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Al-Ghazali's Theory of Resilience: A Tawakkul-Based Islamic Therapeutic Approach for Bullying Victims

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Abstract

Bullying phenomena in Indonesia, particularly among students, demonstrate a high prevalence and generate serious psychological consequences for victims, including depression and suicidal tendencies.

Objective: This study aims to explore the role of the concept of tawakkul in enhancing the resilience of bullying victims. **Method:** This research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis through a literature review that includes indexed scientific articles, books, online media sources, and other reliable academic references. **Results:** The findings indicate that *tawakkul*, from the perspective of al-Ghazali, contributes to strengthening individual resilience through dimensions of spirituality, self-acceptance, and complete trust in divine decree. **Conclusion:** This study asserts that *tawakkul* may function as an Islamic-based psychotherapeutic approach to support psychological recovery among bullying victims. In conclusion, *tawakkul* has the potential to serve as a therapeutic foundation for improving resilience and preventing long-term psychological impacts.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali; Bullying; Tawakal; Resilience.

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Introduction

The prevalence of bullying in Indonesia remains considerably high, particularly within formal educational settings. A 2020 UNICEF report revealed that approximately 41% of male and female students had experienced bullying during their schooling years. This statistic indicates that bullying is a serious and persistent issue within the national education system, requiring comprehensive scholarly and policy attention. The forms of bullying occurring in schools are multifaceted, encompassing physical aggression, such as assault and the destruction of victims' belongings, as well as psychological violence, including threats, verbal ridicule, social exclusion, and the dissemination of harmful rumours. The consequences extend beyond physical injury and involve long-term emotional and social implications for students. Numerous studies have demonstrated that victims of bullying are vulnerable to anxiety, diminished self-confidence, learning disengagement, and declining academic performance. Given this complexity, identifying the patterns and characteristics of bullying is crucial as an academic imperative and as a fundamental basis for designing effective preventive strategies. Such efforts aim not only to reduce the incidence

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of bullying but also to foster a safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment that promotes optimal psychological development and academic growth among students (Dhamayanti, 2021).

This condition is particularly concerning considering that the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, and within Islamic teachings, causing harm to others is regarded as a grave sin that is strictly prohibited. Scholars have provided several definitions of bullying to describe its characteristics and scope. One definition refers to bullying as a prolonged act of physical or psychological aggression carried out by an individual or a group toward someone who is unable to defend themselves. In other words, bullying is an intentional behavior that instills fear or a sense of threat in the victim, resulting in feelings of insecurity, distress, and unhappiness. Another definition states that bullying is a deliberate harmful action aimed at making others uncomfortable or emotionally distressed. These definitions illustrate that bullying is not merely a conflict or a one-time incident, but rather a systematic form of mistreatment that undermines the victim's dignity and psychological well-being (Pradana, 2024).

In addressing bullying within the education sector, the government has taken several strategic measures. One major effort is strengthening character-based curricula that emphasize moral values, mental-health awareness, and the development of spiritual and social attitudes among students. This approach aims to shape learners holistically and reduce aggressive behavior in schools. The government has also deployed professional human resources for the PPKSP Team (Prevention and Handling of Violence in Educational Units), consisting of experts in psychology and counseling to ensure proper intervention. Public campaigns have been conducted to raise awareness, supported by offline and online reporting services. These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to creating a safe and responsive educational environment ("Pemerintah Bersama Tri Pusat Pendidikan...", 2024).

In addition to addressing bullying itself, it is equally important to provide proper treatment for victims. Without appropriate intervention, victims are at risk of developing serious psychological disorders that may affect their emotional stability and overall well-being. One effective approach to support bullying victims is by fostering resilience within them. Resilience enables individuals to adapt positively, recover from adverse experiences, and rebuild confidence after trauma. When resilience is strengthened, victims are more capable of overcoming fear, reducing the impact of negative experiences, and continuing their lives with healthier coping mechanisms. Thus, resilience-building serves not only as a recovery strategy but also as a preventive measure against long-term mental health issues caused by bullying. Strengthening resilience is therefore essential in the holistic handling of bullying cases,

complementing preventative policies and disciplinary measures already implemented (Andriyani & Sa'adah, 2024).

