Addressing Academic Anxiety Among Students from Broken Families: Exploring an Islamic Counselling Approach Grounded in Javanese Indigenous Values

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Abstract

Adolescents from divorced or conflict-affected families in Indonesia often experience academic anxiety rooted in emotional instability and limited family support. This challenge is especially pronounced in Javanese cultural settings, where harmony, acceptance, and spiritual balance are central to well-being. However, research on school counselling in Indonesia remain largely generic, often neglecting these cultural and spiritual dimensions that shape students' emotional resilience. To address this gap, the present study explores the *Junggringan Kawruh Jiwo* (JKJ) counselling method, a culturally grounded approach that integrates Islamic spirituality and Javanese indigenous values to support students from broken families in managing academic anxiety. JKJ combines Ki Ageng Suryomentaram's concept of *kawruh jiwa* (self-awareness and emotional responsibility), Islamic spiritual practices (*dhikr*, prayer, and reflection on Qur'anic verses), and Javanese principles (*nrimo, ngalah, sabar*) into a holistic therapeutic framework. Six students (aged 16-18) from divorced or conflict-affected families and three experienced school counsellors, purposively recruited through school administrations based on their prior work with such students, participated from three vocational schools in Semarang, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of reflective journals (February-April 2025). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation across data sources and validation via member checking and expert consultation in Javanese cultural and counselling traditions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and reflective journal analysis. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and verification of interpretations via member checking and expert consultation in Javanese culture and counselling practice. The findings reveal that JKJ counselling enabled students to recognise and regulate anxiety through reflective dialogue, spiritual practices, and culturally resonant exercises promoting acceptance and self-awareness. Counsellors' empathetic engagement fostered emotional safety and trust. Collectively, these results indicate that JKJ represents a culturally responsive counselling framework with potential to enhance the psychological support available to adolescents from broken families in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Academic anxiety among students from divorced or conflict-affected families is a growing psychological concern in Indonesia, reflecting the broader social implications of rising divorce rates. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022) indicate approximately 467,258 divorce cases annually, equivalent to 1,280 couples separating each day. Beyond signalling a crisis in family stability, this phenomenon has profound consequences for

children's psychological well-being. Empirical studies show that students from broken families are more vulnerable to emotional distress, concentration difficulties, and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Güler et al., 2024; Susgaleni & Ridlwan, 2024; Čaňo & Gracia, 2022). Ali et al. (2022) further reported that around 60% of children from such families are at high risk of developing maladaptive behaviours, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both emotional and educational outcomes.

Previous studies have examined the multidimensional impact of family breakdowns on adolescents (i.e., psychological, academic, and psychosocial). Psychologically, adolescents often experience emotional instability, low self-esteem, and difficulty maintaining relationships due to a lack of affective support (Firdausi et al., 2020; Ifdil et al., 2020; Arizona et al., 2025). Academically, family conflict correlates with impaired concentration and reduced academic achievement (Okoree et al., 2020). Psychosocially, adolescents from broken families display higher levels of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Obeid et al., 2021). Although Siregar (2024) highlighted the protective role of religious values, most studies remain descriptive and fail to translate these insights into structured, culturally grounded interventions. Consequently, school counselling practices in Indonesia tend to remain generic, relying on standardised psychological techniques that insufficiently account for the spiritual and cultural frameworks underpinning students' emotional resilience. This gap is particularly striking in Javanese communities, where values of harmony (*rukun*), acceptance (*nrimo*), and patience (*sabar*) form the basis of emotional regulation and coping (Khadafi et al., 2024).

To address this gap, the present study explores the *Junggringan Kawruh Jiwo* (JKJ) method as a contextual and procedural form of Islamic counselling that integrates spirituality and local culture. Initiated by Ki Ageng Suryomentaram and elaborated by Kholik and Himam (2015), JKJ emphasises *kawruh ing ati* (self-understanding) and *ngelmu lathi* (self-control training), two interrelated processes that promote emotional awareness and balance through reflective and communal practice. Unlike conventional Islamic or Western counselling approaches that prioritise cognitive or prescriptive techniques, JKJ fosters self-transformation through dialogue, mindfulness, and value internalisation. Within educational settings, its practice involves guided discussion forums that encourage students to express emotions, reflect on spiritual meanings of personal experiences, and build supportive peer relationships. This participatory and culturally resonant process has been shown to foster self-acceptance, resilience, and inner peace (Achmad, 2020).

