



Internalizing the Values of Al-‘Afw (Forgiveness) in Islamic Counseling Services to Address Cyberbullying among Adolescents

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abstract

Background: Cyberbullying among adolescents has become a pervasive problem that damages self-esteem, disrupts peer relationships, and, in severe cases, leads to depression and self-harm. Islamic counseling services in Indonesia have not optimally internalized the value of al-‘afw (forgiveness) as a therapeutic and preventive approach, despite its central place in Islamic ethics and its documented psychological benefits for reducing anger, resentment, and cycles of retaliation.

Aims: This study aims to examine how the value of al-‘afw can be internalized within Islamic counseling services as a strategy to address gossip and cyberbullying among adolescents, and to describe the counseling model that emerges from this internalization process.

Methods: This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Islamic counselors and adolescent clients, participatory observation of counseling sessions, and documentation studies, then analyzed using an interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and method triangulation.

Results: Preliminary findings indicate that internalizing al-‘afw within Islamic counseling helps adolescent victims release resentment, reduces the perpetrators' tendency toward repeated aggression, and strengthens empathy-based communication between peers, although its effectiveness depends heavily on the counselor's spiritual competence and the client's religiosity.

Conclusions: Internalizing al-‘afw values in Islamic counseling offers a culturally and religiously grounded alternative for handling gossip and cyberbullying, and needs to be developed into a structured intervention model supported by adequate counselor training.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by emotional turbulence and high vulnerability to social pressure from peers. Advances in digital technology have fundamentally changed the face of adolescents' social interaction: gossip that once occurred only in face-to-face encounters has moved into digital spaces and transformed into cyberbullying, a form of bullying that reaches a far wider audience, continues without time limits, and leaves traces that

are difficult to erase. This condition places adolescents at considerable psychological risk, ranging from lowered self-confidence, anxiety, and withdrawal from the social environment to, in severe cases, depression and even the desire to harm oneself (Li et al., 2024). On the other hand, perpetrators of gossip and cyberbullying often act without realizing the long-term impact of their behavior, as a result of weak self-control and a limited appreciation of the religious values that should guide ethics on social media (Bukhori et al., 2024; Febriana et al., 2025).

Various international studies have shown that forgiveness-based approaches can reduce anger, resentment, and the potential for defuse anger and the urge for revenge (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018). Unfortunately, most of these interventions originate from secular psychological frameworks that do not fully address the spiritual dimension lived by Muslim communities. Yet the Islamic tradition has the concept of *al-'afw* (forgiveness), whose position is highly esteemed and is affirmed repeatedly in the Qur'an and hadith as a principal virtue of a Muslim. Al-'afw does not stop at forgetting the wrongs of others; it encompasses a deeper psycho-spiritual process, namely releasing resentment, self-acceptance, and entrusting all affairs to Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala (Abu-Raiya & Ayten, 2020).

Internalization is the process of instilling values, norms, beliefs, or teachings into a person so that these values are not only understood at the level of knowledge but are also deeply felt, believed, and embodied in everyday attitudes and behavior. From an educational perspective, internalization is a process of character formation that takes place gradually through habituation, role modeling, experience, and reflection on the values being taught (Aisyah et al., 2025). Accordingly, the success of internalization is measured not only by an individual's ability to understand a value but also by the extent to which that value becomes part of the personality and is reflected in concrete action (Curren & Ryan, 2020).

According to Muhaimin (2008), value internalization is the process of incorporating values into learners so that those values merge with their personalities and become the basis for thinking, behaving, and acting. In line with this view, Lickona (1991) explains that effective character formation cannot stop at moral knowing but must continue to moral feeling and moral action. That is, a value can be said to have been internalized when an individual not only knows the value but also has the emotional commitment to carry it out consistently in daily life.

