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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Maiyah as a Path to Reducing Anxiety: A Study of Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders

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Abstract: Amid the rising prevalence of anxiety disorders among adolescents, the search for alternative approaches beyond conventional medical treatments has become increasingly relevant. *Maiyah*, a spiritual and cultural forum rooted in the traditions of Indonesia (*Islam Nusantara*), offers a unique and inclusive approach. This study aims to describe how and why participation in *Maiyah* activities helps reduce anxiety in Muslim adolescents diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Employing a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that adolescent anxiety often begins with loneliness, escalates into psychological pressure, and eventually manifests as anxiety related to economic, career, and future uncertainties. *Maiyah* plays a significant role in alleviating anxiety through the concept of *semeleh*—presented in accessible language, practical values for daily life, a familial and open atmosphere, and a deeply spiritual-philosophical framework. These findings underscore the importance of *Maiyah* as an alternative spiritual space that meaningfully addresses the psychological struggles of contemporary Muslim youth.

Keywords: *Maiyah*, Therapy, Psychology, Islam.

Abstrak: *Di tengah meningkatnya prevalensi gangguan kecemasan di kalangan remaja, pencarian pendekatan alternatif di luar perawatan medis konvensional menjadi semakin relevan. Maiyah, sebuah forum spiritual dan budaya yang berakar pada tradisi Indonesia (Islam Nusantara), menawarkan pendekatan yang unik dan inklusif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana dan mengapa partisipasi dalam kegiatan Maiyah dapat membantu mengurangi kecemasan pada remaja Muslim yang didiagnosis dengan gangguan kecemasan. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kecemasan remaja sering kali diawali dengan rasa kesepian, meningkat menjadi tekanan psikologis, dan pada akhirnya bermanifestasi menjadi kecemasan yang berkaitan dengan ketidakpastian ekonomi, karir, dan masa depan. Maiyah memainkan peran penting dalam mengurangi kecemasan melalui konsep semeleh yang disajikan dalam bahasa yang mudah dipahami, nilai-nilai praktis dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, suasana kekeluargaan dan keterbukaan, serta kerangka spiritual-filosofis yang mendalam. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya Maiyah sebagai ruang spiritual alternatif yang secara bermakna menjawab pergulatan psikologis kaum muda Muslim kontemporer.*

Kata kunci: *Maiyah, Terapi, Psikologi, Islam.*

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1. Introduction

Mental health is an integral component of human well-being and has increasingly become a significant social issue, particularly in Indonesia. In daily life, many individuals experience psychological pressures that affect their productivity, social relationships, and overall quality of life. These mental health challenges are particularly prevalent among adolescents, a group vulnerable to emotional fluctuations, academic stress, and social pressures. According to the 2018 Riskesdas (Basic Health Research) report, more than 14 million Indonesians aged 15 and above suffer from Emotional Mental Disorders (EMD), with common symptoms including anxiety and depression. This data highlights that mental disorders have become a pressing social concern requiring serious attention from multiple sectors (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence spans the ages of 10 to 19 and is marked by a dynamic period of biological, psychological, social, and emotional transition (Sawyer et al., 2018). Among adolescents, internal conflict often arises due to the pressure to meet both social and personal expectations, which are frequently misaligned with their capacity for emotional regulation (Pérez et al., 2016). Anxiety disorders in this age group not only impact psychological well-being but also diminish quality of life, including academic performance, social relationships, and civic engagement (Sharaf Eldin et al., 2025). Although medical treatment and psychological therapy are available, they are not always easily accessible to all adolescents (Hansen et al., 2021). Some feel alienated, uncomfortable, or even reject these methods due to economic constraints, cultural dissonance, or spiritual considerations. In such contexts, approaches rooted in local values and religious traditions emerge as viable and meaningful alternatives.

Maiyah has emerged as an alternative spiritual and cultural space worthy of scholarly attention. Initiated by Muhammad Ainun Nadjib (commonly known as Cak Nun), *Maiyah* is a forum for discussion and reflection that emphasizes equality, open dialogue, and a contextual form of Islamic spirituality. It functions not only as a platform for religious outreach but also as a space for inner healing and the search for meaning. Activities such as *dzikr* (remembrance of God), art, and critical thinking within the forum can be understood as forms of spiritual, artistic, and cognitive therapy. The horizontal dialogical format fosters a safe environment where participants can express their concerns without fear of judgment. Within *Maiyah*, there are foundational values articulated by Cak Nun, Nursamad Kamba, and Ahmad Fuad Effendy. These values are gradually internalized by participants as part of their daily lives—serving as a form of soul nourishment and therapy, with the aim of cultivating clarity of thought and resilience in facing life's challenges, both individually and collectively (Nia & Mubaedi, 2018).

