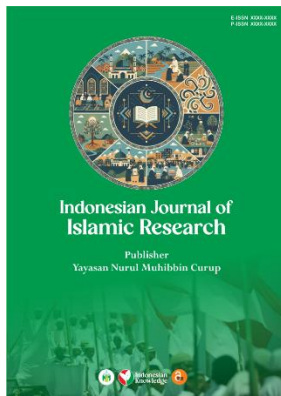


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Religion, Humanitarian Action, and Natural Disaster: *Dawah bil-Hal* Practices of Palang Merah Indonesia during the Bengkulu Flood



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ABSTRAK

Tujuan: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana dakwah bil-hal—praktik dakwah Islam melalui tindakan nyata—diwujudkan oleh relawan Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) dalam penanganan banjir Bengkulu tahun 2024. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana kerja kemanusiaan tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai bentuk pemberian bantuan, tetapi juga sebagai manifestasi pengabdian religius. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan data yang diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap delapan relawan PMI dan satu koordinator. Data dianalisis secara tematik dengan mengacu pada literatur mengenai etika Islam, subjektivitas religius, dan aksi kemanusiaan. **Temuan:** Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para relawan mengekspresikan nilai-nilai Islam melalui tindakan yang penuh empati dan inklusif, sering kali tanpa menggunakan wacana keagamaan secara eksplisit. Aktivitas kemanusiaan yang mereka lakukan memperdalam kesadaran keimanan dan tanggung jawab etis mereka, sekaligus menunjukkan bagaimana prinsip-prinsip Islam membimbing respons mereka terhadap bencana. **Implikasi:** Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa motivasi berbasis keagamaan dapat memperkaya praktik kemanusiaan. Studi ini mendorong pengakuan yang lebih besar terhadap etika religius dalam kerangka penanggulangan bencana serta membuka peluang bagi penelitian lintas konteks mengenai dakwah bil-hal sebagai bentuk ketahanan moral yang melekat dalam masyarakat Muslim..

Kata Kunci: Dakwah bil Hal, Kemanusiaan Islam, Respon Bencana, Kerelawanan berbasis Keagamaan.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how *dawah bil-hal*—the Islamic practice of preaching through action—was embodied by Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) volunteers during the 2024 Bengkulu flood response. It explores how humanitarian work served both as aid delivery and as a form of religious devotion. **Method:** Using a qualitative approach, the study draws on in-depth interviews with eight PMI volunteers and one coordinator. Data were analyzed thematically, informed by literature on Islamic ethics, religious subjectivity, and humanitarian action. **Findings:** The research finds that volunteers expressed Islamic values through compassionate, inclusive actions, often without explicit religious discourse. Their humanitarian work deepened their sense of faith and ethical responsibility, illustrating how Islamic principles guided their disaster response. **Implication:** This study shows that faith-based motivations can enrich humanitarian practice. It urges greater recognition of religious ethics in disaster frameworks and encourages further cross-context research on *dawah bil-hal* as an embedded form of moral resilience in Muslim-majority societies.

Keywords: *Dawah bil-hal*, Islamic Humanitarianism, Disaster Response, Faith-based Volunteering

INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters have long been a defining feature of the Southeast Asian region, particularly in Indonesia, where geographic, climatic, and socio-environmental factors converge to make the country highly vulnerable to ecological crises. Among these, floods remain the most frequent and devastating events, with over 1,300 flood incidents recorded in Indonesia in 2023 alone (BNPB, 2023). These recurring catastrophes not only disrupt daily life but also expose the inadequacy of institutional responses and societal preparedness. However, in addition to their destructive impact, natural disasters have also become spaces where ethical, religious, and humanitarian values are negotiated and redefined. Islamic humanitarian organizations, such as Palang Merah Indonesia (Indonesian Red Cross, PMI), have played a pivotal role in delivering rapid and inclusive relief during such crises. Their work integrates operational efficiency with spiritual and moral imperatives, often embodied through what is termed "*dawah bil-hal*" (preaching through action), a method of Islamic da'wah that emphasizes action over words (Shihab, 2004; Zaidan, 2010). Despite the growing recognition of the moral and spiritual dimensions of disaster response, scholarly attention to how Islamic ethical values are enacted through humanitarian practice during natural disasters remains limited (Omer, 2018; Al-Darmaki, 2021).