In the context of this study, the internalization of the value of *al-'afw* (forgiveness) is understood as the process of instilling and appreciating the Islamic teachings on forgiveness in adolescents through Islamic counseling services, so that the value develops into awareness, attitudes, and real behavior in facing interpersonal conflict, including gossip and cyberbullying. This process does not merely encourage adolescents to forgive others; it also guides them to understand the spiritual meaning of forgiveness, control negative emotions, build empathy, and entrust the final resolution to Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala (Rapp et al., 2022). The internalization of *al-'afw* is therefore an important foundation for building adolescents' psychological resilience and religious character, enabling them to respond to conflict more wisely in accordance with Islamic teachings (Bukhori et al., 2024).

Islamic counseling services in fact have great potential to make the value of *al-'afw* a therapeutic approach in addressing gossip and cyberbullying among adolescents, because

Islamic counseling does not target only the cognitive and behavioral aspects, as conventional counseling does, but also touches the client's spiritual dimension, which is a source of inner strength in facing interpersonal conflict (Naqvi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, Islamic counseling practice in the field often remains at the normative level and has not yet explored in depth how the value of al-'afw can be internalized systematically in terms of techniques, stages, and indicators of success.

Studies on gossip and cyberbullying in Indonesia have in fact developed quite rapidly, from the perspectives of law, educational psychology, and general guidance and counseling. Bukhori et al. (2024), for example, identified several determinants of cyberbullying behavior among Indonesian adolescents, including family, peer group, and intensity of social media use. Meanwhile, Elbedour et al. (2020) emphasized the strategic role of school psychologists and counselors in addressing cyberbullying as a complex, cross-disciplinary social justice issue. At the level of intervention, Puspita et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of group guidance using the sociodrama technique in reducing adolescent cyberbullying behavior, while Astiti (2019) documented the effectiveness of peer counseling in resolving various student psychological problems, including interpersonal conflict.

On the other hand, studies of al-'afw in Islam have been conducted extensively from the standpoint of exegesis and Islamic psychology. Warsah (2020) comparatively reviewed forgiveness from the perspectives of positive psychology and Islam, concluding that both scholarly traditions place forgiveness as an attitude that needs to be continuously cultivated because of its positive effects on mental health, social relations, and physical health. Huda (2022) conducted a thematic study of the verses on al-'afw in the Qur'an and linked them to the concept of forgiveness in contemporary psychology, showing a strong conceptual convergence between the two. However, these studies are generally normative-textual (library research) and have rarely been tested empirically in the context of real counseling practice, particularly on the issue of adolescent gossip and cyberbullying.

Previous studies on Islamic counseling generally still deal with moral problems in general or with aspects of worship, while studies that specifically link al-'afw to the handling of adolescent cyberbullying remain very limited. Conversely, research on forgiveness therapy in the Western tradition tends to overlook the transcendental dimension that characterizes religious communities in Indonesia. This gap underlies the urgency of the present study, namely the need for an in-depth examination of how the value of al-'afw is internalized in Islamic counseling practice as a strategy to address gossip and cyberbullying among adolescents, as well as the formulation of a counseling model that is relevant to the cultural and religious context of Muslim society.

The gaps identified from previous studies are: (1) research on cyberbullying in Indonesia generally uses secular psychoeducational or cognitive-behavioral intervention approaches, without systematically addressing the client's spiritual dimension; (2) research on al-'afw in Islam is generally textual-normative and has seldom been integrated into the design of operational counseling interventions; and (3) no study has been found that specifically maps the stages of the process of internalizing al-'afw in real counseling sessions with adolescent

victims and perpetrators of gossip and cyberbullying. This study seeks to fill these gaps by combining the strengths of the empirically tested forgiveness therapy approach (Enright & Group, 1991; Worthington, 2006) with the spiritual depth of the concept of al-'afw in Islam, and by formulating them into a counseling model that is applicable for counselors in the field. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of stages of al-'afw internalization that are empirical-contextual rather than merely normative, and in the addition of the dimension of spiritual surrender (*tawakal*) as a fifth stage that complements the conventional forgiveness therapy model.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims (1) to analyze the forms of gossip and cyberbullying experienced by adolescents and their psychosocial impact, (2) to explore the process of internalizing the value of al-'afw in Islamic counseling services, and (3) to formulate an al-'afw-based Islamic counseling model that can serve as a reference for counselors in handling cases of gossip and cyberbullying among adolescents.

