



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)

<https://gaexcellence.com/ijepc>



DEVELOPING THE 8S TAZKIYAH-BASED MARITAL COUNSELLING FRAMEWORK

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 27.01.2026

Revised date: 18.02.2026

Accepted date: 03.03.2026

Published date: 31.03.2026

To cite this document:

Al Hidabi, D. A. M. Y. (2026).
Developing The 8s Tazkiyah-
Based Marital Counselling
Framework. *International
Journal of Education,
Psychology and Counselling*,
11(62), 1205-1222.

Abstract:

Marital instability has become an increasing concern across many Muslim societies, with rising divorce rates and relational distress, indicating the need for counselling models that are spiritually grounded and culturally congruent with Muslim societies. Although Islamic scholarship offers a rich reservoir of virtues such as *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity), *ṣabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), *shūrā* (consultation), *sakīnah* (tranquility), *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *khidmah* (service), and *Sa'ādah* (well-being/flourishing), these concepts remain thematically dispersed and have not been systematically integrated into a unified therapeutic framework for marital counselling. Likewise, while *tazkiyah al-nafs* (self-purification) is central to classical Islamic psychology, it remains under-theorized within contemporary marital counselling practice. This study addresses these gaps by developing the 8S tazkiyah-based marital counselling framework through a grounded content analysis of the *Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth*, classical texts, modern Islamic psychology literature, and empirical research on Muslim marital counselling. The analytical procedure involved textual coding and thematic categorization of classical and contemporary sources. The resulting model integrates three components: (a) *tawhīdic epistemology* as the overarching worldview; (b) *tazkiyah al-nafs* as the core psychospiritual mechanism; and (c) eight virtue-based *processes*—*ikhlaṣ*, *ṣabrr*, *shukrr*, *shūrāā*, *sakīnahh*, *ṣidqq*, *khidmahh*, and *Sa'ādah*—that collectively guide intrapersonal and interpersonal transformation within marriage. The framework contributes to Islamic psychology by offering a structured, spiritually anchored virtue model and providing practitioners with an evidence-informed tool for marital interventions. This study demonstrates how Islamic virtues, when systematically conceptualized, can form a cohesive therapeutic pathway to strengthen marital relationships and enhance family well-being in Muslim contexts.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1162070 **Keywords:**Islamic Psychology, Islamic Marital Counselling, *Tazkiyah*-Based Framework, *Tazkiyah Al Nafs*, Virtue-Based Therapeutic Model

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Introduction

Marital instability has emerged as a pressing social and spiritual concern across many Muslim societies, as reflected in rising divorce rates and increasing relational distress. In Malaysia, official statistics indicate sustained strain on marital stability, with 63,338 and 57, 835 divorce cases recorded in 2022 and 2023, respectively, demonstrating persistently high dissolution rates despite a marginal decline (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2024). At the global level, demographic data further confirm that several Muslim-majority countries experience elevated divorce trends, signaling structural challenges that affect family cohesion (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2023). These patterns point not only to social change but also to deeper issues related to emotional regulation, communication, and the erosion of spiritual foundations within marital relationships (Hamdan, 2008; Badri, 2018). As Muslim families navigate economic pressures, shifting gender norms, and increasing exposure to secular therapeutic discourses, there is an urgent need to re-examine the psychological and spiritual foundations of marriage within the Islamic tradition.

In Islam, marriage (*nikāh*) is framed as a sacred covenant (*mīthāq ghalīz*) and a divinely instituted source of *sakīnah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (mercy) (Qur'ān 30:21; 4:21). Classical Islamic scholarship consistently presents marriage as a moral and spiritual institution through which ethical character (*akhlāq*) is cultivated, and emotional maturity is refined. Central virtues such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *ṣabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), *shūrā* (consultation), *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *khidmah* (service), and *Sa'ādah* (well-being/flourishing) are repeatedly emphasized as foundations of marital harmony and spiritual excellence (al-Ghazālī, 2004; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1996; al-Qaradāwī, 2004). Despite their prominence, these virtues are often discussed independently and lack systematic integration into a coherent therapeutic structure that can guide counselling practice (Haque, 2004; Hamdan, 2008). Consequently, much religious guidance in marital contexts remains exhortative, offering moral counsel without operationalized psychospiritual processes that can facilitate sustained relational change (Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

A central factor contributing to this limitation is the under-theorization of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the self) in contemporary counselling practice. Classical scholars such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim regarded *tazkiyah* as the foundation of moral behavior, emotional regulation, and relational balance, viewing the refinement of the self as a prerequisite for ethical interaction (al-Ghazālī, 2004; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1996). However, modern Muslim

marital counselling programs rarely position *tazkiyah* as a structured therapeutic mechanism. Instead, spiritual components are often treated as supplementary or symbolic additions rather than the core process driving psychological and relational transformation (Badri, 2018; Awaad & Ali, 2022). This has widened the gap between Islamic anthropology, which conceives human beings as integrated moral, emotional, and spiritual entities, and counselling models grounded in secular assumptions about selfhood and well-being (al-Attas, 2001; Abu-Raiya, 2012).

