



## **ANALYTICAL DISCOURSE ON RELIGIOUSITY, SPIRITUALITY AND MENTAL HEALTH FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the Islamic perspective of religiosity, spirituality and mental health. The paper explains in details the meaning of religiosity and spirituality and the Islamic position on mental health. The paper concludes that religiosity and spirituality are the same. There is no difference between the two concepts from the Islamic perspective. The study also recommends that all Muslim believers should be religious and spiritual as Islam considers religiosity and spirituality to be the same. All Muslims are expected to strictly follow their religion so as to have good mental health. Muslims should not only restrict themselves to Du'a in treating mental illness, but should look for various lawful treatments. Muslims should spiritually treat their mental health issues like depression, grief, anxiety and other mental illnesses through reciting the Quran constantly.

**Keywords:** *Religiosity, Spirituality and Mental health.*

### **Introduction**

In terms of scientific research, there has been an explosion of interest in recent years regarding the link between religiosity, spirituality and mental health (Utz, 2011). Much of this research suggests a relationship between these variables indicating that those who are more religious or spiritual tend to have better mental and physical health. In the area of mental health, more than five hundred studies have found significant positive relationship between religiosity and spirituality which promotes better mental health and well-being. This specifically includes less depression

and faster recovery from depression, less anxiety, lower suicide rates and less dangerous substance abuse. Greater well-being encompasses more hope, optimism, purpose and meaning in life, greater marital satisfaction, mental stability, and higher levels of social support (Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001).

While most of this research has been conducted with Christian populations in the West, a recent literature review of a growing body of studies with Muslim populations suggests that religiosity and spirituality also benefit the mental health of the Muslims

adherents (Utz & Oman, 2011). This relationship encompasses a multitude of variables, including greater happiness, well-being, life satisfaction and optimism, and reduced likelihood of depression, anxiety, death anxiety, antisocial behaviour and suicide. Basically, what this means is that, Muslims who are religious and spiritual and practice their faith are healthier and happier.

Studies have found, for example, persons who are spiritual and warm caring, helpful and dependable are less likely to be lonely, depressed, or anxious. They also cope better with major life stresses and less likely to abuse drugs. As this link established, more and more people emphasize the role of spirituality and religion in providing not only curative potential for mental illness, but also preventive measure as well. In Islam, this understanding is fundamental to the nature of humankind and to success in this life. The closer one is to Allah, the more he/she increases in righteousness and elevates his or her spiritual and physical existence.

In a society faced with so many of these ills and lacking any form of spirituality, the connection between the two becomes readily apparent. Allah the Exalted, the Almighty has provided the cure in the Quran, and it is available for every human being. Even those who suffer from some form of mental illness have relative or total relief by maintaining hope in Allah's mercy, returning to Him in repentance, and relying upon Him for a cure.

Allah mentions in the Quran the importance of guidance, because it is

through guidance that the seeker finds the truth and the food that is necessary for the spiritual sustenance of the soul.

*Whoever is guided is only guided for the benefit of his soul and whoever errs only errs against it. No bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another, and never would we punish until we sent a messenger (Qur'an 17:15)*

In another surah, Allah (SWT) says:

*Indeed, we sent down to you the book for the people of truth. So whoever is guided-it's for the benefit of its soul and whoever goes astray only goes astray in violation against it. (Qur'an 39:41)*

### **Islamic Views on Religiosity/Spirituality**

The term religion, which originates from the Latin word "religare", means to tie or bind fast (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). From the perspective of Islam, religion is the bond between God as the Ultimate Reality and His creations, with humans being one of the creations. It is a way of life (al-din) or path (tariqat) with God as the Anchor that encompasses the sum total of a Muslim's work, faith, and being. In Islam, the most valuable source that provides a comprehensive description of al-din is contained in a hadith known as "Hadith Jibril" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 6, Book 60, Number 300, Hadith 47). This hadith is important because it describes al-din as a concept with three essential constituents. The first is al-Islam, which covers one's religious obligations signified by acts of

worship; the second is al-Iman, which represents the cognitive and belief system in the understanding of God; and the third, al-Ihsan, which represents the actualization of moral and spiritual excellence. These three concepts are not separate but connected to and necessary for each other to become a balanced and religious person. This view is implicit in the writings of past Muslim scholars and researchers such as Al-Qardawi (1985), Hawwa (1989), and Yassin (2001) who consider the intimate relationship between these three concepts. While the word Islam literally means submission to anything having power over the person, in Islam, it specifically refers to total and absolute submission and obedience to Allah (SWT). A person can submit to God at three levels. At the first level, Islam, this is done via works or religious practices such as worship and rituals (e.g., performance of prayers [salat], fasting [sawm], alms [zakat], pilgrimage [hajj]), and other social obligations. The Iman level involves understanding and beliefs in God, his prophets, angels, scriptures, and resurrection. The final level, Ihsan, entails the inner dimension where a person performs supererogatory acts of worship in his/her devotion to Allah (SWT). This can be seen as a spiritual transformation from the exoteric to the esoteric with the goal of being *al-insan al-kamil* (a perfect or universal human) or the actualization of virtue and goodness, in line with the role that God has decreed for humans. Ihsan, therefore, is the highest level that could be attained by a person, and by achieving it, a Muslim is assumed to have totally submitted. In other words,

total submission or obedience is possible only when one knows the purpose of one's existence and has firm faith based on knowledge and conviction. Against this backdrop, it can be argued that the definition of religion and, by extension, religiosity, emphasises the bodily action or human activity (Islam), the mind or understanding of God (Iman), and the spirit or actualization of virtue and goodness (Ihsan).