1.1 The Concept of Al-'Afw in Islamic Perspective

Etymologically, al-'afw derives from an Arabic word meaning to erase or to remove. In the context of morality, al-'afw is understood as an attitude of erasing the wrongs of others without bringing them up again, accompanied by a generosity of heart that extends to doing good to those who have done wrong. This value is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an as one of the characteristics of the pious and was exemplified directly by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in various events of his life. Psychologically, al-'afw contributes to a decrease in negative affect such as anger and resentment and increases the psychological well-being of the individuals who practice it (Huda, 2022).

1.2 Cyberbullying among Adolescents

Gossip is a form of informal communication that discusses an absent third party, which in many cases is negative in content and has the potential to damage a person's reputation (Romera et al., 2018). When gossip moves into the digital realm, the phenomenon can escalate cyberbullying, which is characterized by perpetrator anonymity, a wide reach of dissemination, and persistence, because digital traces are difficult to erase completely. Adolescents are the group most vulnerable to experiencing and committing cyberbullying because of their intensive use of social media and the immaturity of emotion regulation at that age (Ferrara et al., 2018; Foster, 2004).

1.3 Islamic Counseling as an Intervention Approach

Islamic counseling is a process of helping individuals live in harmony with the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, placing the spiritual dimension as an integral part of psychological healing. Unlike conventional counseling, which emphasizes rational-empirical aspects, Islamic counseling views human beings as creatures with physical, intellectual, and spiritual (*ruh*) dimensions that must be addressed holistically. In this context, the internalization of the value of al-'afw can serve as an intervention technique that directs clients to interpret interpersonal conflict, including gossip and cyberbullying, from a broader spiritual perspective (Uyun et al., 2019).

2. Methods

2.1 Research Approach and Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, chosen because its purpose is to understand in depth and in context how the process of internalizing the value of al-'afw takes place in real Islamic counseling practice, rather than to statistically test cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell, 2022). The case study is considered appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation, the internalization of spiritual values in the counseling process, depends heavily on cultural context, the counselor-client relationship, and interaction dynamics that cannot be separated from their natural setting. The case study design used is instrumental, meaning that the counseling cases studied serve as a tool for understanding the phenomenon of al-'afw internalization more broadly, not merely for understanding the cases themselves (Yin, 2018).

2.2 Location, Participants, and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted at an Islamic counseling service institution under Universitas Islam Raden Rahmat Malang, with participants selected through purposive sampling. The participants consisted of three Islamic counselors with experience handling cases of adolescent interpersonal conflict, and six adolescent clients (aged 13–18 years) who had been victims and/or perpetrators of gossip or cyberbullying and had undergone the counseling process. The inclusion criteria for clients were willingness to take part in interviews voluntarily, permission from parents or guardians, and a psychologically stable condition for being interviewed. The inclusion criteria for counselors were experience handling at least three cases of adolescent interpersonal conflict and willingness to be observed during the counseling process.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews with counselors and clients to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings constructed during the counseling process. The interview guide was developed based on the stages of conventional forgiveness therapy Enright (2001); Worthington (2006), modified with questions exploring the Islamic spiritual dimension, such as the client's understanding of the concept of al-'afw, spiritual experiences during the process of forgiving, and the role of religious belief in encouraging or hindering that process. Second, participatory observation of several counseling sessions to directly observe the techniques and stages of al-'afw internalization applied, including the language, religious metaphors, and Qur'anic verses and hadith used by the counselor. Third, documentation studies in the form of case notes, counseling process records, and other relevant supporting documents to enrich and confirm the field data.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques and Data Validity

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2019), which consists of three concurrent streams of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This process is cyclical and iterative, in which the thematic categories emerging from the data are continually refined as more field data accumulate. The thematic

categorization in this study was guided by the conceptual framework of forgiveness therapy (Enright & Group, 1991), which was then juxtaposed inductively with the Islamic spiritual themes emerging from the field data, so that the analysis proceeded in a deductive-inductive (abductive) manner. To maintain data validity, this study applied source triangulation (comparing information from counselors, clients, and documents) and method triangulation (comparing the results of interviews, observation, and documentation), complemented by member checking to confirm the researchers' interpretations with participants.