Existing marital education initiatives in Muslim-majority contexts further illustrate this gap. For example, in Indonesia, the BP4 premarital program integrates Qur'anic instruction with basic communication skills but lacks a structured virtue-based therapeutic sequence (Sari & Pramono, 2018). In Malaysia, state-mandated premarital courses emphasize *tawhīd*, *fiqh al-usrah*, and general interpersonal guidance but primarily function as educational rather than therapeutic interventions (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014). In several Gulf contexts, Shari'ah court mediation prioritizes legal reconciliation and moral admonition, often with limited incorporation of systematic psychological or virtue-based counselling processes (Al-Zahrani, 2020). While these initiatives reflect a genuine concern for family stability, they remain constrained by fragmented approaches and insufficient integration of Islamic psychological theory (Hamdan, 2008; Badri, 2018).

Simultaneously, reliance on Western psychological frameworks presents additional challenges. Although cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, and systemic approaches offer valuable techniques, their underlying assumptions regarding autonomy, moral neutrality, and emotional expression may conflict with the Islamic worldview (Haque, 2004; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Attempts to "Islamize" such models through superficial scriptural references risk epistemological incoherence and limited therapeutic effectiveness (Badri, 2018). Scholars in Islamic psychology have argued for counselling frameworks that emerge organically from Islamic epistemology rather than being retrofitted onto secular paradigms (Hamdan, 2008; Abu-Raiya, 2012).

While existing premarital education programs and Islamic counselling initiatives have contributed to strengthening marital awareness, they remain limited in their ability to provide a structured psychospiritual framework capable of guiding therapeutic intervention. Many existing approaches emphasize moral instruction, legal guidance, or communication skills but do not systematically integrate Islamic moral psychology into a coherent counselling model. Consequently, spiritual concepts are often presented as advisory principles rather than operational therapeutic mechanisms that can facilitate sustained relational change. Moreover, contemporary Muslim societies are experiencing increasing marital complexity due to socioeconomic pressures, shifting gender expectations, and exposure to diverse psychological paradigms, highlighting the need for counselling frameworks that are both spiritually grounded and methodologically structured. Developing a comprehensive model that translates Islamic virtues into an integrated counselling framework is therefore necessary to bridge the gap between Islamic moral theology and applied marital counselling practice.

Against this backdrop, a clear research gap emerges: the absence of a unified Qur'anic-based marital counselling model that systematically integrates classical Islamic knowledge, contemporary Islamic psychology, and *tazkiyah al-nafs* as a psychospiritual mechanism for marital conflict resolution. No existing framework coherently operationalizes *ikhlaṣ*, *ṣabr*, *shukr*, *shūrā*, *sākinah*, *ṣidq*, *khidmah*, and *sa'ādah* into interlinked therapeutic processes that

progress from intrapersonal purification to interpersonal relational excellence (Badri, 2018; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

To address this gap, the present study develops the 8S Tazkiyah-Based Marital Counselling Framework, a structured virtue-based model grounded in tawhīd epistemology, with *tazkiyah al-nafs* as the core psychospiritual mechanism and eight Qur'ānic virtues guiding therapeutic practice. Using qualitative content analysis of Qur'ānic verses, Prophetic traditions, classical Islamic psychological texts, and contemporary empirical literature, this study seeks to offer a culturally congruent, spiritually anchored, and clinically relevant counselling framework for Muslim marriages (Krippendorff, 2019; Elo et al., 2014).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to Islamic psychology, marital counselling, and Muslim family well-being. By systematically integrating classical spirituality with contemporary therapeutic design, the proposed framework offers a coherent pathway for strengthening marital resilience, fostering emotional intimacy, and restoring *Sakinah-centered* relationships in contemporary Muslim societies (Badri, 2018; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

Literature Review

Marriage in the Islamic Worldview

In the Islamic worldview, the concept of marriage (*nikāh*) is more than a legal agreement or civil union. However, it embodies a sacred covenant (*mīthāq ghalīz*) that unites two souls in a spiritual, moral, and social partnership between husband and wife. It serves as the foundation of the family unit, which is highly valued in Islamic cultures. The Qur'ān states, “*And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy*” (Q 30:21). This verse establishes *sakīnah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion) as the three foundational elements of marital life. Classical exegetes such as Al-Ṭabarī (2001), Al-Qurṭubī (2003), and Ibn Kathīr (1998) explain that *sakīnah* is inner repose bestowed by divine harmony, *mawaddah* denotes enduring love grounded in righteousness, and *rahmah* reflects mercy that sustains companionship. This triad establishes marriage not only as a source of emotional fulfillment but also as a means of spiritual purification, aligning intimacy with acts of worship in the process.

Prophetic traditions reinforce the sanctity of marriage by linking it to the completion of one's faith and moral discipline. The Prophet ﷺ said, “*When a servant marries, he has completed half of his faith*” (Al-Nasa'ī, 1998). Thus, the family unit is conceptualized as a formative environment for cultivating *akhlāq karīmah* (noble character), with scholars such as Al-Ghazālī (2004) portraying the marital home as a madrasah where spouses learn patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), humility, and cooperation (*ta'āwun*). Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (2004) further situates marriage within the broader framework of Tawhīd (divine unity), safeguarding the higher objectives of shariah (maqāsid) of lineage (*hifẓ al-nasl*), dignity (*hifẓ al-'ird*), wealth (*hifẓ al-māl*), and the self (*hifẓ al-nafs*), which underscores the multidimensional role of marriage in Islamic ethics and law.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2010) expands this understanding by framing the marital bond as part of a “metaphysical ecology of compassion,” where individual virtue contributes to cosmic harmony. This contrasts with secular marital theories that prioritize emotional satisfaction or

contractual arrangements, emphasizing the inseparability of marital stability from spiritual intention and divine order. Al-Hidabi (2024) identifies the deterioration of this spiritual foundation, particularly through neglect of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (self-purification), as a root cause of marital discord among Muslims, highlighting the critical role of ongoing spiritual refinement in sustaining marital harmony in Islam.

