



Psychospiritual Transformation in Response to Midlife Crisis among Middle-Aged Adults in a Rural Indonesian Religious Community

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Abstract

This study explores how middle-aged adults in a rural Indonesian Muslim community experience midlife crisis and how psychospiritual transformation emerges from that experience. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten middle-aged adults selected through purposive sampling. Participants were grouped into higher and lower religious practice intensity based on observed consistency in daily prayers, Qur'an recitation, participation in mosque activities, attendance at religious gatherings, and involvement in socio-religious community practices. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, cluster themes, and construct the essential structure of participants' lived experiences. The findings show that the midlife crisis was experienced through anxiety, regret, loneliness, economic pressure, bodily decline, changing family roles, and the search for meaning. Three patterns of psychospiritual transformation emerged: reorientation of life meaning, integration of worldly responsibilities and worship, and self-acceptance through transcendental awareness. Participants with higher religious practice intensity tended to interpret crisis as a divine reminder, an opportunity for repentance, and a path toward worship and social usefulness. In contrast, participants with lower religious practice intensity tended to narrate crisis through emotional exhaustion, shame, regret, social comparison, and fragmented attempts to change. These findings suggest that Islamic counseling can address midlife crisis as a crisis of meaning, moral reflection, and spiritual orientation by helping adults reconstruct life meaning, strengthen constructive religious coping, and integrate everyday responsibilities with worship.

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INTRODUCTION

The experience commonly described as a midlife crisis should not be understood merely as a pathological episode or as a universal disturbance in adult development. In middle adulthood, individuals often reassess their identity, social roles, family responsibilities, work achievements, bodily changes, and awareness of life's finitude. These transitions may produce psychological symptoms such as anxiety, mild to moderate depressive tendencies, dissatisfaction with previous life achievements, and an intensified search for meaning (Avis et al., 2021). At the same time, a midlife crisis may also become a turning point through which adults reconstruct their priorities, redefine life goals, and consolidate moral or spiritual commitments (Infurna et al., 2020). Midlife can also be understood as a developmental period marked by reflection, meaning-making, identity disruption, re-evaluation, and revision rather than merely as a period of decline (Bhatia et al., 2025; Christensen-Duerden et al., 2026). This dual character of midlife crisis, as both a psychological vulnerability and an opportunity for growth, makes it important to examine not only its symptoms but also the transformative processes through which individuals reinterpret their lives.

In this process, spirituality often becomes a central resource for meaning-making. Middle-aged adults who encounter existential anxiety, role transitions, health concerns, or disappointment with life achievements may turn to spiritual and transcendental dimensions to make sense of uncertainty and limitation. This search for meaning is not only cognitive but also emotional, moral, and existential because it involves a reorganization of self-understanding, values, and life orientation. Psychospiritual transformation refers to this integrative process in which psychological reflection and spiritual awareness interact to produce significant changes in one's perception of the self, others, life purpose, and relationship with the Divine (Wahid et al., 2025). Psychologically, this transformation may reduce anxiety, dissatisfaction, and inner fragmentation; spiritually, it may deepen religious commitment, strengthen acceptance, and enable individuals to reinterpret crisis as a meaningful life passage rather than merely a personal failure (Ahmadi, 2023; Bhatia et al., 2025). Psychospiritual resources may also help middle-aged adults maintain psychological well-being during extreme crises by drawing on personal practices, significant relationships, safe spaces, and spiritually meaningful experiences (Ledesma et al., 2025).

Previous studies have shown that middle adulthood is often associated with renewed reflection on meaning, identity, spirituality, and well-being. Meaning in life may differ across developmental stages, including middle adulthood, and may involve sources of meaning, life goals, meaningful experiences, and the search for meaning (Şahin & Kabasakal, 2023). Midlife transition may also involve lessons learned from crisis, redefined spirituality, and growth through giving, suggesting that midlife can be approached from a growth-oriented perspective rather than solely from a crisis-based perspective (Bhatia et al., 2025). In religious contexts, faith and purpose may provide

continuity during midlife identity transitions by supporting coherence, resilience, and growth (Christensen-Duerden et al., 2026). Spirituality is also associated with health and well-being indicators in middle adulthood and aging, while spiritual practices may help individuals reshape self-concept and adapt to role changes (Covey, 2020; McManus, 2024; Vagnini et al., 2024). These studies show that spirituality is relevant to midlife adaptation, but they do not yet fully explain how individuals in specific religious and cultural communities experience inner transformation during crisis.

The existing literature therefore leaves three important gaps. First, many studies on midlife crisis, spirituality, and well-being remain quantitative, correlational, or mixed-method in orientation, focusing on the measurement of spirituality, mental health, meaning in life, or life satisfaction rather than the lived process through which individuals experience crisis and transform it into new psychological and spiritual orientations. Although several qualitative studies have begun to address meaning in life and identity in middle adulthood, phenomenological studies that specifically explore psychospiritual transformation during midlife crisis remain limited (Bhatia et al., 2025; Ledesma et al., 2025; Şahin & Kabasakal, 2023). Second, existing qualitative research is still largely situated in Western, urban, or non-Indonesian contexts, so it does not sufficiently explain how religious meanings, communal practices, and culturally embedded values shape the interpretation of crisis in rural Indonesian Muslim communities. Third, the relationship between midlife crisis, psychospiritual transformation, and Islamic counseling has not been adequately developed. Previous studies rarely connect the lived experience of middle-aged adults with Islamic counseling perspectives that attend to cognitive reflection, moral evaluation, faith-based meaning-making, religious coping, and psychospiritual intervention.