2.5 Research Ethics Considerations

Because the research topic touches on sensitive issues, namely experiences of bullying and the psychological condition of adolescents, this study applied research ethics principles strictly, including informed consent from participants and their parents or guardians, anonymization of identities in reporting data, confidentiality of information, and referral procedures to clinical psychologists if indications of psychological distress requiring further treatment were found during interviews. The researchers also limited the duration of interviews and provided breaks whenever clients showed signs of emotional fatigue, in line with the principle of caution in research involving adolescent participants on sensitive topics.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Forms and Impacts of Cyberbullying among Adolescents

Field findings show that the gossip and cyberbullying experienced by adolescents take various forms, including mockery and demeaning comments in social media comment sections, the spread of rumors through group chats, digital social exclusion (being removed from friendship groups), and bullying through anonymous accounts that make it difficult to identify the perpetrators. These modes are consistent with the characteristics of gossip, which defined as the exchange of personal information about an absent third party that is delivered evaluatively; when gossip moves into the digital realm, anonymity and permanent traces make its impact far more persistent than conventional face-to-face gossip.

The psychosocial impacts reported by clients included lowered self-esteem, excessive anxiety when opening social media, withdrawal from social interaction, and, in some cases, negative thoughts about themselves, in line with the findings of the determinants of cyberbullying behavior among Indonesian adolescents. Interestingly, this study also found that some clients who were perpetrators of gossip/cyberbullying initially did not realize the serious psychological impact experienced by their victims, and became aware of it only after going through a counseling process that built an empathic perspective, a finding that reinforces the importance of empathy-based interventions as emphasized regarding the counselor's role in addressing cyberbullying in schools.

3.1.2 Stages of Al-'Afw Value Internalization in the Counseling Process

The process of internalizing the value of al-'afw in the observed Islamic counseling services showed a pattern of four progressive stages, followed by one distinctive spiritual stage. The

first stage is cognitive awareness, in which the counselor helps the client understand the essence of al-'afw as a noble virtue exemplified by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), while correcting the mistaken understanding that forgiving means justifying the perpetrator's wrongdoing. The second stage is emotional acceptance, in which the client is facilitated to recognize and express the anger and sadness resulting from the event before being guided to release them. The third stage is behavioral enactment of forgiveness, which is evident in the client's real changes in interacting with the perpetrator and the social environment. The fourth stage is the cultivation of empathy toward the perpetrator, in which the client is guided to understand the perpetrator's possible motives and limitations without justifying their actions. The fifth stage, which characterizes Islamic counseling and is not always explicit in secular forgiveness therapy models, is surrender to Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala (spiritual surrender/*tawakal*) as a source of inner strength for forgiving sincerely and sustainably.

3.1.3 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Internalization

The effectiveness of this internalization process was found to be strongly influenced by two main factors. First, the counselor's spiritual competence, namely the depth of the counselor's understanding of Islamic sources on forgiveness and the ability to model the attitude of al-'afw within the counseling relationship itself, in line with the method of role modeling (*uswah*) that emphasized as one of the core methods of Islamic counseling. Second, the client's level of religiosity, in which clients with stronger religious commitment tended to be more responsive to the spiritual approach and showed a faster decline in resentment than clients with low religiosity. Other factors that also had an influence were the support of the family and school environment, and whether or not the conflict between victim and perpetrator had been openly resolved before the counseling process began.

