

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.29.2026.364			
Received:	11 September 2025	Accepted:	13 March 2026
Revised:	20 December 2026	Published:	15 Jun 2026
Volume:	29 (June)	Pages:	223-241
To cite: Nur Shahidah Pa'ad, Nur Izyanti Afiqah En Abdul Rahim, Muhammad Safwan Harun & Zaizul Ab. Rahman. 2026. A biopsychosocial analysis of <i>mujahadah</i> (spiritual striving) in rural family transformation: Insights from expert interviews. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 29 (June): 223-241.			

A Biopsychosocial Analysis of *Mujahadah* (Spiritual Striving) in Rural Family Transformation: Insights from Expert Interviews

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ABSTRACT

Rural poverty in Malaysia is not merely defined by material deprivation but is deeply entangled with psychosocial and spiritual challenges that hinder long-term family transformation. This study explores the role of mujahadah (spiritual striving) as a catalyst within the biopsychosocial framework, grounded in tazkiyah al-nafs (spiritual purification) and the principles of maqasid al-shariah (objective shariah). Using a qualitative exploratory design, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine domain experts in Islamic family management, rural poverty, Islamic economic, Islamic psychospirituality, rural community development, and family holistic wellbeing. Thematic analysis of expert insights yielded three key themes: mentality issues and the need for mujahadah; mujahadah as a continuous inner process, and; mujahadah as a source of family resilience. Findings suggest that spiritual striving enhances biopsychosocial well-being and supports holistic transformation in low-income families by fostering internal motivation, emotional regulation, and long-term resilience. It also aligns with the five essential goals of the shariah (al-kulliyat al-khams), reflecting the integration of spiritual and psychosocial development. This approach offers culturally relevant insights for improving rural family well-being and aligns with broader global development goals focused on poverty reduction, social inclusion, and sustainable human development.

Keywords:

Biopsychosocial, families resilience, maqasid al-shariah, mujahadah, rural poverty.

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Introduction

Rural poverty represents a persistent structural and social challenge, rooted in multiple and interrelated factors such as colonial legacies, unequal economic development, and limited access to education and productive resources (Gopal et al. 2021; DOSM 2022; Pa'ad et al. 2024; Hakim 2026 et al.). These systemic issues continue to undermine the livelihoods and well-being of rural communities in Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM 2022), poverty in rural areas remains a concern, with many hardcore poor families struggling to meet basic needs. Reflecting rising living costs, the national poverty line income (PLI) has been updated to RM2,589, while the hardcore poverty threshold is now RM1,198 serving as crucial benchmarks for identifying vulnerable groups.

These thresholds vary between urban and rural areas. For rural households, the average PLI stands at RM2,342, with some areas recording even higher thresholds up to RM2,421, underscoring varying levels of economic vulnerability across rural communities. Aligned with these thresholds, recent national data reports that 12.0% of rural households still live in poverty, with hardcore poverty persisting despite slight improvements. Considering this, the Deputy Prime Minister reaffirmed the government's goal to reduce rural poverty to below 10%, highlighting that over 130,000 household heads remain in the hardcore poor category, facing significant socioeconomic barriers (Sinar Harian 2023).

As a global comparison, according to the 2024 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report by UNDP and OPHI, approximately 1.1 billion out of 6.3 billion people (18.3%) across 112 countries live in acute multidimensional poverty, with 83.7% of these poor individuals residing in rural areas, compared to only 6.6% in urban areas (UNDP & OPHI, 2024). This reflects that rural poverty is not only a concern in Malaysia but also a serious global challenge. This underscores the need for development strategies that integrate cultural and spiritual dimensions often overlooked in mainstream poverty interventions.

However, many rural poor families remain trapped in a fatalistic mindset and aid dependency, hindering long-term transformation (Pa'ad et al. 2024). These mental and social constraints further entrench the cycle of poverty, calling for a more holistic and sustainable approach to enhance rural family well-being. One-off financial assistance often fails to create lasting impact, as poverty extends beyond material deprivation to encompass psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions, requiring comprehensive and multidimensional interventions (Achmad et al. 2023; Gopal et al. 2021; Taqiuddin Mohamad 2024).

A biopsychosocial lens is thus essential in understanding the multifaceted nature of poverty, encompassing biological vulnerability, psychological distress, and social disconnection (Engel 1980). In rural poor families, these dimensions often co-occur and reinforce one another (Gopal et al. 2021). However, this study advances a fourth dimension which is spirituality as a vital and inseparable part of well-being, not in a generic or universalist sense, but specifically grounded in the Islamic tradition. In Islam, spirituality is tied to servanthood (*ubudiyah*) divine trust (*amanah*), and the moral obligation to strive for inner purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). This spiritual striving is not merely introspective but represents an act of worship and moral responsibility.

Nevertheless, Islamic conceptions of well-being emphasize spiritual consciousness and the objectives of the *maqasid al-shariah*, promoting human prosperity through the preservation of *hifz al-din* (strengthening of religious values), *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life), *hifz al-nasl* (preservation of lineage), *hifz al-'aql* (development of intellect), and *hifz al-mal* (protection of wealth) (Kamali 2008). Within this framework, *mujahadah* the earnest striving for self-reformation emerges as a vital mechanism for developing resilient families in poverty (al-Ghazali 2002). It cultivates self-awareness, perseverance (*istiqamah*), patience (*sabr*), and self-monitoring, aligning with the core objectives of *maqasid al-shariah* and contributing to holistic well-being (Mohd Azaman & Badar 2016; Hashim 2020). This highlights the critical importance of spiritual development in transforming rural family resilience.