Rural Indonesian religious communities provide an important context for understanding psychospiritual transformation because religious life in such communities is not limited to private belief or individual coping. It is embedded in collective worship, religious gatherings, kinship networks, local moral authority, and shared interpretations of suffering, patience, gratitude, destiny, and divine testing. Religious authority in Indonesian rural Muslim communities is often shaped through local figures such as *kiai*, *ulama*, *ustadz*, and religious communities, and these figures play an important role in guiding communal values, moderation, and moral orientation (Rosidi et al., 2024; Tahir et al., 2025). Rural Islamic practices such as pilgrimage, hajj-related social engagement, *pengajian*, and communal religious activities are not merely devotional acts but may also produce social identity, solidarity, moral authority, and community resilience (Dzikra et al., 2025; Jufri et al., 2024; Khadijah et al., 2025; Soehadha et al., 2026). In rural Yogyakarta, communal values such as *itsar* and *gotong royong* also influence Islamic social action, indicating that religious life and social solidarity are closely intertwined in rural settings (Qoyum & Ardiansyah, 2025). These findings justify the importance of examining midlife crisis in rural Indonesian religious communities, where spirituality

operates simultaneously as belief, practice, moral discipline, social support, and existential interpretation.

This context is also relevant to Islamic guidance and counseling. In Islamic counseling, crisis is not only understood as psychological distress but may also involve moral struggle, spiritual uncertainty, religious coping, and the reconstruction of life meaning (Rahayu et al., 2025). Islamic religious coping, including prayer, Qur'anic recitation, dhikr, charity, and positive thoughts about Allah, can support psychological conditions during crisis and may function as an alternative spiritual therapy (Murtadho et al., 2022). An Islamic counseling-oriented phenomenological approach can reveal how ritual is experienced as emotionally and spiritually restorative through moral reflection, social connectedness, and existential meaning-making (Albaar et al., 2026). Da'wah counseling may also be experienced as moral and spiritual meaning-making rather than merely as religious instruction (Rosidi et al., 2026). Faith-based counseling further indicates that spirituality may shape transformation across cognitive, affective, and practical domains (Hidayat et al., 2026). These studies support the view that midlife crisis can be approached through an Islamic counseling framework that integrates psychological reflection, moral evaluation, faith-based meaning-making, social support, and psychospiritual intervention.

For this reason, the novelty of this article lies in its phenomenological exploration of psychospiritual transformation among middle-aged adults in a rural Indonesian religious community and in its implications for Islamic counseling. Rather than measuring religiosity or psychological well-being as separate variables, this study investigates how adults narrate, interpret, and reorganize their lives after experiencing a midlife crisis. The study also pays attention to how religious practices, social relationships, and personal spiritual orientations may shape the ways individuals respond to crisis, including their movement from anxiety, regret, and dissatisfaction toward acceptance, self-reflection, surrender, moral awareness, and spiritual renewal. By foregrounding lived experience, this article provides contextual evidence on how psychospiritual transformation may unfold within a rural society shaped by religious values and communal practices.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. Theoretically, it expands discussions of midlife crisis by showing that crisis in middle adulthood is not merely a psychological disruption but may become a psychospiritual turning point shaped by religious interpretation and communal life. Contextually, it enriches the literature on religiosity and adult development by providing phenomenological evidence from rural Indonesia, a setting that remains underrepresented in studies of midlife transition and spiritual transformation. Practically, it offers implications for Islamic guidance and counseling, crisis counseling, and psychospiritual intervention by showing how counselors and religious practitioners can understand midlife crisis as a process involving cognitive reflection, moral evaluation, emotional struggle, religious meaning-making,

social support, and the reconstruction of life purpose.