3.1.4 The Al-'Afw-Based Islamic Counseling Model

Based on the five-stage pattern, this study formulates a preliminary framework of the Al-'Afw-Based Islamic Counseling Model, a structured intervention model that integrates the stages of cognitive awareness, emotional acceptance, behavioral enactment, and cultivation of empathy known in conventional forgiveness therapy, with the stage of spiritual surrender as a distinctive reinforcing element and the main differentiator from secular counseling models. At the technical level, the model emphasizes the counselor's use of three main strategies: (1) role modeling (*uswah*), in which the counselor models a forgiving attitude within the counseling relationship; (2) *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), a reflective exercise to recognize and release resentment through *muhasabah* (self-introspection); and (3) *tawakal*, the strengthening of the belief that the final resolution of a conflict is entrusted to the will of Allah, so that clients are not trapped in a prolonged cycle of resentment.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Alignment and Novelty Compared with Secular Forgiveness Therapy Models

This part of the discussion highlights the finding that the process of internalizing the value of al-'afw in Islamic counseling does not occur instantly but through gradual stages involving cognitive awareness of the essence of forgiveness, emotional acceptance of the painful event,

and the real enactment of forgiving behavior in the client's social interactions. This pattern of stages has a structural alignment with the Process Model of Forgiveness developed by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991) and Enright (2001), which divides the forgiveness process into four phases: uncovering (becoming aware of the impact of the offense), decision (deciding to forgive), work (striving for empathy toward the offender), and deepening (deepening the capacity to forgive). The pattern is also in line with the REACH model developed by Worthington (2006), which consists of five steps: recall (remembering the painful event), empathize (empathizing with the offender), altruistic gift (sincerely giving the gift of forgiveness), commit (committing to forgiveness), and hold (holding on to forgiveness when doubt resurfaces).

However, as found in this study, Islamic counseling adds a fifth dimension that is not explicit in either Enright's model or Worthington's REACH model, namely surrender to Allah (*tawakal*), which functions as a source of transcendent motivation as well as a reinforcement of the client's commitment not to return to the cycle of resentment. This dimension offers theoretical added value because secular forgiveness therapy generally stops at strengthening cognitive-emotional-behavioral aspects, whereas Islamic counseling views surrender to God as an anchor of meaning that makes forgiveness more stable and enduring, because it no longer depends solely on the individual's psychological strength but also on an eternal transcendental belief.

In addition, the findings show that the five observed stages do not always proceed linearly in actual practice; some clients repeatedly returned to the stage of emotional acceptance before finally being able to enter the stage of surrender firmly, a dynamic consistent with the cyclical nature of the forgiveness process emphasized by Enright (2001). This back-and-forth dynamic strengthens the argument that the fifth stage (*tawakal*) is not merely an administrative closing stage but an anchor of meaning that is repeatedly activated by the counselor whenever the client experiences an emotional setback, so that its function more closely resembles a thread binding the stages together than a single stage standing alone at the end of the process.

3.2.2 Theological and Psycho-Spiritual Foundations of Al-'Afw

These findings reinforce the argument of Warsah (2020) and Huda (2022) that al-'afw in Islam is not merely a moral recommendation but a psycho-spiritual concept that explicitly functions to relieve negative affect such as anger and resentment while also constituting an expression of piety. The Qur'an mentions the value of al-'afw in various verses, among them Surah Ali 'Imran (3:134), which describes the pious as those who restrain anger and forgive the faults of others, and Surah Asy-Syura (42:40), which affirms that the reward for those who forgive and make reconciliation (*islah*) rests with Allah. This theological framework provides additional meaning that secular approaches lack: forgiving is not merely an emotion regulation strategy but a form of worship and an expression of spiritual obedience, so that psychologically clients gain dual motivation, mental health and religious reward, to sustain a forgiving attitude. In this respect Islamic counseling is also in line with the holistic conceptual framework of the human being put forward by Adz-Dzaky (2002) and Az-Zahrani (2005), who view humans as

a unity of body, intellect, and spirit that must be addressed simultaneously in the process of psychological healing.

3.2.3 Contribution to Reducing Anger and Aggressive Tendencies

From a psychological standpoint, the finding that the internalization of al-'afw reduces resentment and repeated aggression in perpetrators is consistent with the meta-analysis of Baskin & Enright (2004), which showed that forgiveness-based interventions consistently produce reductions in anger and improvements in psychological well-being across clinical and non-clinical populations. Likewise, the finding of strengthened empathic communication among adolescents is in line with the study of Kim et al. (2022), which showed that forgiveness contributes to psychological health through the mediating pathways of reduced anger and increased hope. In the context of this study, the reduction of aggressive tendencies in perpetrators appeared to occur not merely because of social pressure or sanctions, but because perpetrators gained a new understanding of the impact of their actions through a counseling process that fostered empathy, a mechanism of change that is more sustainable than approaches that are merely punitive.