Despite its spiritual origin, *mujahadah* has social implications. It fosters family responsibility, ethical conduct, and communal upliftment, thereby bridging personal faith with collective development. Yet, its relevance is often overlooked in conventional poverty alleviation frameworks, which tend to prioritize economic or psychosocial interventions alone (Amalia & Samputra 2020). While previous studies have focused primarily on material and social strategies such as cash transfers, microcredit, and social capital development (Aziz et al. 2024; Zainal et al. 2023; Alkire et al. 2011; Abdul Rashid, S. M. R., & Samat, N. 2018), limited attention has been given to integrating the biopsychosocial model with Islamic spirituality, particularly *mujahadah*, as a transformative tool for achieving *maqasid* oriented well-being. Moreover, existing discussions on *mujahadah* tend to focus narrowly on personal piety, such as through the *self-hisbah* (self-accountability) framework (Lukman et al. 2023), with little exploration of its collective or policy-based applications.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of *mujahadah* in enhancing the biopsychosocial well-being of rural poor families, guided by Islamic spiritual principles and the *maqasid al-shariah* framework, with implications for broader applications in culturally grounded poverty alleviation strategies.

Biopsychosocial Well-Being of Rural Poor Families

The biopsychosocial concept introduced by George Engel (1977) marked a paradigm shift from the biomedical model, emphasizing that human well-being results from the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors within a complex system. This framework has since been applied to understand how conflict, psychological stress, and social imbalances affect family resilience. For example, Calkins et al. (2013) highlighted the combined role of biological (HPA axis functioning), psychological (emotional well-being), and social (parenting relationships) factors in shaping child development in high-risk families. Rural poverty extends beyond economic hardship, contributing to psychosocial stress and limited healthcare access. Lehman et al. (2017) pointed to systemic barriers, while Steele et al. (2015) emphasized family resilience, aligning with Sen's (1999) view of poverty as capability deprivation and Sachs's (2011) advocacy for structural investment to break poverty cycles.

From an Islamic biopsychosocial perspective, Islam inherently promotes a holistic understanding of well-being, where health (*al-sihhah*) encompasses not only physical wellness but also inner peace and social stability. Rizkiah et al. (2024) discussed the Islamic worldview's influence on mental health, while other scholars emphasized the integration of spirituality and personality in Islamic health perspectives (Hashim 2020). This holistic approach is reflected in the Quranic supplication: "*Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter and protect us from the punishment of the Fire*" (*al-Baqarah*, 2:201), symbolizing the synthesis of biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions.

In this study, the spiritual dimension is not approached generically but is firmly rooted in Islamic theology and ethics. In Islam, spirituality is inseparable from the concept of servanthood (*ubudiyah*), the divine trust (*amanah*), and the obligation to strive for moral and inner purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). This view frames spiritual well-being as an act of worship (*ibadah*), where every effort is including resilience in the face of poverty is part of fulfilling one's responsibility to Allah. Hence, the spiritual component of this model is not universalist in nature but deeply embedded in the Islamic worldview.

Although the biopsychosocial model is increasingly recognized across disciplines, there remains a lack of focused research on the biopsychosocial well-being of rural poor families in Malaysia and the Islamic world. Existing studies are often based on Western contexts, which may not reflect the socio-cultural and spiritual realities of rural communities in this region. Therefore, localized research is crucial to better capture the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dynamics that shape rural well-being (Balqis-Ali et al. 2024).

In Malaysia, rural poverty intersects with socio-economic inequality (social), limited healthcare access (biological), and psychological distress (psychological), illustrating its

biopsychosocial nature (Khazanah Research Institute 2019; Zakaria et al. 2021; Unit Perancang Ekonomi 2023). Ongoing rural hardship also disrupts parenting and child development. Aziz et al. (2019) reported that weak parental supervision and poor communication contribute to youth deviance a key indicator of biopsychosocial well-being. Financial and psychosocial challenges significantly influence mental health in rural communities. Adenam et al. (2023) found strong links between economic stress and psychological outcomes, while Ismail et al. (2025) highlighted the multidimensional deprivation faced by rural children in education, health, and living conditions.

While interest in biopsychosocial frameworks is growing, few studies have integrated Islamic principles such as *mujahadah* within the *maqasid al-shariah* framework. This study addresses that gap by developing a contextualized, integrative model rooted in local socio-religious values. *Mujahadah* against the *nafs* is central to Islamic spirituality and strengthens resilience, discipline, and long-term transformation. Within the *maqasid* perspective, it supports the protection of core aspects of life. To operationalize this idea, the next section introduces a conceptual model that integrates *mujahadah* within a biopsychosocial structure portraying it not merely as a religious practice, but as a transformative path towards achieving holistic well-being grounded in the *maqasid* framework.

Conceptual Framework (Mujahadah as a Catalyst for Biopsychosocial Well-being)

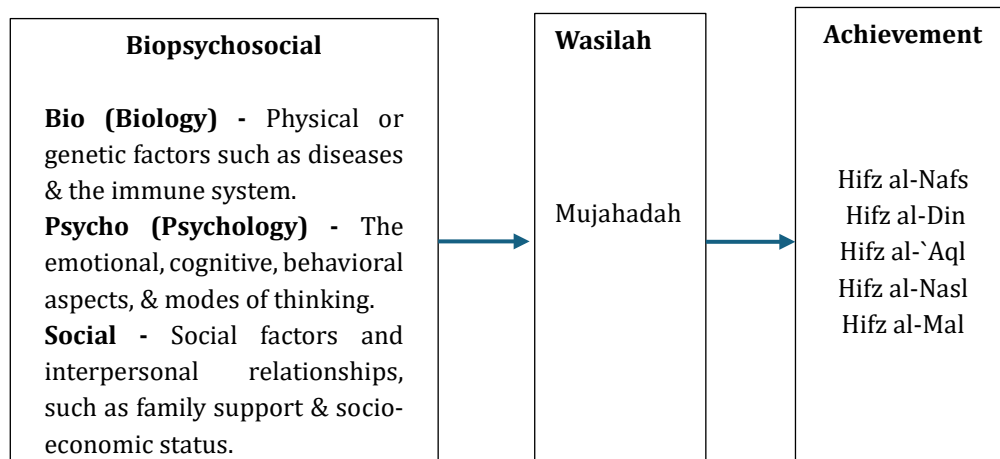


Figure 1.0: Striving (Mujahadah) as a Wasilah

Figure 1.0 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning this study, which integrates the biopsychosocial model with the Islamic spiritual concept of *mujahadah*, functioning as a *wasilah* (approach) towards achieving the core objectives of *maqasid al-shariah*. The biopsychosocial dimensions which are biological, psychological, and social reflect the multiple interdependent factors that shape rural family well-being. These domains are not merely physical, emotional, or economic, but are deeply interwoven with spiritual dimensions in the Islamic worldview.