Based on this background, this study aims to explore how middle-aged adults in a rural Indonesian religious community experience, interpret, and transform midlife crisis through psychological reflection, religious meaning-making, social support, and spiritual practice, as well as to examine its implications for Islamic counseling. Two research questions guide this study: first, the ways in which middle-aged adults experience and interpret midlife crisis within a rural Indonesian religious community; and second, the forms of psychospiritual transformation that emerge from these crisis experiences and their implications for Islamic counseling and psychospiritual crisis intervention.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design with an exploratory orientation to understand the lived experiences of middle-aged adults who experienced midlife crisis and psychospiritual transformation in a rural religious community. A phenomenological design was considered appropriate because this study aimed to explore how participants experienced, interpreted, and gave meaning to crisis, religious practice, social relationships, and changes in life orientation from their own perspectives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The study was conducted in Tlepok Hamlet, Gunungkidul Regency, Indonesia. This setting was selected because it represents a rural Muslim community in which everyday life is shaped by agricultural and informal work, kinship relations, mosque-based activities, communal religious gatherings, and local forms of social solidarity. This context enabled the study to examine midlife crisis not only as an individual psychological experience but also as a religiously and socially situated process.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was used because the study required participants who had direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation and were able to provide rich and relevant narratives (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria required participants to be 40–60 years old, live in Tlepok Hamlet, self-identify as Muslim, have experienced life pressures or reflective struggles associated with a midlife crisis, and be willing to participate in an interview. The indicators of midlife crisis considered in participant selection included anxiety, regret about life achievements, family conflict, economic pressure, dissatisfaction with personal accomplishments, changes in life orientation, and the search for meaning. The exclusion criteria were being outside the age range, not being a resident, being unwilling to be audio-recorded, or being unable to participate in an interview. Ten participants were involved in the study. This number was considered adequate for a phenomenological study because the interviews generated rich and relevant narratives related to the research focus. By the later interviews, the researcher observed recurring patterns in participants' accounts of crisis, religious meaning-making, and psychospiritual transformation. Therefore, the study relied on thematic sufficiency rather than statistical representativeness (Saunders et al., 2018).

Participants were descriptively grouped according to variation in religious practice intensity: five participants showed a relatively higher intensity of religious

practice, while five showed a relatively lower intensity. This grouping was not intended for statistical comparison but to capture variations in participants' lived experiences and psychospiritual responses. As an insider to the community, the researcher had long-term contextual familiarity with residents' participation in mosque activities and communal religious events. The descriptive grouping was informed by the researcher's contextual observation of worship frequency and involvement in religious activities. Participants with a higher intensity of religious practice were identified through indicators such as consistent performance of the five daily prayers, participation in religious gatherings, Qur'anic recitation, and active involvement in mosque activities. Participants with a lower intensity of religious practice were identified through less consistent worship practices, rare participation in religious gatherings, and limited involvement in communal religious activities. This grouping was used as a contextual variation in religious practice rather than as a fixed theological or psychological classification.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used because they allow participants to describe their experiences and meanings in their own words while enabling the researcher to maintain focus on the research questions (Tong et al., 2007). Each participant was interviewed once, with an average duration of approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted either in participants' homes or in other mutually agreed locations where participants felt comfortable narrating their experiences. The interviews were conducted in Javanese, as this was the language most familiar to the participants and allowed them to express personal, emotional, and culturally embedded experiences more naturally. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. The recordings were transcribed, and the Javanese transcripts were translated into Indonesian and then into English for reporting purposes. The translation process prioritized meaning equivalence rather than literal word-for-word translation, particularly for culturally and religiously embedded expressions.

The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' lived experiences of midlife crisis, religious meaning-making, social support, and psychospiritual change. The guiding questions included: "Can you describe a difficult period you experienced during middle adulthood?" "How did you interpret the pressure or crisis you experienced?" "What role did prayer, worship, Qur'anic recitation, religious gatherings, or other spiritual practices play in helping you face that period?" "How did family, neighbors, or religious figures influence your experience?" and "What changes occurred in your self-understanding, values, relationship with God, or life orientation after that experience?" These questions were used flexibly, allowing participants to elaborate on experiences they considered most meaningful.

The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis. This model was selected because it provides systematic procedures for moving from individual narratives to the essential structure of lived experience (Colaizzi, 1978). The analysis was conducted manually without qualitative data analysis software. First, the researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to gain an overall understanding of each participant's

experience. Second, significant statements related to midlife crisis, religious interpretation, emotional struggle, social support, and spiritual change were identified. Third, meanings were formulated from these significant statements. Fourth, the formulated meanings were organized into codes and then clustered into emerging themes. Fifth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they reflected the participants' narratives. Sixth, the themes were integrated into a comprehensive description of psychospiritual transformation. Finally, the essential structure of the phenomenon was formulated into three major patterns: reorientation of life meaning, integration of worldly responsibilities and worship, and self-acceptance through transcendental awareness. Analytic notes were used during the coding and theme development process to record interpretive decisions and relationships among codes.

Several strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was supported through member checking by confirming summaries of interview results with participants. Peer debriefing was conducted by discussing the coding process and emerging themes with another researcher. When interpretive differences emerged during this discussion, they were resolved through dialogue until consensus was reached. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data with the researcher's contextual observation of the social and religious environment and with information obtained from community figures. Dependability was supported through an audit trail consisting of interview transcripts, theme revisions, and analytic decisions. These procedures were used to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

No formal institutional ethics approval was obtained for this study. Nevertheless, ethical principles were applied throughout the research process. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the use of interview data for research purposes, and their right to refuse particular questions or stop the interview at any time. Verbal permission was obtained before the interviews and before audio recording. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes such as P1–P10, and identifying information was removed from the report. The audio recordings were not retained after transcription, while anonymized transcripts were kept securely for analysis.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. The interviews were conducted directly by the researcher. As a member of the same hamlet, the researcher possessed contextual familiarity with participants' social and religious environment, which helped in understanding local expressions, practices, and meanings. At the same time, this insider position had the potential to influence interpretation. To reduce this risk, the researcher avoided leading questions, allowed participants to narrate their experiences in their own terms, and applied bracketing during data collection and analysis. Bracketing was used to help the researcher suspend prior assumptions about religiosity, midlife crisis, and spirituality so that participants' accounts remained central in the interpretation process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The researcher

did not have close personal relationships with the participants, which helped maintain an appropriate distance during the interview process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Participant Characteristics and Theme Development