Within disaster and humanitarian studies, considerable emphasis has been placed on the logistical, institutional, and psychological aspects of emergency response (Tierney, 2019; Wisner et al., 2015; Cahyadi, Pilli & Rahmat, 2021). Yet, there is a growing awareness of the importance of religious ethics, especially in Muslim-majority societies, in shaping both the content and consequences of humanitarian action (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Apriyani & Syaoki, 2025). In Islamic contexts, actions during crisis are not merely technical responses but often expressions of divine duty (*fard kifayah*) and compassion (*rahmah*) (Hashmi, 2002). The problem, however, lies in the gap between the formal recognition of these values and empirical accounts of how they are internalized and manifested by volunteers on the ground. While normative Islamic teachings emphasize sincerity (*ikhlas*), empathy (*ta'awun*), and non-discrimination (*adalah*), it remains unclear how these values are embodied in real-time by volunteers responding to environmental disasters, and whether such engagements transform their own religious consciousness.

Existing literature has explored the intersection between religion and humanitarianism through institutional analysis and theological reflection. For instance, Ferris (2011) emphasizes the growing role of faith-based organizations in disaster response, while De Cordier (2009) critically assesses how religious identity shapes humanitarian agendas. In the Indonesian context, studies have examined the organizational structure of Islamic charities and their efficiency in mobilizing resources during emergencies (Latief, 2014). Other works have investigated the role of da'wah in public spaces and social services (Hoesterey, 2016). However, only a limited number of studies examine how individual Muslim volunteers experience humanitarian work as a form of religious practice. Furthermore, the role of *dawah bil-hal* in disaster zones has been largely under-theorized, especially in terms of its impact on volunteers' religious subjectivity. A few exceptions exist: Suisyanto (2021) and Khoirum (2022) discuss *dawah bil-hal* in community empowerment and organizational culture, respectively, but do not focus on disaster scenarios or its reflective impact on volunteers themselves.

This study addresses the aforementioned gaps by analyzing the practices of *dawah bil-hal* carried out by Muslim volunteers of PMI during the 2024 Bengkulu flood. It examines how these volunteers enact Islamic values during the crisis and how such actions shape their own religious awareness. The Bengkulu flood represents an important case, as it mobilized a significant number of Muslim volunteers in a pluralistic humanitarian setting, where religious motivations intersected with operational demands. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on in-depth interviews, retrospective observation, and institutional documentation. The aim is not only to document the *dawah bil-hal* practices but to investigate their spiritual reflexivity—how volunteers make sense of their actions through religious frameworks and whether this fosters new ethical orientations.

The study builds upon theories of religious consciousness by Elkind (1970) and Goldman (1965), who conceptualize religiosity as a developmental and experiential process. Elkind's emphasis on reflective religiosity among young adults aligns with the demographic profile of PMI volunteers, while Goldman's view that moral-religious identity matures through critical experiences provides a useful lens for analyzing post-crisis reflection. In connecting these theories with the lived experiences of Muslim humanitarian actors, the study articulates a new perspective on *dawah* as an embodied and evolving process. The contribution of this research lies in expanding the discourse of Islamic humanitarianism from institutional and doctrinal concerns to the micro-level of ethical formation and spiritual transformation. It also nuances the understanding of Islam and nature by framing disaster not merely as a site of vulnerability but as a context for ethical action and religious meaning-making.