Accordingly, this study critically examines how the principles of JKJ are applied within school counselling practice and evaluates their relevance in addressing the academic anxiety of students from broken families. Three Research Questions guide this inquiry: (1) What forms of academic anxiety do students from broken families experience? (2) How are the principles of JKJ implemented within Islamic value-based counselling in schools? and (3) How does this approach support counsellors in developing effective therapeutic relationships grounded in psychological–spiritual integration? Through this focus, the study extends existing literature by providing empirical insights into a culturally responsive and spiritually embedded model of counselling that reflects the lived realities of Indonesian adolescents.

METHODS
Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how adolescents from broken families experience academic anxiety and how the JKJ counselling approach may support them within school-based settings. This design was considered appropriate for gaining a contextualised understanding of participants' lived experiences and the ways in which spiritual-cultural elements are embedded in counselling interactions.

The Junggringan Kawruh Jiwo (JKJ) Approach

The JKJ approach functioned as the focus of exploration and as the framework for the intervention. It combines Islamic spiritual practices, such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), prayer, and reflection on Qur'anic verses, with Javanese philosophical values including *ngrigi* (gentle accompaniment), *nrimo* (acceptance), and *kawruh jiwa* (self-understanding). The intervention was delivered through a series of eight counselling sessions lasting 90 to 120 minutes, organised around a flexible structure that incorporated prayer, emotional reflection, thematic discussions, contemplative exercises (*eling-eling* or self-remembrance), and closing reflections.

This process encouraged participants to articulate their feelings, reflect on their experiences, and engage in cultural and spiritual meaning-making. Throughout the sessions, counsellors sought to maintain egalitarian and nurturing relationships (*ngemong*) while using familiar local expressions and metaphors to facilitate understanding. Rather than positioning JKJ as a prescriptive model, the approach was examined as a culturally situated counselling practice that emphasises self-awareness, harmony (*jumbuhing kawula Gusti*), and gradual personal growth within the students' own value systems.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at three vocational high schools (SMK) in Semarang, Central Java (SMK Palapa, SMK Negeri 5, and SMK Cut Nya' Dien) which were purposively selected to reflect different institutional characteristics and counselling environments. These included variations in public–private status and degrees of integration of religious and cultural perspectives within school programmes.

Participant recruitment followed purposive sampling, focusing on individuals whose experiences were directly relevant to the research aims. Inclusion criteria required that students (a) came from divorced or conflict-affected families, operationally defined as households experiencing parental separation, divorce, or prolonged absence of one or both parents, and (b) had previously participated in school counselling addressing emotional or academic difficulties. Identification of eligible participants was conducted in collaboration with guidance and homeroom teachers, who provided anonymised referrals.

Six students (aged 16–18) meeting these criteria were invited to participate, together with three school counsellors who had prior experience supporting students from similar family backgrounds. The counsellors were selected through school administrations based on recommendations and consent to be involved in implementing and reflecting on the JKJ process. Students were considered primary participants, while counsellors contributed as key informants to provide professional and contextual perspectives. This sample was not intended to be statistically representative but to provide detailed and nuanced insight into the studied phenomenon. Participant profiles are presented in Table 1.

Data Collection

Data were collected between February and April 2025 through a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted before, during, and after the intervention to capture change over time in students' perceptions of anxiety and their engagement with the counselling process. Group interviews (approximately 120 minutes) allowed participants to share experiences collectively, while individual interviews (approximately 20 minutes) encouraged deeper personal reflection. Post-intervention interviews with counsellors (around 30 minutes) provided professional viewpoints and supported data triangulation.

Participant observations were conducted across counselling sessions using a structured observation checklist adapted from Bachiochi and Weiner (2004), focusing on emotional

expression, social interaction, and academic engagement. Observations were carried out by trained research assistants and supported by counsellor field notes to enrich interpretive depth. In addition, counselling session documentation, student reflections, and counsellor journals were reviewed to complement the primary data sources. Together, these methods provided multiple perspectives on both students' lived experiences of anxiety and the implementation of JKJ principles.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Initials	Institutional Origin	Background	Gender	Experience (Year)
JG1	SMK Palapa Semarang	Teacher	Male	10
JG2	SMK Negeri 5 Semarang	Teacher	Female	9
JG3	SMK Cut Nya' Dien Semarang	Teacher	Male	10
JS1	SMK Palapa Semarang	Students from the Broken Home family	Male	-
JS2	SMK Palapa Semarang	Students from the Broken Home family	Female	-
JS3	SMK Negeri 5 Semarang	Students from the Broken Home family	Male	-
JS4	SMK Negeri 5 Semarang	Students from the Broken Home family	Male	-
JS5	SMK Cut Nya' Dien Semarang	Students from the Broken Home family	Male	-
JS6	SMK Cut Nya' Dien Semarang	Students from the Broken Home family	Female	-

