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Reconceptualizing Islamic Psychospiritual Counseling: A Qalbun-Centered Approach to Mental Health from Al-Ghazālī's Perspective

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Abstract

This study addresses the need for an Islamic psychospiritual counseling model that integrates spiritual, psychological, and moral dimensions based on an Islamic conception of human nature. It aims to reconstruct a psychospiritual counseling model through a Qalbun-Centered approach grounded in the thought of Imam al-Ghazālī. Using qualitative library research, the study examines Al-Ghazālī's major works, particularly *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and *Kimiyā' al-Sa'ādah*, alongside relevant scholarly literature. The findings indicate that *al-qalb* functions as the center of human consciousness, morality, and spirituality, while psychological disturbances may emerge from imbalances among *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-'aql*, and *al-ruh*. Based on these insights, the study proposes a holistic Qalbun-Centered counseling model structured around *tazkiyat al-nafs*, encompassing *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli* to facilitate psychospiritual well-being. The study contributes a conceptually integrated Islamic counseling framework that extends conventional psychological approaches by positioning spiritual purification and the transformation of the *qalb* as core mechanisms of counseling. The model has implications for the development of culturally and religiously responsive counseling practices, as well as for future empirical research on Islamic psychospiritual interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become one of the most pressing global health challenges. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that in 2021, nearly 1.1 billion people, or approximately one in seven people worldwide, were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders being the most common conditions. This figure demonstrates that mental health problems have reached a significant global scale. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 970 million people were living with a mental disorder in 2019 (World Health Organization, 2022).

The situation deteriorated further during the COVID-19 pandemic. The WHO estimated that the global prevalence of anxiety and depressive disorders increased by more than 25% during the first year of the pandemic (WHO, 2022). This increase was associated with social isolation, loneliness, the loss of loved ones, economic uncertainty, and various other psychosocial stressors. Women and younger people were reported to have experienced more severe impacts. This situation demonstrates that mental health problems are not limited to individual psychological dimensions but are also closely associated with the social, existential, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human life.

The magnitude of the problem is further compounded by significant gaps in access to mental health services. The WHO estimates that more than 75% of people with mental disorders in low- and middle-income countries do not receive adequate treatment. Moreover, mental disorders account for approximately one in six years lived with disability globally (World Health Organization, 2022). These conditions highlight the need to develop counseling approaches that are not solely oriented toward reducing psychological symptoms but are also capable of providing meaning, inner peace, moral strengthening, and spiritual connectedness in ways that are consistent with individuals' beliefs and religious contexts.

Within this context, an Islamic psychospiritual approach has significant potential for further development. The thought of Imam al-Ghazālī places *al-qalb* (the heart) at the center of human consciousness, morality, and spiritual life. This perspective offers a distinctive yet complementary framework to conventional psychological approaches, as human well-being is understood holistically through the interconnectedness of *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-'aql*, and *al-rūḥ*.

Previous research has demonstrated growing support for integrating religious and spiritual dimensions into psychological interventions for Muslims. A recent meta-analysis of 13 empirical studies involving approximately 1,100 participants found that psychotherapy integrated with Islamic principles had positive effects in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, while also demonstrating good levels of acceptability and engagement. These findings strengthen the argument that psychotherapy approaches that are sensitive to individuals' religious beliefs have significant clinical relevance for Muslim populations (Çınaroğlu, 2026).

However, a critical analysis of these studies indicates that most interventions are

still developed using Western psychotherapy, particularly Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and behavioral activation, as the primary framework, with Islamic beliefs, practices, or values subsequently integrated into these approaches (Cucchi, 2022). Thus, the integration that has taken place has been largely adaptive rather than reconstructive. Studies examining the integration of CBT principles with Islam have also highlighted differences at the ontological and epistemological levels between Western psychotherapy and the Islamic conception of the human being. Therefore, meaningful integration needs to take place at the theoretical level, rather than merely by adding religious elements to existing therapeutic techniques.

From an Islamic perspective, particularly in the thought of Imam al-Ghazālī, human beings are understood as an integrated whole comprising *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-'aql*, and *al-rūḥ*. *Al-qalb* occupies a central position in guiding human consciousness, emotions, morality, and spiritual orientation. This framework differs from psychotherapeutic models that primarily position cognition, behavior, or symptoms at the center of the process of change (Wahid et al., 2025).

In *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat*, Al-Ghazālī conceptualizes the *al-qalb* as the center of consciousness, moral awareness, and divine connection, which constitutes the core of human existence (Najib, 2023). The *al-qalb* functions not only as the locus of understanding and intention but also as a spiritual instrument that determines the direction of human life, whether it inclines toward good or evil (Akbar et al., 2026)(Shaharuddin et al., 2024). When the *al-qalb* is in a purified state and oriented toward Allah, it radiates values such as sincerity, inner peace, honesty, patience, and a strong sense of moral responsibility in every action. Conversely, when the *al-qalb* is veiled by base desires and inner diseases such as envy, arrogance, and excessive attachment to worldly life, these conditions are reflected in deviant behavior and psychological imbalance (Apriza et al., 2025; Dhya & Aini, 2025; Madihah et al., 2026; Wahid et al., 2025).

From An-Nu'man ibn Bashir (may Allah be pleased with them both), the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

أَلاَ وَإِنَّ فِي الْجَسَدِ مُضْغَةً إِذَا صَلَحَتْ صَلَحَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ ، وَإِذَا فَسَدَتْ فَسَدَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ, أَلاَ وَهِيَ الْقَلْبُ

Meaning: *"Beware that within the body there is a piece of flesh. If it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart."* (Reported by al-Bukhari, no. 52, and Muslim, no. 1599) (Al-Bukhari, 2010).

