

Mental Health from Al-Ghazali's Perspective

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Abstract

Al-Ghazali defines mental health as a harmony between mental and physical functions characterised by a person's ability to adapt to their environment. This theme is an important study because it reveals the concept of mental health from one of the Islamic figures, namely Al-Ghazali. The purpose of this study is to examine and explore the understanding related to mental psychology expressed by Al-Ghazali. The method used in this study is library research or literature study by utilising content analysis to identify patterns, themes or concepts contained in the content. The results of this study show several points, namely (1) The soul is defined by Al-Ghazali as a subtle and single spiritual substance that is not divided, or commonly called Al-Nafs. (2) Al-Ghazali categorises a healthy soul as one that can be characterised by a strong model of faith, freedom from heart disease, noble morals, good social relationships, and the achievement of happiness in this world and the hereafter. (3) Al-Ghazali also explains the efforts required to achieve peace and happiness in order to attain true mental health. These efforts can take the form of mujahadah or sincere efforts in the form of dhikr, worship and good deeds, riyadlah or spiritual training in the form of restraining lust and guarding the tongue, and also tazkiyatun nafs or purification of the soul which is divided into three stages, namely takhalli, tahalli, and tajalli.

Keywords: Health, Soul, Al-Ghazali

Abstrak

Kesehatan jiwa menurut Al-Ghazali adalah keserasian antara fungsi mental dan fisik yang ditandai dengan kemampuan seseorang untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan lingkungannya. Tema ini menjadi kajian penting karena mengungkap konsep kesehatan jiwa dari salah satu tokoh Islam yaitu Al-Ghazali. Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk mengkaji dan mengeksplorasi pemahaman terkait psikologi kejiwaan yang diungkap oleh Al-Ghazali. Metode dalam penelitian ini menggunakan *library research* atau studi pustaka dengan memanfaatkan analisis konten dengan mengidentifikasi pola, tema ataupun konsep yang ada dalam konten. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan beberapa poin, yaitu (1) Jiwa diartikan oleh Al-Ghazali sebagai substansi ruhani yang halus dan tunggal yang tidak bercerai-berai, atau biasa disebut juga dengan *Al-Nafs*. (2) Al-Ghazali mengkategorikan jiwa yang sehat yang dapat dicirikan dengan model aqidah yang kokoh, bebas dari penyakit hati, akhlak yang mulia, hubungan sosial yang baik, dan mencapai kebahagiaan dunia dan akhirat. (3) Al-Ghazali juga menjelaskan tentang usaha-usaha dalam mencapai ketenangan dan kebahagiaan agar memiliki kesehatan jiwa yang hakiki. Usaha-usaha tersebut dapat berupa *mujahadah* atau usaha sungguh-sungguh berupa dzikir, ibadah dan amal saleh, *riyadlah* atau latihan rohaniyah berupa menahan nafsu dan



menjaga lisan, dan juga *tazkiyatun nafs* atau penyucian jiwa yang terdiri dari tiga tahap yaitu *takhalli*, *tahalli*, dan *tajalli*.

Kata Kunci: Kesehatan, Jiwa, Al-Ghazali

Introduction

Mental health has been widely discussed in various literatures, especially from the perspective of Islamic figures. Mental health itself is an asset in human growth and development. This study is important because it provides a detailed explanation of the concept of mental health from Al-Ghazali's perspective. Al-Ghazali's thoughts show a high relevance to current human mental health issues. The definition of mental health is not limited to the fact that humans do not have mental disorders, but also considers the growth and development of the human personality (B & Hasan, 2017).

Al-Ghazali himself revealed that the essence of humans consists of four important parts, namely the soul or *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh*, and *aql* (Massuhartono & Mukaromah, 2019). In its role, the human soul will be influenced by the human form, which consists of material and immaterial properties. Al-Ghazali, in his book *Kimiya' al-Sa'adah*, likens the soul to a city government. The heart is likened to the king, the mind to the prime minister, desire to the governor of the region, anger to the enemy, and the members of the body, both external and internal, to the army. This is interpreted as a metaphor for the soul working according to its function to bring about tranquillity and peace. Therefore, Al-Ghazali emphasises the essence of humanity in the soul (Soleh, 2022).

There have been several previous studies examining mental health from Al-Ghazali's perspective. Al-Ghazali's thoughts on spiritual health are based on the science of Sufism that he revealed (Fasya, 2022). This research then became the basis for Islamic psychology (Ghofur, 2018). In addition, Al-Ghazali also examined the concepts of truth (Soleh et al., 2023) and happiness (Soleh, 2022a), which are part of human mental health. In a related study, Al-Ghazali also revealed three stages to achieve happiness, namely knowing one's own potential, making the heart the leader, and focusing attention on Allah (Soleh, 2023).