Furthermore, the mechanism of aggression reduction found in this study is also in line with the principle of restorative justice, which emphasizes restoring relationships rather than merely imposing sanctions, although this study did not explicitly use a restorative justice framework as a theoretical reference. The fundamental difference from conventional punitive approaches lies in the source of motivation for changes in the perpetrator's behavior: in the al-'afw-based approach, change is driven by spiritual awareness and empathy that grow from within (intrinsic), not by fear of external sanctions (extrinsic), so that theoretically the resulting change has the potential to be more enduring and independent of continuous supervision.

3.2.4 Comparison with Secular Approaches to Handling Cyberbullying in Indonesia

In the context of handling cyberbullying in Indonesia, this al-'afw-based approach offers an alternative that differs from interventions based solely on behavioral techniques, such as group guidance services using the sociodrama technique (Puspita et al., 2023) or peer counseling, which emphasizes social support among friends (Astuti, 2019). As emphasized by Elbedour et al. (2020), school counselors and psychologists have a strategic role in handling cyberbullying as a complex social justice issue; this study shows that this role can be enriched through a spiritual approach that is culturally relevant to Muslim clients, without neglecting the basic principles of professional counseling. The al-'afw-based approach also has the potential to complement, not replace, evidence-based techniques such as sociodrama and peer counseling, so that they can be combined in a more comprehensive and layered cyberbullying handling program in Islamic-based schools and campuses.

Another implication of these findings is the need for an initial assessment instrument that can help counselors map the client's level of spiritual readiness before fully applying the al-'afw internalization technique. Without such an assessment, counselors risk applying the spiritual approach uniformly without considering variations in client religiosity, which in turn may reduce the effectiveness of the intervention or even provoke resistance in clients with

looser religious commitment. The development of such an instrument needs to involve collaboration between psychometricians and Islamic counseling experts so that its validity and reliability can be scientifically accounted for.

3.2.5 The Role of Counselor Spiritual Competence and Client Religiosity as Moderators

The finding that the effectiveness of al-'afw internalization depends heavily on the counselor's spiritual competence and the client's level of religiosity indicates that this approach is not a single solution universally applicable to all. The variation in outcomes among clients with low religiosity indicates the need for an initial assessment of the client's spiritual readiness before applying this technique, as well as the importance of special training for counselors so that they can integrate the value of al-'afw systematically, rather than merely normatively, as criticized in the introduction of this study. The implication is that Islamic counselor education institutions need to include contemporary forgiveness psychology (Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2006) in their training curricula, while deepening counselors' mastery of Islamic textual sources on forgiveness, so that spiritual competence and clinical competence can develop in balance.

Beyond these three implications, the findings of this study are also relevant to the development of ethical guidelines for Islamic counselors in handling cases of gossip and cyberbullying, particularly concerning the boundary between encouraging forgiveness as a voluntary process and imposing forgiveness as a religious obligation that clients may experience as additional pressure. Counselors need to ensure that the internalization of al-'afw takes place through a dialogical process that respects the client's psychological readiness, not through one-way instruction that positions the client as a passive object in their own spiritual process.

3.2.6 Practical Implications for Guidance and Counseling Services

Practically, the findings of this study have several implications. First, for counselors and guidance and counseling teachers in Islamic schools and universities, the formulated five-stage model can serve as an initial guide for designing structured counseling sessions for cases of gossip and cyberbullying. Second, for managers of religious values-based mental health services, this study underscores the importance of providing continuous training for counselors on integrating spiritual values into evidence-based counseling techniques. Third, for education policymakers, these findings can become a basis for developing character education or guidance and counseling modules in Islamic-based schools that explicitly teach the value of al-'afw as part of the prevention (preventive) of gossip and cyberbullying, not only as handling (curative) after incidents have occurred.