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (may Allah have mercy on him) indicated that the goodness of a person's bodily actions, as well as their ability to avoid what is forbidden and to leave doubtful matters (those whose legal ruling is unclear), all depend on the goodness of the heart (Rajab, 2002). In line with this, according to Imam Al-Ghazālī, the *al-qalb* (heart) is a spiritual entity that serves as the center of consciousness and the primary controller of the body (as its king), as well as the locus of faith, true knowledge, and emotions. Its functions include guiding desires, knowing God (*al-ma'rifatullah*), and shaping moral

character. Therefore, a sound heart (*al-qalb salim*) directs the limbs toward goodness, while a diseased heart (*al-maradh*) gives rise to destructive behavior (Duriana & Lihi, 2015; Mursidin, 2014).

The condition of the *al-qalb* not only determines outward human behavior but also serves as the primary factor in attaining true happiness (*al-sa'ādah*), which is spiritual, profound, and enduring. From this perspective, mental health is not merely understood as the absence of psychological disorders, but as a harmonious state between the spiritual, moral, and psychological dimensions of the human being in connection with the Divine. Thus, Al-Ghazālī's perspective provides a profound foundation for rethinking the concept of mental health and counseling practice within an Islamic framework, emphasizing the importance of *al-qalb* purification, the strengthening of spiritual values, and the development of divine consciousness as the core of the healing process and the cultivation of the human soul (Anshori & Daud, 2024).

This study aims to reconceptualize Islamic psychospiritual counseling by developing a Qalbun-Centered approach grounded in the understanding of Al-Ghazālī that the *al-qalb* constitutes the core of human consciousness. The research gap lies in the dominance of contemporary mental health frameworks that primarily emphasize cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions while failing to fully integrate the spiritual aspect, as well as in the fragmented nature of existing Islamic psychospiritual counseling models, which lack a systematic theoretical foundation rooted in classical Islamic scholarship. This gap highlights the need to reconstruct a Qalbun-Centered psychospiritual counseling model. Such reconstruction is not intended merely to add religious practices to an existing counseling model, but rather to develop the counseling structure from Al-Ghazālī's own anthropological conception, positioning al-qalb as the central locus of psychological and spiritual transformation.

Accordingly, this study offers a novel contribution by formulating an integrative and systematic counseling model that positions the *al-qalb* as the central axis of mental health and human well-being (*al-sa'ādah*), while bridging classical Islamic thought with contemporary mental health needs. The central argument advanced in this study is that true mental health and genuine happiness can only be attained when the *al-qalb* is properly guided and aligned with divine values. The novelty of this study lies in reconstructing Al-Ghazālī's psychospiritual anthropology into a structured Qalbun-Centered counseling model that positions al-qalb as the central mechanism of psychological and spiritual transformation, rather than merely adapting Islamic values into an existing Western psychotherapy framework.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative library research approach to examine Al-Ghazālī's concepts of *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-rūḥ*, *al-'aql*, and *tazkiyat al-nafs* as the foundation of Islamic psychospiritual counseling. Literature was searched through Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ, GARUDA, and MORAREF using keywords such as

"Islamic counseling," "Islamic psychotherapy," "psychospiritual counseling," "Al-Ghazali counseling," "qalb mental health," and "tazkiyat *al-nafs* psychotherapy," combined with AND/OR operators.

The data comprised primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included Al-Ghazālī's *Kimiyā' al-Sa'ādah* and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, addressing *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-rūḥ*, *al-'aql*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, moral transformation, and *al-sa'ādah*. Contemporary secondary literature published primarily between 2015 and 2026 was prioritized in order to capture recent developments in Islamic psychospiritual counseling and mental health, while seminal and classical sources were retained when they were conceptually fundamental to the interpretation of Al-Ghazālī's thought.

Literature selection followed predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eligible sources substantively addressed Islamic psychology, counseling, psychotherapy, Al-Ghazālī's thought, *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-rūḥ*, *al-'aql*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, spirituality, or mental health. Peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, relevant theses, dissertations, and authoritative primary works were included. Sources were excluded if superficial, duplicated, non-academic, unverifiable, or unrelated. Selection involved identification, title and abstract screening, full-text assessment, and thematic categorization.

Data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed using qualitative content analysis supported by philosophical and hermeneutic approaches. The analysis involved: (1) identifying relevant texts; (2) extracting key concepts and arguments; (3) coding *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *al-rūḥ*, *al-'aql*, *tazkiyat al-nafs*, spiritual transformation, and *al-sa'ādah*; (4) categorizing themes; (5) examining relationships among concepts; and (6) synthesizing the findings into an Islamic psychospiritual counseling framework.

Several procedures were applied to minimize interpretive bias. First, the analysis distinguished between Al-Ghazālī's original textual formulations and the researcher's contemporary interpretation. Second, key concepts were examined across more than one primary work rather than being interpreted from isolated passages. Third, the researcher maintained the original conceptual context of each text and avoided directly equating classical Islamic concepts with modern psychological constructs without sufficient conceptual justification. Fourth, interpretations derived from primary sources were cross-checked against relevant secondary scholarship to examine their consistency with established interpretations of Al-Ghazālī's thought. Finally, an audit trail of the literature selection, coding, categorization, and interpretation processes was maintained to enhance transparency and consistency.

The validity of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation and cross-checking among primary and secondary sources. Concepts identified in Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn and Kimiyā' al-Sa'ādah were compared with Al-Ghazālī's other relevant writings and with contemporary scholarly interpretations of Islamic psychology and psychospiritual counseling.