This study involved ten middle-aged adults living in a rural Indonesian Muslim community in Gunungkidul. The participants were between 44 and 60 years old and represented everyday rural occupational backgrounds, including farming, construction work, trading, religious teaching, social service, and informal labor. To protect anonymity, participants were coded as P1 to P10. Based on the variation in religious practice intensity, five participants were identified as having higher religious practice intensity, while five participants were identified as having lower religious practice intensity. This grouping was used to describe experiential variation in interpreting midlife crisis and was not intended as a statistical comparison.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Occupation/Social Role	Religious Practice Intensity	Main Crisis Experience
P1	45	Farmer, active in women's religious gathering	Higher	Empty nest, loss of social role, search for usefulness
P2	50	Construction worker, mosque committee member	Higher	Awareness of death and concern about moral legacy
P3	50	Vegetable seller, regular participant in majelis taklim	Higher	Loneliness, declining trade, redefinition of success
P4	57	Farmer and Qur'an teacher in village prayer house	Higher	Physical decline and search for continuing benefit
P5	60	Former village midwife, active in socio-religious activities	Higher	Post-retirement loneliness and spiritual preparation
P6	48	Farmer, rarely attends mosque	Lower	Fatigue, economic pressure, and limited spiritual reflection
P7	44	Food seller, inconsistent prayer practice	Lower	Emptiness, social comparison, and difficulty maintaining worship
P8	55	Laborer, involved in unhealthy peer habits	Lower	Regret, moral conflict, and difficulty changing
P9	52	Farm laborer, rarely joins religious activities	Lower	Loneliness, caregiving burden, and emotional exhaustion
P10	60	Former driver, currently inactive at home	Lower	Aging, illness, and regret for past lack of religious commitment

The phenomenological analysis generated three main patterns of psychospiritual transformation, namely the reorientation of life meaning, the integration of worldly responsibilities and worship, and self-acceptance through transcendental awareness. These themes emerged from participants' significant statements about anxiety, regret, economic pressure, aging, family responsibility, religious practice, social support, and the search for meaning.

Table 2. Theme Development from Interview Data

Representative Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category	Main Them
“I feel as if I am no longer needed. Even though I still pray and recite the Qur'an, sometimes my heart feels empty, as if I have lost direction.”	The participant experiences emptiness after changes in family role and social function.	Loss of role and search for meaning	Experiencing midlife crisis
“I sometimes think whether my life is meaningful enough. I do not have a high position, but I want my life to be useful.”	Success is reinterpreted from social status toward usefulness.	Redefining success	Reorientation of life meaning
“I live both of them, while intending this work as worship.”	Work is not separated from spirituality but reinterpreted as devotion.	Work as worship	Integration of worldly responsibilities and worship
“Perhaps Allah is giving me more time to worship.”	Retirement and aging are accepted as spiritual opportunity.	Acceptance of life transition	Self-acceptance through transcendental awareness
“I often feel empty. I trade every day, but life feels just the same. Sometimes I envy people who seem peaceful, maybe because they are closer to religion.”	Lack of regular religious practice is associated with emptiness and longing for inner peace.	Spiritual longing and emotional emptiness	Variation in crisis interpretation
“I want to improve myself, but I feel ashamed. I am already old and only now want to go regularly to the mosque.”	Regret and shame become the beginning of possible spiritual transformation.	Moral regret and delayed	Potential for psychospiritual

Experiencing Midlife Crisis: Anxiety, Regret, and Search for Meaning

The interviews showed that midlife crisis was experienced as a period of anxiety, regret, loneliness, and existential questioning. Participants did not describe the crisis only as emotional distress, but also as a moment when they began to question their usefulness, achievements, bodily limitations, family roles, and relationship with God. Midlife crisis often emerged when previous roles changed such as when children had grown up, work capacity had declined, retirement had begun, or social usefulness felt reduced.

P1 described the crisis as a feeling of emptiness after her children had grown and left home:

“I used to be very busy in the field and taking care of my children. Now the children are grown up, some have migrated, and the house feels quiet. I feel as if I am no longer needed. Even though I still pray and recite the Qur'an, sometimes my heart feels empty, as if I have lost direction.” (P1, higher religious practice intensity)

A similar experience was expressed by P5, who had retired from her previous social role as a village midwife. Her loss of routine was initially experienced as loneliness, but gradually became a space for spiritual reflection:

“After retirement, I felt lonely. I used to help people every day, but now I mostly stay at home. Over time, I learned to accept that perhaps Allah is giving me more time to worship.” (P5, higher religious practice intensity)

