

Religion, Existential Anxiety, and the Search for Lifes Meaning: A Humanistic Psychology Approach in Religious Societies

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Abstract

This study advances Islamic counseling scholarship by proposing a model that respects clients religious worldviews while empowering them to find personal meaning, emotional resilience, and spiritual fulfillment. In a time when religious identity and psychological well-being are closely intertwined, particularly in Muslim-majority societies, integrating Islamic values with evidence-based humanistic techniques is not only beneficial but also essential. Existential anxiety is a profound form of psychological distress triggered by confronting fundamental questions of death, purpose, and the meaning of existence. This study explores the role of religion in helping individuals in religious societies cope with existential anxiety and pursue life meaning through a humanistic psychological lens. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected via in-depth interviews with 12 adult Muslim participants who had experienced existential crises. Thematic analysis yielded three core themes: (1) religious narratives as existential anchors; (2) rituals as buffers against death anxiety and meaninglessness; and (3) spiritual reflection as a path to inner reconciliation. Findings suggest that religion serves not only as a spiritual coping mechanism, but also as a comprehensive framework for meaning-making that integrates humanistic values such as self-actualization and transcendence within a divine context. These insights contribute to the development of meaning-centered Islamic counseling models that blend logotherapeutic techniques with Islamic spiritual principles.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era marked by rapid social change, digital overload, and global crises, individuals are increasingly confronted with deep existential questions regarding purpose, freedom, death, and isolation. The collapse of traditional structures, such as family, religion, and community, in many secular or urban contexts has intensified feelings of disconnection and meaninglessness (Becker, 1973). Even in religious societies, the convergence of modern values and spiritual beliefs has created a psychological tension between autonomy and submission, certainty and ambiguity (Watts, 2016).

Existential anxiety defined as the inner turmoil that arises when one confronts the limits of existence is no longer a peripheral concern but has become central to the psychological well-being of many individuals today. This anxiety may manifest in various forms such as depression, loss of motivation, or spiritual emptiness, particularly among individuals who face crises of identity or purpose (Frankl, 1985). The COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergencies,

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and economic instability have only heightened these existential concerns, forcing many to reevaluate the meaning of their lives in a chaotic world (Pargament, 2007; Wong, 2012).

Religion has historically served as a protective buffer against existential distress by offering narratives, rituals, and communities that promote coherence and hope (Koenig, 2012). However, the effectiveness of religion in addressing such anxiety varies depending on one's interpretation, engagement, and the cultural-religious context in which faith is practiced (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). In this study, we explore how individuals in religious communities negotiate existential anxiety and search for life's meaning, employing a humanistic psychology framework that emphasizes personal agency, self-transcendence and authentic living (Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1961).

Religion has long served as a powerful source of existential comfort by offering frameworks of meaning, moral guidance, and transcendent purpose. When individuals are confronted with questions about death, suffering, freedom, or personal insignificance, religion provides a structure in which these concerns can be reinterpreted as part of a divine plan (Pargament, 1997). Through doctrines, sacred texts, and religious rituals, believers often find narratives that help them contextualize suffering and reduce anxiety (Koenig, 2009).

From a psychological perspective, religion plays both a defensive and proactive role. Defensively, it helps to suppress existential fear through belief in an afterlife or divine justice. It fosters purpose, belonging, and self-transcendence, core elements in humanistic psychology and meaning making (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2012). Religious coping mechanisms, such as prayer, scripture reflection, or communal worship, have been empirically linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety, particularly in crisis situations (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). In religious societies, faith is often embedded into daily life, creating a collective culture of shared values and mutual support (Park, 2005). This shared faith identity can reduce feelings of isolation and promote psychological resilience. Furthermore, Islamic spiritual practices such as *dzikr* (remembrance), *tawakkul* (trust in God), and *sabr* (patience) are integral tools in reducing anxiety and enhancing personal meaning for many Muslims (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011).

The role of religion is not universally beneficial. Negative religious coping, such as seeing suffering as punishment or abandonment by God, can worsen psychological distress (Pargament et al., 1998). Understanding the quality and orientation of religious belief is essential when assessing its impact on mental health. This study seeks to explore not merely the presence of religious faith but the function it serves in mediating existential anxiety and guiding the pursuit of life meaning within a culturally religious context using a humanistic psychology lens. Humanistic psychology emerged as a response to the limitations of behaviorism and psychoanalysis, offering a more holistic and optimistic view of human potential. Among its leading figures, Viktor Frankl and Abraham Maslow contributed foundational ideas that link psychological well-being to the quest for meaning, personal growth, and transcendence (Schneider, Bugental, & Pierson, 2015).