Despite this rich intellectual heritage, the literature reveals a conceptual gap: while Islamic scholars extensively discuss virtues such as *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity), *ṣabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), *sakīnah* (tranquility), *shūrā* (consultation), *ṣidq* (truthfulness), and *khidmah* (service), *Islāh al-Nafs* (self-reform), no existing framework systematically integrates these virtues into a structured marital counselling model grounded explicitly in *tazkiyah al-nafs*. This gap highlights the need for a virtue-based, spiritually anchored counselling approach rooted in the Islamic worldview. In response to this gap, the present study proposes the 8S *tazkiyah-based marital counselling* framework, which seeks to translate Qur'ānic and Prophetic virtues into practical therapeutic components to strengthen marital relationships.

Concept of Tazkiyah al-Nafs

Tazkiyah al-Nafs occupies a central position in Islamic spirituality, representing the purification, rectification, and elevation of the human soul. Rooted linguistically in the Arabic term *zakā*, which denotes cleansing, growth, and flourishing, *tazkiyah* encompasses the removal of moral impurities and the cultivation of virtue. The *Qur'ān* underscores the importance of this purification, asserting that success is achieved through the purification of the soul, while failure results from its corruption: “*He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it*” (Qur'ān 91:9–10). Classical Islamic scholars, notably *al-Ghazālī*, conceptualize *tazkiyah* as a lifelong discipline (*riyāḍat al-nafs*) aimed at harmonizing cognition (*‘aql*), emotion (*qalb*), and conduct (*‘amal*) in alignment with divine guidance, thus emphasizing the comprehensive nature of spiritual development.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the self progresses through three distinct spiritual states: *nafs al-ammārah* (the commanding soul inclined toward base desires), *nafs al-lawwāmah* (the self-reproaching soul engaged in self-criticism and striving for improvement), and *nafs al-muṭma'innah* (the tranquil soul at peace through the remembrance of God) (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1996). These states reflect the underlying intrapsychic dynamics that influence emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and interpersonal behavior, all of which are foundational to relational stability, including in marital contexts. The prophetic example of Muḥammad ﷺ, characterized by patience, gentleness, and emotional attentiveness, serves as a practical model for ethical interaction and spiritual purification in marital relationships (al-Nasa'ī 1998).

Contemporary Islamic scholarship approaches *tazkiyah* predominantly from epistemological, educational, and civilizational perspectives rather than from a clinical therapeutic model. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasized *adab*, the discipline of the body, mind, and soul, as essential to Islamic education, positing that inner purification is a prerequisite for genuine knowledge acquisition (al-Attas 1991, 2001). Similarly, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi situated *tazkiyah* within the broader project of Islamization of knowledge, advocating for the removal of *jahili* (ignorant) assumptions to realign all aspects of life, including family relations, with *tawhid* (al-Faruqi, 1982). Scholars such as Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud (1998) and Zainiy Uthman (2008) further extend this philosophical grounding by highlighting *tazkiyah* as foundational to the

development of *insān kāmil*, or holistic human perfection, underscoring its role in moral and spiritual maturation.

In contrast, contemporary Muslim psychologists explicitly integrate *tazkiyah* into therapeutic discourse. Badri (2018) conceptualized *tazkiyah* as a psychospiritual reconstruction process that involves moral discipline, self-reflection (*muḥāsabah*), and behavioral reform. Awaad and Ali (2022) described it as an integrative mechanism that combines cognition, affect, and spirituality, forming the core element of Islamically integrated psychotherapy models. Similarly, Haque (2004) and Rothman and Coyle (2018) emphasized spiritual purification as a pathway to psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and overall well-being among Muslim clients. These perspectives collectively acknowledge *tazkiyah* as a multidimensional process with significant implications for relational ethics and human flourishing, although it is not universally formalized as a clinical or therapeutic framework.

Taken together, these classical and contemporary perspectives offer a comprehensive intellectual foundation for understanding *tazkiyah* as a multidimensional process of moral, emotional, and spiritual refinement. However, although the literature acknowledges the therapeutic relevance of virtues such as *ikhhlās*, *ṣabr*, *shukr*, *shūrā*, *ṣidq*, *sakīnah*, and *khidmah*, no existing model systematically organizes these virtues into a structured marital counselling framework grounded explicitly in *tazkiyah al-naḥs*. This conceptual gap provides the basis for the present study, which seeks to develop the 8S *tazkiyah*-based marital Counselling framework by translating these core virtues into interconnected therapeutic components that promote marital well-being and spiritual flourishing.

Islamic Marital Counselling and Psychology

Islamic counselling and psychology represent a distinctive paradigm that integrates theological, ethical, and psychological principles to promote mental well-being in alignment with divine purposes. Rooted in classical Islamic scholarship, early thinkers such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Sīnā conceptualized psychological disturbance as an imbalance between the intellect (*‘aql*) and spirit (*rūh*). Their holistic view emphasized that healing requires both medical intervention and spiritual refinement, a perspective that continues to inform contemporary Islamic psychological thought (Badri, 2018). This approach fundamentally challenges Western mind–body dualism by asserting that human well-being arises from the integrated functioning of cognition, emotions, behavior, and spirituality.