Based on this systematic process, the study reconstructs a conceptual model of Islamic psychospiritual counseling based on a Qalbun-Centered Approach. Rather than

merely adding religious beliefs or practices to an existing Western psychotherapy framework, the reconstruction derives the fundamental structure and mechanisms of counseling from Al-Ghazālī's Islamic anthropological conception of the human being. In this model, al-qalb is positioned as the central locus of psychological, moral, and spiritual transformation, while *al-nafs, al-'aql,* and *al-rūḥ* are understood as interconnected dimensions of human development. The resulting framework integrates Al-Ghazālī's classical insights with contemporary mental health needs in a systematic, theoretically grounded, and contextually relevant manner.

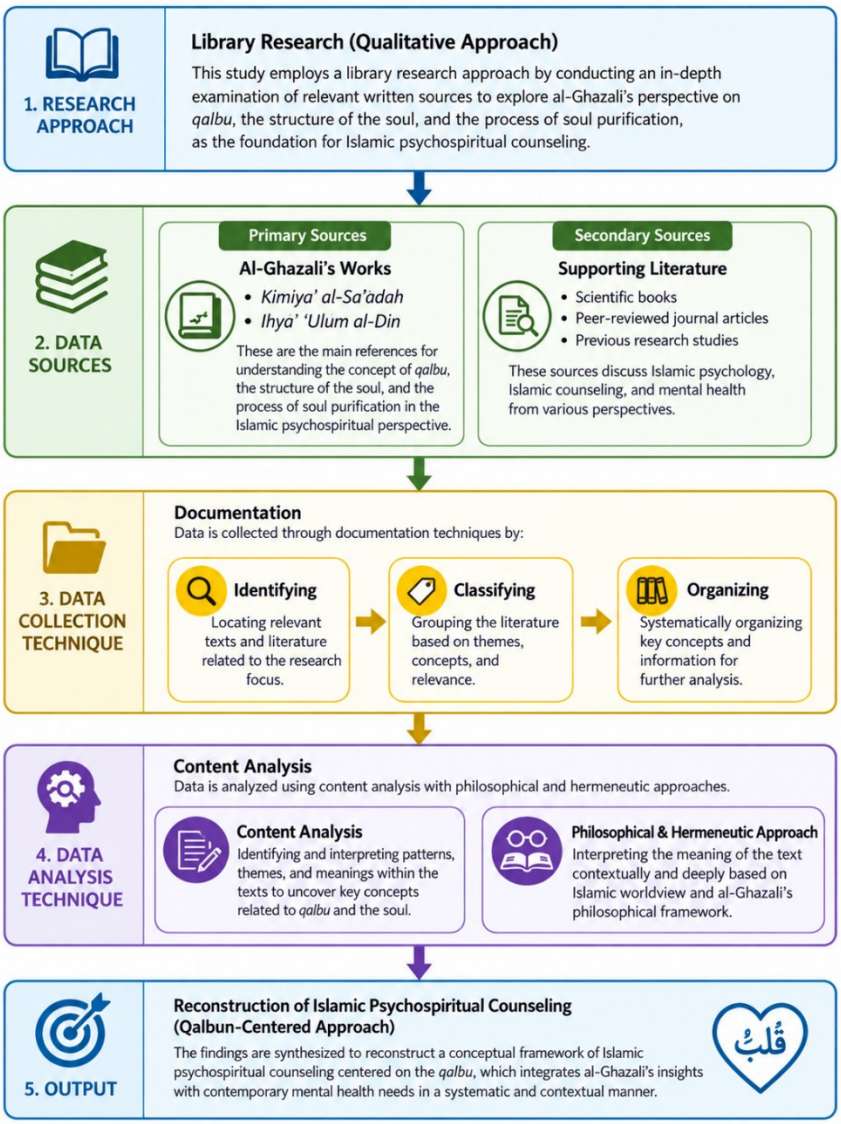

Figure 1. Research Method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Biography of Imam Al-Ghazālī

Al-Ghazālī (Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazālī) was born in 1058 CE in Tus, Khurasan (present-day Iran). He grew up in a religious environment and, from an early age, showed remarkable intellectual ability. His early education took place

in Tus and Jurjan, and he later continued his studies in Nishapur under the guidance of the prominent scholar Imam al-Juwayni, a leading figure in the Shafi'i school of law and Ash'ari theology (Prinada, 2022).

After the death of his teacher, Al-Ghazālī was appointed as a professor at the Nizamiyyah Madrasa in Baghdad, one of the most prestigious intellectual centers of the time. There, he reached the peak of his academic career and became widely known for his expertise in jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and logic. However, despite his success, he experienced a profound spiritual crisis that led him to leave his position and embark on a journey of intellectual and spiritual exploration to Damascus, Jerusalem, and Mecca (A.-I. Al-Ghazali, 2011).

These spiritual experiences shaped his distinctive thought, which integrates Islamic law, reason, and Sufism. His monumental work, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, remains a major reference in the Islamic world, as it combines legal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Al-Ghazālī passed away in 1111 CE in his hometown of Tus, leaving behind a highly influential intellectual legacy that continues to shape Islamic thought to this day (I. Al-Ghazali, 2024; Djamaluddin, 2015).

The *Al-Qalb* as the Center of Consciousness

Al-Ghazālī conceptualizes the *al-qalb* not merely as a physical organ but as a spiritual entity that serves as the center of perception, knowledge, and moral judgment. The *al-qalb* has the capacity to incline toward either الخير (goodness) or الشر (evil), depending on its purification and guidance. A sound *al-qalb* (*al-qalbun al-salim*) reflects divine light and becomes the source of tranquility, wisdom, and ethical behavior. Conversely, a diseased *al-qalb* leads to confusion, anxiety, and moral deviation (I. Al-Ghazali, 1988).