This study stems from preliminary interviews with two adolescents experiencing anxiety, both of whom chose to regularly participate in *Maiyah* gatherings as a path to recovery. They reported significant improvement compared to their previous experiences with conventional approaches such as psychotherapy or medication. These individuals described feeling more at ease, calmer, and more resilient after consistently attending *Maiyah* forums for three months. This suggests the significance of *Maiyah* as a form of Islamic liberation theology, as articulated by Asghar Ali Engineer, which integrates faith and reason in confronting the realities of life (Engineer, 1990). This Theologian rejects the separation between the spiritual and rational dimensions, advocating instead for Muslims to actively engage in resolving life's problems—including psychological distress. Accordingly, this study aims to describe and analyse how *Maiyah* contributes to reducing anxiety in adolescents, and to identify the key elements within the forum that support this process.

2. Literature review

2.1. The *Maiyah* tradition

Previous studies have demonstrated that religion and spirituality play a significant role in managing anxiety disorders. Stewart et al. (2019) found that religious practices and personally held spiritual values—including social support derived from religious communities—contribute to the reduction of anxiety symptoms by fostering emotional resilience and a sense of belonging. These findings are reinforced by Lang et al. (2020), who examined the physiological effects of religious rituals. Using heart rate variability (HRV) as a biological indicator of anxiety, their study showed that participants who regularly engaged in religious rituals experienced a significant decrease in both subjective feelings of anxiety and objective physiological markers. These combined insights suggest that religious and spiritual engagement can influence mental health not only psychologically but also biologically. Therefore, religious communities may offer a multidimensional form of support in addressing anxiety disorders, particularly among youth and vulnerable populations.

A recent study by Aggarwal et al. (2023) emphasized the protective role of spiritual well-being in shielding young people from symptoms of depression and anxiety. Their findings suggest that a strong sense of spiritual connectedness, meaning, and hope can foster resilience in the face of psychological distress. However, the study also highlighted that not all forms of religious coping are beneficial. Negative expressions—such as excessive guilt, fear-based belief systems, or punitive theological interpretations—can actually worsen mental health conditions, particularly among vulnerable youth (Bosch et al., 2017; Sajadian et al., 2024; Verisa et al., 2024). This dual role of spirituality indicates that its impact is shaped by the quality and context of religious experience (Sachdeva, 2024; Tabei et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to explore more holistic and culturally embedded approaches to spirituality that support psychological healing. This underscores the need for nuanced understandings of spiritual practice, especially within community-based models like Maiyah, which emphasize acceptance, reflection, and shared meaning.

In the Indonesian context, studies on Emha Ainun Nadjib and *Maiyah* have been conducted. Robingatun et al. (2024) discuss the contribution of Cak Nun's modern Sufism in bridging spiritual traditions with contemporary life. Meanwhile, Chrisanto (2024) explores how *Maiyah* addresses social issues such as alienation and injustice, and contextualizes Islamic teachings within everyday life. Both scholars emphasize that *Maiyah* employs a participatory approach encompassing social and spiritual healing dimensions; however, they do not explicitly examine its implications for anxiety disorders, particularly among adolescents. However, despite these contributions, existing studies have not specifically investigated the potential of Maiyah practices in addressing anxiety disorders especially among adolescents leaving a gap in understanding its therapeutic relevance in youth mental health contexts

Maiyah is defined as a cultural-religious movement developed by Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun) that integrates Islamic spiritual values with a participatory and contextual approach to contemporary social realities. *Maiyah* is not merely a religious study forum but an open dialogue space characterized by the "*Sinau Bareng*" method—learning together without hierarchical barriers between teacher and student, involving discussion, reflection, art, and music as forms of spiritual expression. The activities within *Maiyah* encompass several key elements, including contextual Islamic religiosity and spirituality, social participation and cultural dialogue, art and cultural expression, and an alternative to conventional therapy.

Building upon the two studies outlined above, existing research has largely focused on the general role of religion or spiritual communities, without specifically addressing the role of cultural-religious movements such as *Maiyah* as an intervention for anxiety disorders. This is where the contribution of the present study lies: to thoroughly examine how *Maiyah*, as a spiritual-cultural community with its distinctive "*Sinau Bareng*" approach, can serve as an alternative means of managing anxiety among adolescents. This approach combines religious, spiritual, artistic, and dialogical elements, creating a healing space distinct from conventional therapeutic methods. Therefore, this study enriches the literature on transpersonal psychology and Islamic liberation theology within the context of mental health.