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, developed after his experiences in Nazi concentration camps, posits that the primary human drive is not pleasure (as in Freud) or power (as in Adler), but the "will to meaning", a deep desire to find purpose even in suffering (Frankl, 1985). According to Frankl, existential frustration arises when individuals are unable to fulfill this will to meaning, often leading to what he terms the "existential vacuum." In therapeutic settings, logotherapy helps clients identify and pursue meaningful life goals through self-transcendence, responsibility, and attitudinal change toward unavoidable suffering (Batthyany & Russo-Netzer, 2014).

Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization complements Frankl's ideas by emphasizing the realization of one's inner potential as the highest need in his hierarchy (Maslow, 1971). Self-actualizing individuals are characterized by creativity, autonomy,

purpose, and a sense of peak experiences, moments of profound spiritual or existential fulfillment. Later in his career, Maslow introduced the idea of self-transcendence, which involves going beyond the self in service of something greater, such as truth, beauty, or God (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Both Frankl and Maslow acknowledged the importance of spirituality in human development, though not necessarily in religious terms. Spiritual frameworks, however, often provide the language, rituals, and symbols through which individuals engage in meaning-making (Wong, 2012). In particular, Islamic spiritual concepts such as *tawhid* (oneness of God), *fitrah* (innate disposition), and *sabr* (patience) align with humanistic themes of self-integration, resilience, and moral growth (Nasr, 1993). Recent integrative models have sought to bridge humanistic psychology with spiritual traditions, arguing that the quest for meaning is inseparable from one's spiritual orientation, especially in religious societies (Emmons, 2005; Pargament, 2007). This literature review provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how existential concerns, when filtered through spiritual lenses, can lead to psychological growth rather than paralysis.

While both humanistic psychology and religious frameworks emphasize personal growth and meaning, there remains a critical gap in literature that effectively integrates these perspectives within the lived realities of religious communities. Most humanistic-existential theories, such as logotherapy and self-actualization were developed in largely secular, Western contexts, often assuming individual autonomy independent of divine authority (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Wong, 2016). As a result, spiritual dimensions are frequently treated as optional rather than essential components of meaning-making. In contrast, individuals in religious societies often derive their core sense of purpose, morality, and existential security from their faith. Their search for meaning is not conducted in isolation but is embedded within theological narratives, communal worship, and divine commandments (Nasr, 1993; Pargament, 2007). This context challenges the applicability of conventional humanistic models that prioritize self-direction over spiritual submission.

Several studies have examined religious coping (Pargament et al., 1998), spiritual well-being (Koenig, 2012), and religious meaning-making (Park, 2005), yet few explicitly link these to existential anxieties such as fear of death, loss of freedom, or the absence of meaning. Even fewer attempt to synthesize religious experiences with humanistic values like authenticity, self-transcendence, or personal growth in a culturally contextualized way (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011). This disconnect limits the development of comprehensive counseling approaches that honor both spiritual commitment and existential depth, particularly in societies where religion plays a central psychological and social role. This study addresses that gap by exploring how members of a religious community navigate existential anxiety and pursue life meaning through both religious and humanistic lenses, thereby contributing to a more culturally inclusive framework of psychological well-being.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how individuals in religious societies, particularly within Islamic cultural contexts, experience and respond to existential anxiety through both religious engagement and humanistic self-reflection. The study aims to investigate how Islamic spiritual frameworks, such as *tawakkul* (trust in God), *sabr* (patience), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *dzikr* (remembrance), serve as psychological resources that help individuals navigate questions of meaning, purpose, and mortality. By integrating these religious experiences with the principles of humanistic psychology, particularly logotherapy and self-actualization, the study seeks to develop a more comprehensive approach to meaning-centered counseling.

The significance of this inquiry lies in its contribution to the development of Islamic counseling science (*ilmu bimbingan dan konseling Islam*) as both a theoretical and practical field. Islamic counseling traditionally emphasizes moral guidance, spiritual development, and

behavioral alignment with religious values (Abdullah, 2010). However, the increasing complexity of modern psychological challenges, such as existential anxiety, identity crises, and spiritual disorientation, demands a broader integrative approach that includes existential and humanistic perspectives without compromising core Islamic teachings (Hamdan, 2008).