### **Differences in Definitions of Religiosity and Spirituality**

In the Western psychology literature, the term religiosity connotes a different meaning than spirituality which is in contrast with Islam, which does not differentiate between religiosity and spirituality. In the Western literature, religiosity is mostly defined as system of organized beliefs and practices which involve a Higher Power, (Mystakidou, 2007), and the desire to please that power (Mc Coubrie and Davies, 2006). It also defines the nature of God and guides worship (Meraviglia, 1999). On the other hand, spirituality is defined as people's understanding of their lives in terms of their ultimate meaning and value (Mystakidou, 2007). It is an aspect of the self which searches for meaning, attempt to make sense out of life events, and which seeks to reconcile one's experiences with personal beliefs (Boevig, 2000). It may exist without religious beliefs or practices and may also co-exist together (Mc Coubrie & Davies, 2006). From the Islamic perspective, religion is the broader construct which encompasses a 'way of life'. Religion provides the roadmap to one's ultimate purpose in life, that is, to live

continuously in relationship with God, the Creator. Thus, the separation between religion and spirituality is not accepted in Islam. This is because to be spiritual but not religious may make a person spiritual but without religion or a road map to reach God; he or she may be misguided. Similarly, to be religious but not spiritual may make a person religious, but without self-understanding and consciousness, he or she is considered spiritually dead. Therefore in Islam, religion and spirituality are integrated into a unitary way of life (Ahmad, 2010).

#### **Islamic Position on Mental Health**

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) defines health as a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual. They further define mental health as the capacity of an individual to form harmonious relations with others and to participate in or contribute constructively to changes in his social and physical environment. Schtte (2002) define mental health as a quality of health resulting from the satisfaction of one's needs through personal and social adaptation to one's environment. Mental health, according to Olatunji (2018), is the behaviour of an individual which is normal. A normal behaviour can be situated on certain factors for instance an appropriate behaviour with respect to age, setting and timing. Salzer (2012) views mental health as the ability to adjust satisfactorily to the various strains of the environment we meet in life and mental hygiene as the means we take to assure this adjustment. Mental health generally is a condition which permits the

maximum development of physical, intellectual and emotional states of the individual so that he can contribute maximally to the welfare of the society and can also realize his aspirations and hopes in life.

On discussing mental health (problems) and Islam, it is important to accept the fact that it does exist and they do affect people in various ways as mentioned before but most importantly to understand that Islam did not come to eliminate depression, sadness or grief, rather it came to regulate it. This is supported by ample evidence from the Quran and Sunnah, which has been later backed by western thoughts and ideas of mental health and general wellbeing. We have all heard the line "just make dua", is not bad, but for someone suffering from severe depression, trauma or anxiety du'a alone does not suffice but make du'a and look for a right treatment according to the teaching of Islam through people who knows it. Allah said in the glorious Quran

".....ask who known, if you don't know" Q21:7 and Q16:43.

In order for us to understand better what mental health is and its importance, we can look back to the lives of the early pious Muslims. They too experienced extreme sadness and grief. Take prophet Yaqub (A.S) who mourned over the loss of his son Yusuf A.S for many years and eventually became blind from excessive crying. Then there is our Prophet (SAW) who has "The year of grief" when he experienced the loss of his wife and uncle. Fatima (RA) was extremely grieved when her father

died and then she passed away six months later. Zainab (RA) experienced anxiety for many years until her husband became a Muslim. Such great Muslim figures experienced sadness and depression, but Allah or the Prophet (Saw) didn't advise the companions to only call upon Allah. In fact the Prophet (saw) was described to be the best of listeners and would give hope and help to those who were hopeless and helpless; we could even say he was the best of advisors, counsellors and supporters. There is recognition of seeking help and support in Islam, even if there is no explicit hadith or ayaat saying "Muslims can experience mental health problems, and there are other cures beside Islamic help" – this sort of concept can be applied to other areas of Islam. Allah has made haram (un-lawful things) explicitly and clear, but the halal (lawful) and the permissible has been left vast and great i.e chemotherapy was not around the time of the Prophet but no one says to a cancer patient that they should just make dua and get on with life.

Finally, we can conclude that low Imaan (faith) is not the only cause of mental health problems and making dua is not the only solution, because Islam has not come to eliminate depression or emotions such as sadness and grief, but to regulate it, direct it and make it a learning process to develop and grow. However, the only way we can do that is together as a community; collectively understand what mental health is and how to deal with it alongside current medications and Islamic interventions. Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, "O

Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I untie her and trust in Allah?" The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Tie her and trust in Allah." (Tirmidhi)

### **Conclusion**

This study provides an insight into islamic religiosity. It is an effort to fill in the gap in the religion-health literature which is conducted primarily in the population of Christian's predominance. The present study indicates that patients with higher manifestation of Islamic beliefs have lower tendency to be depressed. Qualitative results reveal that for Muslim patients, the religion and mental health relationship is not just protective in nature, but that it can also be therapeutic. Getting close to Allah and accepting whatever Allah has willed is believed to be therapeutic for the health of the Muslims.

### **Recommendation**

The following recommendations were made based on the Islamic perspective of religiosity, spirituality and mental health.

1. All Muslim believers should be religious and spiritual as Islam considers religiosity and spirituality to be the same.
2. All Muslims are expected to strictly follow their religion so as to have good mental health.
3. Muslims should not only restrict themselves to Du'a in treating mental illness. They may look for other various lawful treatments and subscribe to it.
4. Muslims should spiritually treat their mental health issues like

depression, grief, anxiety and other mental illnesses through recitations of the Quran.

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