In this perspective, *mujahadah* begins with the awareness that every human being is a servant (*abd*) of Allah entrusted with the responsibility (*amanah*) of vicegerency (*khilafah*). Only when one realises this sacred trust will the sense of accountability emerge, motivating efforts to improve oneself and fulfil divine responsibilities. Thus, *mujahadah* is not merely a personal struggle, but a manifestation of one's commitment to uphold the trust given by Allah through sincere striving in every aspect of life. Building on this foundational awareness of human servanthood and divine trust, the concept of *mujahadah* is explored in greater depth as a central mechanism within the framework.

In this model, *mujahadah*, broadly understood as the internal spiritual striving against base desires (*nafs*), acts as a transformative mechanism that links the biopsychosocial experiences of rural poor families to their spiritual outcomes. This spiritual striving is not a generic personal ethic, but an act of worship (*ibadah*) and an Islamic moral imperative (*taklif*)

deeply grounded in the shariah tradition. This connection is critical, as *mujahadah* enables the regulation of internal impulses while nurturing ethical, emotional, and behavioural discipline. It aligns the effort to overcome poverty with the pursuit of divine proximity and moral integrity fostering a life that is both resilient and purposeful.

Rooted in the Islamic spiritual tradition, the concept of *mujahadah* originates from the Quranic and Prophetic teachings on self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and the struggle to uphold religious commitment. It is not merely an emotional resistance, but a sacred duty (*taklif*) of servanthood (*ubudiyah*), emphasizing the believer's continuous responsibility in fulfilling their role as a servant of Allah. According to classical scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (2002), *mujahadah* is a long-term effort marked by pain, effort, and spiritual exertion, through which the soul is trained to resist desires, pursue truth, and attain sincerity (*ikhlas*) and inner discipline.

The process of *mujahadah* begins with the awakening of self-awareness and regret, followed by setting self-conditions, consciousness of God's watchfulness, *mujahadah* (the struggle itself), self-accountability, and corrective self-discipline. Each stage involves hardship and inner struggle which not as punishment, but as a means of soul refinement and spiritual growth.

The framework positions *mujahadah* as an approach between biopsychosocial stressors and the desired achievements framed by the five universal objectives of the *maqasid al-shariah* (*al-kulliyat al-khams*) such as protection of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-aql*), lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), and wealth (*hifz al-mal*). The fulfilment of these objectives is not only legal or structural but deeply personal and spiritual, requiring continuous striving, ethical consciousness, and internal discipline.

Moreover, this framework draws upon classical and contemporary interpretations of the *maqasid*. Classical scholars such as al-Ghazali and al-Shatibi emphasized that religion serves as the foundation for other aspects of well-being, while contemporary scholars like Kamali and al-Qaradawi expanded its meaning to include socio-communal dimensions. These interpretations justify the integration of *mujahadah* as a dynamic, spiritually grounded method to pursue holistic development.

In sum, the conceptual framework of this study proposes that through sustained spiritual effort (*mujahadah*), rural poor families can enhance their biopsychosocial well-being in a manner consistent with the Islamic ethical vision. This integration of spiritual striving into human development reframes poverty alleviation not merely as a socio-economic or psychological challenge, but as a holistic process of internal transformation aligned with divine purpose. This holistic model resonates with the broader application of Islamic ethical principles in contemporary contexts. As illustrated in discussions on environmental ethics and biotechnology, Islamic teachings emphasize collective responsibility and preservation of the public good as part of ethical conduct (Hasim, et al., 2022). Similarly, in addressing rural poverty, *mujahadah* must be situated within a framework of ethical awareness, accountability, and spiritual striving toward communal upliftment.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory design using semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the integration of *mujahadah* into the biopsychosocial well-being framework of rural poor families. This method was selected to obtain rich, contextual insights into experts' interpretations and spiritual perspectives are particularly dimensions that are not easily quantifiable, such as motivation, self-awareness, and spiritual resilience (Creswell & Poth 2018; Merriam & Tisdell 2016). A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to capture the multidimensional nature of psychological, social, spiritual, and biological experiences related to rural poverty and family transformation.

A total of nine experts were purposively selected based on their specialized knowledge and over five years of professional experience in their respective fields. All experts were affiliated with public universities or government agencies and had active involvement in low-income community programs. Table 1 presents the selected expert informants, outlining their expertise and areas of community development, as well as their specific contributions to the field.

Table 1.0: Selected Experts with Their Areas of Expertise and Areas of Community Development with Contributions

Expert	Expertise/Community Development Scope	Contribution
Informant 1	Islamic economics - Poverty alleviation and community welfare policy for low-income communities	Advisory fellow to Kedah state zakat board, providing policy input on poverty reduction and welfare initiatives.
Informant 2	Rural community development -Local governance and socio-economic policy	Chief of Village Headmen in Sabak Bernam, leading governance reforms a rural development coordination.
Informant 3	Rural poverty - Socio-economic empowerment for low-income communities	Developer of a foundational framework for addressing urban poverty among low-income in Penang and Kuala Lumpur.
Informant 4	Rural community development - Indigenous education and rural socio-economic development	Project leader for the Orang Asli Education Development Programme and implemented rural community socio-economic development initiatives.
Informant 5	Islamic Family Management - Faith-based family wellbeing	Developer of the Integrative Family Well-being Model Based on Islamic Principles and Teachings applied in low-income rural contexts.
Informant 6	Rural community development - Local authority engagement and public service delivery	Coordinator of Community Care and Economic Empowerment Initiative for rural households in Sabak Bernam.
Informant 7	Islamic psychospiritual - Youth motivation and employability	Developer of the Soft Skills Competency Module to enhance employability and motivation among marginalized youth.
Informant 8	Family holistic wellbeing - Values-based parenting and moral education.	Developer of Modeling Excellence Strategies in Parenting and Family Development framework, promoting resilience in vulnerable families.
Informant 9	Rural poverty - Multidimensional poverty reduction and policy.	Contributor to the Penang State Poverty Project Reduction Project and reconceptualization urban poverty from multidimensional and multiethnic perspectives in Malaysia.