Among participants with lower religious practice intensity, midlife crisis was more frequently narrated as fatigue, emptiness, and uncertainty. Economic pressure and routine work were experienced as exhausting, while spiritual reflection had not yet become a stable source of meaning. P6 stated:

“Lately I often feel tired of life. I keep working, but the results are just the same. Sometimes I think, what is all this for? But I just go on, because life is like this. I rarely think about the afterlife; what matters is that my children can eat.” (P6, lower religious practice intensity)

P7 also linked her emotional emptiness to the difficulty of maintaining religious practice:

“I often feel empty. I trade every day, but life feels just the same. Sometimes I envy people who seem peaceful, maybe because they are closer to religion.” (P7, lower religious practice intensity)

These narratives indicate that midlife crisis was not experienced as a single event, but as an accumulation of bodily decline, family change, economic pressure, social comparison, and the feeling that life had not fully achieved its expected meaning. Participants with higher religious practice intensity still experienced anxiety and emptiness, but they tended to interpret these experiences through religious reflection. Participants with lower religious practice intensity more often described the crisis as emotional exhaustion, shame, regret, and difficulty finding a stable direction for change.

Religious Practice and Variation in Crisis Interpretation

Variation in religious practice intensity shaped how participants narrated and interpreted their crisis experiences. Participants with higher religious practice intensity tended to interpret crisis through religious language such as divine reminder, preparation for death, moral legacy, worship, charity, and usefulness to others. They still experienced anxiety and regret, but those feelings were more often redirected toward spiritual evaluation and religious action.

P2 interpreted aging and midlife reflection as a reminder of death and spiritual preparation:

“At this age, it feels like life is just waiting for its turn. I used to have a strong spirit for work, but now I often reflect. I think about what I have prepared for death later. That is what makes me more diligent in going to the mosque.” (P2, higher religious practice intensity)

P4 also described physical decline not merely as loss, but as a reason to seek new meaning through religious teaching and service:

“Now I am not as strong as before. When I go to the field, I get tired quickly. Sometimes I feel useless. But when I started teaching children to recite the Qur’an, I felt that my life had meaning again.” (P4, higher religious practice intensity)

Table 3. Variation in Crisis Interpretation Based on Religious Practice Intensity

Aspect	Higher Religious Practice Intensity	Lower Religious Practice Intensity
Dominant crisis experience	Reflection, awareness of aging, concern about moral legacy, search for usefulness	Fatigue, emptiness, social comparison, regret, loneliness
Meaning of crisis	Divine reminder, spiritual preparation, opportunity for worship and service	Burden, failure, uncertainty, unresolved longing for change
Religious coping	Prayer, Qur’anic recitation, religious gatherings, mosque involvement, charity	Situational prayer, inconsistent practice, desire to change but unstable commitment
Moral orientation	Usefulness, worship-oriented work, charity, responsibility before God	Shame, guilt, fear of judgment, social comparison
Transformation tendency	More integrated, reflective, and transcendental	Fragmented but still open to spiritual renewal

In contrast, participants with lower religious practice intensity tended to narrate crisis through social comparison, emotional exhaustion, shame, and unresolved moral conflict. Their narratives showed spiritual awareness, but this awareness was often unstable and had not yet been translated into regular religious practice. P6 stated:

“My friends have succeeded; they have good houses, and their children work in the city. I feel left behind. Sometimes I envy them, but I also surrender. I have not had time to think about worship; what matters is surviving.” (P6, lower religious practice intensity)

P7 described a desire to return to religious practice but was held back by shame and fear of community judgment:

“Sometimes I want to join the religious gathering, but I feel ashamed because I have not come for a long time. I am afraid people will talk about me. So I just choose to work at home.” (P7, lower religious practice intensity)

The lower-intensity group also expressed moral regret and the desire to change, but this desire was often weakened by habit, fatigue, or social environment. P8 described this conflict clearly:

“I know my habit is not good, but it is hard to leave. Deep inside, I want to change, but the environment also does not support me. Sometimes I feel sinful, but usually I only remember God when I am in difficulty.” (P8, lower religious practice intensity)

This variation suggests that religious practice did not eliminate midlife crisis, but it shaped how participants interpreted and responded to it. Higher religious practice intensity was associated with more stable religious interpretation, acceptance, and action-oriented transformation. Lower religious practice intensity was associated with stronger

emotional burden, shame, regret, and fragmented attempts to change. However, the lower-intensity group was not without transformative potential. Their regret, longing for peace, and awareness of wrongdoing indicated the beginning of moral and spiritual reflection.

Three Patterns of Psychospiritual Transformation

The first pattern of psychospiritual transformation was the reorientation of life meaning. Participants began to reinterpret success not merely in terms of income, social status, or material achievement, but in terms of blessing, usefulness, moral accountability, and closeness to God. This pattern appeared among participants who initially felt anxious about not having high social status or wealth, but later redefined meaningful life through contribution and religious devotion.

