

BREAKING THE SILENCE



ON MENTAL HEALTH

BOOKLET 1

DEC. 2021



ICNA
SISTERS



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Relief

MUSLIM FAMILY SERVICES

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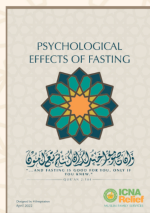
<https://muslimmentalhealth.psychiatry.msu.edu/researchers/amber-haque-phd>

MENTAL HEALTH SERIES



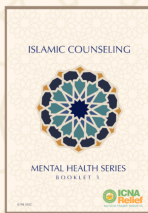
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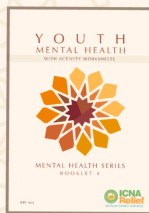
Booklet 2

https://www.academia.edu/74337572/Psychological_Effects_of_Fasting



Booklet 3

https://www.academia.edu/82485006/Islamic_Counseling



Booklet 4

https://www.academia.edu/87585546/Youth_Mental_Health

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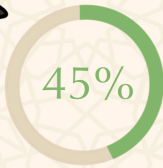
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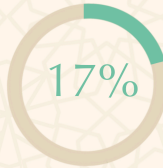


Let's begin with numbers!

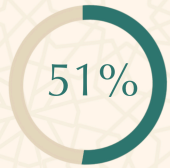
1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness



of adults with mental illness receive treatment



of youth experience a mental health disorder



of youth receive mental health treatment

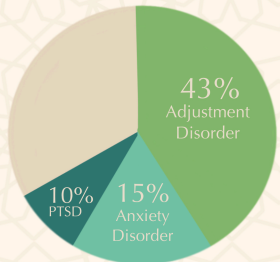
Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021)

Data on Muslim Mental Health in the U.S.



Muslim adults in the U.S. are 2 times more likely to report suicidal attempts than respondents from other faith traditions, including atheists and agnostics (Awaad, R. et al. JAMA Psychiatry, 2021; 78(9): 1041-1044).

The pie chart on the right represents an older study done on 875 Muslims in Chicago (Basit, A. & Hamid, M. J. IMA 2010 42(3), 106-110.) These numbers are generally higher compared to the local American population. While American Muslims continue to suffer from psychological issues, the research and treatment are severely lacking.



875 Muslims in the Chicago area in 2010

Mental Health & Mental Illness

We refer to our psychological well-being, coping mechanisms and social interactions when we talk about mental health. These are generally learned behaviors but can also be biologically based. Our mental health substantially impacts how we think, interact with others, and deal with situations. Positive mental health implies the absence of mental illness, but there are times when people with good mental health can become psychologically unhealthy as mental health and mental illness are on a continuum.

Mental Health is...



Psychological well-being



Coping mechanisms



Social interactions

Whether we refer to mental health as good or poor often depends on how we are doing when it comes to these aspects of our lives.



Like there are ways of protecting oneself from physical illness, there are ways to prevent mental illness. Luckily, and in most cases, mental illness is not an ongoing illness because the person could have the highs and lows and days or weeks with no mental worries at all. Furthermore, most people can overcome their illness if they get the proper care and treatment.

The Stigma Around Mental Illness



According to studies, almost 9 out of 10 people who experienced mental illness also experience discrimination due to that illness (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stigma-and-discrimination>). This may be why people can be hesitant to speak about mental illness as well as seek treatment.

Such discrimination may be seen more in some countries and cultures than others.

According to research, the stigma of mental illness among the Muslim communities is very high (Cifti, Jones, and Corrigan, 2012. Mental Health Stigma in the Muslim Community, Journal of Muslim Mental Health 7, 1, 17-32).



This corresponds with a CBS News poll in 2019 presented below.



agreed on mental illness stigma/discrimination in the American society



believed stigma around mental illness has decreased in the last 10 years

Most respondents agreed that as mental illness is such a serious issue, there is a need for increased awareness and education about mental health and mental illness.

What could be the reason for this decrease in stigma around mental illness? Well, more education and better understanding.

Do you have a stigma against mental illness?

Answer the questions below and check on the last page how many were correct. Incorrect answers may indicate a lack of awareness and presence of stigma. The more the wrong answers, the stronger the stigma!