The sample size was deemed adequate for data saturation, which was achieved by the eight to ninth interviews. This aligns with established qualitative research literature indicating that expert interviews typically reach thematic saturation within 6 to 12 participants (Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006; Hennink Kaiser & Marconi 2017; Vasileiou et al. 2018). Member checking was employed by sharing emerging themes with participants to ensure accuracy and interpretive alignment. This sampling and saturation strategy was appropriate for an exploratory study that prioritized depth of expert insights over generalizability.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. Informed consent was secured, and all sessions were audio-recorded with permission. Interviews were conducted online using the Google Meet platform and lasted 60 to 90 minutes each session. It is a duration supported by Creswell and Poth (2018) as sufficient for eliciting deep, reflective responses in exploratory qualitative research. Transcripts were anonymized using pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality. All data were securely stored and retained according to institutional guidelines.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on the study's conceptual framework and validated through expert review by qualitative research specialists to ensure content clarity and thematic alignment. Data were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), following six key steps such as familiarization, initial coding, theme

generation, theme review, theme naming, and final reporting. An inductive approach was applied, allowing themes to emerge from the data itself. Thematic analysis was conducted manually without software, and iterative coding and cross-checking were carried out to maintain consistency and trustworthiness. Additionally, the identified themes were reviewed and verified by field experts to strengthen the credibility of the interpretation. The final analysis focused on identifying biological, psychological, social, and spiritual resilience themes that illustrate how *mujahadah* contributes to the holistic well-being of rural poor families.

Findings

Data obtained from in-depth interviews with nine experts were analysed using a thematic approach. Three key themes emerged, corresponding to the main issues discussed: (1) Mentality Issues and the Need for *Mujahadah*, (2) The Continuous Process of *Mujahadah*, and (3) *Mujahadah* as a Form of Resilience among Rural Poor Families. These themes serve as the foundational basis for integrating *mujahadah* into the biopsychosocial framework and the attainment of the five dimensions of *hifz*.

Mentality Issues and the Need for *Mujahadah*

Mentality issues cannot be resolved without *mujahadah*, and *mujahadah* itself cannot take place without the presence of inner awareness. Deep awareness is one of the key prerequisites for undertaking spiritual struggle (al-Ghazali 2002). One of the most consistent findings across all informants was the existence of a dependency mindset among rural poor families. The absence of self-awareness leads to continuous reliance on aid without any initiative toward self-reliance. *Mujahadah*, in this sense, becomes the spiritual antidote to learned helplessness which instilling inner drive, responsibility, and the will to break free from passive dependency on external help. Informant 1 remarked:

“Of course it’s not enough. That’s why we see many of them receiving zakat indefinitely, without any effort to move forward... But in terms of mentality, they still believe they are zakat recipient’ and that zakat is their right forever.”

This perspective reflects the presence of psychological stagnation, a clearly recognized symptom in the biopsychosocial model that undermines emotional and social well-being (Balqis-Ali et al. 2024). Without awareness, determination and sincere effort cannot be cultivated, resulting in a sense of comfort with the status quo and a lack of will to change. In the context of *tazkiyah al-nafs*, this condition signifies the absence or lack of introspection and recognition of one's weaknesses and the need for personal reform (al- Ghazali 2002). This stagnation is also evident in poor attitudes toward work and effort. For example, Informant 6 shared:

“I once ran a food retort business course. The first round had about 30 people signing up. But by the second session, only 5 showed up. Maybe it’s because the business looked like it needed a lot of capital.”

This illustrates how long-term perseverance is lacking even when support structures are in place. Islam regards consistent effort as an act of worship, and abandoning opportunities for self-improvement is seen as a weakness in *mujahadah* and a neglect of one's trust (*amanah*) to strive for a better life. Many engage only in the initial stages but fail to follow through, reflecting a lack of sustained spiritual striving, or *mujahadah*. Informant 2 echoed this sentiment:

“They have quite a similar attitude. Most of them still hold the mindset of not wanting to change. They claim to be content, unwilling to strive. They make efforts, but only minimally. They have become comfortable with receiving aid without making efforts to escape poverty. This stems from one obvious issue are their mentality, which accepts and settles for their

current state... If they had higher spiritual awareness in Islam, they would certainly try to rise above their circumstances."

This resignation reflects a cultural norm that not only indicates a weakening of preservation of intellect which serves as a faculty for reasoning, critical thinking, and decision-making but also transmits short-term thinking across generations. When the intellect is not actively engaged, dependency becomes a psychological comfort zone, reinforced by structural poverty traps (Sachs 2011). As Informant 6 further observed:

"They're only thinking about getting through today... Even if their children are well-educated, how can they move forward if the whole family is still struggling?"

Such a mindset obstructs long-term transformation and contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. It contradicts the forward-looking orientation required in *mujahadah*, where hope and future planning should be anchored in faith, not fatalism. Informant 3 further agreed, noting that this comfort zone discourages individuals from initiating any efforts to improve their lives:

"They think, 'If I just stay like this, it's easier than having to strive.' If a person is destined to earn just a little, then that's all they should get. That kind of mentality is what we truly need to change."

Informant 3 also elaborated that individuals often do not perceive this situation as burdensome, as they have never experienced the true hardship of self-reliance:

"They don't even feel burdened. Perhaps because they've never truly experienced the hardship of striving independently. For example, they would rather sell the equipment they received than make an effort to run a business. It's as if they do not want to generate income on their own. That is one of our biggest challenges."