This study bridges the gap by synthesizing religious and psychological insights to address contemporary concerns in a culturally relevant manner. It advances Islamic counseling science by proposing a model that respects the religious worldview of clients while simultaneously empowering them to find personal meaning, emotional resilience, and spiritual fulfillment. Furthermore, the findings can inform faith-based counseling practices, Islamic psychotherapy modules, and counselor training programs that aim to support clients holistically. In a time when religious identity and psychological well-being are deeply intertwined, particularly in Muslim-majority societies, integrating Islamic values with evidence-based humanistic techniques becomes not only beneficial but essential (Yusuf, 2012; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of individuals in religious communities who face existential anxiety and seek meaning in life through both spiritual and humanistic pathways. A phenomenological approach was chosen to allow for in-depth interpretation of participants' internal processes and meaning-making strategies, consistent with the goal of understanding subjective experience (Creswell, 2013).

Participants. The participants consisted of 12 adult Muslims (aged 25–50) residing in a predominantly religious region of Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria being: (1) self-identification as religiously observant, (2) having experienced existential or spiritual crises (e.g., anxiety about death, purpose, or isolation), and (3) willingness to share personal experiences. The sample included both male and female participants with diverse educational and professional backgrounds to enrich the thematic variation.

Data Collection. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting approximately 60–90 minutes per session. Interviews were conducted in person at mutually agreed locations that ensured comfort and confidentiality. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to elicit experiences related to anxiety, religious coping, life purpose, and the role of faith in meaning-making. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Research Instruments. The primary instrument was the researcher guided by a semi-structured interview guide developed from existing literature on existential psychology, humanistic counseling, and Islamic spiritual concepts. Field notes and reflective journals were also maintained to ensure contextual sensitivity and capture non-verbal cues.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) involving initial coding, theme identification, refinement, and interpretation. NVivo 12 software was used to assist with coding and organizing data. Emergent themes were triangulated with field notes and reviewed by a second coder to enhance reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Theme 1: Religious Narrative as Existential Anchor

A prominent theme that emerged from participants' narratives was the function of

religious stories, doctrines, and worldview as an existential anchor in times of psychological uncertainty and distress. For many participants, religious teachings offered a coherent narrative structure that not only explained suffering and uncertainty but also contextualized them within a broader metaphysical framework of divine will, afterlife, and moral accountability.

Several respondents described how stories from the Qur'an, particularly those involving prophets who endured hardship, such as Prophet Ayyub (Job) or Prophet Yunus (Jonah), provided powerful reference points in confronting personal adversity. These narratives were not perceived merely as symbolic or historical accounts but as living templates that guided daily responses to existential questions. For example, one participant stated:

“When I feel lost or overwhelmed, I think of Prophet Ibrahim leaving his homeland with full trust in Allah. It reminds me that sometimes, uncertainty is part of faith.” (P7, female, 38)

These accounts support previous findings suggesting that sacred texts and spiritual stories function as cognitive-emotional schemas, helping believers interpret events with meaning and maintain psychological coherence (Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005). Rather than succumbing to feelings of meaninglessness or chaos, participants often reframed suffering as a test or opportunity for spiritual elevation (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), thereby reducing existential anxiety and reinforcing agency within a religious paradigm (Nasr, 1993).

Importantly, this anchoring effect was not passive; participants actively revisited, internalized, and reinterpreted these narratives to fit their evolving life circumstances. This dynamic engagement reflects a meaning-making process deeply rooted in both theological belief and psychological need, a convergence rarely emphasized in secular humanistic models (Wong, 2012).

Thus, religious narrative in this context serves not merely as doctrine but as a lifeline, a structured, enduring, and morally compelling resource for navigating the core existential challenges of life, such as loss, mortality, and purpose.

Theme 2: Rituals Reducing Anxiety of Death and Meaninglessness

A second key theme that emerged from the participants' accounts was the central role of religious rituals in mitigating existential anxiety, particularly those related to death, uncertainty, and the search for meaning. For many individuals, daily and periodic religious practices served as a structured pathway to re-establish internal peace, reduce emotional volatility, and affirm a deeper metaphysical order beyond the transient nature of worldly life.

Participants consistently described practices such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), recitation of the Qur'an, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and attending communal worship as spiritually grounding and emotionally stabilizing. These rituals were not merely behavioral habits, but deeply intentional acts that reconnected them with divine presence and eternal truths. One participant expressed:

“Whenever I feel overwhelmed by thoughts of death or purposelessness, I perform *tahajjud* (night prayer). It brings me peace and reminds me that life is a test, not a punishment.” (P3, male, 29)

Such statements reflect the embodied nature of ritual, where action, intention, and faith converge to create a powerful emotional container for managing fear, doubt, and despair (Koenig, 2009; Pargament, 2007). Rituals offered more than psychological distraction; they functioned as existential strategies, creating space for reflection, surrender, and hope in the face of mortality and the apparent absurdity of life (Becker, 1973).