Apart from that, there are also several studies that examine psychological therapy from Al-Ghazali's perspective. Al-Ghazali's well-known psychological therapy is *tazkiyatun nafs* therapy (Hanafi F. L. and Hambali A.Y.R., 2023). This method is also considered relevant for its implications in the world of Islamic education (Mutholingah, 2021). Apart from that, there is also research that discusses the therapy for arrogance as studied in Al-Ghazali's spiritual theory (Adam & Omar, 2023). This study explains that arrogance can be one of the causes of human mental illness that is important to treat. In other literature, Al-Ghazali also explains that spiritual therapy can also be done through *tafakur* or efforts to gain new knowledge (Ibrahim et al., 2020). In contrast, Al-Ghazali also reveals the importance of spiritual intelligence education, which currently has great relevance to humans (Safitri et al., 2023).

Based on the results of previous studies that have been reviewed, there are quite a number of studies that raise awareness of the importance of human mental health, particularly from Al-Ghazali's perspective. It can also be understood that Al-Ghazali involves spirituality in his therapeutic process (Pratama & Ghozi, 2025). However, researchers consider it necessary to conduct further in-depth research on the concept of mental health from Al-Ghazali's perspective



and his psychological therapy. Therefore, this study aims to examine and analyse in greater depth the concept of mental health as presented by Al-Ghazali. By using this interdisciplinary approach, the researchers hope to gain a deeper understanding of the theme being studied so as to improve human mental health.

Research Method

This study focuses on psychological concepts expressed by Al-Ghazali. The method used is *library research*, which involves providing explanations about the topic and conducting research on relevant literature and sources (Adlini et al., 2022). This research method cites and combines various data related to the theme raised through topics that have been found previously. In this study, the author attempts to identify and explain the concept of mental health as described by Al-Ghazali.

The discussion of this topic uses data sources obtained from various related literature such as books, journals, articles, research reports, and so on. The analysis used by the researcher here is content analysis by identifying patterns, themes or concepts in the content. The researcher also utilised a literature review by identifying previous literature related to the theme as a development of this article.

Results and Discussion

A. The Nature of the Soul

The soul, according to Al-Ghazali, is a subtle and singular spiritual substance that is indivisible, also commonly referred to as *Al-Nafs* (Muthhar et al., 2023). Linguistically, *al-nafs* is interpreted as spirit, self, or desire. There are two meanings for the word "soul" or "*al-nafs*". The first is the force that gathers anger, desire, and bad traits. The second is the state of humans that functions as a container and motivator for human behaviour. Al-Ghazali said that the soul has the ability to think, remember, and so on, but the soul is a spiritual element that helps the body carry out its functions (Massuhartono & Mukaromah, 2019).

According to Al-Ghazali, humans themselves have three characteristics. First, animalistic characteristics such as eating, drinking, and sex. Second, satanic characteristics such as inciting evil, deceit, and lies. Third, angelic characteristics such as spreading goodness, developing knowledge, and conveying the majesty of God. (Soleh, 2022b) In a psychological context, the psychic dimension influences humans, where human values and qualities originate in the dimension of the soul or *nafs*. This means that even though humans consist of a material form or body and immaterial forms such as *qalb*, *ruh*, *aql* and *nafs*, each will have an impact on their psychological dimension. Thus, the soul functions as a vehicle that drives the substances of the human soul itself.

Al-Ghazali describes the human being (*nafs*) as a city-state in his book *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Its king is *the heart*, its entire territory is the body, its prime minister is *the intellect*, its governors are the desires, and its enemy is anger. Meanwhile, the king's army consists of the members of the body, both external and internal. (Cholik, 2015). This is an analogy of the human soul: if every substance of our body functions according to its purpose, then the human soul itself will feel at peace. Referring to this, Al-Ghazali emphasises the

soul as the essence of humanity. This is what distinguishes humans from other creatures. Humans can think, have free will, and act with their souls. In fact, their safety and happiness depend on the state of their souls. If their souls are impure, they will display their badness, and vice versa. (Muthhar et al., 2023). The essence of humanity according to Al-Ghazali can be illustrated in the diagram below:

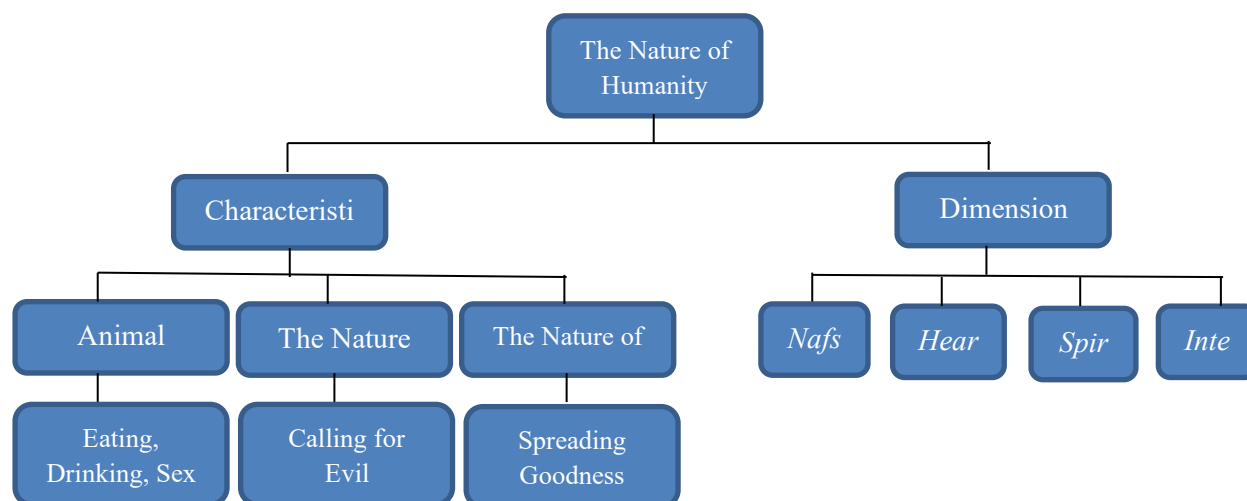


Chart 1. The Nature of Human Beings

B. The Concept of Mental Health

According to Al-Ghazali, harmony between mental and physical functions is known as spiritual health, which is characterised by a person's ability to adapt to their environment. In his book *Ihya Ulumuddin*, Al-Ghazali reveals his thoughts on the characteristics of spiritual health (Al-Ghazali, 2011). The first is a strong faith or belief in Allah SWT. The foundation of human life is faith. People with strong faith have a purpose in life and know the roots of their existence. Therefore, they will feel peace of mind and will not experience alienation in their lives. The second characteristic is freedom from heart disease. Peace and happiness cannot be achieved without a clear heart. The source of peace in life is the heart. A person free from heart ailments always lives more realistically and peacefully..

In addition, the third characteristic revealed by Al-Ghazali is noble character. Mental health disorders stem from poor morals. Bad character is also described as poison or filth that can distance a person from Allah SWT. Hypocrisy, following one's desires, talking too much, anger, envy, arrogance, and pride are characteristics of people who experience mental or psychological disorders (B & Hasan, 2017). This is because of their potential to destroy peace and tranquillity of the soul. The fourth characteristic is productive social relationships. People with healthy souls will be able to face life's challenges, be beneficial to themselves and others, accept and appreciate diverse opinions, and meet life's challenges in their social environment. Al-Ghazali considers good social relationships between oneself and one's parents, family, friends, and others to be important (Sanjari & Pratiwi Nurlita, 2023).

The fifth characteristic is feeling happy in this world and the hereafter. People with healthy souls will have feelings of health and happiness (Sanjari & Pratiwi Nurlita, 2023).

In addition, people who are happy with themselves will be able to overcome various conditions in their daily lives. Al-Ghazali revealed that a person's state of mind is very important for human life. Individuals who are able to be useful and face challenges in life are only those who have mental health and are able to feel happiness. Various aspects of an individual's life can show symptoms of mental illness, such as thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and physical health (B & Hasan, 2017). The description of mental health according to Al-Ghazali can be illustrated in the diagram below:

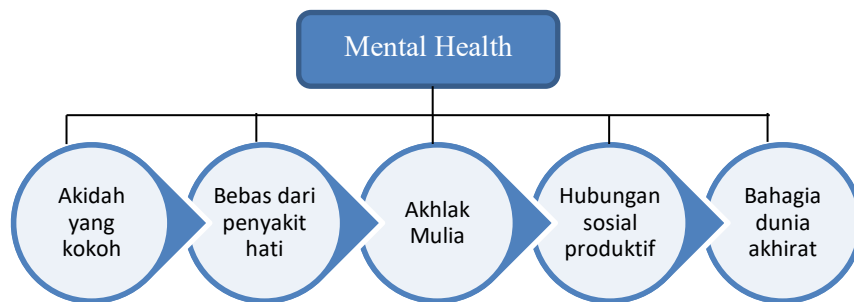


Figure 2. Mental Health According to Al-Ghazali

C. How to Achieve Mental Health According to Al-Ghazali

In the process of achieving mental health, Al-Ghazali applies the principles of *mujahadah* and *riyadlah* in his teaching methods. Specifically for the purpose of improving mental health, Al-Ghazali applies the *tazkiyatun nafs* method. In the *mujahadah* method, humans strive to resist their desires as a form of resistance against all bad traits and behaviours that arise from *nafs al-ammarah*. Therefore, *mujahadah* is defined as an intense effort made by humans to resist their desires, wants, and ambitions with the aim of achieving a purer soul (Apipudin, 2016). This is in line with Al-Ghazali's statement that guidance is dependent on the behaviour of jihad. Whoever is sincere in jihad will receive His pleasure. Conversely, whoever abandons it will be deprived of guidance (Apipudin, 2016).

Unlike *mujahadah*, Al-Ghazali applied the principle of *riyadlah* as a form of spiritual training to purify the soul (Salsabila & Tentiasih, 2024). This is intended as self-control, both of the soul and the body. The process begins with purifying the soul from everything except Allah, and then beautifying the soul through remembrance of Allah, worship, righteous deeds, and noble character. *Riyadlah* itself can be used as a means for humans to perfect themselves. Al-Ghazali argues that the practice of *riyadlah* can be done by advising oneself towards enlightenment about the existence of God or other worship activities (B & Hasan, 2017). The forms of *riyadlah* as described by Al-Ghazali include limiting unnecessary speech to guard the tongue from idle talk, training oneself to control desires, and so on.

In addition to the two points above, Al-Ghazali also revealed the method of *tazkiyatun nafs* as one way of managing mental health. Linguistically, *tazkiyatun nafs* is defined as purification of the soul. In terms of terminology, *tazkiyatun nafs* is interpreted as an effort to purify the soul from various diseases of the heart by utilising Sufi therapy. In relation to

spiritual therapy, Al-Ghazali introduced the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs*, which consists of three stages. The first stage is *takhalli*, the cleansing of the heart, which aims to eliminate all negative thoughts and actions that can pollute the heart. The second stage is *tahalli*, or the cultivation of virtuous behaviour within oneself. The third stage is *tajalli*, where the individual has attained a healed soul with deep-rooted awareness in the heart. The process of achieving mental health according to Al-Ghazali is illustrated in the diagram below:

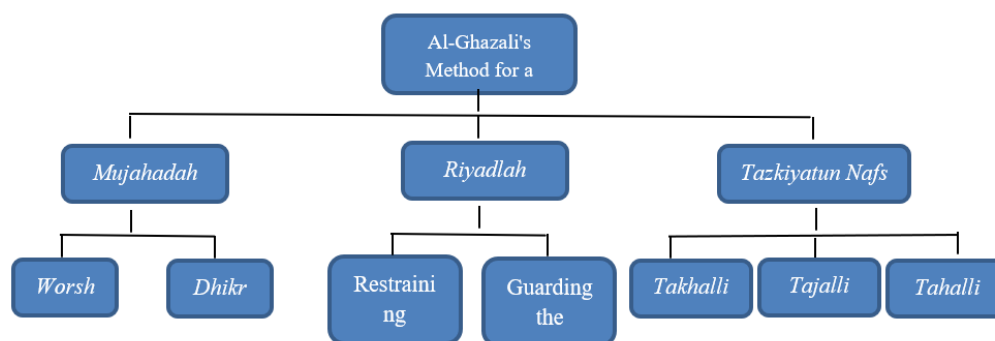


Chart 3. How to Achieve Mental Health According to Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali defines the soul as one of the single spiritual substances that are important to humans, in addition to *the heart*, *spirit*, and *intellect*. In his philosophical works, Al-Ghazali reveals that the soul is the essential identity possessed by humans and cannot be separated (Massuhartono & Mukaromah, 2019). Al-Ghazali also describes humans (*nafs*) in the book *Kimiya' al-Sa'adah* as a city of government. The king is *the heart*, the entire territory is the body, the prime minister is *the mind*, the governor of the territory is desire, and the enemy is anger. Meanwhile, the king's army consists of the body's members, both external and internal. (Cholik, 2015) This is an analogy of the human soul: if every substance of our body functions according to its purpose, then the human soul itself will feel at peace. Therefore, Al-Ghazali emphasises the soul as the essence of humanity.