Modern Islamic counselling models have evolved by adapting classical insights into a structured therapeutic framework. Hamdan (2008) introduced a counselling process based on Qur’ānic stages of transformation *tawbah* (repentance), *muḥāsabah* (self-reflection), and *tazkiyah* (purification), which correspond to key mechanisms of marital resilience, including emotional regulation, honesty, forgiveness, and self-awareness. Similarly, Erhamwilda (2009) highlighted the role of spiritual consciousness as an internal regulator that stabilizes emotional responses and aligns behavior with ethical values, underscoring the centrality of spirituality in therapeutic change.

Empirical studies in Muslim-majority contexts further validate these theoretical foundations. In Indonesia, the *Badan Penasihat Pembinaan dan Pelestarian Perkawinan* (BP4) integrates Qur’ānic education with communication and conflict resolution skills in premarital counselling. Sari and Pramono (2018) demonstrated that BP4’s spiritually grounded modules

significantly enhance marital readiness, empathy, and prosocial communication. In Malaysia, premarital Islamic counselling is mandatory for Muslim couples under state religious authorities, where modules typically integrate *tawhīd* (oneness of God), *akhlāq* (moral conduct), family *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), communication skills, and strategies for emotional regulation. Research indicates that spiritually anchored courses enhance marital preparedness and strengthen couples' psychological resilience by grounding relational skills in Islamic values (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014). These findings illustrate that counselling approaches grounded in spirituality yield deeper and more sustainable relational outcomes than secular approaches.

Recent progress in Islamic psychology emphasizes *that tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the self) is a pivotal mechanism for therapeutic transformation. Awaad and Ali (2022) conceptualized *tazkiyah* as an integrative process that harmonizes cognition, emotions, and spirituality in Muslim clients. Badri (2018) identified *taqwā* (God-consciousness) as the ultimate curative force in the context of psychotherapy. Collectively, these perspectives frame Islamic counselling as *tarbiyah rūḥiyyah*, a developmental, virtue-based process aimed at refining character, nurturing moral consciousness, and restoring alignment with divine guidance.

Despite these advances, a notable conceptual gap remains. Existing Islamic counselling frameworks often refer to individual virtues such as *ṣabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity), *sakīnah* (tranquility), and *shūrā* (consultation). However, no current model systematically integrates these virtues into a structured marital counselling framework explicitly grounded in *tazkiyah al-nafs*. Addressing this gap, recent scholarship has proposed the 8S *tazkiyah*-based marital Counselling framework, developed through grounded content analysis of Qur'ānic, Prophetic, and classical Islamic psychological sources, to provide a comprehensive virtue-centered approach to marital therapy.

Comparative Perspectives and Theoretical Gap

Existing knowledge of marital counselling frameworks within Muslim contexts reveals significant diversity in structure, institutional backing, and methodological approaches. However, a common theoretical deficiency persists across these models. Existing initiatives in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Gulf region, and parts of Africa have demonstrated efforts to incorporate Islamic principles into marital guidance; however, these remain fragmented and lack a cohesive *Qur'ānic*-based psychological framework that integrates spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) with relational therapy.

In Indonesia, the *Badan Penasihat Pembinaan dan Pelestarian Perkawinan* (BP4) exemplifies an institutionalized premarital education system that combines Qur'ānic teachings with communication and conflict resolution skills. Empirical studies suggest that coupling spiritual instruction with interpersonal skill development improves marital readiness and empathy (Sari & Pramono, 2018). Malaysian premarital courses, conducted by state Islamic religious authorities, emphasize foundational Islamic concepts such as *tawhīd* and *fiqh al-usrah*, as well as communication skills. However, these programs function more as value-based education than as structured therapeutic systems, lacking a unified conceptual framework linking spiritual virtues to psychological processes (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014). Gulf region Shariah court mediations prioritize legal and moral guidance but show limited integration of psychological assessments or virtue-based interventions (Al-Zahrani, 2020). In African contexts, such as

Nigeria's National Islamic Marriage Council, reliance is heavily placed on community elders and religious leaders, offering culturally relevant but methodologically unsystematic guidance without empirical evaluations.

This comparative evidence highlights an epistemological tension within Islamic counselling practices: the oscillation between adopting Western psychological methods superficially framed in Islamic terminology and traditional moral exhortation, devoid of structured therapeutic rigor. Scholars have advocated for an Islamic counselling paradigm grounded in *Tawhīdic* epistemology, in which revelation (*waḥy*) and reason (*ʿaql*) jointly inform evidence-based therapeutic design (Hamdan, 2008; Hamjah & Akhir, 2014). This critique warns against the mere "Islamization of language," which risks reducing counselling to moral preaching rather than a comprehensive psychospiritual discipline.

The primary theoretical gap identified is the absence of a systematic framework that operationalizes Qur'ānic virtues, such as sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), consultation (*shūrā*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), tranquility (*sakīnah*), service (*khidmah*), and self-reform (*tazkiyah*), into therapeutic constructs. Existing models treat these virtues as conceptually dispersed rather than as integrated components of a structured counselling approach.

seeks to systematically translate core Islamic virtues into an integrated psychospiritual counselling model. The framework conceptualizes these virtues as interconnected therapeutic processes that guide individuals from inner moral refinement toward ethical relational conduct. By grounding the model in *Tawhīdic* epistemology and aligning it with the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, the framework provides a structured approach that links spiritual purification with relational transformation. In doing so, it offers a theoretically coherent and operationally relevant model capable of addressing the conceptual, methodological, and practical gaps within existing Islamic marital counselling paradigms.