P1 expressed this shift from social achievement toward usefulness:

“I sometimes think whether my life is meaningful enough. I do not have a high position, but I want my life to be useful. Now I join mosque activities more often and help my neighbors so that my heart becomes calmer.” (P1, higher religious practice intensity)

P3 similarly redefined achievement by moving away from a purely material measure of success:

“I once felt less successful. But then I realized that success is not only about money. If I can raise my children honestly and maintain my worship, that is also a great achievement.” (P3, higher religious practice intensity)

This reorientation was also visible in P4’s desire to leave a lasting moral and religious contribution rather than material wealth:

“I do not have much wealth, but I want to have deeds that continue to flow. That is why I teach Qur’an recitation and help at the mosque. I want my life to be useful even though it is simple.” (P4, higher religious practice intensity)

The second pattern was the integration of worldly responsibilities and worship. Participants did not describe transformation as withdrawal from daily obligations. Rather, they reinterpreted work, family care, earning a living, and social service as forms of religious devotion. This pattern was especially important because several participants experienced inner conflict between the desire to focus on worship and the obligation to continue working.

P1 described this integration in relation to farming and family responsibility:

“There is a desire to rest from the field and focus on worship, but if I do not help my husband, the income will be lacking. In the end, I live both of them, while intending this work as worship.” (P1, higher religious practice intensity)

P2 expressed a similar tension between work and worship, but resolved it through prayer and the hope for divine approval:

"Sometimes I want to stop working and focus on Qur'an recitation and worship. But if I do not work, how will my family's needs be met? I often pray that Allah is pleased with what I am living now." (P2, higher religious practice intensity)

P3 also framed her economic activity as charity and moral contribution:

"Sometimes my heart wants to stop selling so I can focus on religious learning, but if I stop, I cannot help my husband. Now I intend selling as charity too, because from the income I can help others." (P3, higher religious practice intensity)

These narratives show that psychospiritual transformation did not involve leaving worldly responsibilities. Instead, participants reconstructed the meaning of those responsibilities. Work, family care, and social involvement became religiously meaningful when connected to intention, service, and accountability before God. The third pattern was self-acceptance through transcendental awareness. Participants gradually moved from resisting aging, physical decline, loneliness, and unfulfilled expectations toward accepting these experiences as part of God's will and as opportunities for spiritual maturity. This form of acceptance did not mean passive resignation. It was expressed through worship, charity, social engagement, and renewed commitment to a meaningful life.

P5 described retirement as an initial loss of social usefulness, but later interpreted it as a divine opportunity:

"After retirement, I felt lonely. I used to help people every day, but now I mostly stay at home. Over time, I learned to accept that perhaps Allah is giving me more time to worship." (P5, higher religious practice intensity)

She also connected aging with self-evaluation, repentance, and charity:

"In the past, I was proud because I could help many people. Now I worry more about whether those deeds are accepted. I do more istighfar and give more charity." (P5, higher religious practice intensity)

For participants with lower religious practice intensity, self-acceptance had not yet fully developed, but the possibility of transcendental awareness appeared through regret and the desire to improve. P10 stated:

"I want to improve myself, but I feel ashamed. I am already old and only now want to go regularly to the mosque. Sometimes I pray, sometimes I do not. But every time I see people who are diligent in worship, my heart is moved." (P10, lower religious practice intensity)

P9 also expressed the longing for peace, although she had not yet found a stable path toward it:

“People say that if we are close to God, the heart becomes peaceful. But I cannot do it yet. Sometimes I want to pray, but I am already tired. I know it is wrong, but sometimes I have no spirit.” (P9, lower religious practice intensity)

Overall, the findings show that midlife crisis among middle-aged adults in this rural Indonesian Muslim community was experienced through anxiety, regret, loneliness, bodily decline, and the search for meaning. Religious practice intensity shaped how participants interpreted these experiences. Higher religious practice intensity supported a more integrated and transcendental interpretation of crisis, while lower religious practice intensity was associated with emotional exhaustion, shame, and fragmented transformation. Across the participants, three patterns of psychospiritual transformation emerged: reorientation of life meaning, integration of worldly responsibilities and worship, and self-acceptance through transcendental awareness.

Discussion

Midlife Crisis as a Psychospiritual Turning Point

The findings of this study show that midlife crisis among middle-aged adults in a rural Indonesian Muslim community was not experienced merely as emotional distress, but as a complex existential condition involving anxiety, regret, bodily decline, loneliness, changing family roles, economic pressure, and the search for meaning. Participants questioned whether their lives had been meaningful, whether their achievements were sufficient, and whether they had prepared themselves morally and spiritually for later life. This confirms the view that midlife is a developmental period marked by reflection, re-evaluation, identity negotiation, and the search for meaning rather than simply a period of decline or psychological instability (Bhatia et al., 2025; Infurna et al., 2020).

However, this study extends previous discussions of midlife crisis by showing that the crisis was interpreted through religious and moral language within a rural Muslim community. Participants did not only ask whether they had achieved economic success or social recognition, but also whether their lives had been beneficial, whether their deeds would be accepted by God, and whether their remaining time should be directed toward worship, charity, and social usefulness. This finding supports the idea that midlife well-being is closely related to meaning, life satisfaction, and the capacity to interpret stress within a broader existential framework (Avis et al., 2021; Nasution et al., 2025).