Every state of mind will have an impact on human thought patterns, which in turn shape human actions or behaviour (Manawi et al., 2021). Of course, these two substances must work together to improve humans. This is reinforced by Al-Ghazali's statement that humans must have several powers, such as the power of knowledge, anger, desire, and balance. His opinion reveals that each power requires balanced control in its operation, because without control of the soul, human thinking patterns will become more free, and vice versa (Khodirun, 2024). In this way, humans can produce what is called peace of mind and tranquillity of thought.

According to Al-Ghazali, harmony between mental and physical functions is known as mental health, which is characterised by a person's ability to adapt to their environment. Mental health does not only mean that a person does not have mental disorders or illnesses, but also has a good personality, good physical and psychological growth, independence in mental balance and outlook, resilience to stress, independence, perception of reality free from distortion, and empathy. According to Islamic beliefs, mental health is based on faith

and piety, as well as the desire to live a meaningful life in this world and the hereafter (Sanjari & Pratiwi Nurlita, 2023).

According to Al-Ghazali, a healthy soul can be characterised by a strong faith, freedom from spiritual illness, noble character, good social relationships, and the attainment of happiness in this world and the hereafter (B & Hasan, 2017). Mental health should be nurtured from an early age. This is because humans are born with a pure and faithful nature. This is where religion plays a role, whether in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. Religion provides guidance in preserving human nature. Through the preservation of human nature, individuals will grow and develop well without mental health issues.

According to Al-Ghazali, peace and happiness within humans can be achieved through the control of the soul and mind over desires and anger. Al-Ghazali's two principles of happiness are that it must be pursued and that it is gradual. The first principle indicates that humans must strive to achieve happiness. The second principle indicates that happiness is not singular (Soleh, 2022b). This means that all human beings are capable of feeling happiness, but the quality of happiness differs for each individual. Witnessing the greatness of Allah SWT is the highest level of happiness.

Al-Ghazali also explains the efforts required to achieve peace and happiness. This is intended to enable humans to attain true spiritual health. These efforts can take the form of *mujahadah* or sincere effort, *riyadlah* or spiritual training, and also *tazkiyatun nafs* or purification of the soul, which consists of three stages, namely *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli* (Harahap & Hendra, 2022). However, the changes that occur in humans can be very rapid or very slow. This is because the basic nature of humans is not the same in accepting change. These differences can be due to the character that has been carried since birth and has become a characteristic of humans, or the bias of bad morals that can make it difficult for individuals to adopt good morals.

In line with this, Al-Ghazali wrote in his book *Bidayah al-Hidayah* about tips for mental health. He revealed that one of the keys to achieving peace of mind is through practising to abandon worldly things that have the potential to damage the soul (Salsabila & Tantiasih, 2024). This aims to avoid all negative thoughts that can interfere with mental health. This book discusses three main aspects of mental development that can be applied by adolescents experiencing mental health issues. First is obedience by living life according to the example of the Prophet Muhammad. Second is avoiding sin by steering clear of actions that lead to sin. Third is maintaining a balanced relationship between humanity and the Creator, as well as among fellow human beings. By maintaining this balance, humans can avoid the difficulties arising from life in this world.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that (1) Al-Ghazali defines the soul as a subtle and singular spiritual substance that is indivisible, also commonly referred to as *Al-Nafs*. (2) Al-Ghazali categorises a healthy soul as one that can be characterised by a strong model of faith, freedom from heart disease, noble character, good social relationships (), and the attainment of happiness in this world and the hereafter. (3) Al-Ghazali also explains the efforts required to achieve peace and happiness in order to have true spiritual health. These

efforts can take the form of *mujahadah* or sincere effort, *riyadlah* or spiritual training, and also *tazkiyatun nafs* or purification of the soul, which consists of three stages, namely *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli*. This idea also mentions the importance of behaviour in dealing with human mental health.

Methodologically, the writing of articles in this study cannot yet be considered perfect. Further development and research on Al-Ghazali's psychological concepts through related literature is needed. The writing can be presented in the form of tables or charts in each discussion so that the essence of the writing can be easily understood. In addition, future researchers are expected to further explore the significant understanding related to the concept of mental health revealed by Al-Ghazali.

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