2.2. Anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorder is a mental health condition marked by excessive, persistent feelings of fear, worry, or unease that are disproportionate to actual circumstances or sometimes occur without any clear cause (Kessler et al., 2009). Unlike temporary anxiety that arises in response to everyday stressors, anxiety disorders are more intense, last longer, and can significantly impair daily functioning (Abubakar et al., 2021; Sivolap & Azimova, 2020). Individuals may experience difficulty concentrating, disrupted sleep, avoidance behaviors, and strained social relationships. Anxiety disorders appear in several forms, including generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias (Halaby et al., 2015; Hofmann et al., 2015; Sönmez et al., 2022). Each type presents distinct symptoms but shares a common core of overwhelming anxiety that interferes with quality of life. These conditions often begin in adolescence and, if left untreated, can persist into adulthood, highlighting the importance of early intervention and holistic approaches to treatment that consider emotional, social, and sometimes spiritual dimensions.

The emergence of anxiety disorders is influenced by a range of complex, interrelated factors. Biologically, imbalances in neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine can disrupt emotional regulation (Teleanu et al., 2022). Psychologically, individuals exposed to traumatic experiences, chronic stress, or negative thought patterns are more vulnerable to developing anxiety (Bystritsky & Kronemyer, 2014). Environmental factors, such as academic pressure, dysfunctional family relationships, and lack of social support also contribute significantly (Rayan et al., 2022). In addition, genetic predispositions increase risk, especially when there is a family history of anxiety or related disorders. Social stigma surrounding mental health in certain communities further worsens the condition, as individuals may feel ashamed or hesitant to seek help (Feldman, 2020; Semrau et al., 2024; Torales et al., 2023). These overlapping factors illustrate that anxiety disorders are not caused by a single source, but emerge from the dynamic interaction of biological, psychological, social, and cultural influences.

2.3. Islamic healing

Islamic healing is a holistic approach that integrates spiritual and faith-based elements into the process of mental and physical recovery, rooted in Islamic teachings and worldview (Ikhwan et al., 2023). It involves a range of practices, including the recitation of Qur'anic verses, *dzikr* (remembrance of God), *ruqyah syar'iyyah* (Islamic spiritual healing), supplication (*du'a*), and the use of Zamzam water. These methods are believed to purify the soul and body, calm emotional turmoil, and counteract negative spiritual influences. The core aim of Islamic healing is to restore inner tranquility, deepen one's connection with Allah, and re-establish spiritual balance that may be disrupted by psychological distress or worldly pressures (Hassan, 2024). By emphasizing both divine intervention and personal reflection,

Islamic healing offers an integrative pathway for individuals seeking emotional and spiritual restoration alongside conventional treatment approaches.

The effectiveness of Islamic healing is significantly influenced by an individual's level of *iman* (faith) and tauhid (monotheism), their understanding of Islamic teachings, and the presence of a supportive religious social environment (Abdul Rahman et al., 2019; Rahman, 2015). When these elements align positively, healing practices can foster inner peace, resilience, and spiritual clarity. However, this approach may become less effective, or even harmful, if applied rigidly or misused (Abdillah et al., 2023). For instance, excessive emphasis on guilt, sin, or fear-based theological narratives can exacerbate anxiety and lead to spiritual distress, especially among vulnerable individuals. Therefore, Islamic healing should be practiced with contextual sensitivity, compassion, and proper guidance (Bentley et al., 2021; Mitha, 2019; Suhami et al., 2016). When thoughtfully integrated with modern psychological methods, this approach has the potential to offer more holistic and adaptive outcomes (Ali & Sultan, 2023; Maktar et al., 2025). Such integration is particularly valuable for addressing anxiety disorders in adolescents, whose developmental needs require both emotional support and spiritual grounding.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals with anxiety disorders and how engagement with the diverse Maiyah community is perceived as a coping mechanism. The focus is on understanding the subjective meanings attached to these experiences, as directly felt, thought, and lived by the participants within the context of their spiritual and religious lives. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of how individuals interpret their emotional struggles and find relief through communal spiritual practices (Mujib, 2015), offering insights into the interplay between faith, community, and mental health coping strategies.

Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participant criteria included: a) adolescents exhibiting symptoms of anxiety disorders based on self-report and researcher observation; and b) active participation in *Maiyah* activities for at least the past six months. Based on these criteria, this study involved two primary adolescent informants, referred to by the initials PU and GY. Additionally, data were collected from secondary informants—namely, the parents of the primary participants—who provided supplementary perspectives on the psychological conditions and behavioural changes of their children.

Data collection was conducted over a period of three months using three methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation employed was participatory observation of *Maiyah* activities attended by the informants, aimed at directly witnessing interactions and affective changes. The interview technique involved in-depth interviews with both primary and secondary informants. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow room for exploration of the participants' experiential meanings (Sugiyono, 2017). Documentation in this study included recordings of activities, diaries, and transcripts of Maiyah lectures or discussions deemed relevant by the participants.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher as a human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also utilized a semi-structured interview guide developed based on initial themes from preliminary studies and the theoretical framework. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model (as cited in Sugiyono, 2017), consisting of three stages:

1. Data reduction: Filtering and focusing raw data into key information relevant to the research objectives.
2. Data display: Organizing data into thematic narratives for easier reading and comprehension.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification: Interpreting meanings and patterns from the deeply analysed data.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, which involved comparing information from primary and secondary informants as well as observation and documentation to verify data consistency and credibility. Additionally, member checking was conducted, involving the re-clarification of interview results with informants to avoid misinterpretation (Moleong, 2014).

4. Result

This study reveals two key findings regarding *Maiyah* as a path to reducing anxiety in adolescents. First, the emergence of anxiety disorders in PU and GY is rooted in personal and social factors. PU experienced academic pressure and emotional neglect, while GY struggled with peer rejection and low self-worth. These cases illustrate how anxiety develops from complex psychosocial backgrounds. Second, specific aspects of *Maiyah*—such as spiritual reflection (*mujahadah*), open dialogue, music, and inclusive communal atmosphere—provide emotional support and spiritual grounding. These elements help adolescents feel accepted, understood, and less burdened by internal stress. Thus, *Maiyah* serves not only as a spiritual gathering, but also as a space for informal emotional healing. These findings show that *Maiyah* can foster mental well-being by blending cultural, spiritual, and communal resources. This representation will be further explored in the following discussion.

4.1. Background of anxiety disorder emergence in individuals PU and GY

The anxiety experienced by adolescent individuals PU and GY can be understood through Freud's psychoanalytic perspective as a conflict among the id, ego, and superego. Simply put, the id represents the individual's immediate reality or experiences, the ego reflects desires or expectations, and the superego embodies rules or norms that impose limits. Therefore, the anxiety disorders reported by the two primary informants stem from internal conflicts involving the id, ego, and superego. Furthermore, based on in-depth interviews, PU's anxiety is rooted in family conditions related to economic and career concerns. During the interview session, PU revealed:

> "I am the eldest of five siblings, Sir, and I am 18 years old. My father has passed away, and I have become the backbone of the family. As the firstborn, I feel a heavy burden, especially since my younger siblings are still in school and my mother only works as a market vendor."

The interview excerpt aligns with the researcher's observations conducted over three months, which revealed that every morning at 6:30 AM, PU accompanies his mother to the market before working from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. PU works as a private-sector employee, serving as a driver, and supports his four younger siblings who are still in junior and senior high school. PU's father was a bank employee who passed away three years ago. The family's economic condition and needs are the responsibility of PU and his mother, as all four siblings are still in school. PU's mother stated:

> "Sometimes I feel sorry for PU because he has to work so hard to support the family, Sir. I can only help as much as I can. After PU finishes work at the office, sometimes he works as an online motorcycle taxi driver from night until morning."

Based on the interview excerpt with PU's mother, it can be interpreted that PU's anxiety disorder is primarily driven by the family's economic condition, pressures, and the burden of continuous work. Additionally, PU lacks a confidant for emotional support. This is further confirmed in the interview with PU, who stated:

> "Honestly, at that time, I felt desperate and extremely exhausted, Sir. Demands, obligations, needs, fears, and worries arose and circled in my mind. Suddenly, everything felt dark, my heart was pounding, and I kept thinking about what would happen if I couldn't earn money tomorrow. I couldn't sleep at night, even though I had to work again in the morning until night."

> "There came a time when I no longer wanted anything for two months. Seeing my college friends made me feel deeply pressured. I really wanted to go to university, Sir, and that made me afraid to meet people. My whole body felt sore."