1. People suffering from mental illness
 - a. Did something to deserve it
 - b. Are faking it
 - c. Are being dramatic and need to snap out of it
 - d. Deserve support and professional treatment
2. Anyone suffering from mental illness
 - a. Is not capable of carrying out tasks or getting employed
 - b. Can be dangerous
 - c. Is not capable of having healthy relationships
 - d. Could be functioning healthily with the right care and treatment
3. If I found out someone I know suffers from mental illness, I would
 - a. Avoid them and warn my family members about them
 - b. Encourage them to pray because only prayer can heal
 - c. Accept them, provide support and encourage professional care
 - d. Tell them to repent for sins that have led them to this position



Myths about Mental Illness



Mental illness can never be cured

Talking to people with suicidal ideation can be dangerous



Therapy and counseling take years until they help



The treatment for mental illness is prayers only

There are many such myths about mental illness, and they are not valid. By believing in such tales, we hurt the person who is already suffering from mental illness. There are cures for mental illness, such as talking to someone with suicidal thoughts the right way can actually be helpful for them. Therapies also do not take years to cure; medications may be necessary if the roots of the problem are biological. Prayers are not the only method to treat mental illness.

Can we confront the stigma around mental illness?

Research shows that if we are more aware of the mentally ill people around us, we can get a more realistic picture of mental illness that helps us examine our stereotypes and change our thinking.

We can use three approaches to reduce stigma about mental illness:



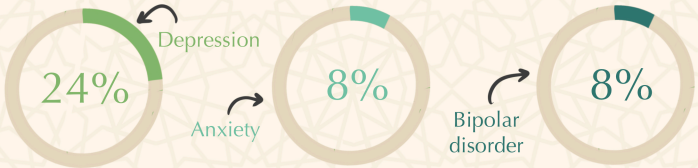
The media can play a vital role by educating the public and changing attitudes, the community leaders who can influence public perception of mental illness and related stigma, and the persons of trust who have had a mental illness. They will be heard more if they are known to the general public.

Can persons with mental illness succeed in life?



One of the most revered American Presidents had a mental illness. Abraham Lincoln was clinically depressed and yet one of the strongest people in history. Lincoln believed that he was destined for something great, and he had to pursue his dream to become the country's president. After becoming president, he endured the insults of his cabinet members but never gave up. His secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, called him a "gorilla" and referred to him as an imbecile. However, Stanton was also overwhelmed by Lincoln's greatness and, at his death, mourned, "There lies the perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen."

Mental Illness in U.S. Presidents



In an interesting study on mental illness in U.S. Presidents, the researchers reviewed biographical sources on mental illness in 37 American Presidents from 1776 to 1974. After consultation with experienced psychiatrists, they concluded that the Presidents met the criteria of depression (24%), anxiety (8%), bipolar disorder (8%), etc.

(Davidson, J. R.T.; Connor, K.M.; & Swartz, M., *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Jan. 2006, 194, 1: 47-51.

This data proves that most people get out of their illnesses and can live a successful life despite having a mental illness.



Did God's Prophets also suffer from Grief and Sorrow?

It is a misconception that sorrow and grief come only to those away from the Islamic norms. Many stories from the Quran and other religious texts suggest that God's prophets suffered from grief and often deep sorrow. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) suffered from intense distress from the passing of his wife Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib in addition to the boycott of Muslims in Makkah, so the entire year was called the Year of Sorrow. Allah addressed Muhammad (PBUH) in the Quran by saying, "Perhaps, you would kill yourself in grief (O Muhammad SAW) over their denial, because they believe not in this narration." (18: 6). Similarly, Prophet Yaqub (AS) suffered prolonged grief when his beloved son Yusuf (AS) went missing with his brothers. Many verses of the Quran declare the reality of depression, e.g., 3:139, 9:40, 10:65, 35:34, 4:30.

