

Proposal For the Development of an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index for Muslim Transgender Individuals in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The issue of transgender individuals in Malaysia is increasingly concerning today because the majority of transgender individuals in Malaysia are Muslims. The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), as the authoritative body in Islamic affairs, with the assistance of various Islamic NGOs, has implemented various initiatives to address this issue. However, statistics show a significant gap between the number of existing transgender individuals and those participating in rehabilitation programs. This raises questions about the suitability of existing approaches. The absence of a mechanism capable of assessing the level of an individual's involvement as a transgender person, particularly from a psychosocial and Islamic values perspective, renders rehabilitation approaches too general and not personalized. Therefore, this study finds a need to develop an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index for Muslim Transgender Individuals that functions as a determinant of an individual's involvement as a transgender person. Furthermore, this index also serves as a basis for more targeted rehabilitation approaches. Islam was chosen as the core because history has proven the effectiveness of Islamic approaches in addressing social problems, such as the widespread social issues in the Arabian Peninsula during the advent of Islam. This study has two objectives. First, to identify the gaps in the approaches implemented by selected Islamic institutions in Malaysia in addressing the issue of Muslim transgender individuals. Second, to analyse the necessity of developing an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index for Muslim Transgender Individuals. This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on document analysis as the primary method. Through this analysis, various sources such as fatwas, guidelines from Islamic institutions, rehabilitation program reports, academic articles, and policy documents related to Muslim transgender issues are examined to identify themes, principles, and existing gaps in current approaches. This method allows the study to elaborate on the discourse development, conceptual framework, and the suitability of Islamic institutions' approaches in addressing transgender issues based on Sharia and psychosocial perspectives. This approach also provides a comprehensive overview of institutional response patterns, thereby supporting the proposal for the development of an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index for Muslim Transgender Individuals. The findings of this study indicate that one of the gaps in addressing transgender issues in Malaysia is the absence of a psychosocial index for Muslim transgender individuals. This index is crucial for planning and implementing holistic approaches, especially rehabilitation programs, in the future. Furthermore, it is expected that the development of this index can assist JAKIM, particularly in determining appropriate *da'wah* approaches based on the level of transgender involvement. This study is significant as it aligns with the national agenda to enhance public well-being and uphold core *madani* values, particularly in the aspect of community welfare.

Keywords: Proposal, Development, index, transgender

INTRODUCTION

The issue of transgender individuals in Malaysia is an increasingly complex social problem that requires the attention of all segments of society. Statistics and research findings indicate that transgender individuals in Malaysia are predominantly from the Malay ethnic group, accounting for 70% to 80% compared to other

ethnic groups (Teh Yik Koon, 2001). This is also corroborated by Chang Lee Wei (2012) and Siti Amirah Akilah Abd Rahim (2019). Although no official statistics on the number of transgender individuals have been released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, reports by Bernama (2018) and Audrey Dermawan (2018) indicate that the number of transgender individuals in Malaysia is increasing annually. This contradicts Malaysia's long-standing principle of not recognizing transgender individuals as a gender (Samadi Ahmad, 2021). This creates a conflict between social reality and national as well as religious policies.

This phenomenon not only touches upon aspects of gender identity and self-expression but also has profound implications for psychosocial dimensions, mental well-being, family relationships, community involvement, and the interaction of transgender individuals with religious and state institutions. In the context of Muslim society, the issue of transgender individuals becomes more sensitive because it is closely related to the framework of Sharia law, behavioural boundaries set by religion, and moral values that shape the social structure of the majority of society (Aziz et al., 2023).

Although the discourse on transgender individuals is often presented from medical, psychological, or human rights perspectives, studies specifically evaluating the psychosocial well-being of Muslim transgender individuals based on an Islamic epistemological framework have not yet been systematically developed. The absence of suitable instruments creates a knowledge gap in understanding the true condition of this group, especially concerning rehabilitation needs, social support, emotional stability, and self-acceptance according to Sharia principles (Bakar et al., 2025). Most existing instruments are developed based on Western paradigms that do not consider aspects of *aqidah*, *ibadah*, *adab*, and the position of humans as servants of Allah, thus not being entirely suitable for application in the context of Muslim society in Malaysia.

Furthermore, rehabilitation and intervention efforts carried out by religious institutions and non-governmental organizations often face challenges due to the lack of standard measures that can holistically and religiously describe the psychosocial status of Muslim transgender individuals. This void not only complicates the assessment of individual functioning but also hinders the development of more effective policies, guidelines, and rehabilitation modules oriented towards *maqasid al-shariah*. Therefore, the construction of an Islam-based psychosocial index is greatly needed to provide a more suitable, fair, and religiously grounded assessment framework recognized by the Muslim community.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a library-based research design through systematic document analysis. The qualitative design is appropriate as the study is conceptual and analytical in nature, aiming to examine institutional practices, normative frameworks, and scholarly discourses rather than to generate empirical measurements. Data were obtained exclusively from secondary sources, including official documents and guidelines issued by Islamic institutions in Malaysia, fatwas, policy and rehabilitation reports, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature related to transgender issues, Islamic psychology, psychosocial well-being, and *maqasid al-shariah*. The selected documents were analysed thematically through iterative reading, open coding, and thematic categorisation to identify recurring patterns, conceptual gaps, and underlying assumptions in existing approaches to Muslim transgender rehabilitation. The analysis was interpretively synthesised using an Islamic epistemological framework to assess the adequacy of current institutional responses and to justify the need for developing an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index. As a library-based qualitative study, the findings are conceptual and design-oriented, intended to inform framework development rather than empirical generalisation, while ensuring analytical rigor through source triangulation, thematic saturation, and coherent theoretical interpretation.

