processes in the form of reappraisals or reappraisals of stressful situations. When students carry out prayers or dhikr, they not only do physical movements, but also do cognitive reframing of the problems they face. A spiritual perspective helps them see academic challenges not as a threatening threat, but rather as a test that has deep meaning their spiritual journey. This process is in line with the religious coping theory that explained that religious individuals tend to use positive religious coping strategies, which are to seek spiritual meaning in difficulties and strengthen a relationship with God.

**Social Aspects**

In addition to having an impact on oneself, religious practices also strengthen students' social relations. Family support and the campus environment are important encouragement for them to worship more consistently. The participants also assessed that religious activities on campus such as studies or recitation not only increase knowledge but also become a means of refreshment. This activity expands the network of friends while providing support from peers who have similar religious values and visions. Thus,

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[11] Rahmawati dan Fauji, "Peran Pendidikan Islam Kontekstual," 223.
[12] Sintya dan Ningsih, "Peran Sholat dalam Mengurangi Stres," 65.

they feel not alone in facing the pressures of life, but rather in a community that supports and motivates each other.

The social dimension of this religious practice reflects the concept of social support which is one of the important protective factors in mental health. The religious community on campus serves as a support system that provides emotional, informational, and instrumental support. When students face academic stress, they not only rely on individual practices such as prayer or dhikr but also get support from communities that share the same value system. This creates a strong sense of belonging and reduces the feeling of social isolation that Generation Z often experiences in the digital era.

In addition, participation in campus religious activities also functions as a protective factor against the negative influence of social media. Religious communities provide a more positive and constructive alternative to social space compared to virtual interactions that often trigger comparative anxiety and fear of missing out. Arinie and Surawan's study shows that the consumption of religious content on social media also plays a role in the psychological well-being of students [13], but face-to-face interactions in religious communities still have a deeper impact on forming mental resilience.

**Moral- Spiritual Aspects**

From a moral-spiritual perspective, religious practice is understood as a way to find a more positive meaning in life. For the participants, worship is not the only solution to complex mental health problems, but worship can serve as an effective coping in strengthening resilience to stress and fostering spiritual awareness. One of the participants even emphasized the importance of a holistic approach, which is combining worship with other strategies such as time management, social support, and stress management skills. This shows that maintaining mental health requires a balance between religious, psychological, and social dimensions, especially in the digital age.

This view is strengthened by the explanation that students today also build spirituality through the consumption of digital religious content which acts as a means of self-reflection and moral strengthening [14]. Social media thus becomes a new space for the formation of Islamic values that are relevant to the lives of the younger generation in the digital era. However, it should be noted that this digital spirituality has different

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[13] Selfi Arinie dan Surawan, "Peran Konsumsi Konten Religius di Media Sosial terhadap Kesejahteraan Psikologis Mahasiswa IAIN Palangkaraya," *Jurnal Ilmiah Nusantara (JINU)* 2, no. 4 (2025): 789.
[14] Arinie dan Surawan, "Peran Konsumsi Konten Religius," 790.

characteristics from traditional religious practices, so it requires an integrative approach to maximize its benefits.

The existential dimension of religious practice provides a framework of meaning that helps students confront fundamental questions about life's purpose, suffering, and self-identity. In the context of existential psychology, the search for meaning is a basic human need, and the absence of meaning can lead to an existential vacuum that leads to mental disorders. Islamic religious practices provide a comprehensive system of meaning through the concepts of fate, exams, and merits that help students reinterpret academic difficulties within a broader spiritual framework. This is in line with the concept of meaning-making in religious coping which explains that religious individuals tend to be more resilient because they are able to find positive meaning in difficulties.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms the significant role of religious practices as an effective coping strategy in maintaining the mental health of Generation Z students. Social support from families and campus communities strengthens the effectiveness of religious practices in creating a holistic coping system. These findings suggest that spiritual approaches can be integrated with other psychological strategies to optimize students' mental health in the digital age.

The findings of this study provide practical implications for the development of mental health programs in Islamic universities that integrate spiritual approaches. The campus can develop spiritualbased counseling services, strengthen students' religious programs, and create a campus environment that supports religious practices as part of a mental disorder prevention strategy. But it's important to understand that religious practices are part of a broader coping system, not a single solution to complex mental health problems. Islamic religious education plays an important role in the mental health of Generation Z by not only emphasizing the spiritual side, but also helping to shape character and develop one's full potential.

Further research is recommended to explore the neuropsychological mechanisms underlying the therapeutic effects of religious practices, as well as develop integrated intervention models that combine spiritual and psychological approaches in a broader context. Longitudinal studies are also needed to understand the long-term effectiveness

of religious practices as coping strategies in various stages of student development. In addition, comparative research between various contexts of Islamic universities in Indonesia can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of religious practices in maintaining the mental health of Generation Z students.

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