From the perspective of Imam Al-Ghazālī, the *al-qalb* (heart) is not merely an emotional organ but serves as the center of consciousness, integrating the spiritual, cognitive, and affective dimensions of the human being (Mursidin, 2014). The *al-qalb* is the locus that receives divine light (*al-nur*) from the *al-ruh,* enabling it to perceive truth beyond mere rational understanding. It functions as the "king" (*al-malik*) of the psychic system, in which all human behavior is determined by its condition: when the *al-qalb* is pure, the entire self becomes good, and when it is corrupted, the whole self is likewise corrupted (Al-Ghazali, 2002a). Moreover, the *al-qalb* acts as the center of integration, processing information from the *al-'aql* (cognitive faculty), impulses from the *al-nafs* (desire system), and illumination from the *al-ruh* (spiritual essence). In this sense, the *al-qalb* operates as the center of existential decision-making, encompassing not only psychological processes but also moral and spiritual dimensions (Al-Ghazali, 2002a).

According to Al-Ghazālī, the human psyche consists of four interconnected elements: *al-qalb* (heart) as the central decision-maker, *al-nafs* (self) as the source of desires and impulses, *al-'aql* (intellect) as the faculty of reasoning and discernment, and *al-ruh* (spirit) as the divine essence that connects humans to God (Sukandar, 2025c). Mental health depends on the harmonious interaction among these elements, in which the *al-qalb* governs the *al-nafs* under the guidance of the *al-'aql* and the illumination of the

al-ruh. In this system, *al-nafs* functions as the motivational–desire component, generating impulses, instincts, and biological drives (I. Al-Ghazali, 1982). In its lower state (*al-nafs al-ammarah*), it inclines toward worldly pleasures and impulsive behavior, and therefore must be disciplined through *al-riyadhah* to reach the state of *al-nafs al-mutmainnah*, the tranquil soul. The *al-'aql*, on the other hand, serves as the cognitive–rational faculty that enables reasoning, discernment (*al-furqan*), and moral judgment, acting as an advisor to the *al-qalb* in regulating the impulses of the *al-nafs*; however, its capacity remains limited if not guided by revelation and the illumination of the *al-ruh.* Meanwhile, the *al-ruh* represents the spiritual–transcendent dimension, the divine essence that provides spiritual life, higher awareness, and inner illumination, enlivening the *al-qalb* and directing it toward Allah (Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021).

The relationship among these components forms a dynamic and hierarchical interaction in which the *al-ruh* provides light and direction, the *al'aql* offers reasoning and regulation, and the *al-nafs* supplies energy and impulses. At the center of this interaction, the *al-qalb* integrates and governs all three, ensuring balance and harmony within the human psyche (Anshori & Daud, 2024).

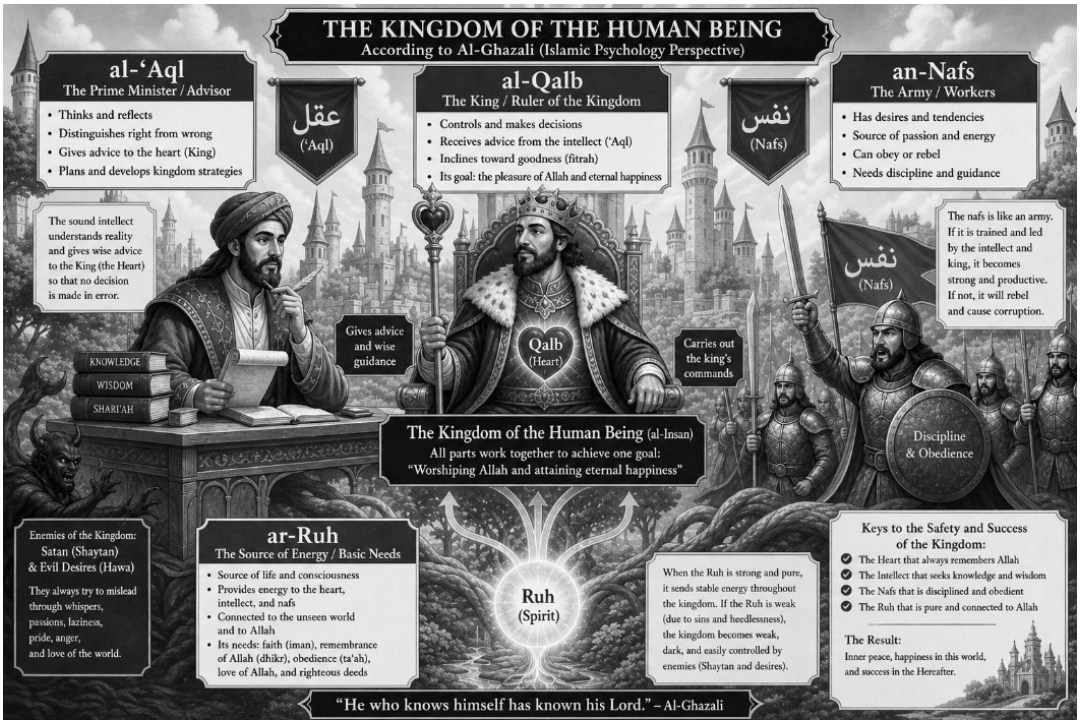

Figure 2. The Interaction of *al-qalb, al-'aql,* and *al-nafs* within the Kingdom of the Human Body: An Al-Ghazālī's Perspective