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in you from
anxiety, grief, weakness, laziness,

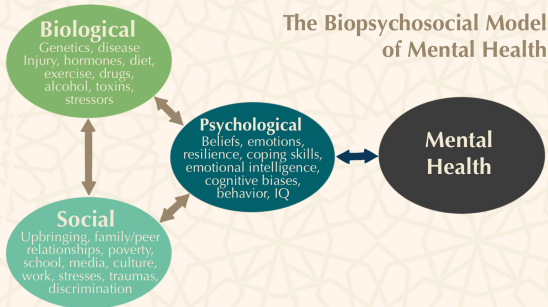


Al-Bukhari
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miserliness, cowardice, extreme debt and
being overpowered by other men.

Causes of Mental Illness

The causes of mental illness are varied but based primarily on three realms: bio-psycho-social. In the biological sphere, scientists are still struggling to learn the complexities of the human brain and how the neurons and neuro-chemicals affect the thought processes. The biological reasons could also be hereditary, meaning that depression or anxiety could run in the family. There could also be infections, brain injury, prenatal damage, substance abuse, and other factors that lead to various forms of mental illnesses. Even malnutrition and toxin exposure can lead to mental disorders and developmental disabilities.



Psychological factors relate to interpreting the events around us, our beliefs, emotions, resilience, and cognitive biases. People prone to look at the negative side of things tend to have higher mental illnesses.

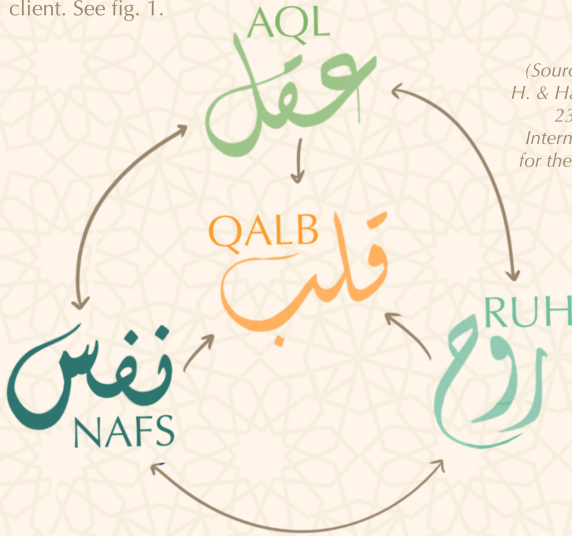
The social factors are the interpersonal skills and relationships over the years. Our family upbringing, friendships, traumas, school and work environment also affect our well-being. The diagram above shows how a person's mental health is affected by three significant factors; none of which can be ignored.

It is also essential to know that even healthy people have days when they could be depressed, but the difference lies in whether one can get out of depression after a while as we vary in our resilience and coping skills. While there could be medical treatments for mental illnesses, the psychosocial approach is also necessary as causations and treatments must be multipronged.

Additionally, spiritual factors may also influence mental health and illness and need serious consideration.

Islam and Mental Health

Islamic scholars have described how circular causality among the nafs, ruh, and aql can lead to various forms of diseases of the heart (Amraaz al-Qalb) and how Islamic-based assessment and treatment can help the client. See fig. 1.



(Source: Keshavarzi, H. & Haque, A. 2013, 23:230:249. The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion)

Early Muslim scholars also identified biopsychosocial factors in the origins and treatment of mental illness. Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi (849-943 AD), for example, explained that both our bodies and souls need sustenance to keep us mentally healthy. He wrote many scientific treatises and introduced the concepts of psychosomatic medicine, counseling psychology, cognitive therapy, and classification of mental disorders a thousand years before the American Psychiatric Association published their first volume of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). A few names of the Muslim scholars who discussed mental illnesses and their treatments during the Islamic Golden Age are given in the figure on the next page.

EARLY MUSLIM SCHOLAR'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PSYCHOLOGY