> "I then realized that I was experiencing an anxiety disorder after a neighbour advised me to seek treatment at a hospital, and I was referred to a psychiatric hospital in January 2024."

The interview excerpts with PU indicate that the anxiety disorder manifested through several symptomatic indicators, including insomnia, physical pain, and social withdrawal. In contrast, the anxiety experienced by GY was explored in depth, with GY stating:

> "At first, I felt pressured because I failed twice to get accepted into university through the KIP scholarship program, Sir. As the only daughter in my family, I wanted to uplift our status and improve our financial situation through education. But in reality, I failed, and that made me overthink every day. Especially when I see my family's financial condition, I feel helpless and sad—I cry every day in my room."

> "I began to realize that I was experiencing an anxiety disorder when I started isolating myself in my room, Sir. I couldn't sleep and would just stare blankly—that went on for over two months. Then my family took me to the hospital, and I was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. At that point, I completely lost the will to do any activities."

Based on the interview with GY, it is evident that her anxiety disorder was triggered by academic failure, the family's financial condition, and uncertainty regarding her future or career. This interpretation is supported by findings from Pertiwi (2020), which indicate that academic pressure can lead to anxiety disorders and psychological problems among adolescents, particularly due to the psychological immaturity that characterizes this developmental stage (Cahyani & Putri, 2024). Furthermore, social factors aggravate this condition, as cultural norms and societal stereotypes often label individuals who experience mental health issues following failure as a source of shame (Syam et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a prevailing perception that those who attain higher education are seen as economically better off and are therefore more socially appreciated (Hukama, 2017).

4.2. Factors within *Maiyah* that contribute to reducing anxiety in adolescents

This study found that PU and GY experienced anxiety disorders due to factors such as family financial hardship, pressure and burdens, academic failure or stress, and concerns

regarding career and future prospects. Interviews with the primary informants, PU and GY, revealed that:

> "I attend Cak Nun's *Maiyah* gatherings both online and offline because I feel a sense of comfort when applying the life principles he teaches, particularly the concept of *semeleh* (spiritual surrender). What also motivates me to participate in Maiyah is the realization it brings—Sir, it makes me aware that I should be grateful for the blessings and gifts from Allah."

> "At first, I was hesitant to attend *Maiyah* gatherings at night, Sir, especially since they often last until dawn. But the inner calm and sense of peace I felt during *Maiyah*, particularly during the recitation of *suluk* (Sufi spiritual practice) and *sholawat* (reciting praises for the Prophet Muhammad) gave me a sense of relief and broadened my perspective on life and its problems—which seem to come packaged with their own solutions. Through Maiyah, I also felt free from judgment by anyone. That's why I chose to attend *Maiyah* rather than seek treatment at the hospital. Wherever *Maiyah* is held, I always make sure to attend with my father."

> "When GY started attending *Maiyah*, she told me she felt much better, Sir. So I've been accompanying her wherever *Maiyah* is held. We've been to Rembang, Pati, Magelang, Salatiga, Semarang—anywhere. As long as it helps my daughter heal and regain her spirit to be active again, I'll take her wherever *Maiyah* takes place."

Maiyah simply teaches its members to "*nerimo ing pandum*" (accept what is destined). Besides utilizing cultural, artistic, and religious approaches, Cak Nun also presents a modern Sufism concept relevant to contemporary society. As described in the study by Robingatun, Fidia, and Abdul Wasik, which explains Cak Nun's philosophical contributions to modern Indonesian society, there are three key points. First, the modernization of Sufism. Cak Nun introduces a concept of Sufism that harmonizes worldly life and spirituality. He emphasizes the importance of self-introspection, simplicity, and awareness of humanitarian values in navigating modern life. Second, social and cultural influence. Cak Nun's Sufi teachings positively impact the attitudes and perspectives of *Maiyah* members, particularly in fostering tolerance, social awareness, and humanitarian values. Third, Sufi practice. Cak Nun interprets Sufi concepts such as *dhikr* and *tazkiyat al-nafs* more flexibly, allowing them to be applied in daily life without being bound to formal rituals. This understanding enables members to pursue spiritual closeness without having to abandon worldly activities (Robingatun et al., 2024).