Despite the valuable contributions of existing Islamic marital counselling initiatives, several conceptual and methodological limitations remain evident in the literature. Many programmes, particularly premarital courses and religious counselling initiatives, are primarily educational in orientation, emphasizing moral instruction and religious knowledge without providing structured psychospiritual intervention processes. While these approaches successfully promote awareness of Islamic marital values, they often lack a coherent theoretical framework that systematically links spiritual virtues with measurable psychological and relational outcomes. Furthermore, existing models tend to treat virtues such as *ṣabr*, *shukr*, and *ikhlaṣ* as independent ethical ideals rather than integrating them into a dynamic and interdependent therapeutic sequence. This fragmentation limits their applicability within structured counselling practice and reduces their potential to function as operational therapeutic constructs. In addition, although contemporary Islamic psychology recognizes the importance of *tazkiyah al-naḥs*, it is rarely conceptualized as a central mechanism in marital counselling models, creating a gap between Islamic moral theology and applied counselling frameworks. These limitations highlight the need for a theoretically integrated and systematically organized model that translates Islamic virtues into practical counselling processes grounded in *Tawhīdic* epistemology. The development of the 8S *tazkiyah*-based marital counselling framework, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by providing a coherent psychospiritual structure that connects spiritual purification with relational transformation, offering a more comprehensive and operational model for Islamic marital counselling practice.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study synthesizes the key gaps identified in the literature review. It organizes them into a coherent structure that explains how Islamic concepts, spiritual mechanisms, and virtue-based processes interact to support marital well-being. The review in Sections 2.1–2.4 revealed the absence of an integrated *Qur'ānic*-based counselling model explicitly grounded in *tazkiyah al-nafs* and systematically organized around core Islamic virtues, despite strong recognition of their relevance in classical scholarship and contemporary psychological literature. This conceptual framework is based on three interconnected foundations: (a) *Tawhīdic* epistemology as the meta-theoretical worldview, (b) *tazkiyah al-nafs* as the central psychospiritual mechanism, and (c) the 8S *tazkiyah-based marital counselling* framework as the applied virtue-based sequence. The integration of these elements provides a structured, spiritually anchored, and theoretically robust basis for understanding Muslim couples' dynamics.

Tawhīdic Epistemology as the Meta-Theoretical Foundation

Tawhīd, the central principle of Islamic theology, frames human relationships including marriage as spiritually purposeful and morally structured. As discussed in Section 2.1, the *Qur'ān* conceptualizes marriage as a sanctuary of *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (Qur'ān 30:21), placing relational harmony within the framework of the divine moral order. This worldview situates marital behavior within a holistic understanding of the human person, where cognition, emotion, behavior, and spirituality are interdependent rather than compartmentalized. Islamic epistemologists, notably al-Attas (1991, 2001) and al-Faruqi (1982), emphasize that authentic knowledge is derived from the integration of revelation (*wahy*) and reason (*'aql*) grounded in *adab*, or right conduct toward Allah, self, and others. This holistic unity stands in sharp contrast to secular counselling models that often separate psychological, emotional, and behavioral domains or prioritize autonomous self-fulfillment (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Islamic psychology critiques such reductionism, noting that it neglects the moral and spiritual dimensions of human functioning (Badri 2018; Haque 2004). *Tawhīdic* epistemology thus provides the ontological coherence necessary for an Islamic marital counselling model by asserting that therapeutic intervention must nurture both psychological health and moral-spiritual development.

The teleological nature of *Tawhīd* further shapes the goals of counselling. Instead of focusing primarily on satisfaction or emotional expression, Islamic counselling seeks alignment with divine guidance and the fulfilment of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, especially the preservation of family, dignity, and emotional well-being (al-Qaradāwī, 2004). Hamdan (2008) argues that therapeutic change becomes an act of worship (*'ibādah*) under this paradigm, requiring sincerity of intention and ethical orientation. Thus, *Tawhīd* establishes the meta-theoretical basis upon which *tazkiyah al-nafs* and the 8S virtue sequence operate.

Tazkiyah al-Nafs as the Core Psychospiritual Mechanism

Section 2.2 underscored that *tazkiyah al-nafs* is one of the most comprehensive constructs in Islamic spiritual and psychological thinking. Linguistically rooted in purification and growth, *tazkiyah* involves cleansing the soul of destructive traits and cultivating virtuous qualities. Classical scholars such as *al-Ghazālī* (2004) conceptualized it as the harmonization of intellect, emotion, and behavior with divine guidance, achieved through practices like *muḥāsabah* (self-

examination), *muraqabah* (self-vigilance), and *riyādat al-nafs* (disciplining the self). Ibn Qayyim (1996) described the internal transformation that occurs as the nafs transitions from the commanding self (*ammārah*) to the self-reproaching (*lawwāmah*) and eventually the tranquil (*muṭma'innah*), indicating psychological maturation.

Modern Islamic psychology affirms that *tazkiyah* is a powerful therapeutic process. Abu-Raiya (2012) demonstrated that spiritual purification enhances emotional regulation and resilience. Awaad and Ali (2022) argued that *tazkiyah* integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual processes, offering a holistic alternative to fragmented secular paradigms. Kaplick and Skinner (2017) highlight that Islamic psychology offers a morally anchored approach to well-being, filling gaps in Western value-neutral therapies. These insights align with empirical findings from Indonesia and Malaysia, indicating that spiritually grounded marital and premarital programs significantly improve communication, empathy, and readiness (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014; Sari & Pramono, 2018).

