

The Role of Ethical Communication in Counseling: Insights from the Hadith Speak Good or Remain Silent

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ABSTRACT

Counseling is a deeply communicative process where effective interaction between counselor and client determines the success of addressing individual challenges. Counselors are tasked with creating empathetic, respectful, and wise relationships, ensuring clients feel safe to express their emotions and concerns. The principle of "Speak Good or Remain Silent," rooted in Islamic teachings and supported by the hadith from Sahih Bukhari (Index 5670), underscores the importance of ethical communication. This study examines the significance of this principle in counseling practices, focusing on its role in maintaining client confidentiality, fostering trust, and promoting a supportive counseling environment. Using a textual analysis method, the study delves into historical and contemporary perspectives on the principle. Primary sources include hadith texts and supporting Islamic literature, while secondary sources explore its application in ethics and professional counseling. The hadith is analyzed for authenticity through its sanad (chain of transmission) and matan (content), confirming its classification as sahih li dhatihi (authentic in itself) and a valid foundation for practice. Findings highlight the ethical and spiritual dimensions of speaking wisely in counseling, with practical implications for creating a comfortable, respectful environment for clients. Silence, as an alternative to unwise speech, is shown to be a critical tool for counselors to prevent harm and promote deeper understanding. This study offers valuable insights for integrating Islamic ethical principles into professional counseling, benefiting both Muslim and non-Muslim practitioners in fostering meaningful client-counselor relationships.

Keywords: ethical communication, counseling principles, islamic ethics, speak good or remain silent, client confidentiality



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INTRODUCTION

Counseling is a process grounded in deep communication, where the effectiveness of communication serves as a critical determinant of successful interaction between counselor and client. In the counseling process, the counselor acts as a guide and supporter for individuals facing various challenges in their lives. Counselors bear the responsibility of establishing relationships that are empathetic, respectful, and wise, creating a safe space where clients feel comfortable discussing their problems and emotions. In communicating with clients, the words chosen by counselors can have a profound impact. Words spoken with wisdom can provide

emotional support, motivation, and solutions necessary to resolve issues. Conversely, harsh, insensitive, or unwise words can damage relationships, undermine trust, and even exacerbate the client's problems. Thus, ethical communication in counseling is essential to maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the counseling process. One ethical principle with significant relevance in counseling practice is the principle of "Speak Good or Remain Silent." This principle emphasizes the importance of speaking wisely, choosing words carefully, and remaining silent when speaking might harm relationships or hurt feelings. This principle is not only applicable in counseling practice but also has profound implications in various aspects of life, including social relationships, family dynamics, and the workplace. In the context of Islam, the principle of "Speak Good or Remain Silent" is strongly supported by the sayings (hadiths) of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These hadiths provide Muslims with a robust and responsible ethical framework for communication, encouraging them to speak gently, avoid hurting others' feelings, and resolve conflicts peacefully. Therefore, an in-depth study of these relevant hadiths and their application in counseling practice can offer valuable insights for Muslim and non-Muslim counseling practitioners alike.

The words of a counselor carry extraordinary power in counseling practice. The expressions spoken by a counselor can influence the emotions, thoughts, and actions of clients. Hence, understanding the urgency of "Speak Good or Remain Silent" in the context of counseling is crucial. In exploring counseling principles rooted in Islamic values, this study delves into the hadith recorded in Sahih Bukhari, Index Number 5670, which underscores the importance of speaking well or remaining silent in various situations. In counseling, specific approaches help create a comfortable session environment. One way to build a conducive atmosphere is by maintaining and providing responses that align with the client's expectations. This article discusses the urgency of the hadith on "Speak Good or Remain Silent" in Islamic counseling guidance. The concept of "Speak Good or Remain Silent" has been a subject of study in various contexts, including its application to prohibitions against hate speech on social media. The book *Berkata Baik atau Diam: 294 Adab Kebiasaan Rasulullah SAW* explains that a hadith states, "Whoever believes in Allah should speak good or remain silent." In the work of M. Fuad Anwar, this hadith is also identified as a foundation for Islamic counseling guidance. This article highlights the urgency of this hadith in counseling practice, as previous studies have rarely explored its application in Islamic counseling. It is hoped that this article will clarify how the hadith "Speak Good or Remain Silent" can serve as a foundation for counselors' attitudes in Islamic counseling guidance. This approach is not only about speaking but also about bringing wisdom and ethics into every counseling interaction, creating a safe and supportive space for individuals seeking help to overcome their challenges.

METHOD

This study is a manuscript analysis—referred to in other literature as a textual study—borrowing the term articulated in Sahih Bukhari, Index Number 5670, which defines textual study as a historical and rational reconstruction. In this method, ideas are viewed as concepts situated in history, and texts are treated as sources of historical documentation. The writer's task is to present and reinterpret new ideas, discussing the intersection of texts with other texts and the problematization of these texts in relation to the latest contemporary issues. The primary source in describing this article is the texts addressing the concept of "speaking good or remaining silent" as found in Sahih Bukhari, Index Number 5670. The additional sources

include writings related to the same topic. The research sources for this article's theme are not only physical literature (hard copies) but also digital resources (soft copies) derived from hadith databases and the Maktabah Syamilah digital library. Although the writer does not employ a systematic literature review (SLR) method, the article remains focused and avoids diverging into unrelated themes. The data is analyzed through several stages, beginning with comparison, integration, and deriving various meanings from relevant findings. This approach enables the study to explore the historical and contextual significance of "speaking good or remaining silent" while engaging with contemporary issues in a meaningful way.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Text and Authenticity of the Hadith

