



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION BY DA'I IN REDUCING PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS AMONG CONVERTS TO ISLAM: A Case Study at The Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the psychological disorders experienced by converts (mualaf) at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, the therapeutic communication employed by Dai in alleviating these disorders, and the implementation of therapeutic communication by Dai in reducing psychological distress among converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with Dai and converts, field observations, and documentation. Informants were purposively selected from among the Dai of the foundation and the guided converts who had undergone the mentoring process. The results of the study indicate that converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin experience psychological disorders such as severe stress, social anxiety, overthinking, feelings of guilt, and inner conflict due to family rejection and identity crises. Therapeutic communication by the Dai is carried out through an empathetic approach, active listening, trust-building, and spiritual empowerment. The forms of communication used include both verbal and nonverbal communication, with strong religious and emotional content. The implementation of this communication has proven effective in gradually alleviating psychological symptoms, although several obstacles such as time constraints and limited abilities of the Dai remain challenges. The conclusion of this study shows that the therapeutic communication by Dai is effective in helping the psychological recovery process of converts, provided there is consistency, empathy, and depth in interpersonal relationships.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, continues to experience the growth of Islamic adherence, not only through birthright but also through religious conversion. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the increasing number of individuals who choose to embrace Islam as their new faith. Data from Mualaf Center Indonesia (MCI) indicates a rising trend in conversions over the past three years: 114 individuals in 2023, 155 in 2024, and 97 in 2025. At the regional level, Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin in Medan has reported 60 individuals taking the shahada and 74 receiving religious guidance from 2020 to 2025. These figures illustrate not only the openness of Islam to new followers but also the significant responsibility held by Islamic institutions in providing continuous spiritual and psychological support for converts.

In Islamic teachings, guidance is considered a divine gift, and those who embrace Islam are regarded as having received Allah's hidayah. As stated in Surah Al-A'raaf verse 178, true guidance is bestowed by Allah upon whom He wills. This highlights the sacred nature of religious conversion and positions the convert commonly referred to as mualaf as someone undergoing a spiritually significant journey.

The term mualaf refers to individuals who have recently embraced Islam and are in the early stages of learning and adjusting to their new beliefs. The conversion process is rarely just a spiritual transition; it often represents a complete transformation of identity. Converts must adapt to new religious norms, lifestyles, and community dynamics, which can be deeply challenging. The shift frequently results in emotional conflict, familial rejection, and social isolation, particularly when their new identity is not accepted by their prior environment (Wahyuni, 2022).

According to Yustina and Rahman (2023), effective guidance for mualaf should be comprehensive, incorporating not only religious education but also emotional and psychological support. This approach ensures that converts can navigate their journey with confidence, self-worth, and mental stability. Guidance that neglects the psychological wellbeing of converts risks leaving them vulnerable to internal distress and external pressures.

Field research conducted at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin has revealed that many converts continue to struggle with emotional and psychological issues despite receiving religious instruction. Notable cases include individuals like Leonardo and Frenko Simbolon, who experienced deep psychological trauma post-conversion. Their challenges included family rejection, social alienation, financial hardship, and a general sense of instability. These conditions led to symptoms of anxiety, overthinking, and emotional exhaustion.

According to the DSM-5 by the American Psychiatric Association (2013:20), psychological disorders are defined as patterns of cognitive, emotional, or behavioral dysfunctions that impair a person's ability to function. Stuart and Sundeen (1995:45) further define these disorders as maladaptive responses to internal and external stressors, indicating the need for structured interventions that address both spiritual and emotional needs.

The psychological condition of converts is often exacerbated by a lack of support systems and insufficient empathetic communication from their new religious communities. Therefore, beyond conventional dakwah or religious instruction, there is a growing need for therapeutic communication as part of convert guidance. Therapeutic communication is a deliberate, professional interaction designed to alleviate emotional distress, enhance trust, and foster healing (Anjaswarni, 2016). Though typically associated with healthcare settings, this communication style has proven essential in religious mentoring, especially for individuals facing mental health challenges during spiritual transitions.

Therapeutic communication includes both verbal and nonverbal techniques such as active listening, emotional validation, gentle speech, and non-judgmental responses. It aims to build a safe space for converts to express their doubts, fears, and emotions. As Ari Wibowo (2021) notes, such an approach not only improves psychological wellbeing but also strengthens the relational bond between Dai (Islamic preachers) and converts. This connection is vital in helping converts rebuild their identity and regain confidence.

At Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, initial observations conducted in January 2025 show that the Dai have assumed not only the role of spiritual mentors but also of emotional caregivers. Their interactions go beyond preaching—they establish long-term, meaningful relationships with converts

through consistent presence, personal communication, and emotional support. The Dai function as companions, mentors, and sometimes even as surrogate family members, providing converts with a sense of belonging and emotional safety.