3.2.8 Integrating Al-'Afw Values with Professional Counseling Ethics

The application of the value of al-'afw in Islamic counseling must remain subject to the principles of professional counseling ethics that apply universally, such as respect for client autonomy, non-maleficence, and confidentiality. As emphasized by Adz-Dzaky (2002) and Az-Zahrani (2005) in their frameworks of Islamic counseling that view human beings holistically, the spiritual dimension should enrich, not replace, the established ethical standards of the counseling profession. In the context of this study, the observed counselors consistently

positioned the invitation to forgive as a reflective offer delivered through dialogue, not as a coercive religious command, so that clients retained room to determine their own pace and way of processing traumatic experiences.

Such caution is important because gossip and cyberbullying often involve unequal power relations between victim and perpetrator, so the urge to forgive quickly without considering the client's emotional readiness may produce what the forgiveness literature calls premature forgiveness, that is, forgiveness forced before the process of emotional acceptance is complete, which may conceal psychological wounds rather than heal them. Therefore, the al-'afw-based Islamic counseling model formulated in this study places the emotional acceptance stage as a prerequisite before clients are directed into the stage of behavioral enactment of forgiveness, in line with the same caution emphasized in the Process Model of Forgiveness (Enright, 2001).

3.2.9 Opportunities and Challenges of Replicating the Model in Other Institutional Contexts

As a model formulated from a case study at a single counseling service institution, the Al-'Afw-Based Islamic Counseling Model has the potential to be replicated in other institutional contexts such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), Islamic-based schools, and guidance and counseling units at other universities, considering that the need to handle adolescent gossip and cyberbullying cuts across institutions. Nevertheless, such replication needs to account for variations in cultural and religious context across regions of Indonesia, since levels of religiosity and religious understanding in society may differ, as shown by the importance of client religiosity as a moderator of effectiveness in the findings of this study.

Another challenge to anticipate is the availability of counselors with balanced spiritual and clinical competence, since not all Islamic counselor education institutions in Indonesia explicitly equip their curricula with contemporary forgiveness therapy competencies (Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2006). Resource limitations, whether in the available counseling session time or the ratio of counselors to students, may also hinder the full application of the five-stage model in institutions with heavy service loads. Therefore, adapting the model to other institutional contexts should be contextual and gradual, beginning with brief training for counselors on the basic principles of al-'afw internalization before being expanded into a more comprehensive structured program.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the internalization of the value of al-'afw in Islamic counseling services offers a culturally and religiously rooted alternative for handling gossip and cyberbullying among adolescents, while enriching the body of forgiveness therapy with the transcendental dimension characteristic of Muslim communities. The internalization process takes place through five interconnected stages, namely cognitive awareness, emotional acceptance, behavioral enactment of forgiveness, cultivation of empathy toward the perpetrator, and surrender to Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala, with effectiveness moderated by the counselor's spiritual competence and the client's level of religiosity. Theoretically, this study contributes to bridging the study of Islamic ethics on al-'afw with the contemporary psychological framework of forgiveness, particularly the Process Model of Forgiveness and the REACH model, while

offering a fifth dimension of spiritual surrender that enriches both models. Practically, the framework of the Al-'Afw-Based Islamic Counseling Model formulated in this study, with its three technical strategies of role modeling, *tazkiyatun nafs*, and *tawakal*, can serve as an initial reference for Islamic counselors, guidance and counseling teachers, and managers of religious values-based mental health services in handling cases of gossip and cyberbullying among adolescents. Future research is recommended to develop this model into a more structured and tested intervention module, accompanied by a counselor training curriculum that specifically equips spiritual competence in internalizing al-'afw. In addition, further research with quantitative or mixed-methods designs on larger, cross-institutional samples is needed to test the model's effectiveness empirically, for example by using standardized measurements of trait anger, resentment, and clients' psychological well-being before and after the intervention, and by comparing its effectiveness with existing secular forgiveness therapy approaches.

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