Tazkiyah operates at two levels in marital relationships. At the intrapersonal level, it moderates destructive impulses, such as anger, pride, and resentment, which are key antecedents of marital breakdown. At the relational level, it cultivates virtues such as empathy, forgiveness, patience, and cooperation, aligning with the Prophet's (ﷺ) model of emotional attentiveness and gentleness in family interactions (Al-Nasa'ī, 1998). This dual function enables *tazkiyah* to serve as the central psychological engine driving marital transformation.

Despite its richness, *tazkiyah* remains underdeveloped as a structured clinical model. Most Islamic counselling efforts incorporate elements of spirituality but lack an integrated sequence linking spiritual purification to relational behaviors. This gap necessitates a systematic virtue-based structure, which is addressed through the 8S model.

The 8S Tazkiyah-Based Marital Counselling Framework as the Applied Model

Section 2.4 highlights the absence of an integrated Islamic marital counselling model that systematically organizes Qur'anic virtues into a structured therapeutic sequence grounded in Islamic moral psychology. The 8S *tazkiyah*-based marital counselling framework addresses this gap by operationalizing eight core Qur'anic virtues into a clear and progressive counselling model. Within this framework, *tazkiyah al-nafs* functions as the central psychospiritual mechanism underpinning the entire counselling process, rather than being one of the applied stages. Therefore, the model's applied dimensions are articulated through eight virtue-based processes: *Ikhlās*, *Ṣabr*, *Shukr*, *Shūrā*, *Sakīnah*, *Ṣidq*, *Khidmah*, and *Sa'ādah*.

Ikhlās (sincerity) establishes the motivational foundation of the counselling process by aligning marital intentions with divine purpose rather than ego-driven expectations (Qur'ān 98:5). *Ṣabr* (patience) nurtures emotional regulation and psychological endurance, enabling spouses to manage conflict and adversity with restraint and perseverance, consistent with findings that spiritually grounded coping enhances relational resilience (Haque, 2004). *Shukr* (gratitude) supports positive cognitive reframing by reinforcing appreciation and counteracting negativity bias in marital interactions (Ibn Kathīr, 1998). *Shūrā* (consultation) formalizes ethical communication through collaborative dialogue, shared decision-making, and mutual respect (Qur'ān 42:38). *Sakīnah* (tranquility) reflects emotional stability and spiritual reassurance within the marital relationship, representing a state of psychological safety and calm that

emerges from the consistent practice of sincerity, patience, gratitude, and consultation (Qur'ān 30:21).

Ṣidq (truthfulness) cultivates honesty, transparency, and moral integrity in speech, intention, and behavior, thereby strengthening trust and relational security (Qur'ān 9:119). Khidmah (service) externalizes inner moral refinement through compassionate action, mutual care, and shared responsibility, mirroring the conduct of the Prophetic household (al-Nasā'ī, 1998). Finally, Sa'ādah (sustained relational flourishing) occupies a culminating position within the 8S framework. Unlike transient happiness, sa'ādah denotes enduring well-being, grounded in moral integrity, spiritual tranquility, and relational harmony. It represents a sustained state of marital flourishing arising from the continuous embodiment of the preceding virtues.

Collectively, these eight virtues function as therapeutic processes that translate tazkiyah al-nafs into observable relational behaviors and ethical marital conduct. Conceptually, the model follows a vertical progression from intentional realignment through emotional regulation and communicative ethics toward relational stability and sustained flourishing, with tazkiyah operating transversally as the psychospiritual engine throughout the counselling process.



Figure 01 Source: Compiled by the Author

By integrating spiritual, ethical, and psychological dimensions, the 8S framework offers a culturally congruent, theoretically grounded, and practically applicable counselling framework that addresses the epistemological and methodological limitations identified in previous literature.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and interpretivist research design to develop the 8S tazkiyah-based Marital Counselling Framework through a systematic analysis of Islamic textual sources and contemporary scholarly literature. The interpretivist paradigm was selected

because the study seeks to understand and conceptualize psychospiritual constructs within their theological and intellectual contexts, rather than to test empirical relationships. A qualitative content analysis approach was employed to examine primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'ān, Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), and classical Islamic scholarly works, particularly those of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim, alongside contemporary Islamic psychology literature and selected empirical studies on Muslim marital counselling. Primary textual sources were selected for their explicit relevance to marital ethics, spiritual purification (tazkiyah al-nafs), and moral psychology; classical texts were included for their foundational role in the Islamic intellectual tradition; and contemporary works were used to provide theoretical and empirical insights into Islamic counselling practice. Empirical references from Muslim-majority contexts, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, were incorporated as illustrative examples because of their institutionalized premarital counselling systems.

GCA was conducted using an inductive coding approach to ensure methodological transparency and conceptual rigor. Open coding was first applied to identify recurring concepts related to virtues, marital ethics, and psychospiritual development across the selected sources. Axial coding was then used to group related codes into broader thematic categories representing intrapersonal and interpersonal processes relevant to marital functioning. Selective coding was used to synthesize these themes into a coherent conceptual structure, resulting in the identification of eight core virtues demonstrating theoretical centrality and relevance to marital counselling practice. The framework was subsequently developed through a systematic conceptual modelling process in which identified themes were evaluated based on their frequency across sources, theoretical significance within Islamic moral psychology, and relevance to relational functioning. These virtues were organized into a sequential yet interdependent structure reflecting the developmental logic of Islamic tarbiyah, progressing from internal moral alignment to sustained relational flourishing, with tazkiyah al-nafs functioning as the central psychospiritual mechanism grounded in tawḥīd epistemology.

