

Psychospiritual and Socioreligious Approaches to Mental Health in Islam and Christianity

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Abstract

Mental health is a multidimensional aspect of human well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual components. In religiously devout societies such as Indonesia, spiritual and communal values deeply influence how mental health is perceived and addressed. This study explores psychospiritual and socioreligious approaches to mental health by comparing Islamic and Christian perspectives. Through a qualitative-descriptive method and library-based research, the study draws upon classical theological texts, scriptural sources, and contemporary literature to analyze religious coping mechanisms, core spiritual values, and their integration into mental well-being. Findings reveal that Islam emphasizes *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* (the tranquil soul), achieved through *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification), devotion, and social responsibility. Christianity, meanwhile, centers on *shalom* (divine peace), fostered through personal relationship with God, hope, and communal worship. Both traditions offer distinct but complementary coping strategies that connect inner resilience with faith-based practices and collective religious life. By situating mental health within theological and sociocultural frameworks, this study contributes to the development of integrative models that bridge psychological care, spiritual meaning, and community-based support—particularly in multireligious and culturally rooted contexts.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Religious Coping, Spirituality, Islam, Christianity, Psychospirituality, Socioreligious Framework*

A. Introduction

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of human life that shapes an individual's ability to think clearly, manage emotions, maintain healthy social relationships, and adapt to life's challenges. From a psychological perspective, mental health refers to emotional, psychological, and social well-being that enables a person to live a meaningful and productive life (Hanurawan 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) also defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities (Dewi 2012; WHO 2022).

Despite growing attention in academic and public discourse, the understanding of mental health in Indonesia is still often clouded by stigma. Many people continue to associate mental illness with weak faith, ingratitude, or even spiritual possession, rather than recognizing it as a medical condition requiring professional support (Fajrussalam et al. 2022; Yusuf 2021). These perceptions are deeply rooted in local socio-religious constructions, making it difficult for clinical approaches to succeed without integrating spiritual and religious elements that are inseparable from everyday life.

Theoretically, the concept of *mental hygiene*—or the cultivation of psychological and spiritual balance—offers a useful framework for understanding mental health. This concept emphasizes the importance of continuously maintaining emotional and spiritual equilibrium to prevent psychological disturbances (Carona and Fonseca 2021). Hasneli (2014) defines mental health as the capacity to effectively and efficiently adapt to internal and external pressures. This capacity is closely related to the concept of *coping mechanisms*, which refers to how individuals manage stress and navigate personal or social conflicts.

Both Islam and Christianity place strong emphasis on mental well-being, although each tradition offers a distinctive approach grounded in its own theological values. In Islam, mental health—referred to as *al-shihhah al-nafsiyyah*—is closely linked to *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification), faith, patience, trust in God (*tawakkul*), and remembrance of God (*dhikr*) (Sanjari and Pratiwi Nurlita 2023; Taufik 2020). Scholars such as al-Ghazali define a healthy soul as one that is free from spiritual diseases and achieves inner peace through the control of desires, such as *Tibb al-Qalb* (therapy of the heart) and *Tibb al-Ruhani* (spiritual therapy) (A.F. Jaelani 2000; Tamrin 2018; Yahya et al. 2020). As early as the 9th century, al-Balkhi had already articulated a framework connecting physical and mental well-being through concepts (Awaad and Ali 2016; Saeed et al. 2024)

In contrast, Christianity often understands mental health in terms of a harmonious relationship between humans, God, and others (Lloyd et al. 2024). Biblical teachings emphasize emotional balance, peace of mind, and hope amidst suffering as essential elements of a healthy spiritual life (Lewis Hall and Hill 2019; Mijatović 2021). Proverbs 17:22, for example, says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine,” illustrating the connection between emotional and physical health. Spiritual practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and worship music have long served as tools of spiritual healing (Welan, Wangean, and Kasingku 2023).

Theoretically, religious approaches to mental health can be analyzed through Kenneth Pargament’s concept of *religious coping*, which argues that religion provides psychological resources—such as meaning, social support, and faith-based strategies—to help individuals face life’s challenges (Pargament

2001). This framework is particularly relevant in deeply religious and culturally rooted societies like Indonesia.

