

DIGITAL DA'WAH AS SPIRITUAL THERAPY: ANALYZING HABIB JA'FAR'S COUNSELING APPROACH TO GEN-Z DEPRESSION

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Abstract: This article explores the phenomenon of depression among Generation Z by integrating a cognitive psychological perspective with the approach of digital da'wah counseling. According to Aaron T. Beck's theory, depression arises from cognitive distortions that form the *Cognitive Triad of Depression* negative views of oneself, the world, and the future. Meanwhile, Johann Hari emphasizes that depression is closely linked to the loss of connection with nature and with other human beings. This disconnection deprives individuals of opportunities to restore balance through outdoor activities that stimulate happiness hormones and through meaningful social interactions that provide emotional support and empathy. Within this context, the study highlights the importance of a contextual and empathetic da'wah approach, exemplified by Habib Ja'far through his digital channel *Jeda Nulis*. His method integrates Islamic spiritual values with modern counseling principles, making da'wah not only informative but also therapeutic. The research employs a qualitative *content analysis* of the video "Why Is Gen-Z Easily Depressed? (ft. Hasan Askari)" to uncover the embedded messages and counseling values. The findings indicate that digital da'wah incorporating counseling principles can serve as an effective form of spiritual therapy to address Gen-Z's mental health crisis, provided it is delivered through empathetic communication, a humanistic approach, and ethical use of digital media.

Keywords: Digital Da'wah, Islamic Counseling, Gen-Z, Depression, Habib Ja'far, Spiritual Therapy, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Depression among Gen Z has become an increasingly urgent and relevant issue, especially in today's digital era. The *Survei Kesehatan Indonesia* (SKI, 2023) reported that the prevalence of depression among the Indonesian population is around 1.4%, meaning that approximately one out of every hundred people experience depression. This condition is characterized by various symptoms such as changes in sleep patterns, mood swings, feelings of hopelessness, unexplained

sadness, and loss of interest. The prevalence of depression has increased significantly among vulnerable groups such as Gen Z, women, the unemployed, and university students. This situation is exacerbated by the influence of social media, which creates unrealistic standards of living and encourages social comparison.

In this context, *da'wah* which should ideally serve as a source of tranquility and spiritual guidance often fails to address the core issues faced by Gen Z (Marwantika, 2015). Conventional *da'wah* approaches are sometimes perceived as less relevant, making them ineffective in providing real solutions to the mental health crises experienced by this generation. Therefore, innovative and contextual *da'wah* strategies are needed those that can integrate spiritual values with modern counseling approaches (Muhaemin, 2017).

Furthermore, in the digital era which has become the main space of interaction for Gen Z the process of disseminating information has evolved rapidly. This can be seen from how easily information on various topics can now be accessed. This accessibility can be utilized as a medium for providing counseling services. In counseling, the delivery of information can also be integrated with *da'wah* activities, as demonstrated by one of the preachers, Habib Ja'far (Ramadhani & Halwati, 2014).

Indeed, *da'wah* is closely linked to Islamic guidance and counseling, as both aim to nurture, improve, and guide individuals toward better spiritual, emotional, and social well-being (Aini, 2023). In this context, Islamic guidance and counseling form a more personal and in-depth part of the *da'wah* process, focusing on helping individuals understand their life problems through Islamic values and find solutions consistent with *shariah* principles. A *da'i* (preacher) who understands the principles of Islamic guidance and counseling can address the psychological and spiritual aspects of the *mad'u* (audience) more effectively (Azwar, 2024).

Through his *da'wah* delivered via digital platforms, Habib Ja'far seeks to inspire his audience toward goodness. He explains that *da'wah* aimed at young people should not be confined to mosques but can be effectively delivered through social media a method that remains underutilized. Therefore, the use of digital platforms for *da'wah* is highly essential in the current era, as today's youth can no longer be separated from information and communication technology. These technologies play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes, ways of thinking, and psychological dimensions (Sumardianto, 2025).