Ultimately, this study argues that disaster response can serve as a field of religious praxis, where values such as sincerity, solidarity, and empathy are not only expressed but deepened through direct engagement. The findings suggest that *dawah bil-hal* in the context of natural disaster constitutes more than a method of outreach—it is a spiritual encounter with the realities of human suffering and environmental disruption. This encounter, in turn, cultivates a heightened sense of religious awareness among volunteers, affirming the significance of faith-based humanitarianism in shaping ethical subjectivities in the face of ecological crises. The study contributes to scholarly conversations in Islamic studies, religious ethics, disaster anthropology, and the growing field of Islam and ecology, offering a grounded account of how Muslim humanitarian volunteers engage nature, society, and self through action-oriented *dawah* during times of crisis.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation of *dawah bil-hal* among Muslim volunteers of Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) during the 2024 Bengkulu flood and its influence on their religious awareness. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest, qualitative inquiry is suitable for capturing rich, contextualized understandings of human experience. Given the study's focus on subjective experiences and internal reflection, a case study design was chosen to delve deeply into the meanings and processes underlying the volunteers' humanitarian engagement. The methodological framework aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing meaning-making and lived experience as central to social inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection was conducted over an eight-month period, from May to December 2025, centering on the PMI Bengkulu City office as the institutional setting. This site was selected due to its direct involvement in the emergency response during the December 2024 flood, which affected over 473 households across 18 urban districts. The PMI Bengkulu was responsible for deploying volunteer teams for evacuation, first aid, and psychosocial support. The context provided a compelling field for examining how Islamic values were mobilized and experienced in crisis situations. The primary data sources included semi-structured interviews, retrospective observation, and official documentation. Semi-structured interviews served as the principal data collection tool, allowing for both guided inquiry and emergent probing. This method is particularly effective in qualitative studies where personal experiences and reflexive processes are central (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview protocol covered themes such as the volunteers' religious background, perceptions of their roles during disaster response, understanding of *dawah bil-hal*, and reflections on how their faith was influenced through their actions. Informants were selected purposively, following a *purposive sampling* strategy that prioritizes participants with the most relevant and rich knowledge of the phenomena under study (Patton, 2015).

The final sample included eight PMI volunteers and one program coordinator who directly participated in the Bengkulu flood response. As shown in Table 1 (see below), the informants represented both gender categories and spanned an age range between 23 to 35 years. Most were in the early adulthood stage, which, according to Elkind (1970) and Goldman (1965), is a critical period for the development of reflective religiosity. This demographic detail is significant in light of the study's theoretical framework.

Table 1. Informant Demographics and Roles

Code	Role	Gender	Age Range	Role Description
F1	Coordinator	M	30-35	Oversaw field and logistical operations
F2	Administration	F	35-40	Record all flood logistics
F3	Volunteers	M	22-27	Direct involvement in evacuation, logistics, and support
F4	Volunteers	M	20-25	Direct involvement in evacuation, logistics, and support
F5	Volunteers	F	20-25	Direct involvement in evacuation, logistics, and support
F6	Volunteers	M	20-25	Direct involvement in evacuation, logistics, and support
F7	Flood victims	M	40-45	Explaining the assistance received from PMI
F8	Flood victims	M	50-55	Explaining the assistance received from PMI

Sources: Primary data, 2025

Data from interviews were triangulated with retrospective observation and official documents. Observation was carried out retrospectively through analysis of photos, video documentation, and activity logs maintained by PMI during the flood emergency. This allowed the researcher to contextualize and verify the narratives shared by the informants. The documents included operational reports, volunteer deployment logs, and program guidelines that detailed the roles and responsibilities of volunteers during the emergency phase. These records provided an institutional backdrop against which personal experiences could be analyzed.

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed multiple validation strategies. First, triangulation was used across sources (interviews, documents, observations) to verify the consistency and depth of data. Second, member checking was conducted, wherein informants reviewed interview transcripts and key interpretations for accuracy. Third, peer debriefing was applied during the data analysis phase,

involving discussions with academic supervisors and peers to test emerging insights against broader theoretical and empirical perspectives. These steps align with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study in response to the two central research questions: (1) What forms of *dawah bil-hal* were practiced by Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) volunteers during the 2024 Bengkulu flood? and (2) How did such practices influence the volunteers' religious awareness? These findings are derived from in-depth interviews, retrospective observation, and document analysis, and are structured according to the thematic patterns that emerged during the fieldwork.