RESULTS

Gaps In Approaches Implemented by Selected Islamic Institutions in Malaysia in Addressing the Issue of Muslim Transgender Individuals.

Fundamentally, Islamic institutions in Malaysia, especially the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, have strived to provide guidelines, counselling, spiritual guidance modules, and social interventions to Muslim

transgender individuals. Existing approaches still show significant gaps in terms of understanding reality, methodological accuracy, and implementation effectiveness.

The issue of transgender individuals cannot be viewed superficially based solely on Sharia law and da 'wah (Faridah et al., 2023). This is because the transgender issue is a complex psychosocial phenomenon involving the interaction of biological factors, developmental experiences, trauma, family context, social structure, and an individual's religious understanding. Without an integrated approach that combines Islamic epistemology with modern social sciences, rehabilitation efforts often fail to yield consistent and sustainable results.

The majority of approaches used by religious institutions are regulatory and morally prescriptive, whereas internal dimensions such as gender identity disorder, psychological stress, depression, or history of abuse are not addressed scientifically and structurally (Darmansjah et al., 2019). Da 'wah modules tend to emphasize rehabilitation alone without understanding the underlying factors contributing to transgender identity. Consequently, transgender individuals often find it difficult to connect religious rulings with their experiences. This results in rehabilitation not addressing the root causes of transgender issues. This gap in approach also leads to negative effects such as rejection, extreme guilt, or withdrawal from mosque communities and religious institutions.

Furthermore, there is an absence of specific assessment instruments for Muslim transgender individuals developed based on the framework of *maqasid al-shariah*, Islamic psychology and psychosocial constructs within Malaysian Muslim society. Western measurement tools such as Gender Dysphoria Scales, Quality of Life Indexes, or various psychological well-being inventories do not consider elements of *'aqidah*, relationship with ibadah, motivation for tawbah, adab values, or the meaning of self as a servant of Allah. This epistemological void causes interventions to fail in accurately measuring spiritual and social changes. Without a suitable psychosocial index, rehabilitation programs become difficult to evaluate in terms of long-term outcomes and cannot be developed as a national policy model.

The intervention approaches of Islamic institutions are also found to be inconsistent. These approaches depend on resource capacity, da 'wah orientation, staff background, and state legal requirements. For instance, JAKIM's counseling modules differ from the approaches of State Islamic Religious Councils, while Islamic Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) use various motivational modules. The absence of a standardized model leads to inconsistencies in the provision of religious information, rehabilitation techniques, and psychological approaches. In the context of sensitive issues like transgenderism, this inconsistency not only reduces the effectiveness of interventions but also creates confusion and distrust among rehabilitation participants.

Furthermore, the implemented interventions still lack the application of an Islamic social ecological perspective. Many programs focus solely on individual change, whereas social transition and long-term rehabilitation heavily depend on family support, peer groups, mosque communities, and emotional support networks. Family-based Islamic counselling approaches have not yet been systematically developed in the transgender context, nor have community-based interventions to reduce social stigma. Without inclusive ecosystem support, transgender individuals who have undergone rehabilitation modules often experience relapse due to social pressure, family rejection, or economic difficulties.

Next, there is an epistemological divergence between legal and psychological approaches that has yet to be reconciled. Some religious institutions insufficiently involve Islamic psychiatrists, Muslim therapists, and psychological researchers in formulating rehabilitation modules. Conversely, some mental health professionals lack understanding of the nuances of Islamic law related to gender identity. The failure to integrate these two domains of knowledge creates a critical gap, as rehabilitation in Islam demands a combination of Sharia understanding, *'ilm al-nafsaniyyah*, and contemporary psychological interventions.

Finally, existing approaches still pay insufficient attention to long-term empowerment aspects such as life skills, career development, economic stability, and strengthening family relationships. Transgender individuals are often in vulnerable positions regarding employment and social support. However, the majority of rehabilitation programs focus solely on spiritual aspects, without providing a comprehensive empowerment

framework to restore their social standing as members of society. Spiritual rehabilitation without social rehabilitation often leads to difficulties in reintegration, thereby increasing the risk of continuous marginalization.

Overall, these gaps indicate an urgent need to develop a Muslim transgender assessment and rehabilitation model that is truly Islam-based, empirical, holistic, and relevant to the Malaysian context. Therefore, the construction of an Islam-based psychosocial index for Muslim transgender individuals becomes a strategic effort to provide systematic, comprehensive, and integrated measurements to help religious institutions formulate more effective and holistic interventions.