This finding aligns with other cases where aid is misused due to moral detachment. As Informant 7 shared:

"Things like gas stoves and cooking pots that were given as aid ended up being sold just so their kids could buy a motorcycle. They don't see those items as something entrusted to them by the community."

Such behavior reflects a deep crisis of spiritual self-awareness, marked by the absence of accountability before Allah and the community. In the Islamic context, accountability (*mas'uliyah*) means bearing the responsibility to act truthfully, fulfil trusts (*amanah*), and uphold justice in one's dealings, especially in matters involving communal resources such as aid. This sense of moral responsibility is not only outward but rooted in an inner awareness that Allah is ever watching, a consciousness cultivated through *mujahadah*.

In this case, the absence of accountability indicates a failure in the inner struggle (*mujahadah*) to uphold ethical behaviour, such as being honest and trustworthy in managing support received. When individuals are not spiritually anchored in this awareness, they tend to misuse external support, treating it not as a trust from society but as a personal entitlement.

Without this internal spiritual check, external assistance is easily devalued and misused. Amran and Hussin (2020) emphasized that emotional competence grounded in faith which includes self-regulation, gratitude, and responsible behaviour is essential in building spiritual resilience and navigating life's hardships. When such spiritually grounded emotional regulation is absent, we begin to see a rise in moral detachment even in areas tied closely to communal trust, such as welfare aid and community-based support.

The informant also further highlighted that misunderstandings of religious teachings also contribute to this detachment, where passive resignation is mistaken for reliance on divine will:

“Some would say, 'If our fate is to get just a handful, then that's all we'll ever have.' They've become overly resigned to their situation.”

This reflects a distorted understanding of trust in Allah, where the boundary between true acceptance and passive resignation becomes unclear. True *mujahadah* revives motivation and action, not helpless fatalism. The informant added: “If they had proper values, they'd definitely think twice before selling off the aid they received.” This statement shows a decline in spiritual integrity which is the inner sense of moral responsibility that *mujahadah* aims to build. Without such awareness, people may act in ways that are lawful but ethically wrong in Islam.

This is particularly significant, as it indicates a deficit in awareness that contributes to the absence of motivation or willingness to work toward progress (Sen 1999). This indirectly leads to the deterioration of faith that understood as the protection of religion, which is one of the core aspects of life in the framework of *maqasid al-shariah* as essential values such as responsibility, reliance on Allah, and personal accountability begin to erode (al-Shatibi 1992). From the perspective of *mujahadah*, this illustrates the interconnectedness between the lack of self-awareness, the absence of intentional commitment to change, the failure to regulate base impulses, and ultimately, the absence of sustained inner striving (*mujahadah*). However, Informant 4 offered a more strategic reflection:

“When they realize that aid is not merely assistance, but an opportunity for change, they begin to make efforts. But awareness does not emerge on its own. It requires a moderator or an intermediary.”

This statement underscores that fostering awareness, which eventually leads to genuine *mujahadah*, is not an effortless task. It requires deliberate strategies and guided facilitation to help individuals internalize and act upon change in accordance with the structured spiritual process outlined above. This leads directly to the second theme.

The Continuous Process of *Mujahadah*

A sound strategy for implementing transformation based on Islamic spirituality, as outlined in earlier discussions, cannot be separated from long-term efforts whether carried out independently or with external support (al-Ghazali 2002; Pa'ad et al., 2021). Informant 1 emphasized:

“But... issues related to the biopsychosocial system take time. It's not a one- or two-day task... There must be long-term development programmes, like mentoring! For example, if it involves business, there should be entrepreneurial guidance... regular follow-up to monitor business growth.”

“Sometimes, these efforts to bring about change can stall halfway... But we must acknowledge that at the beginning, there will always be weaknesses... If we can carry out an intervention like this (on a continuous basis) and achieve even 30% success, that's acceptable! Human efforts are never perfect from the start.”

This underscores the need for sustained efforts to ensure that rural poor families stay on the right path and gradually achieve transformative goals. This is also aligned with the process of character and ethical development. Good character stems from good habits, and good habits are rooted in consistent discipline and internal willpower (Pa'ad et al. 2021). Thus, any initiative that relies on one-off execution is inherently insufficient. By practicing *mujahadah* in accordance with Islamic spiritual principles, the process serves not only to enhance self-discipline in the pursuit of escaping poverty but also deepens spiritual consciousness and devotion to Allah (Sarif & Ismail 2011; al-Ghazali 2002). In terms of implementation, *mujahadah* can be operationalized through various platforms and intermediaries, as noted by Informant 2:

“We integrate Islamic elements into their economic management... more systematic zakat distribution... access to long-term education... They begin to appreciate the value of self-reliance in Islam.”

When Islamic principles form the foundation of economic and social interventions, *mujahadah* can be grounded in practical efforts that reinforce *hifz al-mal* (protection of wealth) while simultaneously nurturing a spirit of *‘ubudiyyah* in managing resources and engaging in work. Through such integrated implementation, the objectives of *hifz al-din* (protection of religion) and *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) can also be realized both directly and indirectly, transforming the intervention from a merely material initiative into one that also fosters spiritual growth (Kamali 2008; al-Shatibi 1992). Informant 5 supported this direction and proposed the need to design a systematic and well-structured plan with a phased and periodic implementation mechanism rooted in Islamic values. He stated: “Within the governmental structure... it becomes easier to implement such efforts on a continuous basis.” In relation to these Islamic values, Informant 5 further noted:

“In Islam, there is a principle that nine out of ten sources of sustenance come from trade. If someone truly believes in this principle, they will be motivated to improve their own economic situation and that of their family. It means that Muslims are obliged to work toward economic empowerment.”