This approach reflects values found in Surah Ali Imran verse 159, where it is emphasized that compassion, patience, and gentleness are key qualities in guiding others. In the context of convert support, this verse underlines the importance of mercy and emotional intelligence in leadership and communication.

Suryani (2005) stresses that therapeutic communication is built on mutual trust, emotional congruence, and the ability to regulate one's own emotions in service of another's healing. Similarly, Rizky (2020:51) and Rahayu (2012) identify several principles essential to therapeutic communication: empathy, trustworthiness, emotional engagement, and integrity. Effective communication is not only about delivering information, but also about creating a meaningful human connection that promotes healing and growth.

While several Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin have integrated these therapeutic strategies into their daily practice, the extent and consistency of their application remain underexplored. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation on how significantly such communication contributes to reducing psychological distress among converts.

Based on the current situation and existing challenges, it becomes important to investigate how therapeutic communication is being applied in convert mentoring and whether it has a tangible impact on mental health outcomes. Thus, this research aims to analyze: "The Effectiveness of Therapeutic Communication by Dai in Reducing Psychological Disorders of Converts: Case Study of Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin".

B. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research approach with a case study method, aimed at exploring phenomena through in-depth analysis of specific cases. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of complex contexts and individual experiences (Sugiyono, 2014). Data were collected holistically through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, allowing the researcher to

explore multiple perspectives and uncover patterns and themes for theoretical development (Yuliana, 2022).

The research was conducted at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhamajirin in Medan, with Dai and converts (mualaf) as informants. Data sources included primary data (from converts) and secondary data (documents, books, interviews, reports, and academic articles). Data collection techniques included participant observation, allowing immersion into the research environment; unstructured interviews to explore the experiences of Dai and mualaf regarding therapeutic communication; and documentation (archives, photos, audio) from the foundation and Mualaf Center Indonesia Medan to enrich analysis. Data analysis followed the model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification ensuring the findings were interpreted in a structured and meaningful way.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher collected data through interviews with the preachers (Dai) and converts (mualaf) at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhamajirin about the types of therapeutic communication used by the Dai to reduce psychological disturbances among converts. Observations were conducted to assess the effectiveness of this communication in alleviating psychological distress. Additional interviews explored the perceived impact as well as supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. Documentation from interviews and organizational archives was also gathered.

In an interview, Dai Hamdani Tumanggar explained that most converts arrive in a psychologically vulnerable state, facing family rejection, anxiety, stress, guilt, and sleep difficulties, highlighting the need for emotional support and a gentle approach. Rahmad added that many converts suffer from anxiety and low self-confidence due to lack of support and mockery from friends and family. The Dai feel empathy and are concerned that without proper guidance, converts might revert to their previous faith.

Psychological Disturbances among Converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin

In the process of religious conversion, converts do not only experience spiritual transformation, but also significant mental, emotional, and social pressure. Based on interviews, observations, and documentation at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, it was found that most converts experience psychological disturbances after embracing Islam. These disturbances are caused by external factors (family rejection, social stigma, loss of status) and internal factors (identity crisis, uncertainty about the future, spiritual confusion).

The following are the psychological disturbances experienced by converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, based on field interviews and observations:

Stress, many converts experience psychological disturbances as a result of rejection by their immediate families. The process of changing one's faith is often seen as an act of betrayal, leading to exclusion or even being expelled from home. This often results in stress, which is the most common psychological disorder faced by converts. Stress arises from the significant changes in their lives: leaving their old beliefs, adapting to Islamic teachings and practices, and dealing with pressure from family and environment. This stress affects their social functioning and productivity in daily life. Leonardo stated:

"Every night I have trouble sleeping, Brother, because I keep thinking about how my family has become distant from me." (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Anxiety, anxiety develops as a continuation of unresolved stress. Many converts suffer from excessive anxiety due to uncertainty about social acceptance, their future, and their ability to practice Islam properly. This fear often arises from concern about making mistakes in worship, fear of rejection in their new community, or being labeled as apostates by their families. As a result, some converts feel hesitant and afraid to actively engage in Islamic environments. Dio Adinta Damanik stated:

"I always feel anxious, Brother anxious that I won't be accepted by new friends, afraid my worship might be wrong and not accepted, especially since I'm still learning a lot." (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Low Self-Confidence, one of the most prominent psychological issues among the converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhibbin is low self-confidence (inferiority feeling) in living as Muslims. This stems from feelings of inadequacy, a sense of being left behind in religious knowledge, and fear of judgment by fellow Muslims. This lack of confidence impacts their motivation to learn about Islam, causes them to withdraw from educational settings, prevents them from expressing their faith openly, and makes them feel unworthy of belonging to their new environment. Dio Adinta Damanik stated:

“Sometimes I feel shy joining the study groups, Brother, because I still can’t read the Qur'an, while the others are fluent. Plus, I don’t feel confident because my family doesn’t support me.” (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

If not addressed, this lack of self-confidence can seriously hinder the formation of a healthy Islamic identity. Self-confidence is a crucial foundation for spiritual and social adaptation. Converts with low self-confidence are more vulnerable to social anxiety, isolation, and even a desire to return to their previous religion due to feeling incapable of being a ‘good Muslim’.