Strengthening religiosity represents an effective approach to enhancing individual psychological resilience. Numerous studies indicate that religiosity is positively associated with a person's capacity to cope with stress and trauma. Religious beliefs provide emotional support, meaning-making processes, and spiritual coping strategies that enable individuals to respond to stressful situations more adaptively. Consequently, religiosity becomes a significant factor in resilience development, particularly among individuals who have experienced bullying (Nashori & Saputro, 2021). One religious concept believed to enhance resilience is *tawakkul*. Individuals who internalize *tawakkul* surrender their affairs to God while continuing to exert effort and maintain optimism in confronting life challenges (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Previous studies reveal a correlation between religiosity and psychological resilience (Bakri et al., 2025), including within the contexts of mental health and trauma recovery (Wahyudi et al., 2021). However, the existing literature has not yet identified a study that specifically explores *tawakkul* as a primary framework for strengthening resilience among bullying victims. Therefore, this research aims to elucidate how *tawakkul*, from the perspective of al-Ghazali, can serve as a foundation for reinforcing psychological resilience in bullying victims. This study is expected to expand Islamic psychotherapy discourse and contribute to the development of spiritually grounded mental health interventions for affected individuals.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using a Sufi-based psychotherapy framework grounded in the intellectual tradition of Imam al-Ghazali. This methodological orientation was selected because al-Ghazali's thought offers an integrated model of spiritual purification, emotional regulation, and soul refinement, which is directly relevant to the research focus on resilience and healing (Amer & Jalal, 2013). Data were collected through a library research method, emphasizing textual analysis and interpretation. Primary data consisted of classical works authored by Imam al-Ghazali, which served as the foundational corpus for examining key psychological and spiritual concepts, particularly those related to *tawakkul*, resilience, and inner healing (Wahyudi, et al., 2021). Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed academic journals, books, empirical studies on Sufi psychotherapy, and credible online databases that support theoretical construction and analysis (Miles et al., 2014). This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive engagement with the intellectual content of al-Ghazali's writings and facilitated analytical comparison with modern psychological perspectives.

Results and Discussion

The term *bullying* originates from English, and to this day, there is no Indonesian equivalent that fully captures its conceptual meaning with precision. In the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), *bullying* is translated as *perundungan*, derived from the root word *rundung*, meaning to disturb, demean, or continuously inflict suffering upon others. This translation attempts to represent the essence of repetitive actions that cause psychological or physical harm to victims. The earliest scholarly formulation of this concept was introduced by the Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus, who defined bullying as a negative and aggressive behaviour carried out repeatedly and over a period of time against victims who find it difficult to defend themselves. According to Olweus, bullying includes various forms of harmful behaviour such as verbal insults, social exclusion, physical aggression, intimidation, and the dissemination of malicious and false rumours. This perspective became the foundation for subsequent studies on school violence and emphasized that bullying is not a single isolated incident, but a recurring pattern of dominance intended to inflict pressure and suffering. This understanding has since informed modern research across educational psychology, mental health, and social behaviour, emphasising the profound impact of bullying on victims' emotional well-being, development, and resilience (Dhamayanti, 2021).

There are at least five significant factors that contribute to the emergence of bullying behavior. First, social and economic conditions, particularly financial difficulties, may trigger individuals to engage in bullying practices such as extortion or coercion in school settings. Students who experience socioeconomic pressure often use bullying as a means to compensate for feelings of inadequacy or to assert dominance. Second, the school environment plays a crucial role. Educational institutions that lack supervision, preventive policies, or firm disciplinary measures inadvertently create a permissive atmosphere where bullying becomes normalized and even tolerated. Third, exposure to digital media, especially violent or aggressive content circulating on social media platforms, can shape behavioral patterns and desensitize adolescents to acts of violence, motivating them to replicate similar conduct in real life. Fourth, family dynamics are a major determinant. Many perpetrators originate from dysfunctional households, witness domestic conflict, or experience emotional and physical abuse, resulting in maladaptive coping mechanisms that manifest in bullying others as a form of emotional release or displacement.

Fifth, peer influence strongly reinforces bullying behavior. Adolescents often seek acceptance, popularity, or social status within their peer group, and involvement in bullying can become a strategy to gain recognition or avoid becoming victims themselves. Collectively, these factors demonstrate that

bullying is not a stand-alone phenomenon, but a complex social issue shaped by interactions between personal, familial, institutional, and cultural environments. Understanding these root causes is essential for developing effective preventive strategies and interventions (Latifah, 2024).