Note. SMK = Vocational High School

Trustworthiness and Validation

To enhance the credibility of the findings, several strategies were applied, including source triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity. Triangulation involved comparing information from student interviews, counsellor observations, and documentation to identify consistencies and variations across sources (Khairunnisa et al., 2024; Benchimol et al., 2011). Member checking was conducted by sharing brief summaries of preliminary interpretations, not full transcripts, with 15 students and three counsellors. Participants were asked whether the themes captured their experiences accurately or if any aspects had been overlooked (Hidayati & Irmawati, 2019). Their feedback was used to refine the analysis. In addition, interpretive summaries were discussed with two experts in Javanese culture and counselling practice to ensure that the contextual meanings of key concepts were represented appropriately. Throughout the research process, the primary researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document assumptions, positionality, and interpretive decisions, minimising bias and enhancing transparency in line with qualitative standards for confirmability and trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the Huberman and Miles (2002) framework, which includes interconnected phases of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, open, axial, and selective coding were applied to interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents, with NVivo 12 software used to manage and organise the data. Codes were developed inductively to allow patterns to emerge naturally from the material. The analysis then moved to data display, where thematic matrices and descriptive summaries were used to visualise relationships among emotional, behavioural, and cultural dimensions.

The process of conclusion drawing and verification involved iteratively comparing themes across data sources, returning to the field notes and participant feedback to confirm or

refine emerging interpretations. This interpretive cycle supported the identification of recurrent patterns while acknowledging the contextual and subjective nature of participants' experiences. Through this analytic approach, the study sought to provide a careful, context-sensitive understanding of (1) the manifestations of academic anxiety among students from broken families, (2) how JKJ principles were interpreted and enacted in school-based counselling, and (3) how counsellors' empathetic and spiritually informed engagement contributed to the development of therapeutic relationships.

RESULTS

Manifestations of Academic Anxiety Among Students from Broken Families

Analysis of interview and observation data revealed that academic anxiety among students from broken families manifested across three interrelated domains: school life, future prospects, and social interactions. Within the school context, students frequently described difficulties concentrating, worries about poor grades, and a sense of discouragement due to the absence of emotional support at home. Their learning environments were often disrupted by conflict or instability, leaving them to study in isolation and without motivation.

> *I always feel unfocused when studying because my mind is filled with family problems. (JS1)*
> *Every time there's an exam, I'm afraid of failing because no one supports me like my friends have. (JS2)*

Concerns about the future were also pervasive. Students expressed fears of being unable to continue their education or find stable employment due to their family's financial difficulties and lack of role models to guide them. These worries were described in concrete rather than abstract terms, linking personal experiences to structural limitations within their family context.

> *I'm afraid I won't be able to go to college because my family doesn't have enough money. (JS1)*
> *I often wonder if I can succeed even though there's no role model at home. (JS3)*

Socially, participants reported feelings of inferiority, avoidance of group activities, and discomfort when peers discussed family life. These experiences were associated with a persistent sense of stigma and exclusion.

> *I avoid group work because I feel different from the others. (JS5)*
> *When people talk about their parents, I get quiet. (JS6)*

Students also described how prolonged parental conflict or divorce amplified their anxiety, affecting concentration and daily motivation. Recurrent exposure to conflict contributed to emotional exhaustion and diminished engagement in learning activities.

> *I can't study peacefully because I hear my parents arguing every day. (JS1)*
> *I feel mentally exhausted, making it impossible to focus on my lessons. (JS6)*

Field observations supported these accounts. During non-teaching periods, several students were observed sitting alone in library corners or outdoor areas, writing in diaries or quietly reflecting. Teachers noted that while these students rarely disrupted lessons, they often appeared disengaged and avoided interaction. The visualisation of anxiety pattern can be seen in Figure 1.
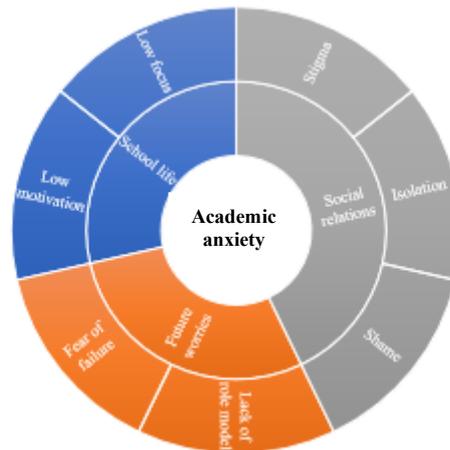
Figure 1. Patterns of Academic Anxiety Among Students from Broken Families

Implementation of the JKJ Counselling Approach

The JKJ intervention was delivered over eight weekly sessions, each lasting approximately 90–120 minutes. Every session followed a structured pattern involving an opening prayer, guided emotional sharing, the use of Javanese–Islamic narratives, contemplative dhikr practice, and a closing commitment. Teachers facilitated the process in an egalitarian and nurturing manner consistent with the principle of *ngemong* (gentle accompaniment).