While numerous studies have examined mental health from the perspective of a single religion, comparative analyses between Islam and Christianity remain scarce, especially in multireligious societies. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing the concept of mental health in both traditions using a qualitative-descriptive approach and library-based research methods. The aim of this study is to explore how Islam and Christianity define mental health, what spiritual values they emphasize, and how religious teachings can be applied as strategies for maintaining and restoring psychological well-being. By doing so, the study hopes to contribute to the development of a more holistic, context-sensitive, and spiritually informed psychospiritual approach to mental health in the modern era.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using library research as its primary method. This approach was chosen to explore and analyze conceptual understandings and theological values concerning mental health from both Islamic and Christian perspectives, as articulated in relevant primary and secondary literature. A qualitative-descriptive method allows the researchers to interpret meanings embedded in religious texts, symbols, and the accompanying social constructions in a nuanced and contextual manner (Creswell 2018; Sugiyono 2017).

The data for this study were collected from a wide range of sources, including religious books, peer-reviewed journals, academic articles, and official documents discussing mental health from Islamic and Christian viewpoints. Particular attention was given to classical works, such as the thoughts of al-Ghazali and al-Balkhi in Islamic tradition, and biblical passages and their interpretations within both the Old and New Testaments in Christianity. Literature from international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) was also used to provide a conceptual foundation on mental health in a global context.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The collected materials were categorized into major themes such as definitions of mental health, the role of spirituality, religious coping mechanisms, and theological values related to psychological well-being. A comparative analysis was then conducted to assess the similarities and differences between Islamic and Christian approaches. The validity of findings was ensured through source triangulation, which involved comparing results across different types of literature to obtain a comprehensive and balanced understanding. Through this method, the study aims to generate a rich and contextual insight into how two

major world religions—Islam and Christianity—formulate their concepts of mental health and apply them within the spiritual and social lives of their adherents.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Concepts of Mental Health: Psychological and Socio-Religious Dimensions

Mental health is a vital component of individual well-being, enabling people to function optimally in their daily lives. It involves not only the capacity to think clearly and regulate emotions but also encompasses the social and spiritual dimensions of human existence. According to the World Health Organization, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities. From a psychological perspective, mental health reflects emotional stability and an individual's adaptive capacity to respond to life's pressures and challenges. Hasneli (2022) defines mental health as the ability to effectively adjust to both internal and external stressors. This adjustment process involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, enabling individuals to maintain functional well-being in a variety of situations.

Anwar and Julia (2021) outlines several indicators of good mental health, including life satisfaction, stress management, emotional resilience, and the ability to maintain productive social relationships. He also highlights the importance of self-actualization, flexibility in adapting to change, and maintaining balance across different areas of life—work, leisure, and rest. From a social standpoint, mental health is not an isolated condition; it is shaped by cultural norms, communal values, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Lubis et al. (2019) emphasize that positive social relationships, strong self-control, and a healthy worldview significantly contribute to psychological stability.

In religious societies like Indonesia, the spiritual dimension plays a central role in how mental health is understood. Spirituality often serves as a source of inner peace, hope, and meaning, particularly in times of hardship. Consequently, psychospiritual approaches to mental health have gained increasing relevance. Concepts such as coping mechanisms, resilience, and self-regulation are no longer examined solely through the lens of psychology but are increasingly integrated with religious values and faith-based practices. Thus, mental health should not be viewed merely as the absence of mental disorders but as a holistic condition that encompasses emotional, social, and spiritual functioning. This comprehensive framework provides a meaningful foundation for exploring how Islam and Christianity, as two major world religions, interpret and address mental health through their teachings, practices, and theological principles.

2. Islamic Perspective on Mental Health

In Islam, mental health is inseparable from spiritual well-being. It is understood as part of the holistic harmony between the soul (*nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), and faith (*īmān*). This concept is often referred to as *al-ṣiḥḥah al-naḥsiyyah*, which reflects a state of inner stability, free from spiritual ailments, and guided by Islamic teachings toward a balanced and meaningful life. This view is rooted in the belief that human beings are composed of both physical and spiritual dimensions, and true well-being can only be achieved when both are in harmony. The Qur'an and the prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) serve as the primary references in understanding mental health. One notable verse states, "Truly, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace" (Qur'an, Ar-Ra'd: 28), underscoring that spiritual connection with God is essential to inner tranquility.