On the other hand, *Maiyah* also disseminates values of religious moderation through digital platforms that are friendly to youth. This is highlighted in research by Akhriyadi Sofian and Kaisar Atmaja, who observed the interactions and activities of the *Maiyah* community on social media such as Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, the study found that *Maiyah* spreads the values of religious moderation through the spirit of egalitarianism, deliberative dialogue, and cultural approaches. The egalitarian values in *Maiyah* forums are evident in the absence of segregation between male and female members, as well as the stage setup designed to enable everyone to interact directly with the speakers. This creates an open dialogue atmosphere where all members feel they have equal opportunities to ask questions and engage in discussions without fear of discrimination. Deliberative dialogue in *Maiyah* forums is demonstrated by the open opportunities to ask questions, discuss, and even debate with the speakers (Sofian & Atmaja, 2023).

> "Participating in *Maiyah* makes it easier for me to understand because the language used is simple and accessible."

> "I enjoy joining *Maiyah* because the teachings are easy to comprehend and directly applicable to daily life."

Based on the interview results, the participants reported that *Maiyah* activities provide easier and more practical understanding. The language used in *Maiyah* is perceived as simple and accessible, allowing the concepts discussed to be quickly applied in daily life. *Maiyah's* straightforward approach, which directly relates to real-life practice, serves as a key attraction for participants who seek deep yet easily applicable understanding. In addition to the language and practical approach factors, the familial atmosphere and openness within the *Maiyah* forum also significantly contribute to reducing anxiety in both individuals, PU and GY.

The sense of familial closeness and openness was observed during *Maiyah* activities. This was evident through the informal nature of the gatherings, which avoided rigidity; participants and speakers showed mutual respect and provided opportunities for anyone to speak or ask questions. Such attitudes strengthened the sense of family and openness among participants. Discussions in *Maiyah* were dialogical, where participants not only listened but also actively spoke and engaged in conversations. In other words, everyone was regarded as equal and entitled to express their views. Ultimately, *Maiyah* activities fostered solidarity and a familial spirit. According to interviews with PU and GY, it was stated that:

> "What surprised me was when I met someone who turned out to be a wealthy entrepreneur; he sat down just like a street vendor, just like me. From that moment, I realized that all human beings are regarded as equal and the same."

> "On several occasions, I always asked questions, and my friends in *Maiyah* never mocked me. They respected what I felt, even in forums with thousands of participants. That is why I feel very happy and not alone when attending Cak Nun's Maiyah study."

Another factor that helps reduce loneliness in *Maiyah* activities is its spiritual and philosophical approach. *Maiyah* also addresses spiritual and philosophical aspects that are relevant to life values, encouraging participants to view life from a deeper and more meaningful perspective. This is reflected in moments of reflection and contemplation. Through observations, it was found that *Maiyah* invites participants to meditate or reflect on life, their role in society, and their relationship with God. This process creates a profound sense of togetherness, where participants feel spiritually connected and understood. Philosophical topics discussed in *Maiyah*, such as the meaning of life, life purpose, and the essence of humanity, provide space for participants to find answers to profound questions regarding themselves. This is further affirmed by interview results stating that:

> "If someone says that religion is not the key to all problems, I am convinced that the person speaking has not deeply understood the meaning of religiosity, because through religion—especially by actively participating in *Maiyah*—I have found peace and inner serenity."

> "Cak Nun often invites us to engage in reflection, to confess our sins through *suluk* and *sholawat*. That is what moves me deeply and makes me realize that I am full

of faults and mistakes. On the other hand, I also begin to accept myself as I am and find meaning in my role in this transient world."

Based on the interviews above, it is understood that spiritual activities such as *suluk* and *sholawat* in *Maiyah* function as emotional and spiritual therapies, inviting participants to focus on values of goodness and peace. This provides a sense of relief and is capable of reducing anxiety by bringing inner serenity within oneself. Furthermore, *Maiyah* activities also explore the spiritual meaning of religion, enabling participants to feel more at ease and find solutions for the anxiety they experience in life. Here, religion becomes a source of calmness that gives meaning to life and liberates one from existential anxiety. In addition, the communal aspect of Maiyah gatherings fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance, which is essential for adolescents who often experience emotional turbulence and identity confusion. The open-dialogue format encourages participants to express their struggles without fear of judgment, creating a safe emotional space. Through shared experiences and mutual empathy, individuals realize that their anxieties are not unique, reducing feelings of isolation. This supportive environment, combined with spiritual reflection, strengthens personal resilience and nurtures inner peace.

