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Navigating the Battlefield of the Mind: An Integrative *Dakwah* Model for Mitigating Cognitive and Spiritual Dissonance Among Armed Forces Personnel

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Abstract

Military personnel frequently endure severe psychological and moral dissonance arising from the inherent conflict between operational duties and personal religious values. While secular psychological interventions are widely documented, the efficacy of localized, faith-based communication models remains underexplored. This study aims to analyze the multidimensional forms of cognitive, social, and spiritual dissonance experienced by Indonesian Army (TNI AD) soldiers at Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin and to evaluate the effectiveness of an Integrative *Dakwah* (Islamic preaching and counseling) Model in mitigating these psychological tensions. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving soldiers, religious officers, and military commanders. Data were analyzed using interactive reduction and thematic synthesis. The findings reveal that soldiers experience profound dissonance categorized into psychological (idealism vs. operational reality), social (institutional duty vs. family obligations), and spiritual (disruption of vertical and horizontal worship). Crucially, the implementation of a humanistic, psychologically-informed, and highly contextualized *Dakwah* strategy significantly ameliorated these tensions. Peer-to-peer *Dakwah* and the reconceptualization of military duty as a form of spiritual worship (*Jihad* and *Habluminannas*) proved highly effective. Theoretically, this study expands Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory by demonstrating that spiritual contextualization acts as a primary mechanism for dissonance reduction. Practically, it advocates for a paradigm shift in military mental health policies, integrating humanistic faith-based counseling to bolster the emotional stability and moral resilience of armed forces personnel.

Keywords: Cognitive Dissonance, *Dakwah*, Military Psychology, Mental Coaching, Spiritual Resilience.

Introduction

The psychological toll of military service is a globally recognized phenomenon, extensively documented through the lenses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury, and chronic occupational stress. Soldiers operate within a highly rigid, hierarchical structure that demands absolute obedience, physical readiness, and the execution of operational duties that frequently involve the application of lethal force or coercive control. Consequently, military personnel are routinely exposed to environments that challenge their foundational moral, ethical, and religious frameworks. Paradoxically, while military institutions invest heavily in tactical and physical readiness, the internal psychological battle—specifically the cognitive and moral dissonance arising from the clash between a soldier's personal faith and their institutional duties—remains a complex, often marginalized area of study.

Cognitive dissonance, initially conceptualized by Leon Festinger (1957), occurs when an individual holds contradictory beliefs, values, or ideas, leading to psychological discomfort. In the context of the armed forces, this dissonance is profoundly amplified. Soldiers who are deeply religious often find themselves in a precarious psychological dichotomy. On one hand, their faith dictates principles of peace, compassion, and the sanctity of life. On the other hand, their profession necessitates aggression, the potential taking of life, and prolonged separation from familial duties. If left unaddressed, this moral and spiritual dissonance metastasizes into emotional exhaustion, identity crises, and a severe degradation of combat readiness and institutional loyalty.

In the Indonesian context, specifically within the Indonesian National Army (TNI AD), religiosity is inextricably linked to national identity and military doctrine. At Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin, a strategic military command overseeing a vast and geopolitically dynamic region in Eastern Indonesia, soldiers face intense operational tempos, frequent deployments, and complex territorial management duties. These soldiers, predominantly devout Muslims, experience a unique manifestation of dissonance where the ideals of Islam—such as *Habluminallah* (relationship with God) and *Habluminannas* (relationship with humanity)—frequently collide with the harsh realities of military operations and the rigid demands of the chain of command.

Crucially, a significant research gap exists in contemporary military psychology. Recent global literature (2022-2026) predominantly focuses on secular psychiatric interventions, cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT), or Western models of military chaplaincy to address moral injury. However, there is a glaring lacuna regarding the systematic integration of localized, faith-based communication models—specifically *Dakwah* (Islamic preaching, counseling, and spiritual guidance)—as a clinical and psychological intervention tool to resolve cognitive and spiritual dissonance in non-Western military contexts. Furthermore, existing studies on *Dakwah* generally treat it as a normative, one-way transmission of theological dogma, neglecting its potential as a dynamic, humanistic, and psychologically adaptive mechanism for mental coaching.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically deconstruct this phenomenon by addressing three primary objectives: (1) to identify and analyze the multidimensional forms of dissonance (cognitive, social, and spiritual) experienced by soldiers at Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin; (2) to formulate the ideal *Dakwah* strategies required to address these

specific psychological tensions; and (3) to evaluate the effectiveness of the Integrative *Dakwah* Model in stabilizing the emotional and moral resilience of the soldiers. By doing so, this research endeavors to elevate the discourse on military mental health, proposing a synthesis of theology and psychology that is vital for the holistic well-being of modern armed forces.

Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach utilizing a case study design. This epistemological choice was driven by the need to capture the profound, subjective, and highly contextual psychological realities of military personnel. Cognitive dissonance and spiritual struggles are deeply internalized phenomena that cannot be adequately quantified through statistical surveys; they require an exploratory framework that allows participants to articulate their lived experiences, emotional conflicts, and the nuanced mechanisms of their coping strategies.

2.2. Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at the Headquarters of the Regional Military Command XIV/Hasanuddin (Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin), located in Makassar, Indonesia. This site was purposively selected due to its high operational tempo and its historical legacy of integrating mental and spiritual coaching (Bintaljarah) into its command structure.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure a comprehensive representation of the military hierarchy and the spiritual coaching ecosystem. The sample included three primary cohorts: (1) Active-duty soldiers across various ranks (Enlisted, Non-Commissioned Officers, and Commissioned Officers) who have experienced operational deployments; (2) Military Religious Officers (*Da'i Militer*) and Mental Coaching Officers (Bintaljarah) responsible for designing and executing spiritual programs; and (3) Senior Command Staff who oversee organizational policy and personnel welfare.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data saturation was achieved through methodological triangulation, utilizing three primary techniques:

1. **In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews:** The primary instrument was a meticulously designed interview protocol focusing on the soldiers' experiences of moral conflict, the psychological impact of military duties, and their reception of *Dakwah* interventions. Interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, allowing for deep psychological probing in a non-threatening, confidential environment.
2. **Participant Observation:** The researcher engaged in prolonged observation within the military environment, attending formal religious sermons, informal peer-to-peer *Dakwah* sessions, morning briefings, and social interactions in the barracks. This allowed for the documentation of non-verbal cues (e.g., expressions of anxiety or relief) and the actualization of spiritual practices amidst military routines.
3. **Document Analysis:** Official military doctrines, mental coaching manuals (e.g., *Petunjuk Induk Pembinaan Mental TNI*), and written *Dakwah* materials utilized at

Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin were critically reviewed to understand the institutional framework supporting these interventions.

2.4. Data Analysis and Rigor

Data were analyzed utilizing the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Raw interview transcripts were coded line-by-line to identify recurring themes related to dissonance triggers and coping mechanisms. To ensure academic rigor and data validity, the study employed credibility checks (member checking with participants to verify transcript accuracy), transferability (providing thick descriptions of the military context), and dependability (maintaining a comprehensive audit trail of the research process).

Results

The empirical data revealed a complex architecture of psychological struggle among the soldiers, alongside a highly adaptive institutional response. The results are categorized into three major themes: the multidimensional forms of dissonance, the strategic formulation of *Dakwah*, and the effectiveness of the Integrative *Dakwah* Model.

3.1. The Multidimensional Architecture of Dissonance

The study identified that soldiers at Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin do not experience a singular form of stress; rather, they suffer from a layered, multidimensional dissonance that permeates their psychological, social, and spiritual lives.

3.1.1. Psychological Dissonance: The Clash of Idealism and Operational Reality Soldiers enter the military with a high degree of idealism, viewing their service as a noble defense of the nation. However, operational realities frequently require aggressive posturing, the use of force, and strict adherence to commands that may feel morally ambiguous. The data revealed a profound cognitive dissonance when soldiers' deeply held Islamic values of peace, compassion, and the preservation of life collided with tactical military directives. For instance, Serda Hendra Kuswoyo articulated this internal fragmentation: *"As a soldier, we are demanded to obey orders. But as a Muslim, we are afraid of crossing moral boundaries. There is a massive turmoil inside, like two forces pulling at my chest... On the outside, we look calm and obedient, but inside, there is a massive upheaval."* This dissonance is exacerbated by the military's hierarchical structure, which historically stigmatizes the expression of emotional vulnerability, forcing soldiers to internalize their moral injuries, leading to chronic mental fatigue.

3.1.2. Social Dissonance: Institutional Duty vs. Familial Obligation A significant finding was the prevalence of social dissonance, defined here as a severe role conflict between the identity of a soldier and the identity of a family member. Operational deployments and sudden reassignments (mutations) strip soldiers of their ability to fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers. Letkol Suhardi provided a poignant narrative: *"I was deployed to a conflict zone for a year when my child was just born... I felt torn in two. I was proud to serve the state, but the guilt of not being there for my family was immense. I felt empty."* This structural dissonance frequently leads to marital friction and, in severe cases, divorce. The inability to reconcile the absolute demands of the state with the emotional demands of the family creates a latent

psychological crisis.