One of the earliest Muslim scholars to address psychological well-being was Abu Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934 CE), a pioneer of mental health theory in the Islamic tradition. In his work *Masāliḥ al-Abdān wa al-Anfus*, al-Balkhī explained that mental disorders such as anxiety, grief, and anger require treatment just as physical illnesses do. He introduced terms like *tibb al-rūḥānī* (spiritual-psychological therapy) and *tibb al-qalb* (therapy of the heart), illustrating an integrated approach to healing (Tamrin, 2018). Similarly, Imam al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), through his Sufi and theological perspectives, emphasized that a sound soul is one that can master its desires and avoid spiritual diseases such as envy, arrogance, and resentment. For al-Ghazālī, achieving *al-naḥs al-muṭma'innah* – the tranquil soul – requires *tazkiyat al-naḥs*, or self-purification, through worship, inner reflection, and sustained closeness to God (Burlian 2016; Hafidz Khusnadin and Shihab 2025). Core values such as patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*) are central to maintaining mental well-being in Islam. *Ṣabr*, for instance, is not merely about enduring hardship, but represents spiritual resilience – the ability to stay grounded in faith and goodness even under pressure (Alfain, Soleh, and Yamani 2023). *Tawakkul* teaches the balance between personal effort and surrender to God's will, fostering a sense of psychological stability anchored in divine trust (Faizah and Syamsul Arifin 2023; Huda et al. 2019).

In contemporary terms, these teachings align closely with the concept of religious coping. Kenneth Pargament's (2001) theory of religious coping describes how spiritual beliefs and practices serve as psychological resources for navigating stress. Within this framework, Islamic rituals – such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), recitation of the Qur'an, remembrance (*dhikr*), and supplication (*du'ā*) – not only fulfill religious obligations but also provide therapeutic benefits. Prayer, for example, has been shown to calm the nervous system and create a sense of order, while *dhikr* offers emotional release and mental clarity. Therefore, Islam does not merely prescribe moral codes but provides an integrated psychological and

spiritual framework. Mental health in Islam is not simply the absence of disorder, but a dynamic condition in which the soul remains stable, purposeful, and aligned with divine guidance. This holistic approach integrates spiritual, ethical, social, and emotional dimensions into a coherent model of well-being.

3. Christian Perspective on Mental Health

In Christian tradition, mental health is regarded as an essential part of spiritual and emotional well-being, rooted in the integrity of one's relationship with God, oneself, and others (Timbers and Hollenberger 2022). Although the term "mental health" does not appear explicitly in the Bible, its foundational values—such as peace, hope, forgiveness, and love—are central to a spiritually healthy life. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a joyful heart and a mind anchored in truth. One frequently cited verse is Proverbs 17:22: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." This verse illustrates the direct link between emotional and physical health. From a Christian perspective, mental health cannot be separated from the spiritual joy that flows from a personal relationship with God (Solomon 1999).

The concept of *shalom*—often translated as "peace"—is a key theological principle that reflects the Christian vision of a healthy soul (Callender-Carter and Oluikpe 2016; Sanou 2024). In John 14:27, Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." This peace is not merely external calm, but a deep inner tranquility that transcends worldly circumstances. It is a form of divine comfort that empowers believers to endure suffering without losing hope. The Bible also presents many figures who wrestled with emotional and psychological struggles, offering valuable insights for modern mental health discourse. King David, for instance, often expressed fear, anxiety, and despair in the Psalms, yet consistently returned to a posture of trust in God. In Psalm 42:11, he writes, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God." Prayer and praise served as his way of processing and overcoming emotional turmoil.

The story of the prophet Elijah also highlights the importance of holistic care in mental healing (Iwański and Plante 2025). After facing intense pressure and threats, Elijah reached a point of exhaustion and despair, asking God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). However, instead of scolding him, God provided rest, food, and space for renewal. This narrative reflects the Christian view that mental restoration involves not only spiritual support but also physical and emotional care.

Faith, in this context, acts as a powerful inner resource for coping with adversity. The figure of Job is a profound example—despite overwhelming physical and emotional suffering, Job remained steadfast in his faith. His story illustrates that spiritual endurance can offer strength and meaning in the midst

of crisis. This aligns with contemporary understandings of religious coping, in which spirituality functions as a psychological mechanism for resilience and transformation.