Liberation theology in the Islamic context aims to free humans from various forms of injustice, including social, economic, and psychological injustices. This theory is relevant to the factors within *Maiyah* that help reduce anxiety in adolescent individuals, as *Maiyah* activities offer dialogical space, spiritual reflection, and values of simplicity and equality that align with the principles of liberation from psychological and existential pressures. By fostering critical awareness and emphasizing collective healing, Maiyah empowers adolescents to reinterpret their struggles not as personal failures, but as part of broader human experiences. This liberationist perspective encourages resilience, fosters hope, and nurtures a sense of purpose, which can significantly alleviate psychological distress and anxiety.

5. Discussion

This study focuses on the role of *Maiyah* in reducing anxiety among Muslim adolescent individuals. The findings show that *Maiyah* offers values and activities that can provide therapeutic benefits to those suffering from anxiety disorders. The discussions within the *Maiyah* forum offer life formulas that can be applied by adolescent individuals. In this context, the concept of "*semeleh*" invites individuals to accept their circumstances, no matter how difficult they may be. GY explained that through the *Maiyah* forum, she found peace through the recitation of *suluk* and *sholawat* performed by the Kiai Kanjeng group. *Maiyah* also provides a spiritual and philosophical approach for its participants. This offers positive meanings that foster personal growth. For example, *Maiyah* encourages its participants to reflect and contemplate on life, social roles, and their relationship with God, leading to the understanding that to achieve peace, one needs to practice altruism towards others, support one another, and maintain a strong relationship with God. Philosophical topics discussed include the meaning of life, the purpose of life, the essence of humanity, and how to behave in times of adversity.

Anxiety experienced by adolescents does not occur spontaneously; it is influenced by multiple and complex factors. These factors come from both external and internal sources. External factors include close friends, family conditions, and school-related issues, while internal factors may include hereditary traits and innate dispositions (Chen, 2023). External factors, more specifically, may involve the influence of peers, economic hardship, lack of social support, unmet aspirations, academic stress, limited self-knowledge, and worldview in facing difficult situations. In this context, anxiety among adolescents becomes

a serious concern. Additionally, adolescents may experience anxiety disorders due to their brains are developing rapidly and are highly sensitive to external stimuli (Kühl & Firk, 2025; Pfeifer & Allen, 2021; Romeo, 2017).

Anxiety disorders experienced by adolescents, if not properly addressed, can have serious consequences for an individual's psychological development. Depression and anxiety between the ages of 8 and 13 have been linked to poor health outcomes at age 24, such as mental health issues, physical health problems, substance abuse, and difficulties in education or career paths (Morales-Muñoz et al., 2023). On the other hand, there is a significant correlation between a high level of individual spirituality and reduced levels of anxiety. Spirituality has a substantial impact in combating anxiety, depression, and stress (Widiani et al., 2023). In addition, perceived social support also affects an individual's level of anxiety (Laksmiwati & Tondok, 2023). This is evident in the *Maiyah* forum as well. Participants from various backgrounds experience an atmosphere of familial equality and mutual support within the community.

These findings indicate that healing from anxiety disorders does not solely rely on formal medical or psychological interventions, but can also be achieved through existential and spiritual experiences within communities such as *Maiyah*. This holistic approach draws individuals closer to a sense of connection, self-acceptance, and a broader life purpose. Engagement in *Maiyah* forum does not merely offer temporary emotional relief, but initiates a process of meaning-making that gradually shifts negative perceptions and irrational thoughts that fuel anxiety. This aligns with Viktor Frankl's logotherapy approach, which emphasizes the search for meaning as a key to psychological healing. Therefore, *Maiyah* provides a unique model of community-based healing that integrates emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.

The findings of this study differ from previous research concerning the impact of religion on anxiety. It was found that religious practices, internalized values, and social support can significantly help individuals suffering from anxiety disorders. A study by Lang et al. (2020) revealed that individuals who regularly engage in religious rituals exhibit lower levels of physiological anxiety, as measured by heart rate variability. Furthermore, research conducted by Aggarwal et al. (2023) showed that spiritual well-being can serve as a protective factor against symptoms of depression, while negative religious coping may exacerbate the effects of stress. Another relevant study was conducted by Robingatun et al. (2024), which analysed the modern tasawwuf (Sufi) thought of Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun), the initiator of the *Maiyah* movement. The distinction of this research lies in its focus: while previous studies examined religious rituals, theological concepts, or belief systems in general, the current study specifically investigates the role of *Maiyah* in reducing anxiety among adolescents.