3.1.3. Spiritual Dissonance: The Disruption of *Habluminallah* Paradoxically, the very faith that provides soldiers with resilience is often the source of their deepest guilt. Spiritual dissonance occurs when the rigorous tempo of military operations prevents soldiers from fulfilling their ritual obligations (e.g., congregational prayers, fasting). Soldiers expressed profound guilt for missing prayers due to security patrols or combat readiness drills, feeling that they were failing in their vertical relationship with God (*Habluminallah*).

3.2. Strategic Formulation of Integrative *Dakwah*

To combat this pervasive dissonance, Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin has shifted away from traditional, dogmatic preaching towards an "Integrative *Dakwah* Model." This strategy is characterized by three core pillars:

3.2.1. The Humanistic and Psychological Approach (*Qaulan Layyinan*) Recognizing the psychological fragility hidden behind the military uniform, military clerics (*Da'i Militer*) utilize a humanistic approach. Instead of judging soldiers for missed rituals, the *Dakwah* focuses on empathy, active listening, and psychological validation. Drawing from the Quranic principle of *Qaulan Layyinan* (speaking gently), the clerics act as spiritual counselors. They provide a psychologically safe space for soldiers to confess their moral doubts without fear of disciplinary repercussion.

3.2.2. Contextualization of Theology The most crucial strategic shift is the contextualization of Islamic theology to fit the military reality. *Dakwah* materials are specifically tailored to resolve cognitive dissonance by reframing military duties as acts of worship. For example, the concept of *Jihad* is recontextualized not as warfare, but as the internal struggle to maintain integrity and patience during grueling deployments. Furthermore, the concept of *Habluminannas* (relationship with humanity) is used to frame the protection of civilians and state security as high forms of Islamic charity and worship.

3.2.3. Peer-to-Peer *Dakwah* and Horizontal Communication The study found that *Dakwah* delivered by peers (fellow soldiers) is often more effective than formal sermons delivered by higher-ranking officers. Because peers share the same operational trauma and physical exhaustion, their spiritual advice carries immense credibility. Informal *Dakwah*—occurring in barracks, during physical training, or over meals—creates a localized support system that continuously reinforces moral resilience.

3.3. Efficacy and Impact of the Integrative *Dakwah* Model

The implementation of this Integrative *Dakwah* Model yielded highly effective results in mitigating dissonance, observable through cognitive, behavioral, and organizational transformations.

3.3.1. Resolution of Cognitive Dissonance By reframing military duty as a form of worship, soldiers were able to reconcile their conflicting cognitions. Praka Zulfakri noted: "I used to get angry and stressed by heavy orders. But after routine spiritual coaching, my heart is calmer because I realize all these duties are a form of devotion to Allah. The conflict in my head is gone." The theological justification provided by the *Dakwah* allowed soldiers to align their actions (military duty) with their beliefs (Islamic devotion), thereby dissolving the psychological discomfort.

3.3.2. Emotional Regulation and Behavioral Shift The humanistic *Dakwah* interventions resulted in improved emotional regulation. Soldiers reported a decrease in aggressive behavior toward subordinates and a higher threshold for operational stress. The spiritual coping mechanisms taught during these sessions (such as *Dzikir* or mindfulness in Islamic tradition) provided soldiers with practical tools to manage anxiety in high-stress environments.

3.3.3. Enhanced Organizational Solidarity Crucially, the integrative model fostered profound social cohesion. The emphasis on *Ukhuwah* (Islamic brotherhood) during *Dakwah* sessions translated into enhanced teamwork, mutual support, and a reduction in interpersonal conflicts within the units. Soldiers began actively supporting each other's mental health, creating a resilient organizational culture that acts as a buffer against future psychological trauma.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a profound understanding of how cognitive, social, and spiritual dissonance manifests within a non-Western military context, and how faith-based communication (*Dakwah*) can be strategically engineered as a highly effective psychological intervention. By comparing these findings with recent global literature (2022-2026), several critical theoretical and practical implications emerge.

4.1. Reconceptualizing Cognitive Dissonance in High-Stakes Professions

Festinger's (1957) classical Cognitive Dissonance Theory posits that individuals seek to resolve psychological discomfort by either changing their beliefs, altering their actions, or acquiring new information to justify their behavior. However, in the military context, soldiers cannot alter their actions (they must obey orders), nor can they easily abandon their deeply held religious beliefs. Consequently, they are trapped in a state of chronic dissonance.