The hadith from Sahih Bukhari (Index 5670) states:

“حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ يُوسُفَ أَخْبَرَنَا مَالِكٌ عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْمَقْبُرِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي شُرَيْحٍ الْكَعْبِيِّ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيُكْرِمْ صَبِيغَهُ جَائِزَتُهُ يَوْمَ وَلَيْلَتِهِ وَالصَّبَاغَةُ ثَلَاثَةُ أَيَّامٍ فَمَا بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَهُوَ صَدَقَةٌ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُ أَنْ يَتَّوِي عِنْدَهُ حَتَّى يُحْرَجَهُ حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي مَالِكٌ مِثْلَهُ وَزَادَ مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيُقَلِّ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ”

“Narrated to us by Isma’il, who said: ‘Malik reported to me similarly but added: ‘Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent.’”

Analysis of the Hadith’s Quality

The analysis of the hadith is conducted from two perspectives: sanad (chain of transmission) and matan (content). Sanad (Chain of Transmission): 1) The hadith from Imam Bukhari's collection (Index 5670) fulfills all criteria of authenticity. The chain of transmission is verified, demonstrating a clear teacher-student relationship among narrators. 2) The narrators are all trustworthy (thiqah), adhering to the standards of integrity (‘adl) and precision (dhabit). Each narrator's timeline, including their years of death, confirms the reliability of the chain. For instance: 1) Khuwailid bin Amru bin Shakhr (Companion) – trustworthy (thiqah). 2) Sa’id bin Abi Sa’id Kaisan (Tabi’in) – trustworthy (thiqah). 3) Malik bin Anas (Tabi’ut Tabi’in) – trustworthy (thiqah). 4) Abdullah bin Yusuf (Tabi’ul Atba’) – trustworthy (thiqah). Matan (Content): 1) The content is free of contradictions or inconsistencies. Comparisons with other sources, such as Sahih Muslim (Index 77), Sunan Abi Dawood (Index 3748), and Sunan Al-Darimi (Index 2078), reveal no discrepancies. 2) Based on this, the hadith is classified as Sahih li dhatihi (authentic in itself) and is deemed a valid source of Islamic law and practice (maqbul ma'mul bih).

Speaking Good or Remaining Silent: Perspectives of Scholars

The hadith emphasizes the importance of honoring guests and practicing ethical speech. In the context of counseling, this principle underlines the necessity for counselors to uphold respect, confidentiality, and ethical communication. Counselors are guided to “speak good” in alignment with their professional ethics, reflecting the values of trust, care, and support. According to Islamic scholars, speaking good or remaining silent is a highly recommended

practice. Using kind and respectful words is considered a form of worship, showcasing good character and preventing unnecessary conflict. The teachings of Islam emphasize guarding one's tongue from harmful speech, including gossip (ghibah), slander (fitnah), or words that hurt others.

Prominent scholars have commented on this principle: 1) Muhammad bin Wasi' stated that controlling one's tongue is more challenging than safeguarding wealth. 2) KH. Mawardi Labay El-Sulthani, in his book *Lidah Tidak Bertulang* (The Tongue Has No Bones), likened the tongue to a sharp sword, capable of causing immense harm or good. Imam Abu Hatim Ibn Hibban Al-Busti, in *Raudhah Al-'Uqala* (p. 45), wrote: "A wise person should remain silent more than they speak, for many have regretted speaking, while few have regretted silence. The most afflicted individuals are those whose tongues are uncontrolled, yet their minds fail to act."

Significance of "Speaking Good or Remaining Silent" for Counselors

In counseling, ethical principles and moral integrity are of utmost importance. Maintaining client confidentiality is a core principle, and adhering to the hadith of "speaking good or remaining silent" supports this ethical standard. A counselor must ensure that everything discussed during sessions remains confidential and is not disclosed to uninvolved parties. This fosters a secure environment, allowing clients to share sensitive information without fear of judgment or exposure. The counselor's demeanor and communication play a pivotal role in creating a comfortable atmosphere. If a counselor cannot provide kind and supportive words, it is better to remain silent to avoid further issues or harm. Upholding this principle enhances trust in professional counseling services, benefiting both the educational sphere and society at large. The hadith also reinforces the need for counselors to embody professionalism and care in their behavior. Positive communication and silence when appropriate are essential tools for fostering solutions and understanding clients' emotions. Silence can be a means to listen actively and empathize deeply with clients' feelings and challenges.

CONCLUSION

In counseling, the counselor is responsible for building an empathetic, respectful, and wise relationship with the client, creating a safe space where the client feels comfortable sharing their problems and emotions. Therefore, counselors must apply ethical principles and appropriate behaviors throughout the counseling session. When clients observe the counselor's positive demeanor, they are more likely to open up and share their concerns without hesitation. The hadith "Speak Good or Remain Silent" is closely connected to the behavior of a counselor. As counselors, we must maintain a professional attitude to ensure there is no awkwardness between the counselor and the client, as explained in *Sahih Bukhari 5670*. Counselors should emphasize the importance of speaking wisely, choosing words carefully, and, when necessary, remaining silent rather than saying something that might harm or damage the relationship. According to Islamic scholars, speaking good or remaining silent is a highly recommended practice. Using kind and polite language is not only an ethical obligation but also an act of worship in Islam, reflecting good character and fostering positive interactions. This principle

helps counselors maintain a respectful and supportive environment, which is critical for the success of the counseling process.

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