Dynamics of *Al-Qalb*: Mechanism of Inner Functioning

The dynamics of the *al-qalb* illustrate how the inner psychological–spiritual system operates, particularly in states of imbalance and restoration. In Al-Ghazālī's framework, disorder emerges when the harmony among the elements of the psyche is disrupted. This condition occurs when the *al-nafs*—especially in its lower form, *al-ammarah*—dominates the inner system, exerting uncontrolled impulses and desires

(Imam Al-Ghazali, 2021). As a result, the *al-qalb* becomes spiritually diseased, losing its clarity and receptivity to truth, while the *al-'aql* weakens or becomes misguided, failing to provide sound judgment and moral direction. Such an imbalance gives rise to various forms of inner disturbance, including psychological conflict, anxiety, restlessness, and a profound sense of spiritual disconnection from Allah. This condition underscores Al-Ghazālī's view that mental disorders are not merely psychological phenomena but fundamentally psychospiritual in nature, rooted in the corruption or imbalance of the heart and its governing functions (Zulkarnain & Hafizallah, 2024).

Conversely, the state of healing represents a dynamic process of restoring balance through the coordinated interaction of the psyche's core elements. This process begins with the activation of the *al-'aql* through knowledge, reflection, and self-awareness, enabling the individual to recognize personal shortcomings and engage in *al-muhasabah* (self-evaluation) (Sukandar, 2025c). Simultaneously, the *al-ruh* is activated through acts of worship, remembrance (dhikr), and spiritual devotion, which provide inner strength and reconnect the individual with divine guidance. These processes facilitate the transformation of the *al-qalb* through *al-tazkiyah* (purification), allowing it to be cleansed from negative traits and reoriented toward higher spiritual consciousness. Alongside this, the *al-nafs* is gradually regulated through *al-riyadhah* (self-discipline and spiritual training), cultivating virtuous habits and weakening destructive impulses. Through this integrated mechanism, the *al-qalb* is restored to its proper role as a healthy, stable, and guiding center of the human psyche, ultimately leading to inner harmony, spiritual well-being, and closeness to Allah (Al-Ghazali, 2002b).

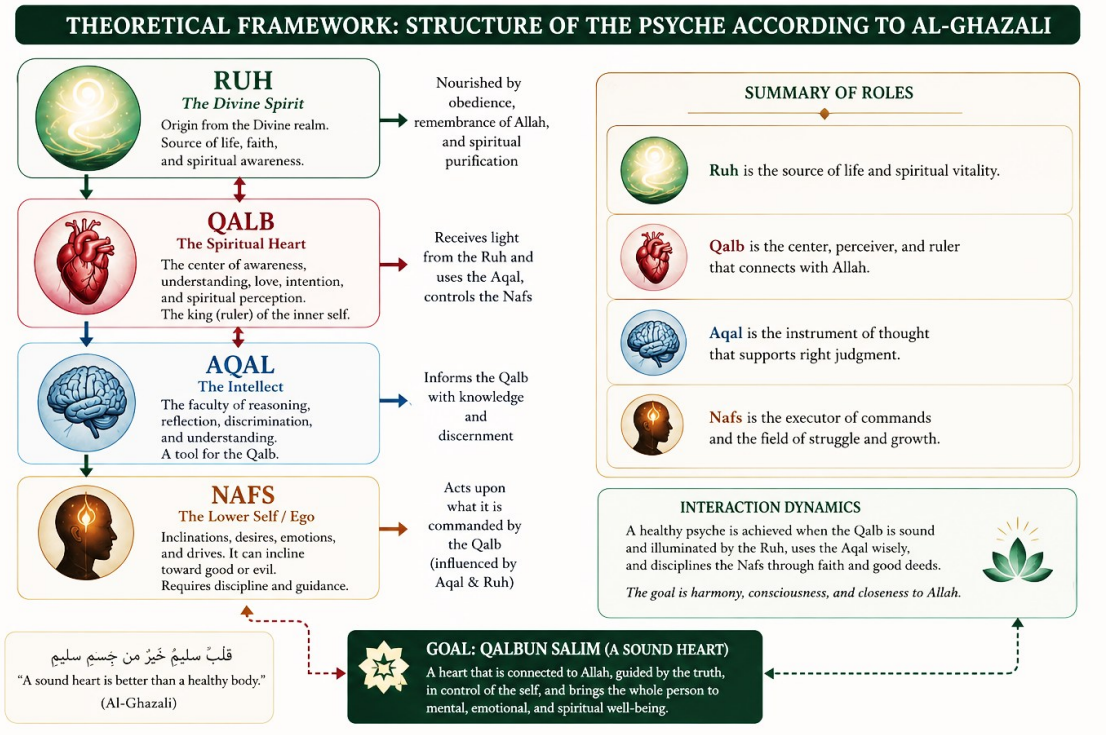

Figure 3. Theoretical Framework: The Structure of the Human Psyche in al-Ghazālī

Qalbun-Centered Counseling Model

The Qalbun-Centered Counseling model is founded upon several core principles that serve as the basis for the entire counseling and intervention process. Central to this model is the understanding that the *al-qalb* (heart) is the core of human identity and transformation. Within this framework, the *al-qalb* not only regulates emotions but also functions as the center of consciousness, values, and life direction. Therefore, genuine and lasting change can only occur when the *al-qalb* itself is purified and strengthened. (Duriana & Lihi, 2015). In addition, the model is grounded in a tawheed-oriented perspective, emphasizing that all processes of healing and transformation are rooted in the oneness of Allah. Counseling, therefore, is not merely a human-centered effort but also involves a deep spiritual connection with Allah as the ultimate source of guidance and strength.