Many participants reported that even when they lacked cognitive clarity or emotional strength, simply engaging in ritual provided a visceral reassurance that “God is near” and that

their lives retained intrinsic value. This aligns with research showing that repetitive spiritual practices regulate emotional arousal and activate neural pathways associated with calm and attachment (Newberg & Waldman, 2009).

Islamic funeral rites, regular remembrance of death (*zikr al-mawt*), and charitable acts done for the deceased were perceived as ritual mechanisms for transcending death anxiety by reinforcing belief in the afterlife and the continuity of the soul. These elements together illustrate how ritual in religious societies operates as a protective and meaning-restorative system, reducing the terror of death and affirming existential purpose through symbolic and sacred action.

Theme 3: Inner Conflict and Reconciliation Through Religious Reflection

A third theme revealed in participants' narratives was the experience of inner conflict, a psychological struggle between fear, doubt, guilt, or existential despair, and the eventual reconciliation of that conflict through religious reflection and spiritual introspection. Many participants acknowledged going through periods of intense questioning about the purpose of life, divine justice, personal worthiness and the apparent contradictions between religious ideals and lived experiences.

Rather than avoiding or suppressing these internal tensions, most participants engaged in deliberate reflection on religious texts, personal prayer, and theological contemplation as a way of navigating emotional ambivalence. A recurring phrase expressed by participants was "finding peace through surrender", not as resignation but as an active, conscious trust in divine wisdom and timing. One participant shared:

"I often questioned why I suffered despite doing everything right. But the more I reflected on Surah Al-Inshirah, the more I realized that hardship itself carries mercy. That helped me stop fighting with myself." (P10, female, 33)

This theme reflects the integrative function of religious reflection: it allows individuals to hold existential paradoxes, such as hope and despair, control, and surrender, within a sacred frame that affirms both vulnerability and purpose (Al-Karam, 2018; Frankl, 1985). Rather than offering simple answers, religious reflection served as a medium for transformation, leading to self-acceptance, resilience, and renewed spiritual commitment.

Participants reported that contemplation on divine attributes such as *Al-Hakim* (The Wise), *Ar-Rahman* (The Merciful), and *Al-Adl* (The Just) helped them reframe suffering not as punishment but as part of a divinely orchestrated process of growth. These realizations often led to profound emotional relief, resolution of internal turmoil, and a heightened sense of meaning.

This aligns with prior research indicating that positive religious cognition and deep spiritual rumination are associated with improved psychological outcomes, especially among those facing trauma, loss, or existential distress (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Pargament, 2007). In this way, religious reflection became a counseling-like mechanism, enabling inner dialogue, emotional integration, and psychological healing through faith-based insight.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics and Religious Engagement

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Ritual Involvement (Daily)	Self-Reported Religious Strength	Experience of Existential Crisis
P1	Male	27	Teacher	5x Prayers, Dhikr, Qur'an	Strong	Death of sibling
P2	Female	31	Nurse	5x Prayers, Weekly Halaqah	Moderate	Divorce

P3	Male	29	Entrepreneur	Tahajjud, Qur'an reflection	Strong	Financial collapse
P4	Female	45	Housewife	5x Prayers, Charity work	Strong	Midlife meaning crisis
P5	Female	38	Lecturer	Regular Qur'an study	Very Strong	Doubts about divine justice

To explore the lived experience of existential anxiety and religious meaning-making, data were collected from twelve participants across diverse demographic and professional backgrounds. Table 1 provides a summary of five representative respondents, illustrating their gender, age, occupation, degree of ritual involvement, perceived religious commitment, and the nature of their existential distress.

As shown in Table 1, participants consistently engaged in daily and extended spiritual practices such as the five obligatory prayers (*ṣalāh*), *tahajjud* (night prayer), *dhikr*, and Qur'anic recitation. These ritual routines were described as playing a central role in their coping process. Notably, individuals with stronger self-reported religious commitment tended to report a more coherent process of reflection and recovery from existential turmoil (e.g., P3, P4, and P5). The existential triggers varied, ranging from the death of a loved one to economic collapse and spiritual doubt, indicating that existential anxiety is both universal and context-sensitive.