Forms of Dawah Bil-Hal Practiced

The practices of *dawah bil-hal* observed among PMI volunteers during the flood crisis in Bengkulu were multifaceted, reflecting both the institutional values of PMI and the volunteers' own religious motivations. Volunteers engaged in various forms of service that aligned with Islamic ethical values, including non-discriminatory humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, team-based coordination, and empathetic communication with disaster victims. These actions not only responded to immediate physical needs but also expressed deeply held spiritual principles.

One of the most prominent forms of *dawah bil-hal* was the provision of aid without regard to ethnicity, religion, or social status. This principle of universal service was frequently mentioned by informants as a reflection of the Islamic value of *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (mercy for all beings). Volunteers articulated that such practices were not merely part of their operational mandate but were consciously framed as acts of worship (*ibadah*). For example, an informant (F2) emphasized that helping others in times of crisis was a form of spiritual duty and an opportunity to realize the Quranic principle of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance).

Another key expression of *dawah bil-hal* was the approach to psychosocial support. Volunteers did not only deliver logistical aid but also took time to listen, console, and support flood victims—especially vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and women. These interpersonal acts were infused with what informants described as *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *rahmah* (compassion). Several volunteers recounted how they comforted grieving families or played with children in evacuation centers to ease their trauma. This emotional labor, though often invisible in standard disaster response metrics, was recognized by the volunteers themselves as a form of spiritual service.

Team-based coordination also emerged as a space for *dawah bil-hal*. The sense of solidarity (*ukhuwah insaniyah*) and mutual responsibility within PMI teams was described as a form of ethical formation. Volunteers shared stories of covering each other's shifts, caring for sick teammates, and resolving logistical problems cooperatively. These acts were not only seen as efficient teamwork but were interpreted through religious lenses as expressions of brotherhood and communal ethics. Informant F4 reflected that working together during crisis situations helped them better understand the Prophet Muhammad's example of collective responsibility and patience.

Furthermore, communication practices played a subtle yet significant role in conveying Islamic values. Volunteers were trained to interact with victims using calm, respectful, and emotionally supportive language. Such communication was seen by some informants as a form of non-verbal *da'wah* that reflected the Prophet's *akhlak* (character). Informant F6 noted that choosing kind words and maintaining a composed demeanor, even under stress, was part of representing Islam in the field. This behavior was not performative but internalized as part of the volunteers' understanding of ethical service. The findings demonstrate that *dawah bil-hal* was embodied in the volunteers' conduct through values of sincerity, empathy, discipline, and inclusivity. These forms of practice were not confined to structured religious activities but embedded in everyday humanitarian actions, reinforcing the premise that disaster relief can function as a site for lived Islamic ethics.

The Influence of *Dawah Bil-Hal* on Volunteers' Religious Awareness

The second major finding of the study concerns the transformative impact of *dawah bil-hal* practices on the religious awareness of PMI volunteers. Across interviews, informants described a deepening of their spiritual consciousness, which manifested in both personal and social dimensions. This transformation was not the result of doctrinal instruction but emerged through direct engagement in humanitarian work during the crisis. One of the clearest shifts reported by volunteers was a heightened sense of *spirituality*. Several informants spoke of becoming more aware of their dependence on God during the physically and emotionally demanding conditions of flood response. They expressed that witnessing human suffering and vulnerability in the disaster area prompted moments of introspection and prayer. Informant F3 stated that helping victims in the field reminded him of the fleeting nature of life and the importance of gratitude and humility. This aligns with Elkind's (1970) concept of reflective religiosity, where individuals begin to interpret their actions and experiences through personal religious frameworks.