Year (approx.)	Scholar	Contribution
700	Ibn Sireen (d. 728)	(Book of Dreams, 25 sections)
700	Al-Jahiz (d. 868)	Ants and other animal psychology and social behavior, 200 plus manuscripts
800	Al-Kindi (d. 866)	239 titles including On Sleep and Dreams, Eradication of Sorrow (depression). He used cognitive strategies to combat depression.
800	Al-Tabari (d. 870)	Child development, psychotherapy, and ties between psychology and medicine, and Firdaus al Hikmah a medical text that is divided into 7 sections and 30 treatises (360 chapters).
900	Al-Razi (d. 932)	Psychotherapy, psychosomatic medicine, measuring intelligence. He wrote Kitab al-Hawi, Mujarabat, al-Tibb al-Ruhani, and al-Tibb al-Mansuri.
900	Al-Balkhi (d. 934)	Classified neurotic disorders, use of cognitive therapies, modern-day reciprocal inhibition, and balance between mind and body.
900	Al-Farabi (d. 950)	Social psychology (Model City), causes of dreams, meanings of intellect, and music therapy.
900	Al-Majusi (d. 995)	Al-Kitab al-Malaki, Mental diseases and the brain, natural healing, prevention of disease, moral aspects of medicine, and relationship between doctor and patients.
1000	Ibn-Miskawayh (d. 1030)	Emotions, traits, moral psychology.
1000	Ibn-Sina (d. 1037)	Mind-body relationship, sensation, perception, psychosomatic illnesses.
1000	Ikwān Al-Safā (10th cent.)	53 epistles containing spiritual and philosophical knowledge, Rational soul, brain, process of thinking, sensation, and perception.
1100	Ibn-Bajjah (d. 1138)	sensation, imagination and human intelligence.
1100	Al-Ghazali (d. 1111)	Concept of self, motor and sensory motives, nature of knowledge, spiritual diseases.
1100	Ibn-Zarbi (d. 1153)	Physical basis for intellectual loss, confusion, amnesia, lethargy, etc.)
1100	Ibn-Tufail (d. 1185)	Treatment of soul and his tale on Hayy bin Yarzam later led to the novel on Robinson Crusoe
1200	Al-Rushd (d. 1198)	Types of intellect and hierarchy of learning.
1200	Fakhar AlDin Razi (d. 1209)	Types of human souls and purpose of human beings.
1200	Ibn-Arabi (d. 1240)	Soul, perception, imagination, dreams, intellect and human heart.

Source: Haque, A. (2004). *Psychology from an Islamic perspective: Contributions of Early Muslim Scholars to Psychology. Journal of Religion and Health. 43:4, 367-387.*

Today, there are renewed attempts to understand mental illnesses from Islamic perspectives (see, for instance, Haque, A. & Mohamed, Y., *Psychology of Personality: Islamic Perspectives*, 2022. International Association of Islamic Psychology, Seattle and Haque, A. & Rothman, A. *Islamic Psychology around the Globe*. 2021. International Association of Islamic Psychology, Seattle) and guide the Muslims to use spiritual treatment mechanisms. In any case, spiritual intervention should go hand-in-hand with the biopsychosocial approach.

The Role of Imams in Muslim Mental Health

Imams play a very crucial role in the life of Muslim families, especially those living in the western world. The congregants of mosques often approach the Imams for counseling. The Imams can educate the families about the Islamic injunctions on family rights and responsibilities and interpersonal issues. The Imams can provide spiritual guidance and advice on moral issues in Islam, but they are rarely trained to deliver professional counseling. If they provide mental health counseling without a license, they may violate state laws about practicing without credentials and harm the clients rather than do good. There is a dire need for Muslim mental health counselors to address the growing psychological challenges in our communities.



Mental Health Counseling at ICNA Relief

Muslim Family Services of ICNA Relief has licensed counselors and religious advisors offering services in many areas. We provide individual, group, and family counseling, premarital and marital counseling, counseling on youth issues, addiction problems, women support and rehabilitation, and more. The two areas in which we see an



increasing demand for counseling are refugee services and foster parenting. Some regions also offer domestic violence prevention and anger management courses.

Ways of preventing mental illness

Prevention is better than cure! The first step to prevention is to know the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and the scientific basis for their existence. There can be many ways to prevent mental illness, but it is also essential to see a professional get the proper intervention.



Healthy interpersonal and social life



Healthy self-esteem & self-worth



The strength to forgive others



Eat healthy meals & have healthy thoughts



Avoid all addictions, rest well, & exercise



Learning to meditate & do self-analysis



Finding ways of self-improvement through self-help books



Spiritual practices to cope & build resilience



Seek help from mental health experts

The Seven Steps to Whole Health



Get outside & move!