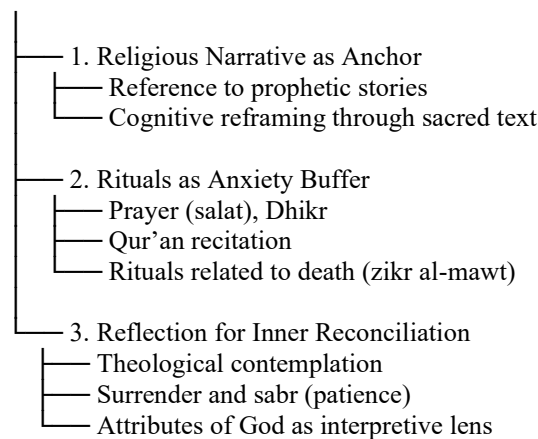


Figure 1. Religion and Existential Coping

The thematic analysis, illustrated in Figure 1, revealed a three-branch coding structure. The first theme captures how participants drew strength from the stories of the prophets and Qur'anic verses. This provided them with psychological templates for enduring hardship and reframing suffering. For instance, P7 reflected: "I think of Prophet Ibrahim leaving his home, it reminds me that uncertainty is part of faith."

The second theme shows how practices such as *tahajjud*, *dzikr*, and funerary rites functioned as emotional regulators. P3 shared that "Tahajjud helps me realign. When I pray at night, the fear of death becomes, manageable." These findings align with prior research indicating that religious rituals can reduce mortality salience and foster psychological resilience (Koenig, 2009; Becker, 1973).

The third theme uncovered how participants underwent internal struggle but ultimately found spiritual clarity through theological contemplation. As P10 stated: "Reading Surah Al-Inshirah helped me realize that hardship carries divine mercy." This reflective process led to a reframing of suffering not as divine punishment, but as spiritual refinement. To support these thematic insights, Table 2 presents select quotes from participants that exemplify each theme.

These narratives reveal the deeply personal and transformative role that religion played in mediating existential anxiety and affirming life's meaning.

These results suggest that religious individuals do not merely rely on faith passively, but actively construct existential meaning through ritual engagement, narrative integration, and reflective practices. These mechanisms provide a rich spiritual-psychological toolkit for navigating the uncertainties of life.

Table 2. Key Participant Excerpts by Theme

Theme	Participant	Quotation
Religious Narrative as Anchor	P7	"I think of Prophet Ibrahim leaving his home... it reminds me that uncertainty is part of faith."
Rituals Reducing Death Anxiety	P3	"Tahajjud helps me realign. When I pray at night, the fear of death becomes... manageable."
Reflection and Inner Reconciliation	P10	"Reading Surah Al-Inshirah helped me realize that hardship carries divine mercy."

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly resonate with Viktor Frankl's concept of the "will to meaning", the intrinsic human drive to find purpose even in the face of suffering, isolation, or uncertainty (Frankl, 1985). Across interviews, participants frequently reframed their existential distress, such as fear of death, moral guilt, or the collapse of life expectations, within a religious meaning framework. This reflective pursuit of meaning confirms Frankl's assertion that human beings can endure almost any "how" if they are given a "why" (Frankl, 1966).

Recent literature strengthens this relevance. Wong (2021) argues that Frankl's theory remains a cornerstone of existential-positive psychology, emphasizing that self-transcendence is the most stable route to flourishing and mental health. In this sense, the participants' reliance on prophetic stories, divine narratives, and eschatological beliefs represents a modern manifestation of logotherapeutic meaning-making, anchored not in secular freedom, but in spiritual submission and accountability.

Maslow's later work on self-transcendence, which he regarded as a higher need beyond self-actualization finds alignment with the participants' practices of ritual devotion, altruism, and deep spiritual reflection. These acts were not merely fulfilling individual potential but also oriented toward something greater than the self such as divine purpose, family harmony, or service to others (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). This aligns with recent empirical work by Wong and colleagues (2016), who posit that spiritual self-transcendence provides a necessary foundation for long-term well-being.

The study by Morrison (2018) supports this integration, showing that motivational self-transcendence enhances the meaningfulness of daily experiences, especially in individuals working under pressure or facing existential doubts. The themes of religious ritual and spiritual reflection identified in this study parallel what Morrison describes as "sacralized motivation", the transformation of mundane challenges into spiritually infused opportunities for growth.