The *Maiyah* forum, with its embedded values, cultural arts, and spiritually infused rituals, has been shown to provide therapeutic effects for individuals suffering from anxiety disorders. As found in Ahmad's (2013) research, spirituality and religiosity have a positive impact on overall human health and are particularly effective in helping individuals cope with stress and chronic illness. However, much work remains to be done in order to fully understand the role of religious or spiritual communities in alleviating anxiety disorders. Further research—both empirical and non-empirical—is needed to explore the impact of *Maiyah* in relation to individual mental health. The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discourse by offering insight into how religious communities such as *Maiyah* can reduce the negative impact of anxiety on individuals. Ultimately, it is envisioned that this will promote improved well-being among adolescents and foster the development of mentally and spiritually healthy individuals.

These findings create an opportunity for reflection, suggesting that in addressing the rising cases of anxiety disorders among adolescents, community-based spiritual-cultural approaches such as *Maiyah* should be taken into serious consideration by academics, mental health practitioners, and policymakers alike. Forums like *Maiyah* not only provide a space for self-acceptance and emotional expression, but also offer alternative narratives of suffering—narratives often absent from conventional clinical approaches. Future studies may further explore how social interactions, spiritual practices, and local values within *Maiyah* can be integrated into psychological intervention models that are both contextual and inclusive. In practice, such approaches could serve as complementary methods alongside conventional psychological therapies, particularly in societies where religious and communal values remain strong.

The findings of this study provide insight into how religious communities like *Maiyah* can help mitigate the negative impacts of anxiety on adolescents. Through its inclusive atmosphere, spiritual reflections, and communal support, *Maiyah* offers a space where individuals feel heard, valued, and emotionally supported. This environment fosters a sense of belonging and spiritual grounding that can ease anxiety symptoms. By engaging in shared rituals and open dialogue, adolescents gain alternative ways to process emotional distress outside of clinical settings. These findings suggest that *Maiyah* has the potential to serve as a complementary space for emotional healing, particularly for youth navigating psychological challenges. It is expected that this insight will contribute to enhancing adolescent well-being and resilience. Ultimately, *Maiyah* may support the development of individuals who are not only mentally stable but also spiritually connected and socially integrated.

6. Conclusion

Anxiety experienced by individuals PU and GY was rooted in psychoanalytic conflicts between the id, ego, and superego, as well as life pressures such as economic responsibilities, academic failure, and uncertainty regarding the future. Through *Maiyah* activities, these adolescents found an effective approach to reduce anxiety, particularly through the concepts of *semeleh* and *nrimo ing pandum*, which emphasize sincere acceptance of life's circumstances. *Maiyah* provides both spiritual and philosophical support through the practices of *suluk* and *sholawat*, along with an egalitarian and familial atmosphere where participants are free to engage in open discussion and develop deeper understandings of life. These gatherings not only present religious teachings in an accessible and practical manner, but also foster inner peace, a sense of meaning, and emotional solidarity—contributing to the reduction of existential anxiety among participants.

This study finds that the *Maiyah* forum functions not only as a spiritual space but also as a form of socio-cultural intervention capable of reducing symptoms of anxiety among adolescents. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that community-based spiritual approaches can serve as viable alternatives for understanding and addressing anxiety disorders, particularly within religious communities. These findings enrich the discourse of transpersonal psychology and holistic approaches to mental health, where meaning-making and spirituality are recognized as essential elements in psychological recovery. Practically, this study opens opportunities to utilize the *Maiyah* community or similar forums as a means of psychosocial support, particularly for adolescents experiencing life pressures and existential difficulties. Schools, religious institutions, and mental health communities can consider integrating reflective and spiritual approaches into their support activities.

However, this study has several limitations. It is qualitative in nature with a limited number of participants therefore the findings cannot be generalized broadly. Additionally, the data relied heavily on participants' subjective narratives and were not supported by standardized psychological measurement instruments. This study also did not directly compare the *Maiyah* forum with other forms of interventions in reducing anxiety, making it difficult to conclude its relative effectiveness. For future research, it is recommended to use a mixed-methods approach involving standardized psychological instruments to obtain more objective data. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to examine the long-term impact of participation in the *Maiyah* forum on individual mental health. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare the *Maiyah* forum with other religious or spiritual communities in terms of their roles in psychological recovery.

Author Contribution Statement

Contributions of the authors in this article: Alif Muhammad Zakaria contributed as concepts, data analyzers, and collecting data; Helmi Denada Ari Shandy and Muna Erawati contributed as the drafter of the manuscript and collecting data. Julkarnaen and Ahamed Sarjoon Razick contributed critically revising the article. Author agree to take responsibility for all aspects of this work.

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