Across sites, students described engaging actively in spiritual practices such as dhikr and controlled breathing as mechanisms for calm and focus. The integration of Qur'anic verses and Javanese proverbs was reported to make the sessions relatable and personally meaningful.

Repeating the phrase "La ilaha illallah" made me feel calmer and more focused on positive things. (JS5)
After a few weeks, I was more able to control my anger and anxiety. (JS2)

Teachers observed that dhikr and breathing practices fostered visible relaxation and more stable emotional expression. Students also became more open during sessions, moving from minimal participation in early meetings to active storytelling in later ones.

At first, I just listened. Later, I wanted to tell my story. (JS2)

Field notes recorded at SMK Negeri 5 Semarang on January 17, 2025, described a quiet, focused atmosphere during dhikr practice, with participants seated in a circle, breathing steadily and reciting phrases in synchrony. The activity was conducted calmly, without distraction or unnecessary conversation, reflecting the reflective character of the program.

Teachers and students consistently emphasised that the combination of reflection, prayer, and gentle discussion enabled participants to process difficult emotions in a structured yet familiar way.

We guide students not only to read verses but also to internalise the messages. (JG3)
The stories about patience helped me think more clearly. (JS5)

Counsellor Roles in Developing Therapeutic Relationships

The role of counsellors in the JKJ process extended beyond conventional guidance. Teachers functioned simultaneously as spiritual mentors and emotional facilitators, modelling calmness and empathy during sessions. Their consistent use of reflection, patience, and non-judgmental communication was recognised by students as crucial to building trust and emotional safety.

Our teacher never blamed us. She listened and guided us slowly. (JS6)
I started each meeting by calming myself through dhikr so I could listen with patience. (JG1)

Counsellors frequently checked on students informally between sessions, often during prayer breaks or outside class hours. These interactions were perceived as gestures of care that helped maintain continuity in the counselling relationship.

Now I can talk to my counsellor without fear. (JS1)
I feel closer to my teachers because they genuinely care about what I'm feeling. (JS5)

By the end of the program, students reported feeling calmer, more confident, and more able to communicate openly with peers and teachers. Teachers noted similar patterns, documenting improved classroom focus, greater participation, and fewer signs of withdrawal.

I feel more patient and less quick to anger than before. (JS3)
They were calmer and more consistent in participation. (JG1)

Across schools, both counsellors and students highlighted that the reflective, spiritually grounded process not only helped reduce anxiety but also strengthened relational bonds within the school setting. See Figure 2 for visualisation of counsellor roles.
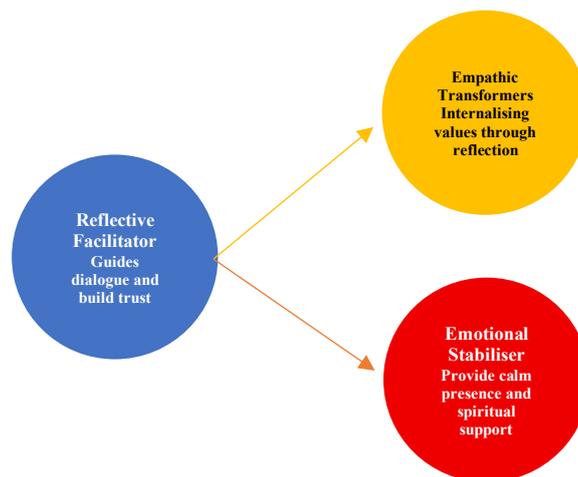

Figure 3. The Role of Counsellors in the JKJ Counselling Framework

Taken together, the findings show that academic anxiety among students from broken families revolved around academic insecurity, uncertainty about the future, and social withdrawal. The JKJ approach, implemented through structured reflection, dhikr, and Javanese–Islamic narratives, provided a familiar and emotionally safe environment in which students could articulate concerns and regulate emotions. The counsellors' calm presence,

empathetic facilitation, and integration of spiritual reflection were central to building trust and sustaining engagement throughout the counselling process.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how adolescents from broken families experience academic anxiety and how the JKJ counselling approach supports their emotional regulation within school contexts. The findings indicate that students' anxiety is not random or general but structured around three primary domains: concerns about academic performance, uncertainty about the future, and difficulties in social interaction. The JKJ approach helped students recognise and regulate these anxieties through reflective dialogue, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), prayer, and contemplative discussion of Qur'anic verses integrated with Javanese values of *nrimo* (acceptance), *ngalah* (patience), and *sabar* (endurance).