The comparison between participants with higher and lower religious practice intensity further shows that religious practice did not eliminate crisis, but shaped the way crisis was narrated and managed. Participants with higher religious practice intensity also experienced loneliness, anxiety, and regret, but they tended to reinterpret these experiences as divine reminders, opportunities for repentance, and moments for spiritual renewal. Participants with lower religious practice intensity tended to experience the crisis as emotional exhaustion, shame, social comparison, and unresolved longing for change. This finding indicates that spirituality functions not only as a belief system, but also as a meaning-making resource that helps individuals transform crisis into a reflective and morally directed life transition (Ahmadi, 2023; Yaden et al., 2022).

Cognitive, Moral, and Faith Development in Meaning Reconstruction

The reorientation of life meaning found in this study can be understood through the concept of postformal thinking in adulthood. Participants began to move beyond a purely material or instrumental view of success and developed a more reflective understanding of life that integrated experience, emotion, moral responsibility, and spiritual awareness. This pattern is consistent with the idea that adult cognitive development involves contextual, dialectical, and integrative thinking rather than only formal logical reasoning (Kallio, 2021; Sinnott, 1998).

In the narratives of participants with higher religious practice intensity, success was no longer defined mainly by wealth, social status, or occupational achievement, but by usefulness, blessing, worship, moral legacy, and accountability before God. This shows that midlife reflection may activate a more integrative form of thinking in which worldly experience is reinterpreted through moral and spiritual values. The finding strengthens the argument that middle adulthood is a period in which accumulated life experience can support deeper reflection on life direction, limitation, and purpose (Ferdyansyah & Masfufah, 2023; Infurna et al., 2020).

The findings also show a moral shift from social comparison and external obligation toward a more internalized sense of spiritual responsibility. Participants with lower religious practice intensity often expressed guilt, shame, fear of social judgment, and difficulty changing old habits, which suggests that moral awareness was present but not yet fully integrated into stable religious action. Participants with higher religious practice intensity tended to frame moral responsibility in terms of worship, charity, family duty, and benefit to others, which reflects a more internalized ethical-spiritual orientation. This interpretation is consistent with Kohlberg's view that moral development may move from conformity to social norms toward more reflective and principled moral reasoning (Ibda, 2023; Kohlberg, 1984).

Faith development also helps explain why some participants were able to transform crisis into spiritual maturity. Participants with higher religious practice intensity did not treat religion merely as inherited tradition or social identity, but as a personal source of reflection, acceptance, and life orientation. This pattern suggests a movement toward more reflective and integrative faith, in which individuals reinterpret aging, work, family responsibility, and suffering through a conscious relationship with God. This finding aligns with Fowler's view that adult faith development involves the reconstruction of meaning, the integration of life experience, and a more reflective relationship with the transcendent (Fowler, 1988; Mallery, 2022; Parker, 2010).

The findings should not be read as a fixed classification of participants into rigid developmental stages, but as evidence of movement in cognitive, moral, and spiritual orientation. Participants moved in different ways from confusion toward reflection, from social comparison toward usefulness, from fragmented religious awareness toward spiritual longing, and from resistance toward acceptance. This supports recent arguments that faith should be understood not only as a structural stage, but also as an active process

of engagement shaped by life experience, context, and personal transformation (Archer, 2024; Streib, 2001).

Rural Religious Community as a Context of Psychospiritual Transformation

This study shows that psychospiritual transformation in midlife was not only an individual psychological process, but also a socially situated process embedded in rural religious life. Participants interpreted crisis through everyday religious practices such as prayer, Qur'anic recitation, religious gatherings, mosque involvement, charity, and service to neighbors. These practices provided not only emotional comfort, but also a moral and symbolic framework for reconstructing the meaning of aging, work, family responsibility, and social usefulness.

The rural Muslim community became a context in which crisis could be reinterpreted through shared religious language and communal values. Expressions such as worship, charity, divine will, preparation for death, acceptance, and usefulness to others shaped how participants understood their experiences. This finding extends studies that treat spirituality mainly as an individual coping mechanism by showing that spirituality in rural religious communities is also sustained through social participation, religious routines, moral expectations, and communal support. This is consistent with research showing that religious and spiritual practices are associated with well-being, aging, and life satisfaction, but this study adds that such practices are meaningful because they are embedded in local social relations and everyday communal life (McManus, 2024; Vagnini et al., 2024; Yaden et al., 2022).

The theme of integrating worldly responsibilities and worship is particularly important in this context. Participants did not resolve midlife crisis by withdrawing from work or family duties, but by reinterpreting farming, trading, earning income, caring for family, and serving the community as forms of worship. This finding suggests that psychospiritual transformation does not always appear as separation from worldly life, but as the religious re-signification of ordinary responsibilities. This interpretation is in line with studies emphasizing that spiritual transformation can reshape daily motivation, moral action, and social orientation (Hakim, 2024; Mendrofa, 2024; Saputra & Efendi, 2025).