The volunteers also reported changes in their *moral and social orientation*. The experience of serving disaster victims led many to reevaluate their attitudes toward empathy, patience, and responsibility. Informant F5 shared that she became more sensitive to the struggles of others and began to see her volunteer work not just as community service but as a religious obligation. This suggests an internalization of Islamic moral values through embodied action, rather than theoretical teaching. The sense of trust and responsibility became integral to their self-perception.

In addition, the data reveal a strong emphasis on *religious sociality*—the idea that religion is not merely a private matter but lived and reinforced through communal action. Volunteers frequently mentioned that working with peers who shared similar ethical commitments created a sense of spiritual fellowship. They reflected on how shared hardships in the field, such as sleepless nights or challenging evacuations, fostered bonds that were both emotional and spiritual. This echoes Goldman's (1965) assertion that religious development is enhanced through social interaction and meaningful engagement.

A particularly profound theme was the notion of *amal saleh* (righteous deeds) as being redefined through experience. Informants articulated that they had come to view acts of logistical coordination, emotional support, and even simple tasks like distributing food as forms of *ibadah* (worship). Informant F8 noted that her previous understanding of worship was limited to ritual practices, but volunteering during the

flood expanded her view to include social action as a religious act. This reconceptualization of *ibadah* reflects a movement toward practical theologies of action and further validates the spiritual function of *dawah bil-hal*.

Another key impact was the cultivation of *religious reflexivity*—a process wherein volunteers reassessed their own religiosity in light of their field experiences. Several informants stated that their engagement during the flood prompted them to return to religious texts, engage more seriously with prayer, or reconsider their ethical priorities. This process of reflection was spontaneous and arose organically through exposure to suffering, teamwork, and moments of moral tension in the field. It highlights the role of crisis as a catalyst for ethical and spiritual growth.

Moreover, this transformation extended beyond the temporal frame of the disaster. Some volunteers reported that the experiences had lasting effects on their religious commitments. Informant F1 shared that since the flood response, he had become more involved in community service and had begun integrating Islamic values more explicitly in his professional work. This supports the hypothesis that *dawah bil-hal* is not only impactful in immediate crisis settings but has enduring effects on personal religiosity and ethical orientation.

Overall, the results affirm that the practice of *dawah bil-hal* during the 2024 Bengkulu flood not only fulfilled operational humanitarian goals but also served as a powerful medium for deepening religious consciousness among the volunteers. Through embodied engagement with Islamic values in a real-world crisis context, volunteers experienced a transformation that bridged the divide between spiritual ideals and practical ethics. This reinforces the study's argument that humanitarian action, when grounded in religious values, becomes a site of both service and self-form.

The Embodying Faith Through Humanitarian Practice

The findings of this study uncover the complex interplay between religion, ethics, and humanitarianism within the practices of PMI volunteers during the Bengkulu flood, demonstrating how Islamic values are embedded in disaster response through lived moral action. Contrary to a conventional understanding of religious engagement as symbolic or ritualistic, the study shows that volunteers enact *dawah bil-hal*—a form of Islamic preaching through ethical conduct—by situating humanitarian work within a spiritual and theological framework. This observation reinforces previous arguments that Islamic humanitarianism does not merely replicate secular models with religious branding but constitutes an epistemologically distinct paradigm driven by values: *rahmah* (compassion), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), as highlighted by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016) and Saeed (2003).

What becomes evident in the volunteers' testimonies is that service in the face of natural disaster was not only an act of charity but a religiously motivated form of moral labor. Many volunteers framed their assistance to flood victims as a form of worship, thereby transforming relief efforts into an expression of spiritual devotion. This is consistent with insights from Petersen (2012), who notes that Islamic aid actors often perceive their work as participation in a divine moral economy rather than a mere fulfillment of civic duty. In this framework, religious values inform not only the intention but also the method and ethics of action. Volunteers' attentiveness to respectful communication, psychosocial support, and non-discriminatory

aid reveals an adherence to Islamic social ethics that is embedded in everyday interactions—an embodiment of what Alatas (1977) termed a moral service orientation grounded in religious culture.