Consistent with Pargament's (2007) theory of spiritually integrated counselling, the present findings suggest that embedding religious and cultural meaning-making into counselling processes may promote adaptive coping and emotional balance. The spiritual rituals within JKJ encouraged self-reflection and internal locus of control, enabling students to reinterpret distress as part of a meaningful journey rather than as personal failure. This mechanism aligns with evidence that religious or meditative practices can stabilise emotional regulation and reduce stress-related symptoms by promoting cognitive reframing and physiological calm (Motzkin et al., 2015; Raedt & Hooley, 2016).

The role of counsellors, teachers acting as emotional stabilisers and reflective facilitators, was pivotal in this process. Their consistent empathy, attentiveness, and culturally resonant communication created a secure relational environment in which students could safely express vulnerability. This observation supports research highlighting that teacher empathy and relational attunement enhance student engagement and reduce anxiety (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). However, it also underscores ongoing challenges: the effectiveness of teacher-led counselling depends heavily on training, supervision, and institutional support (Hoque et al., 2020). Without these conditions, the sustainability and quality of relational interventions remain uncertain.

The study's findings correspond partially with earlier works that addressed adolescent anxiety (Liu et al., 2021) but extend them by highlighting the importance of integrating spiritual and cultural dimensions into counselling for students from broken families. Previous research in Indonesian contexts has noted the promise of spirituality-based guidance (Mulyani, 2024; Sari & Abidin, 2023), yet few have operationalised such values into structured, contextually embedded practice. The JKJ framework contributes to this gap by offering a procedural model that integrates Islamic spirituality and Javanese indigenous philosophy into therapeutic processes.

While the results cannot be generalised beyond the current setting, they illuminate how spiritual–cultural integration can enhance students' emotional resilience and counsellor–student trust. The findings also provide empirical support for the relevance of indigenous approaches within modern counselling systems, illustrating how concepts such as *ngemong* (nurturing guidance) and reflective prayer can coexist with evidence-informed psychological practice.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing evidence that culturally responsive counselling frameworks, grounded in spirituality, empathy, and local wisdom, can meaningfully address academic anxiety among adolescents from vulnerable family backgrounds. Future studies should further examine the scalability of JKJ-based interventions across regions, explore longitudinal effects on academic outcomes, and consider integrating formal counsellor training modules that combine psychological, cultural, and spiritual competencies.

Limitations

This study's qualitative case design, involving six students and three counsellors from three vocational schools in Semarang, offers rich contextual insight but limits transferability to other settings. Data were self-reported through interviews, observations, and reflective journals, which may have been influenced by participants' relationships with teachers who also served as counsellors. Although triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity were used to enhance credibility, the dual teacher–counsellor role could have shaped students' openness during sessions. These factors suggest that the findings represent interpretive depth within a specific context rather than generalisable conclusions.

Implications

Despite these limitations, the study provides a culturally coherent framework for addressing academic anxiety among students from broken families through the JKJ method. By integrating *dhikr*, reflective dialogue, and Javanese values of acceptance and self-awareness, the approach demonstrates how spiritual practices can inform school-based counselling in Indonesia. Teachers' empathetic facilitation emerged as pivotal in fostering emotional safety, highlighting the need for counsellor training that combines psychological, cultural, and spiritual competencies. Theoretically, the findings extend Islamic counselling discourse by operationalising *kawruh jiwa* as a process model for emotional regulation, while methodologically they underscore the value of triangulation and reflexivity in culturally embedded qualitative research.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how the JKJ counselling method supports adolescents from broken families in managing academic anxiety through the integration of Islamic spirituality and Javanese indigenous values. The findings suggest that reflective dialogue, *dhikr*, and culturally grounded practices can foster emotional calmness, meaning making, and trust within the counselling process. Teachers who acted as counsellors played a vital role as empathetic facilitators, helping students develop self-awareness and emotional regulation in supportive environments. While the study's scope is contextually limited, it demonstrates the promise of culturally responsive, spiritually informed counselling in Indonesian schools. Future research should examine the long-term effects of JKJ-based interventions and explore how such approaches can be systematically incorporated into teacher training and school counselling programs.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed to the development of the study. The lead author conducted the data collection and analysis. Co-authors contributed to manuscript revision and approved the final version.

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