Fear of the Future, Converts who lose family or employment support often express great fear about their future. They don’t know where to live, how to earn a living, or how to survive economically. The consequences of this fear include a sense of living without protection and the loss of life goals and plans. Alex Sinaga stated:

“Sometimes I feel sad thinking about my family back in the village. Fear also comes up I feel uncertain about the future, but I can’t leave Islam either. It’s just that, of course, there’s fear about whether I can make it through all this.” (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Overthinking, Many converts experience overthinking excessive worry about the past, future, and how others perceive them. They dwell on things that may never happen, but which trigger real anxiety. Overthinking disturbs their mental well-being and distances them from the peace they should be gaining from religion. Alex Sinaga stated:

“I often think about all sorts of things, Brother. Sometimes it crosses my mind what if my family never accepts me? Or if I fail to become a good Muslim? These thoughts keep coming, especially at night. Even if they haven’t happened, it weighs heavily on my mind and makes

me anxious. I struggle to focus on worship, because my heart is full of fear and doubt. The Ustadz said it's called overthinking, and that I should gradually overcome it with prayer and dhikr." (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Social Withdrawal, Some converts withdraw from social interactions because they no longer feel accepted in their old environments, and have not yet found comfort in their new ones. This is a sign of social isolation, which exacerbates other psychological symptoms. Examples include avoiding social activities, skipping religious training sessions, spending excessive time alone, and frequent rumination. This isolation prevents them from receiving the social support they need and can lead to severe depression if left untreated. Tomi Panjaitan stated:

"When I first converted to Islam, I felt like I no longer belonged anywhere, Brother. My family distanced themselves, old friends started avoiding me. On the other hand, I wasn't familiar with the new environment either, so I stayed quiet most of the time. Sometimes I purposely didn't attend religious sessions—not because I didn't want to, but because I felt out of place and didn't know where to begin. I preferred to be alone, thinking about many things, and it just made me feel more empathy inside." (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Converts undergoing religious transition at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhibirin face serious psychological challenges. These disturbances significantly affect their quality of life, and if not properly addressed, may develop into more severe psychiatric conditions. Therefore, a guidance approach is needed that not only focuses on spirituality, but also on emotional and psychological recovery through therapeutic, empathetic, and continuous communication.

Therapeutic Communication by Dai in Reducing the Psychological Distress of Converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhibirin

Dai play an active role in reducing psychological distress among converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhibirin, whether through verbal, written, or non-verbal communication. Based on interviews and observations conducted by the researcher at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhibirin, various forms, media, messages, and obstacles in the therapeutic communication of Dai to reduce the psychological distress of converts were identified, as follows:

Forms of Therapeutic Communication by Dai in Reducing Converts' Psychological Distress

Verbal Communication, This form of communication is carried out by the Dai and is very relevant for identifying the psychological disturbances experienced by converts. Verbal communication is the process of exchanging information conducted face-to-face by the Dai with the converts. The use of verbal communication is considered more accurate and timely. Words or sentences are used as tools or symbols to express ideas or feelings, evoke emotional responses and memories, interpret objects, and enable observation.

The use of verbal communication by the Dai toward converts can be understood from the researcher's interview with Hamdani Tumanggar, a Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, who stated that one of the biggest challenges in assisting converts is managing their vulnerable psychological conditions. According to him, many converts come with backgrounds of social pressure, family conflicts, or inner trauma due to rejection after embracing Islam. Hamdani Tumanggar emphasized that verbal communication is the main key to opening emotional closeness between the dai and the converts. He explained that the initial approach is always done with gentle, non-patronizing, and empathetic communication. According to him:

"The most effective form of communication we feel in providing guidance to converts, especially in reducing the psychological disturbances experienced by them, is verbal communication because converts are in a very fragile state. If we come directly with lectures or instructions, they might shut themselves off. But if we start by listening, greeting gently, that opens a space of trust because here we meet converts face-to-face. With that, I can automatically gauge the converts' responses and it makes it easier for us as Dai to maintain continuous communication. Through verbal communication, I think I can identify the disturbances experienced by the converts themselves" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

The advantage of using verbal communication face-to-face includes speed, directness, and effectiveness (timeliness), as added by Herwin, a Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, who said:

"To understand the conditions experienced by converts, like their reasons for converting to Islam and what they experience after becoming Muslims, I first approach the converts so they feel comfortable, introducing myself, and we engage in a dialogue and question-answer session. This is interpersonal communication with the converts. The psychological disturbances felt by converts vary, such as due to family factors, economic reasons, or environmental experiences. Common disturbances experienced by converts are feelings of

'anxiety', 'lack of confidence', 'isolating themselves from family and environment', 'overthinking'" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

The interview shows that many psychological disturbances which initially cannot be identified directly are recognized through daily dialogue. During the communication process, converts begin to show signs of anxiety, identity confusion, or deep fear. By listening to their outpouring of feelings, the Dai can better understand their spiritual and emotional needs.