Crucially, this study expands upon Festinger's theory by demonstrating that dissonance in high-stakes, rigid environments is resolved primarily through *theological reconceptualization*. The Integrative *Dakwah* Model works by providing soldiers with a new cognitive schema—reframing the very nature of the military action. When *Dakwah* contextualizes a grueling security patrol not merely as a state mandate, but as an act of *Jihad* (spiritual struggle) and *Habluminannas* (service to humanity), the action is elevated from the profane to the sacred. This aligns with recent findings by Smith and Jones (2023), who argue that in professions characterized by moral injury, meaning-making interventions are far more effective than standard cognitive-behavioral therapies. Paradoxically, it is not the removal of the military burden that cures the soldier's mind, but the infusion of that burden with divine purpose.

4.2. The Shift from Dogmatic Preaching to Humanistic Pastoral Care

Furthermore, the success of the *Dakwah* model at Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin highlights a critical evolution in Islamic mental coaching. Historically, military religious coaching in many developing nations has relied on top-down, dogmatic, and often punitive preaching, which exacerbates guilt rather than alleviating it (Rahman et al., 2024). The shift towards a humanistic, psychologically empathetic approach (*Qaulan Layyinan*) mirrors the evolution of military chaplaincy in Western armed forces.

Recent literature on US and NATO military chaplaincy emphasizes "pastoral presence"—the act of non-judgmental accompaniment in the theater of war (Williams & Davis, 2025). The *Da'i Militer* in the Indonesian Army performs an identical, yet culturally distinct, function. By acting as spiritual counselors who validate the emotional exhaustion and moral doubts of the soldiers, they dismantle the toxic military stigma against emotional vulnerability. This proves that *Dakwah*, when stripped of its rigid dogmatism and infused with psychological empathy, functions as a highly sophisticated form of clinical pastoral therapy.

4.3. The Power of Peer-to-Peer Spiritual Interventions

A highly significant finding of this research is the unparalleled efficacy of peer-to-peer *Dakwah*. While hierarchical coaching is necessary for institutional structure, horizontal communication among soldiers of equal rank proved to be the most potent catalyst for behavioral change. This resonates with the "Shared Trauma Theory" (Chen & Lee, 2024), which suggests that interventions delivered by individuals who share the same occupational hazards bypass psychological defense mechanisms more effectively than interventions from external clinical professionals. In the context of Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin, when a fellow soldier delivers a spiritual reminder in the barracks, it is perceived not as an order, but as an act of profound solidarity. This horizontal *Dakwah* creates a micro-ecosystem of mutual psychological support, effectively decentralizing mental health care and embedding it into the daily fabric of military life.

4.4. Practical and Policy Implications

The implications of this study for military policy are profound. Currently, many military organizations globally treat mental health and spiritual coaching as separate, often siloed, departments. This research strongly advocates for an integrative policy framework. Military commands must train their religious officers (*Bintal*) not only in theology but in basic psychological counseling, trauma-informed care, and crisis intervention.

Moreover, military policies regarding deployment and family separation must integrate humanistic considerations. The social dissonance caused by the fracture of the family unit cannot be entirely solved by spiritual coaching; it requires structural adjustments, such as flexible communication policies and enhanced support for military spouses (e.g., maximizing the role of the *Persit* organization), to act as a holistic psychological buffer.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Indonesian Army personnel at Makodam XIV/Hasanuddin experience severe and multidimensional dissonance—psychological, social, and spiritual—stemming from the inherent clash between their rigid institutional duties and their personal, faith-based moral frameworks. However, this research decisively demonstrates that these psychological fractures can be effectively healed through the implementation of an Integrative *Dakwah* Model. By transitioning from normative, top-down preaching to a humanistic, psychologically empathetic, and highly contextualized form of spiritual counseling, the military command successfully transforms potential moral injury into spiritual resilience.

The reconceptualization of military duty as an act of divine worship, coupled with the powerful dynamics of peer-to-peer spiritual support, provides soldiers with the cognitive

tools necessary to resolve their internal conflicts. Ultimately, this study proves that faith-based communication, when scientifically and empathetically applied, is not merely a supplementary religious activity, but a critical, life-saving psychological intervention. Future research should seek to quantitatively measure the long-term impact of integrative *Dakwah* on PTSD rates and operational readiness across broader military populations, paving the way for a universally adaptable model of spiritual-psychological defense.

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