Wong (2021) emphasizes the four pillars of self-transcendence, purpose, responsibility, spirituality, and humility as integral to a meaningful life. These were all reflected in participants' strategies: ritual prayer reflected responsibility and humility, reflection on divine justice fostered purpose, and surrender through *tawakkul* and *sabr* exemplified spiritual centering. These findings suggest that religious meaning-making in Islamic societies does not conflict with existential-humanistic models, but rather enriches them with theological grounding. Unlike Maslow's original hierarchy which was secular in tone, religious communities integrate spiritual transcendence as both the starting point and end goal of

human fulfillment, not simply a peak experience.

Although this study shares conceptual ground with existential-humanistic psychology, it also reveals crucial contrasts between secular existentialism and religiously grounded meaning-making. Classic secular existential theorists such as Sartre and Camus proposed that meaning is entirely self-created, often in defiance of metaphysical or religious structures. For example, Sartre's concept of "existence precedes essence" locates responsibility for meaning solely in the individual, without recourse to divine authority or absolute truth (Flynn, 2014). In contrast, participants in this study consistently derived meaning from pre-existing religious narratives, divine commandments, and eschatological beliefs. Rather than experiencing anxiety as the absurdity of a meaningless cosmos, these individuals interpreted anxiety as a test from God, a signal for self-refinement (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), or a prompt for deeper submission (*ubudiyah*).

While secular existentialism often valorizes radical autonomy and even rebellion against meaninglessness, participants in this study described surrender (*tawakkal*) as liberating, not as loss of agency, but as a redirection of will toward divine wisdom. This echoes findings from religious psychology, where spiritual surrender is associated with lower distress and higher life satisfaction (Park, 2005; Pargament, 2007). These contrasts suggest that in religious societies, existential concerns are not addressed through individualistic self-construction, but through integration into a sacred cosmology. This shift fundamentally alters the therapeutic language and ethical assumptions of existential counseling when applied in such contexts. The implications of these findings for Islamic counseling practice are significant. One practical application is the use of spiritual listening, which involves not only empathic presence but also attunement to the client's theological worldview. In Islamic settings, effective counselors must listen beyond the psychological symptoms and attend to spiritual dissonance, loss of divine connection, or crises of *tawakkul* (Yusuf, 2012).

A second application is meaning-centered dialogue, where clients are invited to reflect on divine purpose (*maqasid al-hayat*), prophetic examples, and personal acts of spiritual resilience. This is consistent with logotherapeutic techniques such as dereflection and Socratic dialogue, but reoriented through the lens of Islamic ontology (Hamdan, 2008). For instance, instead of asking, "What do you want your life to mean?", a counselor might ask, "What do you think Allah is inviting you to reflect on through this hardship?"

These meaning-centered interventions are further supported by Wong (2021) four pillars of self-transcendence: purpose, responsibility, spirituality, and humility. In Islamic terms, these are reflected in concepts such as *niyyah* (intention), *amanah* (moral responsibility), *sabr* (patience), and *taqwa* (God-consciousness). Integrating existential-humanistic theory with Islamic spiritual frameworks creates a culturally congruent counseling approach that is both psychologically empowering and theologically grounded. Such integration is especially vital in societies where religion is a central axis of identity and meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of individuals in religious societies who grapple with existential anxiety and engage in meaning-making processes through a combination of spiritual devotion and humanistic reflection. The findings demonstrate that religion functions not merely as a source of emotional comfort, but as a deeply integrated system of existential guidance that addresses fundamental human concerns such as death, suffering, and the search for purpose. Three central themes emerged: the anchoring role of religious narratives in reframing suffering; the therapeutic function of rituals in regulating anxiety related to death and meaninglessness; and the capacity of reflective spiritual practices to facilitate inner reconciliation. These insights affirm Viktor Frankl's concept of the "will

meaning” and align closely with Abraham Maslow’s model of self-transcendence, though they are contextualized within a theologically grounded worldview. In contrast to secular existential theories that prioritize individual autonomy and self-constructed meaning, participants in this study derived meaning through submission to divine will, engagement with sacred texts, and trust in metaphysical purpose. Such findings underscore the necessity of culturally and spiritually congruent models of counseling in Muslim societies. This study contributes to the advancement of Islamic guidance and counseling by proposing an integrated approach that combines the existential depth of humanistic psychology with the spiritual resources of the Islamic tradition. It encourages practitioners to adopt meaning-centered, spiritually attuned interventions that honor both the emotional and theological dimensions of clients’ experiences, thereby fostering holistic psychological and spiritual well-being.

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