Conceptual validity was strengthened through triangulation across multiple sources, including classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary theoretical literature, and empirical studies on Muslim marital counselling, ensuring depth of interpretation and coherence of the framework. The iterative analytical process further enhanced credibility and theoretical robustness. The study adhered to principles of academic integrity and epistemic humility by preserving fidelity to Islamic textual traditions while critically engaging with modern psychological literature. As a conceptual study that did not involve human participants or sensitive data, formal ethical approval was not required.

Discussion

The development of the 8S tazkiyah-based marital counselling framework advances a virtue-centred and spiritually grounded model that directly addresses the conceptual, theological, and methodological gaps identified in the literature review. This discussion interprets the model's components, explains the psychospiritual mechanisms underpinning its operation, situates its contributions within contemporary Islamic psychology, and highlights its implications for marital counselling practice. Collectively, these discussions clarify how the 8S structure translates the abstract principles of tazkiyah al-nafs and Qur'ānic virtue ethics into a coherent, structured, and actionable counselling methodology.

Interpretation of Model Components

The 8S framework synthesizes eight Qur'ānic virtues—*Ikhlaṣ*, *Ṣabr*, *Shukr*, *Shūrā*, *Sakīnah*, *Ṣidq*, *Khidmah*, and *Sa'ādah*—into a dynamic psychospiritual model. Within this model, *tazkiyah al-naḥs* functions as the core psychospiritual mechanism that enables moral self-regulation, emotional refinement, and ethical transformation across all stages, rather than being one of the eight applied virtues. Each virtue represents a therapeutic construct rooted in revelation, reinforced by classical scholarship. Their sequencing reflects the developmental logic of Islamic tarbiyah, beginning with intentional inner reform and culminating in sustained relational flourishing.

Ikhlaṣ (sincerity) is a gateway virtue. Classical scholars emphasize that sincerity purifies intention from ego-driven motives (Al-Ghazālī, 2004). Within marital relationships, *ikhlaṣ* realigns goals with the divine purpose rather than personal gratification. This shift recalibrates emotional responses, reduces blame-oriented thinking, and enables spouses to approach conflicts with humility. In counselling contexts, beginning with *ikhlaṣ* allows therapists to facilitate cognitive and moral reframing rooted not merely in rational problem-solving but also in spiritual accountability.

Ṣabr (patience) is the stabilizing force in the model. Unlike passive endurance, *ṣabr* encompasses emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and moral steadfastness. In marital counselling, *ṣabr* facilitates de-escalation, enabling spouses to navigate conflicts without spiraling into hostility. Classical Islamic psychology locates *ṣabr* in the disciplined management of desire and anger, a view that resonates with contemporary therapeutic understandings of distress tolerance (Badri, 2018).

Shukr (gratitude) introduces a positive psychological counterbalance to relational strain. Islamic tradition regards gratitude as both a spiritual act and a cognitive orientation that shifts attention toward blessings and strengths. In marital settings, *shukr* facilitates positive reappraisal, increases emotional warmth, and disrupts negative bias. Empirical studies on Islamic premarital education report that gratitude-based practices enhance empathy and relationship satisfaction (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014).

Shūrā (consultation) marks the transition from intrapersonal to interpersonal processes in Islamic leadership. The Qur'ān highlights consultation as a hallmark of righteous relational conduct (Qur'ān 42:38), whereas classical fiqh identifies it as a relational duty. In therapeutic terms, *shūrā* formalizes communication skills such as active listening, turn-taking, negotiation, and shared decision-making. The 8S framework positions *shūrā* as effective precisely because it follows the emotional and moral preparation established by earlier virtues.

Sakīnah (tranquility) is both a virtue and a relational state. The Qur'ān describes *sakīnah* as a divine gift that instills emotional calm and spiritual reassurance (Qur'ān 30:21). Within the 8S sequence, *sakīnah* emerges when sincerity, patience, gratitude, and consultation are enacted consistently. Psychologically, it aligns with relational safety, affective regulation, and secure attachment, reflecting a stable and balanced marital environment.

Ṣidq (truthfulness) deepens relational integrity and trust. Classical ethics views *ṣidq* as honesty in intention, speech, and behavior. In marital counselling, it forms the foundation of

trust and accountability, counteracting manipulation, avoidance, and emotional withdrawal patterns commonly associated with marital dissatisfaction.

Khidmah (service) externalizes inner moral refinement through compassionate action. The Prophet's conduct within the household exemplifies service-oriented love and shared responsibility (Al-Nasā'ī, 1998). In therapeutic practice, khidmah manifests as care, cooperation, and emotional support, embodying virtues.

Finally, **Sa'ādah (sustained relational flourishing)** occupies a culminating position within the 8S framework. In contrast to transient happiness, sa'ādah denotes enduring well-being grounded in moral integrity, spiritual tranquility, and relational harmony. This reflects a stable state of marital flourishing arising from the sustained embodiment of sincerity, patience, gratitude, consultation, tranquility, truthfulness, and service.