This article aims to analyze in depth the *da'wah counseling* strategies implemented by Habib Ja'far in addressing the issue of depression among Gen Z. Specifically, this study has two main objectives: first, to identify and analyze the digital *da'wah counseling* approaches used by Habib Ja'far who skillfully packages Islamic messages to be relatable and meaningful for Gen Z, a generation known for being open-minded and critical, by utilizing social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Second, to unpack the counseling elements integrated within his *da'wah*, such as the use of empathetic language, emphasis on self-acceptance, discussions with experts like psychologists or psychiatrists, and practical solutions grounded in spirituality. Ultimately, this article seeks to answer the fundamental question of how *da'wah* and counseling can function as both spiritual therapy and a concrete solution to mental health issues particularly depression among today's youth through the optimal use of digital *da'wah* and counseling platforms (Fanani et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method using a content analysis approach to explore and interpret the meanings embedded within the video content uploaded by the YouTube channel *Jeda Nulis* (featuring Habib Ja'far). This approach was chosen because the researcher aims not only to identify surface-level elements within the videos but also to uncover deeper themes, messages, and values both explicit and implicit. Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to understand the social, cultural, psychological, and religious contexts underlying the content, thereby producing a more profound and comprehensive interpretation.

Data in this research were collected using a non-participant observation technique. The researcher directly observed videos uploaded by the *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel specifically the video titled "*Why Is Gen Z Easily Depressed? (ft. Hasan Askari)*" without engaging in direct interaction with the content creator or the audience. This observation process was conducted systematically, where the researcher selected the video based on specific criteria such as topic relevance, invited guest, and main discussion points. The researcher recorded in detail every element that appeared in the video, including the narrative delivered by Habib Ja'far and psychologist Hasan Askari, as well as gestures, language use, and visual symbols. The results of this observation served as the primary data for further analysis.

Once the data were collected, the next step involved applying the data reduction technique. This technique is the initial phase of qualitative data analysis, aimed at filtering, sorting, and summarizing complex data into a more organized form. The data reduction process was carried out by sorting through the observation notes. The researcher repeatedly read the video transcripts or notes to identify key words, phrases, or sentences relevant to the research focus. Irrelevant data were discarded, while significant data were grouped and coded. For example, data discussing depression were categorized together. The outcome of this reduction process was a more focused summary of the data, ready for interpretation.

After completing data reduction, the grouped data proceeded to the next analytical stage data display and conclusion drawing. In the data display phase, the researcher presented the reduced data summary in a narrative format to facilitate understanding. From this presentation, the researcher began to interpret the findings to identify patterns, relationships, and deeper meanings. The final stage was conclusion drawing, in which the researcher formulated key findings from the entire analytical process to comprehensively answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aaron T. Beck, a psychiatrist and pioneer of cognitive therapy, defines depression from a cognitive perspective. According to him, depression is the result of cognitive distortions or deviant negative thought patterns. He developed the concept of the "Cognitive Triad of Depression," which consists of three negative views:

1. Negative view of the self: Feeling worthless, incompetent, and blaming oneself for failures.
2. Negative view of the world: Perceiving the environment or experiences as demanding and full of obstacles.
3. Negative view of the future: Seeing the future as bleak, hopeless, and without improvement.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*, depression is classified as a Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), which is characterized by the presence of at least five of the following symptoms during a two-week period. The symptoms

include a persistently depressed mood most of the day, loss of interest or pleasure in some or all activities, insomnia, feelings of restlessness, decreased ability to think or concentrate, and recurrent thoughts of suicide (Widia et al., 2025).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is a common mental illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that are usually enjoyable. Depression can affect an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and can cause various physical and emotional problems. The WHO also states that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide (Ramadhani & Halwati, 2014).

In general, based on these definitions, it can be concluded that depression is not merely an ordinary feeling of sadness but rather a persistent and significant mood disorder that affects a person's psychological, cognitive, and physical functioning as a whole. This distinguishes it from temporary sadness or disappointment, which are normal parts of life (Azizah et al., 2022). In the video titled "*Why Is Gen-Z Easily Depressed? (ft. Hasan Askari)*" uploaded on the YouTube channel *Jeda Nulis*, Habib Ja'far converses with psychologist Hasan Askari. Hasan Askari explains that contemporary psychologists believe depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the human brain specifically, a deficiency in the production of serotonin, a hormone that regulates mood stability. Consequently, depression is often treated by restoring serotonin levels through antidepressant medication. However, prolonged use of such medication can lead to resistance, a condition in which the body becomes immune to the drug's intended therapeutic effects (Saputra, 2025).