In addition to prayer and meditation on Scripture, Christian communities have long used sacred music as a means of healing. In 1 Samuel 16:23, it is said that when King Saul was tormented by an evil spirit, David played the harp, and Saul's spirit was soothed. Today, this practice is recognized as a form of music therapy, which has been proven effective in reducing anxiety and promoting emotional regulation. Thus, the Christian understanding of mental health rests on three pillars: personal communion with God, emotional regulation through faith, and involvement in a spiritual community. Spirituality is not merely an added element in the recovery process, but an integral part of a healthy psychological life. The Christian approach emphasizes that healing and inner peace are found in the awareness of God's presence and guidance amid all circumstances.

4. Comparative Analysis: Islamic and Christian Approaches to Mental Health

Both Islam and Christianity regard mental health as a fundamental dimension of human life, closely tied to one's relationship with God and one's inner sense of peace. In both traditions, mental well-being is not solely defined by emotional stability, but is also shaped by spiritual alignment and social connectedness. This broader understanding positions mental health as more than just the absence of psychological illness—it is seen as a state of harmony between the soul, the self, and the divine.

In Islamic tradition, the ideal state of mental well-being is embodied in the concept of *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*—the tranquil soul—which is achieved through *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification). This process involves cleansing the soul of negative traits and cultivating virtuous character through acts of worship, remembrance (*dhikr*), and reflection on the Qur'an. The works of scholars like al-Ghazālī and al-Balkhī demonstrate that Islam has long offered an integrated framework that links spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions of health.

In Christianity, the equivalent ideal is expressed through the concept of *shalom*—a peace that signifies wholeness, restoration, and right relationship with God and others. This peace is not merely emotional ease but reflects spiritual integrity. Practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, and spiritual reflection are key pathways to inner healing. Biblical figures like David, Elijah, and Job illustrate that mental struggle is part of the faith journey, and that lasting peace comes through trust in divine presence.

From the perspective of religious coping, both Islam and Christianity emphasize the role of spiritual connection in facing life's hardships. In Islam, the concept of *tawakkul*—relying on God after making sincere effort—nurtures a

sense of inner steadiness. In Christianity, faith and divine comfort are central resources in moments of suffering. These strategies offer psychological resilience grounded in spiritual trust and meaning-making. To clarify the distinctive contributions of each tradition, the table below compares key elements of Islamic and Christian approaches to mental health:

Aspect	Islam	Christianity
Core Concept	<i>Al-nafs al-muṭma'innah</i> (tranquil soul) as the outcome of <i>tazkiyat al-nafs</i>	<i>Shalom</i> (divine peace) as the fruit of restored relationship with God
Scriptural & Intellectual Basis	Qur'an, Hadith, classical scholars (e.g., al-Ghazālī, al-Balkhī)	Bible (Old & New Testaments), pastoral theology, spiritual leaders
Key Values	Patience (<i>ṣabr</i>), gratitude (<i>shukr</i>), trust in God (<i>tawakkul</i>), remembrance (<i>dhikr</i>), prayer (<i>ṣalāh</i>)	Faith, hope, love, prayer, Scripture reading, worship
Religious Coping	Surrendering to God's will while maintaining effort (<i>tawakkul</i>)	Relying on God's love and promises during suffering
Therapeutic Practices	<i>Ṣalāh</i> , <i>dhikr</i> , Qur'anic recitation, spiritual purification	Prayer, spiritual reflection, worship music, faith-based counseling
Social Role	Strong emphasis on social ties; a stable soul is linked to ethical and communal life	Emphasis on personal relationship with God; community is supportive but secondary
Epistemological Framework	Integration of revelation, philosophy, and mysticism (Sufism)	Integration of Scripture, pastoral care, and existential psychology
Ultimate Goal	Harmony between worldly and spiritual life; becoming an <i>insān kāmīl</i> (complete person)	Spiritual and emotional restoration through divine grace

Source: Compiled by the authors from literature review, 2025.

This comparison reveals that although the two traditions use different theological languages and frameworks, they both position spirituality at the core of mental well-being. Islam offers a highly integrative structure that weaves together moral, social, and transcendental dimensions, with a strong emphasis on balance between worldly and spiritual life. Christianity, on the other hand, centers on the power of personal communion with God and the transformative nature of faith as a source of inner peace.