Moreover, the study reveals how the practice of *dawah bil-hal* enables ethical consistency between faith-based motivation and operational humanitarian principles. PMI volunteers adhered to the Red Cross principles of neutrality and impartiality while simultaneously invoking the Islamic imperative of helping the oppressed (*mustadhāfin*) and upholding justice (*adl*). This congruence affirms Mahmood's (2005) argument that ethical subjectivity can be formed at the intersection of institutional norms and spiritual discipline. Volunteers' ethical behavior thus does not result from passive internalization but from active moral reasoning situated within both Islamic theology and humanitarian practice. This dual orientation enriches the normative grounding of disaster response by incorporating metaphysical concerns and eschatological awareness—dimensions largely absent in secular humanitarianism (Barnett & Stein, 2012).

The study also highlights how engagement in humanitarian work facilitates spiritual transformation among the volunteers. Participation in PMI activities served not merely as a vehicle for altruism but as a space for ethical self-formation. Volunteers reported greater awareness of the social meaning of religion, deeper emotional connection to spiritual values, and an expanded sense of moral responsibility. These developments align with Taylor's (1989) notion of moral sources, wherein ethical growth stems from engagement with deeply held metaphysical beliefs. Rather than relying on doctrinal instruction, the volunteers' religious understanding was shaped by embodied experiences in the field—facing death, suffering, and vulnerability.

This process of transformation supports Goldman's (1965) hypothesis that moral and spiritual maturity is catalyzed through direct engagement with existential dilemmas. The field served as a crucible where religious concepts were not merely articulated but practiced, tested, and reinterpreted. Volunteers' shift in understanding *ibadah* from ritual obligation to ethical commitment exemplifies this dynamic. Their testimonies resonate with Swinton and Mowat's (2006) concept of practical theology, where theological reflection emerges from lived action rather than abstract speculation. This suggests that *dawah bil-hal* offers not only an outward influence on society but also an inward transformation of the self, constituting a dialectical relationship between action and faith.

These findings further challenge the dichotomy often drawn between spirituality and operational competence in humanitarian studies. PMI volunteers did not exhibit a tension between their religious motivation and technical skill; rather, they displayed how these two domains can be mutually reinforcing. Their religious commitments informed their attention to detail, their patience with logistical challenges, and their resilience in the face of emotional exhaustion. This echoes Nasr's (2002) argument that Islam, as a holistic worldview, integrates metaphysical, ethical, and practical dimensions of life. By serving with *niyyah* (intention) and trust, volunteers reaffirmed the Qur'anic ethic that service to humanity is part of one's responsibility as *khalifah* (steward) on Earth.

The study's data also highlight the relational dimensions of religious transformation. Volunteers frequently emphasized the significance of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, not only as a theological abstraction but as an experiential bond forged through shared struggle. This reflects Asad's (1986) thesis that religious life is

shaped through embodied practices and communal participation. It was in the solidarity of service—in carrying water buckets, distributing aid, and consoling victims—that faith acquired renewed vitality. Such moments became loci of religious meaning-making, where volunteers rearticulated their understanding of Islam as a lived and relational force.

Importantly, the spiritual effects reported by volunteers were not limited to the immediate aftermath of disaster. Many participants described long-term shifts in their religious commitments, including renewed prayer routines, heightened empathy, and engagement in future volunteer efforts. This supports Galea et al. (2007) research on the enduring psychosocial impacts of disaster response, extending their findings into the spiritual domain. In this light, *dawah bil-hal* emerges not only as a strategy of preaching but also as a mechanism of ethical resilience-building for both volunteers and the broader community.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the specific case of Bengkulu and PMI. They invite a reconsideration of how humanitarian systems—often grounded in secular frameworks—might engage more substantively with the religious motivations of volunteers and communities. As Ferris (2011) argues, although faith-based actors are increasingly acknowledged in humanitarian discourse, their values are often reduced to implementation tools rather than respected as ethical foundations. This study suggests that recognizing religious worldviews as constitutive elements of humanitarian ethics could lead to more holistic and culturally sensitive models of disaster response.

