

Mental Health in Islamic Law Highlighting Its Importance and Therapeutic Means

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Abstract

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it reveals the profound attention Islamic law has given to mental health, while also highlighting the principal methods prescribed for its enhancement and preservation.

Accordingly, the central research problem revolves around the following question: What is the importance of mental health for the individual in Islam, and what are the most significant means stipulated by Islamic law to promote it?

This study seeks to demonstrate the importance attributed by Islamic law to mental health, clarify the most prominent methods and approaches prescribed to strengthen it, and identify the objectives and purposes underlying these means.

The study concludes that:

Islamic law was pioneering in emphasizing the importance of mental health and in advocating care for it.

Islamic law prescribed a number of therapeutic approaches to enhance an individual's mental well-being, among the most important of which are: strengthening the spiritual and faith-based dimension, encouraging optimism while combating despair and frustration, fostering contentment and inner satisfaction, and others.

Keywords: health, (self/soul), Islamic law, means, treatment.

Introduction

Praise be to Allah, Lord of all worlds abundant, pure, and blessed praise and peace and blessings be upon the noblest of prophets and messengers.

To proceed:

Psychological problems are among the oldest hardships endured by humanity throughout every stage of human history. Across the centuries, human beings have moved from one method to another in search of remedies capable of relieving their suffering.

In our present age the age of speed, globalization, and electronic communication social relationships have diminished, and the individual has become increasingly withdrawn into the self; confined within virtual chat rooms and smart phones instead of engaging in direct communication with family, friends, and the surrounding community.

Moreover, the growing prevalence of disasters, wars, and economic crises in the contemporary world has led to an increase in psychological disorders and disturbances, alongside the rise of physical and organic diseases and epidemics.

This reality necessitates a search for therapeutic means and pathways through which the individual's psychological suffering may be alleviated and through which one may attain a state of mental well-being.

From this perspective, the present research paper seeks to examine an important dimension in the promotion of mental health namely, the religious dimension through a study of the most prominent methods introduced by Islam in this regard.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this topic lies in clarifying the great significance Islam accords to mental health, as well as uncovering the principal methods and approaches stipulated by Islamic law for the enhancement of psychological well-being.

Research Problem

The primary issue addressed in this scientific paper may be formulated in the following general question:

What is the importance of mental health for the individual in Islam, and what are the principal means prescribed by Islamic law for its promotion?

In light of this central question, the study will attempt to answer the following subsidiary questions:

What is meant by the term “mental health” in contemporary scientific terminology and within the Islamic perspective?

What importance has Islamic law attributed to mental health?

What are the different types of the human souls in Islam?

What are the principal means and methods for promoting mental health in Islamic law?

What are the objectives and purposes underlying these methods and approaches?

Study Title

This research paper is entitled:

Mental Health in Islamic Law

Highlighting Its Importance and Clarifying Therapeutic Means

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study may be summarized as follows:

To clarify the concept of “mental health” in contemporary global scientific terminology as well as from the Islamic perspective.

To highlight the importance accorded by Islamic law to mental health.

To explore the different categories of the human (soul/self) in Islam.

To identify the principal methods and approaches for promoting mental health in Islamic law.

To examine the purposes and objectives underlying these methods and approaches.

Methodology of the Study

Among the methodologies employed in this study are the following:

The Descriptive Method

This study adopts the descriptive method through its examination and depiction of the reality of “mental health” both in contemporary global scientific terminology and within the Islamic perspective.

The Inductive Method (Partial Induction)

This method is employed through the investigation and collection of the principal means of promoting mental health in Islamic law.

The Analytical Method

This method is utilized through the analysis of these means, together with the clarification of their most significant objectives and purposes.

Previous Studies

A number of studies and researches are related to the subject of this study, among the most important of which are:

“The Prophetic Sunnah and Guiding the Muslim toward Mental Health”

A paper by Dr. Hanaa Yahya Abu Shahbah, presented at the conference The Prophetic Sunnah and Contemporary Studies, held at Yarmouk University in 2007.

“The Human Self and Indicators of Mental Health in Islam”

An article by the researcher Shamisa Kheloui, published in Al-Rasid Journal for Social Sciences Studies in January 2022.

The contribution of this concise research paper may perhaps be found in its attempt to combine the following:

Theoretical grounding of the concept of “mental health” in contemporary global scientific terminology as well as within the Islamic perspective.