The impact of bullying affects not only victims but also perpetrators. Perpetrators tend to show low empathy, abnormal behavior, hyperactivity, and antisocial tendencies. Meanwhile, victims may suffer long-term trauma that affects academic performance. The most severe consequence is psychological distress that may lead to suicidal ideation or attempts (Lusiana & Arifin, 2022).

Tawakkul According to al-Ghazali

The term *tawakkul* is derived from the word *wakālah*, which means “to entrust” or “to hand over”.(Sulaiman, 2023, p. 50) In Sufi terminology, *tawakkul* carries a broad spectrum of meaning. One of the most influential definitions is proposed by Imam al-Ghazali. He defines *tawakkul* as the total reliance of the heart upon Allah, the One to whom all matters are entrusted, without doubt in His power and decree. From al-Ghazali’s perspective, *tawakkul* is not passive surrender or the abandonment of effort, but a psychological and spiritual state in which the heart attains serenity, realizing that every outcome lies completely within Allah’s will. This state can be achieved through *mujāhadah* (spiritual striving) (Zulkarnain, 2024). Thus, *tawakkul* integrates two complementary dimensions: outward effort (*ikhtiyār*) and inward surrender (*tafwīd*), which together cultivate inner strength, spiritual confidence, and emotional stability.(al Ghazali, nd) Other scholars also describe *tawakkul* as the absence of doubt toward the Almighty and complete submission of all affairs to Him. Its locus lies in the heart, meaning that human effort does not negate *tawakkul*, but instead brings tranquility within the process of striving (Al-Qusyairi, 2010).

Al-Ghazali classifies *tawakkul* into three levels. The first and lowest level resembles entrusting affairs to a representative, where reliance on Allah is similar to relying on a trusted agent. The second level is higher, comparable to an infant reliant upon its mother—constantly seeking her, calling her, and crying in her absence. The third and highest level is like a corpse in the hands of those who wash it, unable to resist or detach itself. At this stage, one remains firmly connected to Allah in every action, believing that all events occur by His divine will. Consequently, the individual does not fall into despair, inferiority, trauma, or stress, for they are convinced that everything happens under Allah’s decree.(al Ghazali, nd) Thus, the individual is less likely to feel overwhelmed by loss, inferiority, or emotional distress, and is better protected from trauma and prolonged stress. This condition develops from the conviction that every event

unfolds according to the will of Allah SWT, allowing the individual to accept reality with spiritual awareness, inner calmness, and meaningful trust in divine decree (Faizah & Arifin, 2023).

To attain *tawakkul*, al-Ghazali outlines a gradual process of spiritual cultivation. The first step is strengthening *tawhid*, affirming that Allah alone possesses absolute authority over all affairs. This theological foundation is essential, for complete submission is impossible without firm belief in Allah's oneness and sovereignty. *Tawhid* is the embodiment of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, not merely as a verbal expression but as an inner consciousness and a guiding principle of life. The second step is reinforcing faith (*iman*), which serves as the psychological ground enabling a servant to surrender outcomes to Allah without excessive anxiety.(al Ghazali, nd) The stronger one believes in Allah's perfect knowledge, wisdom, and will, the greater their ability to trust Him fully. Therefore, *tawakkul* is not an instant state but the fruit of sustained deepening of *tawhid* and strengthening of *iman*. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that repeating the phrase *lā ilāha illā Allah* (dhikr of *kalimat al-tawhid*) is one method of nurturing *tawakkul* in the heart of a believer (Al-Ahdal, 2006).

Al-Ghazali's Concept of *Tawakkul* as a Framework for Enhancing Resilience in Bullying Victims

As outlined earlier, one of the key approaches to strengthening individual resilience is through the enhancement of religiosity. Fuad Nashori conceptualizes religiosity as a multidimensional construct that encompasses the breadth of religious knowledge, the firmness of faith, the quality of ritual practices, and the depth of spiritual experience internalized by an individual. According to him, religiosity consists of five interrelated dimensions aqidah (belief), shari'ah (practice), akhlaq (morality), religious knowledge, and experiential spirituality which operate collectively to shape a person's psychological orientation and coping behavior. These dimensions are not isolated components; rather, they interact dynamically to cultivate a holistic religious personality. Through aqidah, individuals anchor themselves in theological conviction, which provides existential meaning and fosters inner security. Shari'ah, manifested through worship and daily religious conduct, functions as a behavioral framework that disciplines the self and nurtures spiritual mindfulness. Akhlaq guides moral judgment and interpersonal behavior, reducing the likelihood of maladaptive or harmful responses. Meanwhile, religious knowledge enriches cognitive understanding, enabling individuals to interpret life experiences through a spiritual lens. Finally, experiential spirituality deepens the sense of divine connection, generating emotional tranquility and enhancing one's capacity to endure difficulties.