Furthermore, this model adopts a holistic integrative approach, viewing human beings as unified entities encompassing spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical dimensions. Psychological problems cannot be separated from an individual's spiritual condition; thus, counseling must address the whole person in a balanced and comprehensive manner. The process is also guided by the values of compassion and mercy, where counseling is conducted with empathy, respect, and without judgment. The counselor acts as a compassionate guide who seeks to understand the client deeply while maintaining ethical integrity (Muhammad, 2021). Moreover, the model emphasizes a proactive and preventive orientation, recognizing that counseling should not only address existing problems but also prevent future psychological and spiritual disturbances through continuous self-purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), fostering resilience, awareness, and spiritual growth (Hamjah, 2016).

The counseling process within this model unfolds systematically through interconnected stages that reflect a transformative journey of the self. It begins with the establishment of a strong therapeutic relationship, where trust is built through sincerity, empathy, and the creation of a safe emotional and spiritual space. This foundational connection enables the client to open their heart and engage meaningfully in the counseling process. Following this, a comprehensive assessment is conducted to understand the client's condition holistically, including physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions, while also identifying the dispositions of the *al-qalb* and the underlying issues faced by the individual (Hamjah, 2016).

The process then moves into a deeper level of analysis, where the client's difficulties are examined through the lens of the *al-qalb.* At this stage, internal conflicts such as the influence of the *al-nafs*, experiences of doubt (*al-waswas*), and states of heedlessness (*al-ghaflah*) are identified, along with various spiritual diseases of the heart. This approach allows the counselor to uncover the root causes of the problem rather than merely addressing surface-level symptoms. Based on this understanding, a structured and personalized intervention plan is developed, integrating psychological techniques with Islamic guidance such as remembrance (*al-dhikr*), supplication (*al-du'a*), and teachings from the Qur'an (Tahir & Husna, 2023).

The implementation phase involves guiding the client toward meaningful inner change by strengthening their relationship with Allah, restructuring maladaptive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and cultivating spiritual practices such as reflection and self-discipline (*al-riyadhah*). Through this process, the *al-qalb* undergoes gradual purification and transformation, leading to greater inner balance and clarity. Finally, the counseling process emphasizes evaluation and continuous growth, ensuring that positive changes are sustained over time. Clients are supported in reinforcing beneficial habits and maintaining long-term development through ongoing self-purification (Hakim et al., 2022).

Thus, this model conceptualizes counseling not merely as a means of problem-solving but as a profound transformative journey centered on the *al-qalb*, grounded in tawheed, and directed toward achieving lasting psychospiritual well-being and closeness to Allah.

Figure 4. Qalbun-Centered Counseling Model

Qalbun-Centered Counseling and Psychospiritual Process

The Qalbun-Centered Counseling and Psychospiritual Process is a counseling approach grounded in the thought of *Imam al-Ghazālī*, which positions the *al-qalb* (heart) as the central core of human psychological and spiritual life. Within this framework, the human psyche consists of four primary components: the *al-qalb* (the emotive and spiritual center), the *al-`aql* (the cognitive intellect), the *al-ruh* (the divine spiritual element), and the *al-nafs* (desire or impulse). The *al-qalb* functions as the "leader" that determines the direction of human behavior, while the *al-`aql* serves as an advisor that guides the *al-qalb* through reasoning and knowledge. The *al-ruh* acts as a source of divine light and spiritual strength that enlivens the heart, whereas the *al-nafs* represents the driving force of desires that must be regulated to prevent it from dominating the individual (I. Al-Ghazali, 1982). The interaction among these four elements is hierarchical and dynamic, and their balance determines a person's psychological and spiritual well-being.

From this perspective, psychological and spiritual disturbances arise when the *al-nafs*, particularly in its *al-ammarah* (lower, commanding) state, becomes dominant, causing the *al-qalb* to become "diseased" and the *al-`aql* to lose clarity in judgment. This condition is characterized by various spiritual ailments such as envy, arrogance, excessive attachment to worldly matters, and distance from God, which ultimately lead to anxiety and unhappiness (Hamjah, 2016). Therefore, the counseling process begins with the stage of diagnosis and self-awareness (*al-muhasabah*), in which individuals develop insight into their inner condition, recognize the dominance of the *al-nafs*, and reactivate the function of the *al-`aql* through knowledge and reflection. At this stage, the *al-qalb* is gradually moved toward transformation and improvement.

The primary goal of this counseling process is to achieve psychospiritual balance, characterized by a purified and healthy al-qalb, a tranquil *al-nafs* (*al-muthma`innah*), a well-functioning *al-`aql*, and a vibrant al-ruh that remains connected to God. This state leads to true happiness (*al-sa'adah*) in both this world and the Hereafter. To attain this goal, the therapeutic process follows the stages of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the self), which consist of three main phases. The first is *takhalli* (emptying), which involves cleansing the heart from blameworthy traits through self-accountability, self-control, and spiritual strengthening. The second is *tahalli* (filling), which entails adorning the heart with praiseworthy qualities such as patience, gratitude, trust in God (*al-tawakkul*), and strong faith. The third is *tajalli* (spiritual illumination), a stage in which the heart becomes clear and radiant, enabling the individual to receive divine light and experience a profound sense of closeness to God and inner peace (I. Al-Ghazali, 2023).

This entire process is supported by *al-riyadah* (spiritual discipline), which includes practices such as moderation in eating and drinking, reducing unnecessary speech, regulating sleep, engaging in remembrance (dhikr) and acts of worship, and maintaining consistency (*al-istiqomah*) in righteous actions. *Al-riyadah* functions as a continuous self-training mechanism to subdue the *al-nafs* and preserve the purity of the *al-qalb.* Ultimately, this process results in a comprehensive personal transformation in which the *al-qalb* becomes a purified center of control, the *al-`aql* functions wisely, the

al-ruh grows stronger and closer to God, and the *al-nafs* becomes disciplined and tranquil. This transformation also fosters deep awareness of the self (*ma'rifat al-nafs*), knowledge of God (*al-ma'rifatullah*), and understanding of worldly and hereafter realities, culminating in the attainment of true happiness from both psychological and spiritual perspectives (I. Al-Ghazali, 1988).