Providing a concise overview of the most prominent methods and approaches for enhancing mental health in Islamic law.

Clarifying the principal objectives and purposes underlying those methods and approaches.

Research Structure

The nature of this study necessitated that it be organized into an introduction, two main sections, and a conclusion.

Introduction

The introduction contains the foundational elements of the study, including its importance, research problem, objectives, previous studies, and related matters.

First Section

The first section serves as a preliminary discussion devoted to clarifying the importance of mental health and its indicators in Islam. It has been divided into two subsections:

First Subsection:

Dedicated to explaining the concept of mental health and its importance in Islam.

Second Subsection:

Concerned with the categories of the human soul/self and the indicators of mental health in Islam.

Second Section

The second section constitutes the core and essence of the study. It is devoted to clarifying the principal means of promoting mental health in Islamic law. It contains five subsections:

First Subsection:

Caring for physical health as a means to mental well-being.

Second Subsection:

Strengthening the spiritual and faith-based dimension in the Muslim individual.

Third Subsection:

Encouraging optimism and combating despair and frustration.

Fourth Subsection:

Contentment and inner psychological satisfaction.

Fifth Subsection:

Self-discipline and training the self to cultivate patience.

Conclusion

The conclusion includes the most important findings and recommendations of the study.

First Section: The Importance of Mental Health and Its Indicators in Islam

This brief introductory section aims to provide a general overview of Islam's concern for mental health by clarifying its nature according to the Islamic perspective, as well as highlighting the categories of the human self, through which one may assess the state of psychological well-being.

First Subsection: The Concept of Mental Health and Its Importance in Islam

Among the most widely circulated contemporary definitions in scientific circles is that of the World Health Organization (WHO), which states that mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders, but rather a state of psychological well-being and wellness that enables individuals to cope with the stresses resulting from life pressures, to realize their abilities in learning and working effectively, and to contribute to their local communities. (WHO, 2025).

As for Islam's view of mental health, it perceives it as the human being's ability to free the self from vain desires, refine and elevate it through fulfilling the obligations prescribed by Allah Almighty, and through interacting positively with the environment in which one lives, such that the individual adopts constructive and beneficial behavior for both self and society. This, in turn, assists the person in confronting crises and hardships in a positive manner, away from emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety, depression, and the like. (Najati, 1422 AH/2001 CE, p. 97).

Thus, it becomes clear that mental health from the Islamic perspective encompasses a broader scope than the concept commonly circulated in scientific circles. It is not confined merely to achieving psychological happiness and well-being through proper management of emotional difficulties, life challenges, and social relationships; rather, it extends further to achieving an ideal relationship with the Creator, Glorified and Exalted, and establishing balance between body and soul.

Accordingly, the supreme objective upon which mental health in the Islamic perspective is centered is that the human being should live in nearness to his Lord, in peace with himself, and in harmony with others thereby attaining immediate happiness in worldly life while hoping for eternal felicity in the Hereafter. (Ahmad, 2022, p. 22).

Owing to this profound importance, Islamic civilization was pioneering in its concern and care for mental health. Indeed, the first psychiatric hospital established in history was founded in the Muslim world, in Baghdad the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate during the eighth century CE. Similar institutions did not appear in the Western world until much later centuries. Furthermore, Muslim scholars and physicians played a distinguished role in presenting studies and theories regarding the psychological disorders experienced by human beings. (Ahmad, 2022, p. 22).

For example, Al-Razi (d. 925 CE) is regarded as one of the earliest physicians who, through his mastery of physical medicine, was able to offer the world valuable treatments in the fields of moral psychology and clinical psychology. Al-Razi believed that bodily illnesses and ailments may arise from psychological causes such as grief and anger, and that treatment should involve removing anxiety and fear from the self while instilling joy and reassurance through pleasant conversation and purposeful exhortation. (Hussein, 2020, p. 86).

Second Subsection: The Categories of the Human Soul and Indicators of Mental Health in Islam

Part of the perfection of Allah's justice, Glorified and Exalted, is that He endowed the human self with equal dispositions toward both good and evil, while granting it the capacity to discern and choose between the two paths: the path of goodness and guidance, and the path of misguidance and temptation. (Kheloui, 2022, p. 157).