To avoid the risk of resistance, it is necessary to conduct a deeper study of the causes of depression in order to find appropriate solutions. According to Johann Hari, the causes of depression include the following:

1. Loss of Connection with Nature

Johann Hari, in his book *Lost Connections*, explains that modern humans live "from indoor to indoor, through indoor." This means that modern people leave home (indoor), go to the office (indoor), and travel by car (indoor). However, humans are not designed to live in boxes; they need to connect with nature and engage in outdoor activities. Psychologically, being in touch with nature can increase the production of serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins three hormones essential for human happiness. Allah SWT says in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Jumu'ah [62]:1 and Al-Hasyr [59]:24:

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

Translation: "Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth glorifies Allah."

Habib Ja'far emphasizes that everything in the universe glorifies Allah SWT

This underlines the importance of humans maintaining their connection with nature because, from a psychological perspective, communion with nature offers numerous benefits. This concept is known as biophilia, a hypothesis proposed by Edward O. Wilson, which suggests that humans have an innate bond with the natural world.

Being in nature helps reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Interacting with natural environments such as forests, parks, or beaches has been scientifically proven to lower stress hormone levels, such as cortisol. The Attention Restoration Theory (ART), developed by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, explains that nature allows the brain to rest from

mental fatigue caused by continuous directed attention. Natural environments, with their gentle and engaging stimuli, enable “involuntary attention,” which restores our cognitive capacity (Saputra, 2025).

Beyond mental benefits, interacting with nature also has positive effects on physical health. Activities such as walking outdoors can increase endorphin production, the hormone responsible for feelings of happiness (Novianto, 2024). Research also shows that exposure to sunlight can boost vitamin D levels, which are vital for bone health and mood regulation. Emotionally, nature provides a sense of tranquility. Being in an environment greater than oneself can reduce feelings of isolation and foster self-reflection, helping individuals feel more connected to the world around them (Chintyasari, 2025).

2. Loss of Connection with Fellow Humans

Social interaction plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health and serves as one of the most effective strategies to reduce depression, as humans are inherently social beings who cannot live in isolation (La Abute, 2019). One of the primary benefits of socializing is the presence of social support. When we interact with others, we feel less lonely and more supported in facing life’s challenges. Sharing stories and emotions with friends, family, or partners can reduce emotional burdens. Receiving empathy and validation from others helps us feel understood and accepted essential components for building psychological resilience against stress.

Biologically, positive social interactions can trigger the release of oxytocin, often referred to as the “love hormone,” as well as endorphins. Oxytocin increases feelings of trust, affection, and happiness, directly countering loneliness and isolation commonly associated with depression. Meanwhile, endorphins act as natural pain relievers and mood enhancers.

Socializing also serves as a healthy distraction from negative thoughts and rumination (excessive brooding), which are typical symptoms of depression. Engaging in shared activities such as dining, watching movies, or exercising helps divert attention from internal distress. Humor and laughter during social interactions are also effective in reducing tension and lowering levels of the stress hormone cortisol. In summary, socializing is not merely a basic human need but also a form of therapy. It creates a supportive environment, triggers positive biological responses, and provides individuals with meaningful reasons to stay engaged with the outside world (Zidansyah, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Depression, from Aaron T. Beck’s cognitive perspective, arises from cognitive distortions that produce the Cognitive Triad of Depression negative views of the self, the world, and the future. These negative thought patterns trap individuals in feelings of worthlessness, pressure from their environment, and a loss of hope. Meanwhile, Johann Hari emphasizes that depression is also closely related to a loss of connection, both with nature and with fellow human beings. Disconnection from nature deprives individuals of opportunities to restore balance through outdoor activities that stimulate happiness-related hormones. Similarly, the loss of social interaction results in diminished emotional support, empathy, and a sense of belonging, ultimately worsening psychological well-being.

Thus, depression is not merely an issue of negative thinking but also a problem of losing essential life connections. Efforts to heal and prevent depression should therefore focus not only on cognitive restructuring but also on reconnecting with nature and strengthening healthy social interactions.

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