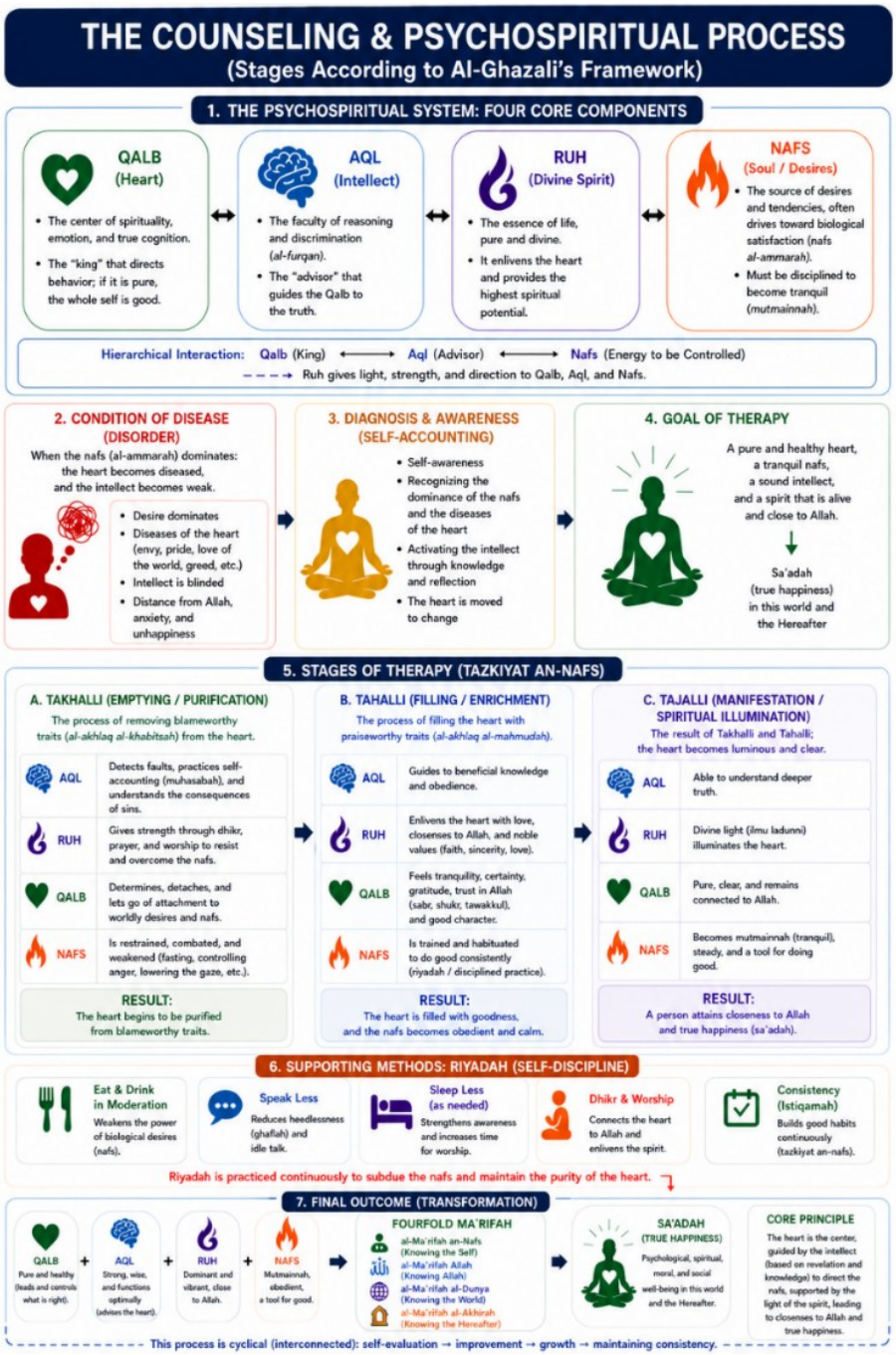

Figure 5. The Counseling & Psychospiritual Process

Discussion

Based on the findings presented, the Qalbun-Centered approach formulated in this article demonstrates a significant paradigm shift in understanding mental health, moving

from a purely psychological perspective toward a more holistic psychospiritual approach. The results affirm that the *al-qalb* functions as the center of consciousness, the regulator of moral conduct, and the determinant of human emotional and spiritual balance. This finding reinforces the critique of modern mental health models, which tend to be reductionistic by focusing primarily on cognitive and behavioral aspects while neglecting the spiritual dimension as the core of human existence (Cucchi, 2022; Dubey et al., 2025; Nursafira et al., 2026; Saputra & Lubis, 2025). This finding is also consistent with the holistic psychology perspective, which views human beings as whole entities; therefore, mental health must be understood through the integration of mind, body, and spirit (Romero, 2024). This finding further enriches and refines the framework of transpersonal psychology by emphasizing the importance of integrating psychology with spirituality. From this perspective, human beings are understood through two primary dimensions, namely the highest potential and the dynamics of consciousness (state of consciousness), with spirituality positioned as the central focus of its theoretical study. Furthermore, transpersonal psychology does not merely view humans as individual entities, but as beings capable of self-transcendence within the broader constellation of the universe, including attaining higher levels of consciousness such as intuition, as well as experiencing mystical and spiritual states (Haryanto, 2021; Umami, 2019). Therefore, integrating the concept of the *al-qalb* into counseling provides a more comprehensive conceptual contribution to understanding the dynamics of the human psyche.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that, from al-Ghazālī's perspective, mental disorders are not merely understood as psychological dysfunctions but as consequences of imbalance within the psychic structure involving the *al-qalb*, *al-nafs*, *'aql*, and *al-ruh*. When the *al-nafs* in its lower state (*al-ammarah*) becomes dominant, the *al-qalb* becomes "diseased," loses its clarity, and is unable to perceive truth, while the *al-'aql* weakens in providing rational judgment. This condition gives rise to various psychological problems such as anxiety, restlessness, inner conflict, and even spiritual alienation. These findings reinforce the view that mental health is inherently integrative, where the spiritual dimension serves as the fundamental foundation determining the quality of an individual's psychological condition. This finding further reinforces the logotherapy perspective developed by Viktor Frankl in the 1930s, which emphasizes that mental health is inherently integrative, with the spiritual dimension serving as a fundamental foundation that shapes the quality of an individual's psychological condition (Ardi, 2020; Fatimah & Soleh, 2025).