Concerning this, Allah the Almighty says:

{ وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا (7) فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (8) قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (9) وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (10) }
[الشمس: 7-10]

One of the important factors in measuring the state of mental health is understanding the various categories of the human. In this regard, the Noble Qur'an mentions three categories of souls: (Al-'Umrani, 2024 CE).

First: The Tranquil Soul

This soul occupies the highest rank of mental and psychological well-being. It is content, serene, and reassured; fully surrendered to its Creator with satisfaction and conviction. It is characterized by strength of character, for it engages only in that whose righteousness and benefit it has become certain of. It has transcended the disturbances and anxieties of worldly life and instead busies itself with cultivating the everlasting abode of the Hereafter. (Kheloui, 2022, p. 157).

Such a soul through its tranquility in relation to its Lord, its obedience to His commands, and its submission to His decrees becomes the ultimate aim and aspiration of every Muslim, so that one may escape the psychological conflicts that besiege human beings in worldly life. It is therefore worthy of the honor and praise expressed in the words of Allah the Almighty:

{ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ (27) ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (28) فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي (29) وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي }
[الفجر: 27-30]

Second: The Self-Reproaching Soul

This is the soul that experiences an inner psychological struggle between good and evil. It is a soul that performs good deeds and loves them, yet may also commit sins while disliking them. Consequently, it reproaches its owner whenever he falls into wrongdoing and sin, blaming him for negligence and error. (Kheloui, 2022, p. 157).

Allah the Almighty swore by the self-reproaching soul immediately after His oath by the Day of Resurrection in His saying:

{ لَا أَقْسِمُ بِبَيْتِ الْقِيَامَةِ (1) وَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ (2) }
[القيامة: 1-2]

This oath illustrates the profound relationship between the destiny of the soul and the coming of that promised Day, on which the human being will stand alone without supporter or helper, reproaching oneself for neglect and shortcomings. (Al-'Umrani, 2024).

Third: The Soul Inclined to Evil

This soul occupies the lowest rank of mental and psychological health. Satan has overpowered it and gained control over its behavior and temperament. Consequently, this diseased soul inclines toward evil and develops a love for disobedience, urging and inciting its owner toward wickedness and immorality. (Kheloui, 2022, p. 157).

Allah the Almighty referred to this soul in His saying:

{ إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (53) }
[يوسف: 53]

At the beginning of one's affair, when a person commits a sin or wrongdoing for the first time, an inner feeling of reproach arises within, and one wishes the act had never been committed. However, if the person returns to the sin repeatedly, the faculty of guilt and moral sensitivity gradually weakens, until the soul begins to incline toward sin and even finds pleasure in it. Thus, the soul transitions from being self-reproaching to becoming commanding toward evil. (Al-'Umrani, 2024).

It therefore becomes abundantly clear that Islamic law has paid the utmost attention to mental health and has presented a profound and precise understanding of the human soul through its identification of the categories of the soul and the defining characteristics of each.

Second Section: The Most Important Means of Promoting Mental Health in Islamic Law

Among the forms of care that Islamic law has devoted to mental health and human psychology is its prescription of a number of therapeutic methods and means that contribute to the promotion of psychological well-being. This section sheds light upon the most important of these methods and approaches while clarifying their principal objectives and purposes.

First Subsection: Caring for Physical Health as a Means to Mental Well-Being

Islam commands the care and preservation of the human body, as well as the treatment of illnesses and diseases, because physical health and bodily wellness grant the individual psychological comfort and the ability to fulfill acts of worship and responsibilities entrusted to him in this life.

The Messenger of Allah (Peace Be Upon Him) encouraged his noble Companions and the entire Muslim community toward this principle when he said:

“Seek treatment, O servants of Allah, for Allah has not created any disease except that He has also created its cure, except for one disease.” They asked, “O Messenger of Allah, what is it?” He replied, “Old age.”

(Al-Tirmidhi, 1382 AH/1962 CE, p. 383).

This Prophetic tradition encourages seeking treatment and remedies for all forms of physical and psychological illness. It is well known that mental health can only be achieved through continuous harmony between the physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of human existence. (Ibrahim, 1421 AH/2000 CE, p. 19).