Herwin also explained that affirmative and religious words greatly help to soothe the psychological disturbances of converts. For example, phrases like "Allah sees your struggle," "You are not alone," and "This is the path of the chosen ones" can provide calmness and renewed spirit. Such words, according to him, are powerful in rebuilding the confidence and faith of converts who may have been shaken. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of consistency in verbal communication not just once or twice, but regularly. With sustained communication, converts feel cared for and not abandoned. This gradually builds emotional stability, accelerates their religious adaptation, and calms them.

Another benefit of using verbal communication is to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that information conveyed is clearly received. As expressed by Leonardo, a convert at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin:

"Direct communication is easy for me to understand because when we talk with the Dai, if I don't understand something he says, I can immediately ask. Sometimes there are terms we don't get, so the Dai explains directly so we converts understand what he means. We prefer simple language because we feel it's easier for us to accept. Sometimes, when we talk, we also laugh so that the conversation isn't stressful." (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

The above interview provides a clear picture of the important role of verbal communication in accompanying and calming the psychological disorders of converts. Based on these interviews, it can be concluded that verbal communication not only serves as a medium for conveying religious information but also as the primary means of building emotional closeness between the Dai and converts.

A key point that emerges is that verbal communication carried out empathetically, openly, clearly, and consistently creates a sense of safety and trust from the converts toward the Dai. In fragile psychological conditions caused by

family, social pressure, and religious transition, converts greatly need someone they can share with. Communication using gentle language, strengthening word choices, and a personal approach has proven effective in reducing anxiety and inner pressure they experience.

These findings align with interpersonal communication theory which states that effective communication meets emotional needs and provides clarity to the message recipient. Two-way communication, as explained by the Dai in the interview, allows for clarification, emotional responses, and active interaction, thus avoiding misunderstandings and strengthening the bond between the mentor and the convert.

Besides being an emotional approach, verbal communication also plays an important role in gradually and understandably transferring Islamic values. The interview revealed that many converts are unfamiliar with Islamic terms or teachings, so clear, simple, and repeated explanations are needed. This can prevent information distortion that could worsen the converts' psychological condition.

Verbal communication also functions as a tool to identify psychological disorders early. Through casual conversation, the Dai can pick up signals like doubt, sadness, or fear often hidden behind the converts' silence or passivity. By listening directly to their feelings, the Dai can promptly respond with emotional support or professional referral if necessary. Thus, the discussion from these interviews strengthens that verbal communication by the Dai, carried out properly and with humor, plays a significant role in reducing psychological disorders experienced by converts. This also confirms that the Dai's role is not only as a preacher but also as an emotional and spiritual guide bridging the Islamic adaptation process for converts.

At Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, written communication, which is also part of verbal communication, serves as a supporting form of communication in reducing psychological disorders experienced by converts. Although face-to-face verbal communication is the main therapeutic method, written communication also plays an important role as a medium for reinforcement, reflection, and psychological accompaniment.

Non-Verbal Communication, Non-verbal communication is an important component of therapeutic communication because it conveys emotional messages

that cannot always be explained in words. In the therapeutic communication process, the Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin uses non-verbal communication as a tool to create a sense of security, empathy, and trust, especially when dealing with converts who are in sensitive psychological conditions.

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher with the Dai regarding therapeutic communication in reducing psychological disorders among converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, several important points in non-verbal communication are summarized as follows:

Friendly and Calm Facial Expressions

One dominant form of non-verbal communication is facial expression. The Dai accompanying converts at this foundation generally uses gentle and calm expressions, such as sincere smiles, warm eye contact, and patient facial gestures while listening to the converts' complaints. These facial expressions help reduce psychological and emotional disturbances and create a psychologically supportive environment.

"As Dai here, we must strive to remain calm and not interrupt the convert's story, but we try to show empathetic facial expressions as a form of emotional acceptance. This is our challenge as Dai, to provide friendly facial expressions that respond well to the converts" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Open Body Movements and Body Language

Therapeutic communication by the Dai is also shown through open body language, such as sitting with the body facing the convert directly, nodding while listening, or slightly leaning forward to show attention. These gestures signal that the Dai is truly emotionally present and ready to listen wholeheartedly.

Based on an interview with Salman, a Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, he said:

"This is very important because converts often feel hesitant or afraid to open up. Open body language from the Dai can encourage converts to be more confident and feel not judged" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Physical Presence and Accompanying Attitude, The consistent physical presence of the Dai in guiding converts is also a very strong form of non-verbal communication. Being present attentively without always speaking is enough to provide a sense of comfort and being valued to the converts. This attitude shows

that the Dai is not only present as a religious guide but also as a friend ready to accompany them in the mental and spiritual recovery process.