Islam also gives explicit weight to social responsibility as a sign of mental stability. Concepts like *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar* (promoting good and preventing harm), social accountability, and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) highlight the interconnectedness between personal serenity and collective ethics. While Christianity values community, its emphasis tends to rest more on the individual's inward relationship with God as the unwavering source of peace.

These insights align with Pargament's (2001) theory of religious coping, which suggests that religion functions as a meaning-making system that empowers individuals in times of crisis. By placing these two traditions side by side, the analysis shows that both Islam and Christianity contribute meaningfully to the development of holistic models of mental health. In a multireligious context like Indonesia, such cross-traditional understanding is not only academically significant but also practically urgent. It opens the door to psychospiritual approaches that are inclusive, contextual, and socially grounded.

5. The Role of Spirituality in Maintaining Mental Health

Amid the growing challenges of modern life—including workplace pressures, social disruptions, and existential uncertainty—spirituality has re-emerged as a vital resource for maintaining and restoring mental health. In both Islamic and Christian traditions, spirituality is not merely an expression of religious identity; it is a value system and set of practices through which individuals interpret, process, and respond to life's realities. The analysis presented in the previous sections demonstrates that in both religions, spirituality serves as an effective coping mechanism, especially during times of emotional stress or existential crisis. Practices such as *ṣalāh* (ritual prayer) and *dhikr* (remembrance of God) in Islam, or prayer and Scripture reading in Christianity, function as inner-strengthening rituals that stabilize emotions, nurture hope, and offer meaning in the face of suffering.

Modern psychological research supports these findings. According to Pargament (2001), religious coping is not only an emotional buffer but also a framework for interpreting life events. Spirituality helps individuals reframe suffering not as a dead end, but as a potential path for inner transformation, spiritual growth, and deeper understanding of life's purpose. Within religious communities, spirituality also plays a critical social role. Participation in spiritually supportive environments—such as *pengajian* (Islamic study circles), prayer groups, or *majelis dhikr* (remembrance assemblies)—strengthens a sense of belonging, reduces isolation, and fosters empathy and mutual support. These insights align with research showing that religious social support correlates positively with resilience and reduced symptoms of depression (Koenig, 2009).

Beyond individual and communal dimensions, spirituality also contributes significantly to public mental health interventions. In many regions,

psychospiritual approaches that combine professional counseling with religious values are more culturally accepted among populations with strong religious orientations. This indicates that the integration of psychological science and religious teachings is not only possible but necessary for developing effective and context-sensitive strategies. Thus, in both Islam and Christianity, spirituality offers more than symbolic or dogmatic significance—it holds genuine therapeutic potential. It can serve as a critical component in designing mental health interventions that are culturally grounded, values-based, and aligned with the spiritual beliefs of local communities. In an increasingly complex and uncertain world, spirituality provides a vital space for individuals and communities to rediscover peace, purpose, and emotional strength in the journey toward healing and resilience.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that both Islam and Christianity view mental health as an integral aspect of human functioning, encompassing spiritual, emotional, and social well-being. In Islam, the concept of *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*—a tranquil and stable soul—is achieved through *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification) and a deep connection to moral, communal, and transcendental values. In Christianity, mental health is reflected in *shalom*, or divine peace, which arises from a restored relationship with God and harmonious interactions with others. Both religious traditions offer distinct but complementary religious coping strategies. Islam emphasizes *tawakkul* (trust in God), *ṣabr* (patience), and structured devotional practices as pathways to inner resilience. Christianity highlights divine comfort, hope through prayer, and faith-based reflection as foundations for emotional healing. Although the two approaches differ in theological nuance, both affirm that spirituality is not merely a psychological support, but a primary source of healing, meaning, and psychological restoration.

The comparative analysis also reveals that Islamic perspectives tend to emphasize collective responsibility and social ethics as indicators of psychological well-being, while Christian approaches place stronger focus on personal renewal through intimate relationship with God. Nevertheless, these perspectives complement each other in forming a more comprehensive understanding of mental health that is highly relevant in religiously diverse societies like Indonesia. The findings of this study contribute to the growing discourse on psychospiritual approaches to mental health by offering a culturally and theologically informed framework. Spiritual values from both Islam and Christianity can serve as foundations for designing mental health interventions that are not only effective in psychological terms, but also culturally appropriate and religiously meaningful. In doing so, this study advocates for a synergistic

relationship between science and religion in addressing the mental health crisis in a more humane, meaningful, and sustainable manner.

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