Islam has also prescribed a number of remedies and medicines in which there is healing for bodily ailments and psychological illnesses. Among these are the following:

The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said:

“Healing is found in three things: in the incision of the cupper, in a drink of honey, or in cauterization by fire, though I forbid my community from cauterization.”

(Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, p. 123).

He (Peace Be Upon Him) also said:

“Talbinah soothes the heart of the sick person and relieves some of sorrow.”

(Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, p. 75).

Second Subsection: Strengthening the Spiritual and Faith-Based Dimension in the Muslim Individual

Firm faith and strong belief instill within the soul a remarkable strength that enables it to overcome hardships and remain steadfast in the face of psychological shocks and emotional disturbances. A strong connection with Allah the Almighty, frequent remembrance of Him, and contentment with His decree and will all of these provide the individual with psychological preparedness to endure calamities and trials with acceptance, surrender, and submission to the God decree. (Abu Shahbah, 2007, p. 12).

Numerous psychological studies in the field of mental health have demonstrated that many perpetrators of crimes such as murder and drug abuse within Muslim societies are driven by their distance from religion and the weakness of their faith in Allah and His decree. This clearly reveals the profound effect of spiritual and doctrinal strength upon mental health. (Abu Shahbah, 2007, p. 12).

For this reason, many Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions emphasize strengthening the spiritual and faith-based dimension of the Muslim individual. Among these are:

The saying of Allah the Almighty:

{ وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ (45) }

[45: البقرة]

His Almighty saying :

{ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ (28) } [الرعد: 28]

And the saying of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) upon the death of his son Ibrahim:

“Indeed, the eyes shed tears and the heart grieves, yet we say only what pleases our Lord. And indeed, O Ibrahim, we are grieved by your separation.”

(Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, p. 83).

Third Subsection: Encouraging Optimism and Combating Despair and Frustration

Psychologists have affirmed that the human mind attains a state of stability and comfort when a person possesses optimism. Optimism is regarded as one of the most important therapeutic means in confronting psychological problems. It also strengthens the body's resistance to various illnesses and grants the individual happiness in life. Studies have further confirmed that optimistic individuals tend to enjoy better health than pessimistic ones. (Ma'di, 2022, p. 2284).

Islam has encouraged and urged optimism and positive engagement with life, while prohibiting despair, pessimism, and negativity all of which serve to strengthen the individual's mental health. The Prophet of Islam (Peace Be Upon Him) favored good names and positive omens, because Allah the Almighty created human beings with a natural inclination toward kind words, hopeful signs, and emotional comfort derived from glad tidings. (Battal, n.d., p. 437).

Accordingly, the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah contain numerous texts encouraging optimism and forbidding superstition and pessimism. Among these are:

The saying of Allah the Almighty:

{ قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ } [الزمر: 53]

And His Almighty saying:

{ وَلَا تَيَاسُوهَا مِن رُّوحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيَاسُ مِن رُّوحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ (87) } [يوسف: 87]

The saying of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him):

“There is no superstition, and the best of it is optimism.” They asked, “What is optimism, O Messenger of Allah?” He replied, “A good word that one of you hears.”

(Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, p. 135).

And his saying (Peace Be Upon Him):

“One night, while sleeping, I saw as though we were in the house of ‘Uqbah ibn Rafi‘, and fresh dates from Ibn Tab were brought to us. I interpreted this to mean that elevation shall be ours in this world, a good end shall be ours in the Hereafter, and that our religion has become pure and wholesome.”

(Muslim, 1419 AH/1998 CE, p. 933).

Thus, Islam encouraged optimism through good names and kind words even in the interpretation of dreams and visions, considering this a powerful psychological factor and a source of hope and glad expectation of good. Such optimism generates within the soul feelings of happiness, reassurance, and inner tranquility.

Fourth Subsection: Contentment and Psychological Satisfaction

Among the greatest causes that disturb a person's emotional balance and undermine psychological comfort and happiness is dissatisfaction with what Allah has apportioned in terms of health, wealth, family, and other blessings. Such a person often lives in a state of misery, anxiety, and psychological distress. In contrast, one of the most important factors contributing to tranquility, happiness, and sound mental health is the Muslim's contentment with what Allah the Almighty has provided and bestowed upon him. Such contentment greatly strengthens psychological well-being and peace of mind. (Ma'di, 2022, p. 2288).