Individual Appearance, Individual appearance is a form of self-expression through attractive appearance that instills confidence. Appearance reflects the self-image that projects from a person and serves as a communication tool. The Dai's appearance is the first thing seen or noticed by the converts. A neat, friendly, warm, and well-dressed appearance of the Dai will encourage success in reducing the psychological disorders of converts. This is consistent with the researcher's interview with Leonardo, a convert at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, who said:

"Yes, honestly, I feel the Dai's appearance really affects our mood as converts. If the Dai comes with a neat, polite appearance and a friendly smile, it makes us feel more comfortable because we are still new, still confused and sometimes afraid. But when we see the Dai appear calm, clean, and have a soothing face, it feels calmer and more confident to approach and talk. Also, sometimes we feel inferior or afraid of being considered 'different'. But if the Dai looks good, dresses politely but not excessively, and speaks politely, it makes us feel at ease. If the Dai comes looking careless, with messy clothes or a flat face, honestly, we hesitate to share. We might feel ignored. So, I think outward appearance also affects inner feelings, especially for us who are learning to adjust."

The interview with Leonardo shows that the non-verbal aspects of communication, especially the physical presence and appearance of the Dai, significantly influence the psychological condition of converts. A neat, polite appearance combined with friendly and calm facial expressions can create a sense of security, comfort, and appreciation for converts during the guidance process. Conversely, an unkempt appearance and unfriendly expressions can create emotional distance and hinder the openness of converts. These findings indicate that non-verbal communication through appearance and attitude of the Dai plays an important role in supporting the effectiveness of guidance, particularly in building emotional closeness and strengthening the psychological recovery process of converts.

Non-verbal communication in the practice of therapeutic communication by Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin has a significant contribution in helping to reduce psychological disorders experienced by converts. Calm facial expressions, open body language, and consistent physical presence are forms of

non-verbal support that build trust, a sense of acceptance, and emotional stability. By harmoniously combining verbal, written, and non-verbal communication, the Dai at this foundation can create a comprehensive approach that touches both the psychological and spiritual aspects of the converts thoroughly.

Therapeutic Communication Media Used by Dai in Reducing Psychological Disorders Among Converts

The communication conducted by Dai to reduce psychological distress among converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin includes:

Media for Psychological Reinforcement, Written communication carried out by Dai with converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, such as WhatsApp messages and mentoring notes, serves as a form of moral and routine support. Through written messages containing motivation and spiritual inspiration, Dai help maintain emotional stability for converts when they are outside the reach of the foundation. Group WhatsApp communication is also used by Dai to show attention to converts through organized activities.

Based on an interview with Rahmad, a Dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin, he stated:

“The Dai here continue to monitor the converts even from a distance, using WhatsApp communication both personally and in groups. The Dai often provide motivational messages to the converts such as: ‘Keep your spirits up, Allah never leaves His sincere servants, every test is a sign that Allah wants you to be closer to Him.’ I believe messages like these can uplift the converts and help reduce their psychological distress” (Interview on May 12, 2025).

Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin also frequently organizes competitions among converts, such as Qur'an recitation contests, memorization competitions, and prayer practice contests. These activities aim to encourage converts to continuously grow in knowledge and worship, while maintaining the closeness and care of the Dai. From the interviews, it is evident that therapeutic communication carried out even through simple written messages can have a lasting therapeutic effect, as they can be re-read by converts when they feel emotionally shaken.

Reflective and Developmental Documentation, In the practice of therapeutic communication at the foundation, some Dai also encourage converts to write daily journals or religious reflections. This form of expressive written communication

helps converts release mental burdens in a structured way. Not only does this help converts recognize their own emotional states, but it also serves as a tool for Dai to understand their psychological and spiritual development. These writings are then responded to with constructive and calming comments.

As stated by Frenko Simbolon, a convert at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin:

"Those of us who want to write are taught and guided to share our stories as converts. We receive various responses from readers mostly encouraging and motivating. I feel happy to receive such support, even from people I don't personally know" (Interview on May 12, 2025).

This form of written therapeutic communication greatly assists Dai in providing support to converts, reducing their anxiety and mental burdens, and ultimately alleviating their psychological distress.

Delivery of Structured and Ongoing Materials, Written communication also comes in the form of convert pocketbooks, inspirational Islamic books, guidance modules, and foundation circulars. These materials contain specific sections written in a personal, inclusive tone with messages that strengthen faith. This communication aims to extend the impact of verbal communication delivered during in-person sessions. These modules become reference guides for converts when at home and facing moments of confusion or anxiety. The language used is intentionally accessible, designed with psychological and spiritual sensitivity.

Sustained Relationship Building, Through written communication, Dai can maintain interpersonal connections with converts especially when in-person meetings are not possible. This continuity reinforces the feeling that converts are not abandoned, even if they are physically distant.