The Need to Develop an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index for Muslim Transgender Individuals

The need to develop an Islam-based psychosocial index for Muslim transgender individuals arises from the awareness that the issue of transgender individuals today cannot be understood through a single approach, let alone solely through normative approaches. Muslim transgender individuals face complex psychosocial pressures encompassing identity conflict, experiences of stigma, emotional tension, and the overlap between religious demands and personal struggles. This reality demands an assessment framework that not only captures psychological dynamics but also integrates spiritual values, family relationships, social position, and worship orientation that shape the well-being of a Muslim. Existing instruments are not constructed within the context of Muslim society and therefore fail to assess critical aspects closely related to Islamic spiritual life and ethics.

At the institutional practice level, various rehabilitation programs established by JAKIM, State Islamic Religious Councils, and Muslim da 'wah bodies still operate without standard indicators that allow the effectiveness of interventions to be objectively measured. The absence of a specific index hinders efforts to identify the most effective intervention components, recognize psychosocial changes occurring over time, and build rehabilitation models adaptable to diverse Muslim transgender profiles. Without consistent scientific measurements, rehabilitation efforts tend to be reactive, relying solely on field experience, and risk producing inconsistent or superficial interventions.

Furthermore, most Western psychological frameworks cannot capture the dimension of the soul according to Islam, which encompasses *nafs*, *qalb*, and *ruh*. The well-being of a Muslim is not measured solely through emotions and thoughts, but also through spiritual strength, relationship with Allah SWT, quality of '*ibadah*', harmony of the heart, and understanding of *ta 'lif shara'*. Without spiritual assessment, the picture obtained regarding the well-being of Muslim transgender individuals becomes incomplete. An Islam-based psychosocial index can fill this gap by assessing aspects such as stability of *iman*, steadfastness in positive change, motivation for *tawbah*, and spiritual readiness to manage identity conflicts more maturely and submit to divine decree.

The need for this index also arises from the increasingly acute pattern of social stigma. Stigma not only weakens the social functioning of Muslim transgender individuals but also affects mental stability, spiritual existence, and community relationships. Without detailed assessment of the effects of stigma—including the level of isolation, family acceptance, access to religious institutions, and patterns of hidden discrimination—interventions developed will struggle to achieve long-term effectiveness. A holistic Islam-based index allows for the mapping of stigma within the context of Muslim community relationships, thereby facilitating the development of more empathetic and humane support strategies.

Furthermore, the construction of this index is important to support the formulation of more accurate, fair, and *maqasid al shariah*-aligned public policies. Currently, policies related to transgender issues tend to be influenced by public sentiment, political narratives, or moral discourse not supported by robust empirical data. Without detailed psychosocial data that considers the Sharia framework, policies tend to be general and do not meet the actual needs of Muslim transgender individuals. The constructed index can serve as a national reference in setting well-being indicators, measuring levels of social risk, and evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programs under Islamic institutions.

Furthermore, the development of this index opens new avenues for integration between Sharia knowledge, social sciences, and modern psychology. This integration is crucial because transgender issues cannot be separated from social context, life history, family relationships, and economic factors. An Islam-based index can unite these disciplines through assessment dimensions that encompass spiritual well-being, family functioning, emotional stability, social relationships, commitment to *'ibadah*, cognitive adaptation, and motivation for self-change. This integration further strengthens evidence-based policies that align with the Islamic worldview.

Finally, the development of an Islam-based psychosocial index for Muslim transgender individuals is a strategic necessity that not only fills academic gaps but also contributes to the effectiveness of Islamic institutions, the social well-being of the nation, and the empowerment of Muslim transgender individuals to return to a more balanced, dignified life in accordance with Sharia. This index has the potential to become a primary reference in research, program planning, rehabilitation module development, and national policy formulation concerning gender identity issues within the context of Malaysian Muslim society.

CONCLUSION

The need to develop an Islam-Based Psychosocial Index for Muslim Transgender Individuals is critical in the context of rehabilitation, social policy, and strengthening the function of Islamic institutions in Malaysia. The issue of transgender individuals can no longer be addressed through a single approach or instruments developed solely based on Western paradigms, as the dimensions of a Muslim's well-being encompass spiritual, moral, emotional, social aspects, and their relationship with Sharia. The absence of suitable assessment tools has created a gap in comprehensively understanding the psychosocial reality of Muslim transgender individuals, thereby limiting the effectiveness of existing interventions and policies.

The construction of this index offers a new assessment framework that is more holistic, integrative, and contextual, by combining modern psychological perspectives and Islamic epistemology. Through this approach, the assessment of factors such as emotional stability, spiritual strength, family support, social acceptance, and adaptive capacity can be carried out more systematically and accurately. This index has the potential to become the basis for coordinating rehabilitation programs, improving modules of Islamic institutions, and formulating evidence-based policies that are more responsive to the actual needs of Muslim transgender individuals.

Overall, the development of an Islam-based psychosocial index for Muslim transgender individuals is not merely to fulfil academic requirements but constitutes an important contribution in formulating rehabilitation approaches that are more humane, effective, and aligned with *maqasid al shariah*. It opens avenues for shaping a more mature, inclusive, and solution-oriented discourse in addressing transgender issues within Malaysian Muslim society.

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