This insight is critical in ensuring that rural poor families do not remain reliant on short-term aid alone but instead develop self-sufficiency through gradual capacity building. This idea emphasizes the importance of instilling core values such as *aqidah* (faith), *sabr* (patience), and *mujahadah* (spiritual striving) as pathways to improve life in meaningful ways. For families living in poverty, this process must extend beyond passive aid to include intentional and consistent efforts that challenge the transmission of defeatist thinking to future generations (al-Ghazali 2002).

This spiritual foundation in Islam forms part of the ethical framework that commands individuals to be proactive in improving their livelihood as part of their devotion to Allah. As emphasized in the Quran (al-Jumu’ah, 62:10): “And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often that you may succeed.” This verse directly links worship to active engagement in the economy, reflecting the integration of spiritual life with worldly responsibilities. Therefore, *mujahadah* becomes the spiritual engine that propels individuals to break free from helplessness and embrace productive living. It is through this inner striving that believers develop the trust in Allah not as passive surrender, but as a complement to effort and perseverance.

In the rural context, where generational poverty persists, Islamic spirituality provides both a motivational and moral compass. Not only does it encourage families to act with responsibility and dignity, but it also grounds their struggle in a higher purpose to fulfil their role as vicegerents on earth by working, striving, and uplifting their communities. In this context, the role of intergenerational influence becomes a key factor which refers to how children inherit not only material poverty but also mindsets and attitudes from their parents. As Informant 2 emphasized:

“If these kids aren’t interested in school, send them to TVET or vocational training... Otherwise, they’ll just follow in their parents’ footsteps. If the father works on a farm, the child will end up doing the same.”

“I always emphasize that if the parents don’t change, the kids won’t either. But if we focus on children in primary and secondary school, there’s still hoped to turn things around.”

This highlights the urgency of early spiritual and motivational intervention. Beginning the process with young children is strategic, as their thoughts and habits are still malleable and receptive to positive influence. At this formative stage, values can be nurtured effectively through

schools, households, or local social institutions such as mosques. In developmental psychology, it is often emphasized that children are more responsive to behavioural modelling and emotional guidance during their early years. Therefore, *mujahadah* must be instilled not only as an individual struggle but as a family ethos that breaks cycles of inherited poverty and mental stagnation. The preservation of *hifz al-nasl* thus depends on planting long-term aspirational values within the younger generation. Furthermore, social institutions play a crucial supporting role. Social institutions such as mosques, surau, and local community centres are more than physical spaces. These are platforms of collective spiritual development. However, their role has often been underutilized in addressing deep-rooted behavioural issues within rural poor communities. As Informant 8 insightfully proposed:

“I feel that when it comes to family-based efforts... maybe we can make use of the mosque or surau. I see that as the most effective way. We can choose mentors from within the family itself such as those who are strong in their faith, emotionally stable, and so on. Then we train them to become role models in the community.”

This approach reinforces the need for structured community-based mentorship, embedded in religious and psychosocial strength. When implemented through institutions such as mosques and community centres, *mujahadah* becomes a communal discipline which not only shaping individuals but nurturing a resilient social ecosystem. By revitalizing these institutions with clear spiritual programming, such as meeting (*halaqah*) on inner reform (*tazkiyah*), mentoring sessions on ethical living, and practical skills tied with values, the practice of *mujahadah* can be normalized within the community structure. This collective approach not only reduces the isolation of struggling families but also builds a shared moral consciousness where spiritual striving becomes a communal culture rather than a private pursuit. From the perspective of *maqasid al-shariah*, this approach contributes meaningfully to *hifz al-nasl* (preservation of lineage), *hifz al-`aql* (development of intellect), and *hifz al-din* (strengthening of religious values). Thus, *mujahadah* should not be seen merely as an individual spiritual pursuit, but rather as a socially impactful endeavour capable of reshaping the collective fabric of impoverished rural communities.

Mujahadah as a Form of Resilience among Rural Poor Families

As previously discussed, without the internalization of *hifz al-din* (preservation of religion), no form of physical or material support can adequately address the core challenges faced by rural poor families especially those related to mentality. True transformation only occurs when the soul is cultivated with Islamic character, rather than merely being exposed to external inputs (Pa'ad et al. 2021). As Informant 1 explained:

“To receive assistance, there should be a prerequisite, come to the mosque, perform congregational prayers, attend religious classes... If a person lacks a religious foundation, the aid they receive will not have any long-term impact.”

This statement underscores that true resilience does not lie in material support alone but is rooted in spiritual strength that is nurtured through consistent religious practice (Gumiandari et al. 2022). Participation in activities such as congregational prayer, religious lectures, and mosque life is not merely ritualistic, it serves as a spiritual training ground that cultivates the values of *mujahadah*, such as patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and steadfastness (*istiqamah*) (Gumiandari et al. 2022). These are inward efforts that act as a shield against the impact of structural poverty.

When individuals in poor rural families internalize *hifz al-din*, they no longer view assistance merely as an external solution, but as an opportunity to strengthen their efforts, purify their intentions, and restructure their lives with dignity and moral purpose. This aligns with the principles of *mujahadah*, which emphasize sustained personal effort and conscious reliance upon God when facing life's challenges (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah 1998).

Moreover, without spiritual empowerment, material support cannot function as a catalyst for genuine change. Rather, it often becomes a temporary relief that quickly dissipates when met with economic and social pressures (Amalia & Samputra 2020). Hence, the resilience of rural poor families heavily depends on their capacity to internalize the values of *mujahadah* in their daily lives shaping identities that are not easily shattered even within deeply entrenched poverty structures (Ibrahim et al. 2024). This is echoed by Informant 9, who shared that:

"So, if you ask me, Doc, what's the cause of poverty I'd say there's no way to pinpoint just one factor... How are we supposed to help people like this? Their mindset plays a big role too. They say they're okay with how things are, but the truth is, they're still in the poverty category and haven't been able to break out of it."