Written communication in the therapeutic communication context at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin functions as both a psychological and spiritual reinforcement tool that complements verbal interaction. Through personal, empathetic, and religious messages, Dai are able to deeply and consistently reach the emotional dimension of converts. With this approach, written communication becomes an effective instrument in reducing psychological distress and accelerating converts' faith adaptation process.

Therapeutic communication is an interpersonal process that is continuous and dynamic. Through this process, Dai and converts develop a relationship not just to exchange information but to support growth and healing from psychological struggles. The relationship between Dai and converts is a conscious commitment to assist in alleviating their psychological distress. Dai build these relationships by integrating respect, empathy, trust, sincerity, and confidentiality into their interactions.

Therapeutic Communication Messages from Dai in Reducing Psychological Distress Among Converts

Dai (Islamic preachers) consistently deliver communicative messages to converts (mualaf) to motivate their recovery from psychological distress. Converts who experience such distress may sometimes feel insecure and close to despair due to pressure from their social environment even from their own families. Dai are present to provide guidance and motivation so that these converts become more confident in their choice of a new religion.

This research found that the therapeutic communication employed by dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin is not merely formal or religiously normative in nature, but rather deeply personal, emotional, and psychological. The messages conveyed by the dai carry healing values (healing messages) that function to restore the mental well-being of converts who are under pressure after undergoing religious conversion.

The following are therapeutic communication messages identified through observation, interviews, and documentation in this study:

Empathy Messages, the dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin demonstrate empathetic attitudes when conveying therapeutic messages to converts. These empathy-based messages acknowledge the feelings of the converts such as sadness, fear, and a sense of loss. The dai do not immediately offer advice or judgment, but instead first recognize and accept the emotional state of the converts. Examples of empathy messages commonly conveyed include:

"I understand how difficult it must be for you to leave your family for your faith. That's not an easy decision."

"It's okay if you're feeling confused right now. We're here as your new family and we'll help you step by step."

These messages have a calming effect on the converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin and create an emotionally safe space., As stated by convert Brother Leonardo in an interview:

"Sometimes I get stressed because my family rejects me. But when Ustadz Hamdani said, 'I will stay by your side even if you have no one left,' I immediately felt stronger" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

The dai at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin have succeeded in demonstrating effective therapeutic communication through their empathetic attitudes. They refrain from giving immediate advice or judgment, choosing instead to recognize and understand the emotional conditions faced by converts such as sadness, fear, and loss. The empathetic expressions shared by the dai help create a sense of safety and inner peace for the converts, fostering a strong emotional bond that supports their spiritual adjustment. Testimonies like that of Leonardo affirm that this empathetic approach brings psychological and spiritual benefits.

Messages of Unconditional Acceptance, Dai at Yayasan Al Muhajirin foster a communication approach that embraces unconditional acceptance, irrespective of the converts' pasts. They communicate that Islam welcomes anyone who seeks to return to their natural faith, regardless of a possibly dark history. Example messages include:

"Islam honors anyone who returns to Allah. We welcome you wholeheartedly."

"No past is greater than Allah's forgiveness."

These messages help alleviate feelings of guilt and foster self-acceptance. Messages of Identity Strengthening, As part of the process of building a new identity, dai convey messages that instill pride and confidence in being a Muslim. This is especially important for converts experiencing an identity crisis due to a loss of former self. Examples of such messages include:

"Being a Muslim is an honor. You've been granted guidance that not everyone receives."

"Your step was an act of great courage. Allah has chosen you."

As expressed by convert Brother Frenko Simbolon in an interview:

"I almost wanted to give up, but Ustadz Herwin said, 'Islam doesn't expect you to be perfect overnight. We'll learn together' That really touched me" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Through these messages, dai help converts develop pride and confidence in their new spiritual identity. These affirmations assist in overcoming identity crises and make the converts feel valued in their spiritual choices. This attitude offers moral support and motivation for continued learning and growth in Islam.

Messages of Calming Spirituality, In addressing inner turmoil, the dai include Quranic verses and Hadiths that convey spiritual tranquility. This becomes a highly effective form of spiritual therapy for converts. As stated by Dai Rahmad Nur Munthe in an interview: "Yes, to calm the hearts of the converts and strengthen their spirituality, we sometimes quote from Hadith or the Qur'an, such as 'Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity' or 'Surely, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace'" (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

The dai incorporate Quranic verses and Hadiths as spiritual therapy to soothe converts experiencing emotional pressure. These messages bring peace of mind and strengthen faith, helping converts remain steadfast in facing life's trials and easing their psychological distress. Such messages serve as a spiritual coping mechanism that reduces anxiety.

Messages of Emotional and Social Support, Dai not only provide religious instruction but also act as a support system for converts. They explicitly offer emotional support that strengthens social connectedness. Example messages include:

"We are your family here. If you need someone to talk to, we're here to listen."
"If you miss your family, talk to us. We can support each other".

These messages help reduce feelings of alienation and loneliness.