Within this framework, religiosity does not merely represent adherence to ritual obligations, but serves as a psychological resource that strengthens resilience when facing adversity. Individuals with high levels of religiosity tend to exhibit greater emotional regulation, optimism, and acceptance, allowing them to confront stressors more constructively. For victims of bullying, the internalization of religious values may function as a protective factor, fostering self-worth, reducing feelings of helplessness, and guiding them toward adaptive recovery rather than internalizing pain or retaliating with aggression. Thus, religiosity can be considered a foundational pathway through which spiritual teachings—particularly the practice of tawakal in the perspective of al-Ghazali—may contribute to restoring psychological stability and enhancing resilience among bullying survivors (Nashori & Saputro, 2021).

Within this framework, Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) holds a significant role, as it not only connects the servant with the Divine in a transcendent manner but also engages directly with the inner psychological dynamics of human beings. Sufism aims at the purification of the soul from negative emotions, destructive impulses, and cognitive distortions that may undermine mental stability. By refining the heart, controlling desires, and cultivating awareness of God's presence, Sufi teachings offer a therapeutic pathway toward emotional balance, self-regulation, and adaptive coping (Adrian, 2024). Such doctrinal foundations make Sufism relevant for addressing psychological challenges among bullying victims who often experience anxiety, prolonged fear, shame, or diminished self-worth due to repeated victimization (Arroisi et al., 2023).

Within the Sufi discourse, *tawakkul* as formulated by al-Ghazali becomes a central concept. Al-Ghazali defines *tawakkul* not as passive resignation, but as a deep psychological state of trust and reliance upon Allah after exerting effort within one's capacity (Sulaiman, 2023). He emphasizes that authentic *tawakkul* arises only when two essential elements are present: knowledge ('ilm) and practice ('amal). The epistemic dimension refers to comprehensive understanding of *tawhid*, particularly the belief that all events occur under the absolute will and wisdom of Allah. When internalized, this conviction nurtures an inner sense of security and reduces excessive worry about external circumstances (al Ghazali, nd). For victims of bullying, such a belief may function as a cognitive reframing mechanism—helping them reinterpret distressing experiences not solely as defeat or humiliation, but as trials with spiritual meaning and potential for growth. Meanwhile, the practical dimension is expressed through consistent devotional acts, especially *dhikr* (Saputra & Wahid, 2023). The act of remembering Allah continuously serves to regulate emotional tension, enhance mindfulness, and solidify the heart's attachment to God. Through *dhikr*, individuals cultivate peacefulness, reduce intrusive negative thoughts, and gradually build resilience through strengthened spiritual assurance.

Thus, *tawakkul* carries therapeutic implications in the context of bullying recovery. When religious education is directed toward deepening *tawhid* awareness and accompanied by regular *dhikr*-based practices, individuals may develop psychological endurance, optimism, and self-acceptance. The integration of al-Ghazali's *tawakkul* model into resilience-building programs can provide spiritual coping resources that enable victims to rise from trauma, manage emotional pain constructively, and regain personal agency. Therefore, fostering *tawakkul* is not merely a doctrinal recommendation, but a potential psychospiritual intervention that supports mental health restoration and empowers bullying victims to rebuild their confidence, identity, and well-being.

Conclusion

Tawakkul demonstrates a strong connection to an individual's level of psychological resilience. The act of surrendering oneself to Allah SWT after exerting optimal effort functions as an internal source of strength that enhances a person's capacity to confront pressure, hardship, and adverse life experiences. In the context of bullying victims, a high level of *tawakkul* has the potential to reinforce psychological endurance, as individuals who place their trust in God tend to display better emotional regulation, perceive their lives as more meaningful, and maintain a more optimistic outlook on the future. The belief that every experience—including the suffering caused by bullying—carries a particular spiritual purpose enables victims to develop healthier forms of psychological adaptation. Thus, *tawakkul* should not be viewed merely as a theological concept; it also serves as a significant coping mechanism that allows individuals to endure, recover, and continue to grow despite stressful and challenging circumstances.

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