This illustrates how post-aid resilience requires not only external support but deep internal shifts. When formal aid ends, the true test of transformation begins. *Mujahadah* enables poor families to maintain spiritual and psychological stability even in the absence of external support. This post-aid resilience ensures that progress does not regress once assistance is withdrawn, transforming *mujahadah* into a critical mechanism for long-term poverty exit. Informant 3 elaborated this point with profound psychospiritual clarity:

"...when they possess good character and strong faith in God, they can indeed rise out of poverty by returning to Allah and placing their trust in Him to succeed. They must have strong effort, patience, gratitude, acceptance, and peace of mind... but they must keep striving without giving up..."

This reflection reveals that *mujahadah* functions as a deeply internal process, challenging, phased, and requiring persistent commitment (*istiqamah*) in the face of poverty. Despite enduring hardships, *mujahadah* serves as a mechanism of resilience, encouraging perseverance and the refusal to surrender to fatigue or hopelessness (Ibn Qayyim 1998). Families who embrace *mujahadah* are better able to resist the tendency to give up halfway or blame fate, choosing instead to confront challenges actively and constructively. Additionally, *mujahadah* also plays a role in moral resilience. In a case shared by Informant 6:

"I've seen it myself in my own family. When social issues and poverty collide, it can lead to serious family problems. If the husband and wife are constantly fighting, eventually neither of them wants to take responsibility for the children. I'm not sure if they got divorced or not, but both ended up leaving their kids with a sibling to take care of. They disappeared from (District of) Sabak Bernam, and no one knows where they went, and there's been no news from either parent since."

This depicts how economic stress can erode moral accountability and parental responsibility. *Mujahadah*, in this sense, is essential to preserving ethical integrity in the face of adversity. It provides the internal compass to act responsibly despite poverty. Beyond the individual, collective resilience is also central. As Informant 9 emphasized:

"I think we shouldn't focus too much on just the target group... the assistance given needs to match their actual needs. At the same time, there's another important point like the implementation of programs and policies must align with the principles of *maqasid al-shariah*."

This shows that *mujahadah*, when internalized collectively through Islamic-based interventions, can strengthen not only personal but also communal capacities to resist poverty. When families and communities uphold shared values of perseverance and spirituality, they create ecosystems of mutual support aligned with the goals of *maqasid al-shariah*. Such commitment to continuous effort allows poor families to cultivate psychological fortitude and the courage to rise from failure (Ridhuan & Fitriana 2024). This stands in contrast to passive attitudes or absolute dependence on external support systems. It nurtures an inner strength to keep trying,

to learn from mistakes, and to plan the future with greater intentionality and strategic awareness. Thus, *mujahadah* is not solely a spiritual pursuit, it also contributes to the development of a resilient mental structure and behavioural discipline. It serves as a catalyst for the capacity to act under pressure and strengthens long-term determination to escape poverty (al-Ghazali 2002; Ibn Qayyim 1998).

In conclusion, the three themes collectively form the foundation for fostering the well-being of rural poor families through the lens of *mujahadah*. Thus, the process of *mujahadah* unfolds cyclically, evolving in tandem with one's faith and external challenges. It affirms that spiritual approaches are not merely complementary to social development but rather constitute its very core in the construction of resilient family systems.

Discussions

Mujahadah functions as a spiritual means that connects biopsychosocial factors with the desired outcomes of Islamic well-being. Broadly, *mujahadah* refers to sincere striving against the lower self, resisting temptations and distractions in pursuit of Allah's pleasure. This internal struggle is distinct from outward struggle, as it centres on moral discipline, purification of the soul, and enduring spiritual effort. Through the lens of spiritual purification, *mujahadah* becomes a mechanism that nurtures holistic human well-being which not only in physical terms but also spiritually and ethically. Classical scholars emphasize that true benefit arises from the balance between bodily needs and spiritual elevation. This aligns with the Quranic reminder of humanity's natural disposition in Surah al-Rum (30:30), where Allah calls mankind to incline toward truth and faith, their original nature.

In the rural poverty context, where biopsychosocial stress is pronounced, *mujahadah* emerges as an internal engine for transformation. Unlike the body, which can be sustained through material provisions, the soul must be safeguarded against arrogance, self-conceit, envy, and ostentation. Hence, Islamic teachings offer not only physical but deeply spiritual prescriptions for resilience. The Prophet's mission, as highlighted in al-Baqarah (2:151), was not only to teach knowledge but to purify souls.

Through the lens of spiritual purification, *mujahadah* addresses the root causes of poverty-related stagnation such as lack of self-awareness, weak moral will, and emotional passivity. For rural poor families, *mujahadah* manifests in daily actions such as maintaining patience during economic hardship, staying committed to work, managing household responsibilities ethically, and resisting despair. These real-life expressions of internal struggle are essential for sustaining biopsychosocial resilience. Furthermore, the effects of *mujahadah* extend to moral resilience. Informants in the study shared cases where poverty led to moral erosion since parents abandoning children due to family conflict or individuals misusing aid. These actions reflect not merely material deprivation but a deeper spiritual void. Here, *mujahadah* functions as a corrective force, cultivating virtues like responsibility, patience, and self-regulation.

The broader implications of this finding suggest that *mujahadah* operates as a post-aid resilience mechanism. When formal support ceases, only those with sustained inner discipline can continue progressing. This aligns with the Quranic view in Surah al-Ankabut (29:69), which promises divine guidance for those who strive with sincerity. Hence, *mujahadah* ensures that progress is not dependent solely on external aid but grounded in spiritual integrity and personal effort.

More than ritual, *mujahadah* manifests as disciplined action, which is persistence in earning an honest income, patience during hardship, ethical family leadership, and responsible time and resource management. These expressions of inner striving show that spiritual commitment plays a concrete role in family survival and social functioning. Furthermore, religious well-being is often seen as the foundation of other dimensions of life such as safety, intellect, family, and economic stability. In this framework, *mujahadah* helps sustain biopsychosocial well-being by encouraging both active practice of spiritual values and avoiding behaviours that threaten moral and social balance. While the former includes actions like remembrance of God

and ethical behavior, the latter involves setting personal limits and upholding integrity. Contemporary scholars expand these principles to reflect societal well-being. For instance, spiritual preservation now includes freedom of belief, personal safety includes dignity and rights, and economic protection includes efforts to reduce inequality. This reflects the modern relevance of integrating *mujahadah* as both a personal and social pathway toward holistic well-being.