Motivational Messages, The dai convey motivational messages that encourage converts to keep learning, growing, and practicing Islam gradually without pressure. These messages are both encouraging and realistic. Examples include:

"There's no need to rush to be perfect. We're all still learning."
"Allah values intention and effort. Even small steps are considered great by Him."

Such messages make converts feel appreciated and unafraid to continue learning. The therapeutic communication delivered by the dai reflects an approach that is highly empathetic, calming, and filled with compassion. The dai serve not just as religious teachers but also as healers of the soul, helping converts through identity crises and psychological pressures. The effectiveness of these messages is

deeply influenced by the sincerity of intention, the genuineness of communication, and the continuity of the relationships built by the dai over time.

Barriers to Therapeutic Communication by Dai in Reducing Psychological Distress Among Converts

The process of therapeutic communication by Dai in reducing psychological distress among converts does not always run smoothly. At Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhaqiqin, Dai often encounter challenges that hinder their therapeutic communication efforts. These obstacles may stem from internal factors within the Dai themselves, the condition of the converts, or environmental circumstances, such as:

Lack of Understanding Among Dai, Some Dai tend to focus more on da'wah (Islamic propagation) and religious knowledge, yet lack training or insight in effective communication practices. This leads to difficulty in accurately identifying signs of psychological distress such as social anxiety or past trauma which are often not handled professionally and instead are perceived merely as a "lack of faith." As expressed by Salman:

'Not all the Dai here fully understand the issues faced by converts, Brother. We all come from different educational backgrounds, so not all of us are necessarily competent in understanding the state of the converts. There are Dai who are not very communicative; they may understand but can't express things to the converts with patience and gentleness. I think the Dai here need to keep learning. A Dai should understand psychology, have good speaking skills, and be someone whose behavior the converts can look up to. This really affects how converts see us. And also, Brother, we shouldn't tell a convert who's struggling emotionally or has trauma that it's just because of weak faith or lack of prayer. In my opinion, not everything should be labeled as a lack of faith if we say that, the converts might just spiral into overthinking' (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

Based on the interview, it can be concluded that a lack of psychological understanding among Dai is one of the key barriers to effectively reducing psychological distress in converts. Without sufficient awareness of individual mental health conditions, the approach taken may be inappropriate or even counterproductive. Therefore, ongoing learning and capacity building such as counseling training for Dai is essential to enhance the effectiveness of therapeutic communication for converts.

Shortage of Female Preachers (Daiyah) in the Institution, The researcher observed that, in addition to the lack of therapeutic communication skills

mentioned earlier, the shortage of *Daiyah* (female Islamic preachers) is also a significant factor hindering therapeutic communication efforts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin.

As Salman shared:

*“What I’ve felt, Brother, is that the absence of *Daiyah* really hampers our approach to female converts, especially in therapeutic communication. They tend to be more comfortable opening up to other women. Without a *Daiyah* accompanying them, they become more closed off and unwilling to share, which disrupts the mentoring process. That’s one of our main obstacles, Brother. First, not many women are willing to become *Daiyah* with a specific focus on converts. Second, a *Daiyah* must have a strong grasp of religion and also psychological sensitivity, especially when dealing with sensitive cases. Plus, many of the existing *Daiyah* also have family responsibilities or jobs, making it hard for them to fully commit”* (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

From this interview, it can be concluded that the limited number of *Daiyah* is a major barrier to therapeutic communication and psychological recovery, especially for female converts. The absence of same gender companions can hinder openness, worsen emotional isolation, and reduce the effectiveness of spiritual and psychological guidance. Special efforts are needed to recruit and prepare more *Daiyah* with psychosocial sensitivity to ensure that mentoring is inclusive and responsive to the psychological needs of converts, particularly women.

Language and Cultural Differences, Many converts come from diverse cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds that differ from the majority culture where the *Dai* operate. These differences can obstruct effective communication. For instance, the use of religious terminology unfamiliar to the converts or overly technical preaching materials can create confusion and alienate them from the mentoring process.

Rahmad shared the following:

*“Yes, sometimes it’s quite difficult for us, Brother, to communicate with converts because of language and cultural differences. For example, we have converts from Berastagi or Karo it’s a bit hard for me to connect with them. Sometimes we don’t understand their language, and they don’t understand ours. In those cases, as *Dai*, we do our best to bridge the conversation, to at least start a dialogue. Also, we try not to use overly academic language they don’t always get that. That’s what it’s like, Brother”* (Interview conducted on May 12, 2025).

From this interview, the researcher concludes that language and cultural differences are significant obstacles to therapeutic communication and psychological recovery efforts for converts. These barriers affect emotional expression, lead to miscommunication, and create feelings of alienation within the community.

Based on the analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews with sources at *Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin*, it can be concluded that therapeutic communication carried out by *Dai* and *Daiyah* plays a strategic role in helping converts recover from psychological distress. A communication process that is empathetic, trust-building, and aimed at actively listening to the struggles of converts has been shown to create a sense of emotional safety and help them navigate their spiritual and social transitions.