Islam came to treat the greed of the soul and its lack of satisfaction. In this regard, the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said:

“Look at those who are below you and do not look at those who are above you, for that is more likely to prevent you from belittling the blessings of Allah upon you.”

(Muslim, 1419 AH/1998 CE, p. 1189).

This Prophetic remedy contains guidance for the soul toward two essential principles: (Ibn Hajar, n.d., p. 323).

First Principle

One should refrain from constantly observing and reflecting upon those who are in better circumstances and possess greater blessings. Excessive focus upon such people implants dissatisfaction with Allah's decree and causes one to belittle His favors, thereby producing sorrow and misery within the soul.

Second Principle

One should instead observe and take lesson from those who are in more difficult conditions and possess fewer blessings. Such reflection generates feelings of comfort and gratitude, since the individual realizes that he is in a better state and has been granted greater favors.

Islam also clarified the true nature of wealth that cultivates psychological happiness, as expressed in the saying of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him):

“Richness is not an abundance of worldly possessions; rather, true richness is the richness of the soul.”

(Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, p. 95).

True wealth, therefore, does not lie in possessing great amounts of money and worldly enjoyment, for many who possess such things remain inwardly impoverished, living in misery because of their greed and insatiable desire. Rather, genuine wealth is the richness of the soul, for its possessor lives in psychological happiness through sufficiency with the little that Allah has granted and through contentment with it. (Battal, n.d., p. 165).

For this reason, the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said to one of his Companions:

“Be content with what Allah has apportioned for you, and you shall become the richest of people.”

(Al-Tirmidhi, 1382 AH/1962 CE, p. 551).

Fifth Subsection: Self-Discipline and Training the Soul in Patience

Throughout the course of life, the human being is exposed to many trials, calamities, disputes, and conflicts that affect mental well-being and generate numerous emotional reactions. The individual who confronts such situations with patience and self-control is the balanced and psychologically healthy person. (Ma'di, 2022, p. 2282).

To attain this elevated degree of mental health, Islam prescribed two major remedies: patience and restraint of anger. These two profound remedies are capable of producing tranquility and psychological comfort. The first serves as a treatment for the grief and sorrow resulting from calamities and hardships, while the second treats anger and impulsive emotional reactions that may arise from disputes and conflicts encountered in daily interactions with others. (Al-'Assaf, 2024, p. 130).

Among the Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions indicating this meaning are the following:

The saying of Allah the Almighty:

{ وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (134) } [آل عمران:134]

And His Almighty saying:

{ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ (155) الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ (156) أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ (157) }

[البقرة: 155-157]

The saying of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him):

“Wondrous indeed is the affair of the believer, for all of his affairs are good, and that is for none except the believer: if prosperity comes to him, he gives thanks and that is good for him; and if hardship befalls him, he remains patient and that is good for him.”

(Muslim, 1419 AH/1998 CE, p. 1200).

And his saying (Peace Be Upon Him) :

“The strong person is not the one who overcomes others in wrestling; rather, the truly strong person is the one who controls himself at the time of anger.”

(Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, p. 28).

Thus, a person's ability to control anger and emotional impulses, and to overcome grief and sorrow, leads to psychological and social harmony both of which are essential indicators of sound mental health. (Abu Shahbah, 2007, p. 25).

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this concise study, a number of findings may be recorded, among the most important of which are the following:

Islamic law was pioneering in emphasizing the importance of mental health and in providing care for it. It also presented a precise and profound understanding of the human soul through identifying its categories and defining characteristics.

The concept of mental health from the Islamic perspective is broader in scope and more comprehensive in nature. It is not limited merely to achieving psychological well-being and happiness; rather, it extends to establishing an ideal relationship with the Creator, Glorified and Exalted, and achieving harmony between body and soul between the material and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

Islamic law prescribed a number of therapeutic methods for promoting the individual's mental health, among the most important of which are: strengthening the spiritual and faith-based dimension,

encouraging optimism while combating despair and frustration, fostering contentment and psychological satisfaction, and other related means.

In concluding this research paper, I recommend giving greater attention to psychological studies and research concerned with the spiritual and faith-based dimension, as well as the importance of activating this dimension in confronting psychological illnesses and crises.

May Allah send His peace, blessings, and grace upon His Prophet Muhammad, his family, and all his Companions. And all praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all worlds.

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