As revealed in the findings, the practice of *mujahadah* also involves a step-by-step internal process. This includes initial awareness of one's shortcomings, followed by commitment to change, emotional regulation, and finally consistent personal effort. These phases shape tangible behavioural transformation, from attitude adjustment to resilience in financial and social responsibilities. Institutional and community support further strengthens this process. As highlighted by informants, local mosques, surau, or community mentors can serve as platforms for cultivating *mujahadah* through faith-based mentorship and structured guidance. When implemented at the community level, spiritual striving becomes a shared responsibility, reinforcing values and resilience in rural social ecosystems. Additionally, this discussion reaffirms the critical role of *mujahadah* as a post-aid mechanism. Several informants observed that once aid ends, only families with inner discipline and motivation continue to grow. This confirms that *mujahadah* builds resilience that is self-sustaining, enabling individuals to maintain progress and adapt without prolonged reliance on external support.

The intergenerational aspect also demands attention. Findings show that children often replicate the patterns of their parents. Therefore, cultivating *mujahadah* within family life is essential for breaking the cycle of inherited poverty and learned helplessness. Early interventions especially among school-aged children help sow seeds of motivation, effort, and spiritual commitment from a young age.

In summary, this discussion affirms that *mujahadah* plays a pivotal role in harmonizing internal capacities with the biopsychosocial challenges faced by rural poor families. It bridges the gap between Islamic spiritual teachings and the lived realities of poverty, enabling families to transcend material deprivation and cultivate lives rooted in dignity, resilience, and holistic well-being. The discussion has comprehensively addressed the three core themes emerging from the findings which are mentality issues and the need for *mujahadah*, the continuous process of *mujahadah*, and *mujahadah* as a form of resilience. This confirms that *mujahadah* is not merely a spiritual endeavour, but a transformative force capable of restructuring biopsychosocial well-being in a holistic and sustainable manner. Theoretical implications and practical strategies for implementation will be further elaborated in the next section, Conclusion and Recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that *mujahadah* serves as a critical foundation in fostering the biopsychosocial well-being of rural poor families. The three key themes derived from expert interviews namely, mentality issues and the need for *mujahadah*, the continuous process of *mujahadah*, and *mujahadah* as a form of resilience demonstrate how deep spiritual effort can cultivate inner strength that significantly contributes to life transformation. The *mujahadah* approach emerges as a self-transformational mechanism that demands not only awareness and determination but also consistent and phased implementation (Pa'ad et al. 2021). Resilience cannot be achieved through external support alone. It requires the development of robust spiritual and psychosocial capacities (Sarif & Ismail 2011). The absence of *mujahadah* leads to stagnation in efforts to overcome poverty and fosters persistent dependency. Therefore, integrating *mujahadah* into the pursuit of biopsychosocial well-being for rural poor families is not merely optional, it is a fundamental necessity to ensure meaningful and sustainable change.

Based on the findings and discussion, this study proposes several recommendations for practical application and further research. To ensure that interventions targeting rural poor families have lasting impact, it is recommended that a structured module grounded in the *mujahadah* approach be systematically developed. This module should be based on the principles of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), encompassing the essential phases of *mujahadah*

which begin with self-awareness and followed by recognition of one's flaws, personal commitment to change, ongoing self-monitoring, and *mujahadah* which sustained inner striving. The implementation of this module may be aligned with skill enhancement training, economic guidance, and community-based activities geared toward holistic self-development. This approach can empower families to build inner strength and resilience, equipping them to navigate life's pressures with maturity and to progress toward self-reliance without passive dependence on short-term aid.

The study's findings offer practical guidance for both policymakers and community organizations to design spiritually integrated poverty interventions. By incorporating the *mujahadah*-based framework into programs such as microenterprise support, zakat distribution, and family resilience strategies, internal empowerment can complement material aid. Community leaders and educators may also embed the phases of *mujahadah* into grassroots initiatives to strengthen spiritual values, ethics, and lasting *behavioral* change. This spiritually grounded model can enhance the sustainability and impact of rural poverty alleviation efforts at both national and local levels.

This study contributes meaningfully to the achievement of key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by introducing *mujahadah* (spiritual striving) as a complementary approach to conventional material-based interventions. Rather than relying solely on financial aid or structural support, the study emphasizes the role of inner strength such as self-awareness, patience, perseverance, and self-regulation in building biopsychosocial resilience and fostering well-being among rural poor families. Unlike conventional strategies that emphasize material development alone, this study broadens the discourse by demonstrating how spiritual empowerment complements economic and psychosocial interventions.

By aligning *mujahadah* with the five objectives of *maqasid al-shariah* which are *hifz al-din* (religion), *al-nafs* (life), *al-aql* (intellect), *al-nasl* (lineage), and *al-mal* (wealth). The study offers a spiritually grounded framework for sustainable development. These findings can inform both policymakers and community actors in designing integrated social programs that not only address economic needs but also nurture long-term internal empowerment rooted in Islamic values.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Selangor State Research Grant (GA023-2023) and the University of Malaya Scholarship Scheme (UMSS). The authors gratefully acknowledge this financial and institutional support, which made the completion of this study possible.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exists with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. The study was conducted independently, without any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest.

Author's Contributions

1. **Nur Shahidah Pa'ad:** Contribute to conceptualization and supervision, framework design and project oversight.
2. **Nur Izyanti Afiqah En Abdul Rahim:** Conducted literature review, manuscript drafting, and formatting.
3. **Muhammad Safwan Harun and Zaizul Ab. Rahman:** Contribute to discussion and thematic interpretation:
All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethics Statement

This research adhered to the ethical standards for human participant studies and received approval from the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) under approval number UM.TN C2/UMREC_4313. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and written informed consent was obtained voluntarily. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

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