Implementation of Therapeutic Communication by *Dai* in Reducing Psychological Distress Among Converts at *Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin*

To assess the effectiveness of therapeutic communication practiced by *Dai* toward converts in reducing psychological distress, this section systematically presents field findings based on interviews and observations. The researcher explores how therapeutic communication delivered not in a formal manner but through personal, empathetic, and spiritual approaches has had a tangible impact on the psychological condition of converts at *Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin*.

From interviews conducted with the *Dai*, it was found that therapeutic communication is not implemented in a technical or procedural way, as in the medical field, but rather through emotional closeness, active listening, and the delivery of comforting religious advice. The interactions between the *Dai* and the converts take place in a familial and trusting atmosphere, creating a safe space for converts to express their inner anxieties.

Interview results with Rahmad, one of the *Dai* at the foundation, revealed that converts have shown significant improvements after receiving guidance through therapeutic communication. Converts have begun to display calmness in behavior, increased self-confidence in communication, and renewed motivation to live their Islamic faith. This observation was echoed by Alex Sinaga, a convert at *Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin*, who stated that the gentle and inclusive

approach of the Dai made him feel valued and not alone. The communication was not limited to formal lectures but also included casual conversations, personal discussions, and even communication via short messages all of which contributed to a sense of safety and comfort.

The researcher also refers to the theory discussed in Chapter II to evaluate the effectiveness of therapeutic communication by the Dai in reducing psychological distress among converts at *Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin*. The *Communication Audit* theory was used as the evaluation framework. This theory emphasizes assessing the effectiveness of communication within an organization based on six key indicators: receiver, message content, timing, communication channel, delivery format, and source of message as proposed by Hardjana. Using this approach, communication effectiveness can be comprehensively evaluated in the context of a socially and spiritually oriented non-profit organization such as a convert development foundation.

In this context, the receiver of communication is the group of converts under the care of *Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin*. Based on interviews and observations, it was evident that the converts were not merely passive recipients but actively responded, built emotional engagement, and demonstrated significant behavioral changes. Positive responses from converts such as openness, comfort in sharing, and improved self-confidence indicate that the dialogue initiated by the Dai was well-received and had a direct impact on the psychological condition of the converts.

The content of the message in this therapeutic communication was not solely composed of formal religious preaching, but also included spiritual messages that touched on emotional and psychological aspects such as life motivation, the importance of patience, the strength of faith, and the reinforcement of Muslim identity. These messages were delivered in simple but meaningful language, making them accessible to the inner conditions of converts from diverse backgrounds.

The therapeutic communication conducted by the Dai proved to be flexible and responsive. There was no formal time frame, yet Dai actively opened communication channels whenever the converts needed support. This is reflected in testimonies from converts who said they could talk to the Dai even through

WhatsApp groups. This shows that communication was delivered at the right time during emotional crises as well as in daily interactions.

The communication channels used by the Dai included direct face-to-face interaction, informal daily conversations, and digital media. This variety of channels allowed communication to continue even in non-formal situations. The combination of these channels made communication more inclusive, flexible, and accommodating to the psychological condition of the converts. The format of therapeutic communication used by the Dai was more dialogical and interpersonal, rather than one-way as in typical religious lectures. This format enabled deep emotional interaction and mutual understanding, which is highly appropriate in the context of convert mentoring an area that requires a flexible and empathetic approach.

D. CONCLUSION

The researcher draws the following conclusions after conducting data collection and in-depth interviews on the effectiveness of therapeutic communication by Dai in reducing psychological distress among converts at Yayasan Pembinaan Mualaf Al Muhajirin. Converts guided by the foundation experience various forms of serious psychological distress, including chronic stress, social anxiety, fear of the future, feelings of guilt and inner conflict, overthinking, self-isolation, and low self-esteem. These psychological challenges are largely triggered by social pressure, family rejection, environmental stigma, and the instability that often accompanies spiritual adaptation. In response to these challenges, the Dai at the foundation have implemented various forms of therapeutic communication both verbal and non-verbal that reflect empathy, honesty, unconditional acceptance, and active listening. The role of the Dai extends beyond that of religious instructors; they also serve as friends, listeners, and emotional support systems for the converts. Their approach is interpersonal, humanistic, and attentive to both emotional and spiritual needs. The implementation of therapeutic communication involves direct interaction and intensive personal engagement. The Dai consistently apply techniques such as active listening, emotional reflection, clarification, and spiritual empowerment. Converts are given the space to express their emotions and personal concerns

without fear of judgment. Furthermore, communication is not limited to formal religious mentoring sessions but is also carried out through home visits, personal conversations, and informal counseling. This holistic and flexible approach has proven to be effective, as evidenced by the positive changes observed among the converts, including increased emotional stability, self-confidence, and a stronger sense of conviction in living their new life as Muslims.

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