Connect with others



Prioritize sleep



Practice having a positive viewpoint



Eat a healthy diet



Practice mindfulness



Help others

The Do's and Don'ts of Mental Illness

DO – DO – DO

- Listen carefully without making a judgment
- Ask questions to know what they are going through
- Seek help to avoid deterioration of the condition
- Ask if they have been going through any unusual circumstances
- Ask if they are or have been on substances
- Set reasonable expectations when they are unwell
- Be patient, calm, and helpful

DON'T – DON'T – DON'T

- Don't blame the person
- Don't ignore, avoid or argue
- Don't make comments like, "You're just fine"
- Don't make decisions without their consent
- Don't wait until your resentment builds up
- Don't play the doctor, psychologist, or counselor

“My parents won’t let me see a counselor!”

By Dr. Amber Haque
Program Director
Muslim Family Services

This is one of the many comments made by a group of youth I saw recently to discuss the psychological challenges they face at home and outside. The stigma of mental illness continues to persist in our communities despite the growing data that our youth suffer from a myriad of mental health challenges.

Why would any family members refuse to see a counselor or a mental health professional? There could be several reasons for this, but a primary reason is the lack of awareness about common mental health issues and denial that our own family members could be the victims of psychological challenges.

The National Institute of Mental Health data shows that more than 1 in every 5 Americans has some form of mental illness. It is also a myth that mental illness outside America is any less because the hard data on mental health does not exist for most other countries.

A growing number of studies show that the Imams are now also frequented by Muslim families to seek counseling services. This indicates that not only do our families face more challenges now than before, they also seek traditional services instead of asking mental health professionals. Unfortunately, and in most cases, the problems quickly get out of hand, and the affected family member continues to suffer in silence.



The youth I talked to voiced many concerns like, “parents don’t understand our point of view, and they always assume the worst-case scenario.” “It’s easier to talk to friends than speak to the parents.” “Negative talks from parents are discouraging.” “Parents mix religion and culture,” and “please give us the respect we



deserve!” While none of these indicate mental illness, they may result in anxieties and depression, which I see as a desperate call for help.

The realization of improved mental health services in our communities is there, but we have a long way to go. There is a lack of research, mental health professionals, and support for such programs. It is time we introduce mental health education in our Islamic schools, families, and circle of friends to build a healthy community. Perhaps it is time; we initiate an inclusive Muslim Mental Health Taskforce to address the growing issues in our communities.

It is also necessary that our counselors educate families about effective listening, cultural biases, practical expectations, and learning to think positively. As parents, we need to know more about ourselves, build on children’s strengths, communicate more effectively, be good role models for our youth, and include children in the decisions that affect them.

Suicidal Warning Signs

Awaad et al.'s (2021) study shows a stark reality that suicide attempts are high among American Muslim adults. It is essential to know the suicidal warning signs to save lives. The list below is a warning that the afflicted person needs immediate professional attention:



Shows little interest in surroundings/people



Talks frequently about death/dying



Talks about being a burden on others

Sleeping too much or too little



Showing anger & reckless behaviors



Persistent anxiety, fear, self-mutilation, etc.



This list is partial, and suicide victims vary in expressing their behaviors. It is often difficult to predict precisely when suicide may occur, as seriously suicidal persons watch out for when they can do it successfully. The best prevention against suicide is to remove the stigma around mental illness and provide adequate mental health care. ICNA Relief has an open door policy and refers cases to outside professionals as needed. We also offer Islamic mental health counseling in some locations. For immediate assistance on suicide prevention, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or go to www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org and Click to Chat.

Suicide Prevention Toolkit

The Family and Youth Institute (FYI), based in Detroit, Michigan, has developed three resources on suicide prevention and intervention: <https://www.thefyi.org/toolkits/suicide-prevention-toolkit/>

The Stanford Muslim Mental Health Lab, run by Dr. Rania Awaad, has also developed a toolkit and procedures for addressing suicide prevention and discusses Muslim Community Suicide response: <https://maristan.org/muslimsuicideresponse>

The Quran declares: "Do not kill (or destroy) yourselves for verily Allah is ever Compassionate to you." An-Nisa: 29

Answers to Stigma Questions: d, d, c.