On the other hand, the study also reveals a transformative mechanism of recovery through the processes of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *al-muhasabah*, and *al-riyadhah* as the core of counseling interventions (Hamjah, 2016). This process indicates that healing does not occur instantly but rather through systematic stages involving self-awareness, self-regulation, and the strengthening of one's relationship with God (Nor Ezdianie & Mohd Tajudin, 2019). The activation of the *al-'aql* through reflection and knowledge, along with the strengthening of the *al-ruh* through acts of worship and *al-dhikr*, becomes essential in restoring the function of the *al-qalb* (Akbar et al., 2026; Maulia et al., 2026).

Thus, counseling from this perspective is not merely oriented toward problem-solving but also toward character development and continuous spiritual transformation of the individual (Aisyahri et al., 2025).

The resulting Qalbun-Centered Counseling model also offers broad practical implications in the field of Islamic guidance and counseling. It emphasizes the importance of an empathetic therapeutic relationship, holistic assessment, and interventions that integrate psychological techniques with spiritual values such as *al-dhikr*, supplication (*al-du'a*), and Qur'anic reflection (Sukandar, 2025a, 2025b; Triyani et al., 2026). This approach is relevant not only in clinical settings but also in education and community development, as it addresses the needs of modern individuals who often experience a loss of meaning and spiritual crisis. In other words, this model has the potential to serve as a more contextual alternative for Muslim communities in addressing contemporary mental health challenges.

However, despite its strong and systematic conceptual foundation, the findings also indicate the need for further empirical validation to assess its effectiveness in real-world practice. Therefore, future field-based research, both qualitative and quantitative, is essential to validate this model across various counseling settings. In this way, the theoretical contributions of this study can be strengthened by empirical evidence that supports its broader implementation.

Finally, the author emphasizes that the Qalbun-Centered Approach not only offers a conceptual reconstruction of Islamic counseling but also opens the way for a more authentic integration between the legacy of classical Islamic thought and the psychological needs of modern humans. By positioning the *al-qalb* as the center of human transformation, this approach frames mental health not merely as the absence of disorder but as a harmonious state that integrates spiritual, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, ultimately leading to true happiness (*al-sa'ādah*).

CONCLUSION

The Qalbun-Centered Model offers several important contributions. First, it shifts the paradigm of mental health from a purely psychological model to a psychospiritual model, in which spirituality is central rather than peripheral. Second, it provides a process-based framework that is both therapeutic and developmental, enabling individuals to move from dysfunction toward flourishing. Third, it bridges classical Islamic scholarship with modern counseling practices, making it relevant for contemporary applications in education, therapy, and community development. However, this model still requires empirical validation through both quantitative and qualitative research to examine its effectiveness in real-world counseling settings. This study is also subject to several limitations, particularly the conceptual and theoretical nature of the model, which has not yet been sufficiently tested across diverse populations, cultural contexts, and counseling settings. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct empirical studies using rigorous quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches to evaluate the model's effectiveness, applicability, and long-term outcomes. Further research should also explore its adaptation to different age groups, psychological concerns, and sociocultural contexts to strengthen its empirical foundation and establish

the Qalbun-Centered Model as a more robust and evidence-informed framework for contemporary Islamic psychospiritual counseling.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The author(s) declare that, in the preparation of this article, artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies were used in a limited and responsible manner, particularly for language refinement, grammar correction, image illustration, and improving clarity of writing. All ideas, analyses, data interpretations, and conclusions are the original work of the author(s). The author(s) have reviewed and verified all AI-generated outputs to ensure their accuracy and compliance with academic integrity standards.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Warlan Sukandar conceptualized the study, developed the Qalbun-Centered framework, conducted the literature review and analysis, and led the drafting and revision of the manuscript. Mohd. Khairul Anuar Rahimi contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, particularly in the areas of Islamic counseling and psychospiritual perspectives, and critically reviewed the manuscript. Rezki Perdani Sawai contributed to the literature review, the analysis of Islamic counseling concepts, and the refinement of the manuscript. Roslizawati Mohd. Ramly contributed to the analysis and interpretation of Al-Ghazālī's perspectives and provided critical feedback on the theoretical and conceptual development of the study. Efendi contributed to the literature review, synthesis of relevant scholarly sources, manuscript revision, and improvement of the academic presentation. Muhamatsakree Manyunu contributed to the review of the manuscript, refinement of the discussion and implications, and the final revision of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the development and refinement of the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are publicly available and can be accessed through the literature sources used in the research.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or other competing interests that could have influenced the research, analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

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