Integrating religious values into humanitarian frameworks, however, requires a shift from instrumental tolerance to dialogical engagement. Organizations like PMI could develop modules that engage volunteers' spiritual aspirations, provide space for theological reflection, and support moral discernment in ethically complex situations. These practices would not compromise neutrality but enrich it by grounding ethical judgment in a plurality of traditions. Such models have been proposed by Barnett and Stein (2012), who advocate for plural humanitarianisms capable of navigating cultural and spiritual diversity without forfeiting universal moral commitments.

In light of these findings, the traditional understanding of *dawah* as rhetorical persuasion must also be reevaluated. The PMI experience reveals how *dawah* can manifest through presence, service, and moral example—what Jouili and Moors (2014) describe as everyday piety enacted in secular space. Volunteers did not preach with words but with actions, challenging dominant narratives about religious propagation and inviting new theoretical approaches that privilege ethical embodiment over doctrinal dissemination.

This discussion, however, must also acknowledge the study's limitations. The findings are context-bound and shaped by the particular cultural, institutional, and geographic realities of Bengkulu. The sample size, though rich in qualitative depth, cannot represent the full spectrum of volunteer experiences across Indonesia or within other faith-based organizations. Moreover, retrospective accounts may contain memory biases or idealized recollections. Future research should address these limitations through comparative studies, longitudinal ethnographies, and analyses that incorporate the perspectives of aid recipients as well as providers.

Nonetheless, the study contributes valuable insight into the spiritual architecture of Islamic humanitarianism. It demonstrates that *dawah bil-hal*, when practiced in disaster contexts, operates as a form

of moral formation, community solidarity, and theological engagement. Volunteers are not merely agents of relief; they are also pilgrims of faith, navigating ethical terrain through acts of compassion. Their stories illuminate how Islam, as both a religion and a lived ethic, can animate humanitarian action with profound moral depth, offering new vocabularies and practices for understanding aid, resilience, and spiritual growth in times of crisis.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the unique ways in which Islamic values and humanitarian practice converge through the lived experiences of Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) volunteers during the Bengkulu flood response. The concept of *dawah bil-hal*, understood as the transmission of religious values through ethical and compassionate action, emerges not only as a religious ethos but as a practical methodology in disaster contexts. Volunteers' engagement was not solely logistical; it was spiritual, ethical, and transformative, reshaping their understanding of service as a form of *ibadah* and humanitarian response as an enactment of Islamic social ethics. These findings challenge the prevailing binary between the secular and the sacred in humanitarian studies, suggesting instead a model in which religious moralities animate and reinforce operational competencies. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic humanitarianism by demonstrating how *dawah bil-hal* fosters both moral resilience and ethical subjectivity, offering a deeply contextualized mode of action rooted in local theologies and social practices.

Despite its contributions, the research is not without limitations. The study's qualitative design and localized focus on the Bengkulu region restrict the generalizability of its findings to broader populations or different institutional contexts. Furthermore, the perspectives analyzed were limited to the volunteers themselves, without incorporating the voices of beneficiaries or other stakeholders involved in the humanitarian ecosystem. Future research should explore comparative cases involving other faith-based actors and regions, investigate the long-term impact of *dawah bil-hal* on both volunteers and affected communities, and integrate recipient perspectives to evaluate the perceived efficacy and ethical resonance of faith-motivated humanitarianism.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

This research is carried out by adhering to the principles of research ethics that uphold respect for human rights, human dignity, fairness in the treatment of research subjects, balance between benefits and risks, and scientific integrity, which includes honesty and openness in reporting data and research results.

AI DECLARATIONS

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI)–assisted tools were used to support the literature review process in the introduction, particularly for identifying relevant studies and improving clarity of synthesis. All interpretations, critical analyses, and scholarly judgments remain the full responsibility of the authors.