The findings also resonate with Erikson's concept of generativity and stagnation in middle adulthood. Participants who felt useless, left behind, or no longer needed showed signs of stagnation, while those who redirected their lives toward teaching Qur'an, helping neighbors, giving charity, participating in mosque activities, and supporting family displayed forms of generativity. In this rural religious context, generativity was not only expressed through career achievement or parenting, but through worship-oriented work, moral legacy, community service, and religious contribution. This expands the meaning of generativity by showing how it may be shaped by Islamic values and rural communal life (Erikson, 1982; Infurna et al., 2020).

Implications for Islamic Counseling and Crisis Intervention

The findings have important implications for Islamic guidance and counseling, crisis counseling, and psychospiritual intervention for middle-aged adults. Midlife crisis

should not be understood only as anxiety, dissatisfaction, or psychological instability, but also as a crisis of meaning, moral direction, and spiritual orientation. Islamic counseling therefore needs to help clients reconstruct the meaning of crisis, evaluate life priorities, strengthen constructive religious coping, and integrate worldly responsibilities with worship.

For clients with higher religious practice intensity, counseling can support the deepening of existing spiritual resources by helping them process aging, regret, retirement, family changes, and awareness of death in a balanced and constructive way. Counselors can help clients avoid excessive guilt while encouraging repentance, gratitude, charity, worship, and socially meaningful contribution. This is important because religious reflection can become a source of acceptance and renewal when it is accompanied by emotional support and realistic life reconstruction (Pargament, 1997; Savira et al., 2021).

For clients with lower religious practice intensity, the findings suggest the need for a gradual and nonjudgmental approach. Their narratives show shame, guilt, fear of community judgment, inconsistent worship, and difficulty changing old habits. Islamic counseling should not begin by blaming the client for weak religious practice, but by validating the crisis experience, identifying spiritual longing, and helping clients take small steps toward prayer, religious learning, supportive relationships, and moral self-repair. This approach is important because regret and shame can become either barriers to change or openings for psychospiritual transformation, depending on how they are guided.

In rural religious communities, Islamic counseling can also involve community-based support. Religious figures, mosque communities, family members, and social-religious activities can become supportive resources when they are used to strengthen acceptance, meaning-making, and social connectedness rather than social judgment. This finding suggests that psychospiritual crisis intervention should combine individual reflection with communal support, especially in rural settings where religious life is embedded in social relationships. Social support is important because psychological well-being is shaped not only by individual coping, but also by relational and community resources (Khoerunisa et al., 2025).

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by showing that midlife crisis in a rural Indonesian Muslim community can become a psychospiritual turning point through three interconnected processes: reorientation of life meaning, integration of worldly responsibilities and worship, and self-acceptance through transcendental awareness. These processes show that psychospiritual transformation involves cognitive reflection, moral evaluation, religious coping, social support, and a renewed relationship with God. This provides a contextual basis for Islamic counseling models that address midlife crisis not only as emotional distress, but as an opportunity for meaning reconstruction, moral renewal, and spiritual maturation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that middle-aged adults in a rural Indonesian Muslim community experienced midlife crisis through anxiety, regret, loneliness, economic pressure, bodily decline, changing family roles, and the search for meaning. These experiences were not merely psychological difficulties, but also moments of moral and spiritual reflection in which participants questioned their usefulness, life achievements, relationship with God, and preparation for later life.

Three patterns of psychospiritual transformation emerged from these experiences: reorientation of life meaning, integration of worldly responsibilities and worship, and self-acceptance through transcendental awareness. Participants with higher religious practice intensity tended to interpret crisis as a divine reminder, an opportunity for repentance, and a path toward worship and social usefulness. In contrast, participants with lower religious practice intensity tended to narrate crisis through emotional exhaustion, shame, regret, social comparison, and fragmented attempts to change.

These findings contribute to adult developmental psychology and Islamic counseling by showing that midlife crisis can become a psychospiritual turning point when individuals are supported in reconstructing life meaning, integrating daily responsibilities with worship, and developing self-acceptance. This study is limited by its small number of participants, single rural Muslim setting, one-time interviews, and the researcher's insider position. Future studies may compare rural and urban communities, examine gender differences, include different religious or cultural contexts, and develop Islamic counseling or psychospiritual crisis intervention models for middle-aged adults.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized AI-assisted technologies, including ChatGPT (OpenAI), Grammarly, and Consensus, to support language editing, grammar checking, improvement of writing clarity, and preliminary assistance in identifying relevant literature. These technologies were used solely as supportive tools in the writing process and did not replace the authors' intellectual contributions in developing ideas, conducting scientific analysis, interpreting research findings, or making academic decisions. All outputs generated through these tools were critically reviewed, verified, and revised by the authors. The authors assume full responsibility for the final content, accuracy, originality, and scientific integrity of the manuscript.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The first author contributed to data collection through interviews, initial data analysis, manuscript preparation, and the development of the manuscript into a complete article. The second author contributed through academic guidance, conceptual input, and supervision throughout the manuscript preparation and refinement process. All authors

have reviewed, provided input, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study were obtained through interviews with research participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the data and the need to protect participants' privacy, the interview data are not publicly available. The data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical considerations and the protection of participants' confidentiality.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of the research, data analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

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