Taking together, these virtues do not function as rigid steps but as interdependent and reinforcing processes within a coherent psychospiritual system. This sequence mirrors the developmental progression found in classical tarbiyah: intentional alignment, emotional regulation, appreciative orientation, ethical communication, relational tranquility, moral integrity, compassionate action, and sustained flourishing.

Contributions to Islamic Psychology

The 8S framework contributes significantly to Islamic psychology by operationalizing classical Islamic concepts into a structured therapeutic system. First, it responds to scholarly calls for psychospiritual integrated frameworks rooted in tawhīd epistemology rather than in Western-derived constructs (Badri, 2018; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). While the existing literature often discusses virtues such as ṣabr, shukr, and ikhlāṣ in isolation, the 8S framework situates them within a coherent relational sequence anchored in tazkiyah al-nafs.

Second, the Framework advances methodological development by offering a mid-range theoretical framework that connects theology with psychologically actionable constructs, including emotional regulation (ṣabr), cognitive reappraisal (shukr), ethical communication (shūrā), and prosocial behavior (khidmah).

Third, the framework integrates classical scholarship with contemporary empirical findings from Muslim contexts. Studies from Indonesia and Malaysia have demonstrated that spiritually anchored interventions improve marital outcomes (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014; Sari & Pramono, 2018). The 8S framework provides a conceptual explanation for these outcomes, offering psychospiritual logic to guide future empirical research.

Finally, by positioning tazkiyah al-nafs as the core mechanism of transformation rather than a symbolic ideal, the model contributes to the indigenization of counselling theory within Muslim societies.

Contributions to Marital Counselling Practice

The 8S framework offers practical value for marital counselling by providing therapists with a structured intervention model that integrates spiritual virtues into therapeutic practice. Existing programs, such as the BP4 premarital counselling in Indonesia and state-mandated courses in

Malaysia, are often educational rather than therapeutic. The 8S framework addresses this gap by sequencing virtues in accordance with therapeutic needs, enabling counsellors to diagnose relational difficulties and intervene with targeted, spiritually grounded strategies.

Moreover, the model provides a culturally congruent alternative to secular counselling approaches that may not resonate with Muslim clients. Rather than importing external theories, the 8S framework draws directly on Islamic moral psychology while remaining compatible with contemporary therapeutic practices.

Religious and Psychospiritual Implications

The theological grounding of the 8S framework is central to its integrity. Rooted in a Tawhīdic understanding of the human person, this model affirms that spiritual purification and relational conduct are inseparable. The virtues embedded within the framework reflect Qur'ānic moral psychology and prophetic exemplars, ensuring theological fidelity. By fostering sincerity, patience, gratitude, consultation, tranquility, truthfulness, service, and ultimately, sa'ādah, the framework aligns marital counselling practice with the Islamic vision of marriage as a source of sakīnah and sustained flourishing.

Limitations

This study is conceptual in nature and therefore does not include empirical validation of the proposed framework. Although the model is grounded in extensive textual analysis and contemporary Islamic psychology literature, its practical applicability has not yet been tested in real counselling settings. Additionally, reliance on classical and contemporary textual sources may limit the framework's generalizability across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts within the Muslim world. The illustrative references to premarital counselling programs in Indonesia and Malaysia are not intended as comparative case studies but rather as contextual examples. They may thus not fully capture variations in practice across different regions. Future research should empirically evaluate the framework through qualitative and quantitative studies involving counsellors, couples, and practitioners to assess its effectiveness, adaptability, and impact on marital outcomes.

Conclusion

This study addresses a longstanding gap in the Islamic marital counselling literature by developing a structured, virtue-based conceptual framework grounded in tazkiyah al-nafs and framed within a tawhīd worldview. Although existing scholarship consistently affirms the centrality of Qur'ānic virtues such as *ikhhlās*, *ṣabr*, *shukr*, *shūrā*, *sakīnah*, *ṣidq*, and *khidmah* in sustaining marital harmony, these virtues have remained largely dispersed across ethical, theological, and advisory discourses, with limited integration into a cohesive therapeutic model for marital therapy. Through a systematic content analysis of Qur'ānic verses, Prophetic traditions, classical writings by al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim, and contemporary Islamic psychology literature, this study synthesized these insights into the 8S tazkiyah-based marital counselling framework. The model articulates a clear psychospiritual structure linking tawhīd epistemology, tazkiyah al-nafs as the core transformative mechanism, eight virtue-based counselling processes, and the attainment of marital sakīnah and sustained relational flourishing (sa'ādah).

The findings of this conceptual study yield several important implications. First, the framework demonstrates that tazkiyah al-nafs is not merely an abstract spiritual ideal but a practical psychospiritual mechanism that regulates harmful impulses, nurtures ethical dispositions, and strengthens emotional and spiritual resilience in marital relationships. Second, the model offers a culturally congruent and theologically grounded alternative to value-neutral secular counselling approaches by rooting therapeutic work in spiritual intentionality, moral self-discipline, and prophetic relational compassion. Third, the 8S framework provides practitioners with a systematic, staged structure that moves beyond general moral exhortation toward clearly articulated, virtue-based intervention processes supported by both textual foundations and psychological insights. In this respect, the framework represents a meaningful advancement in Islamic psychology and counselling by offering a theoretical foundation that can be translated into practical guidelines, assessment tools, and therapeutic strategies.

Based on these contributions, several recommendations have emerged. Marital counsellors, educators, and religious practitioners are encouraged to integrate the 8S sequence into counselling modules, premarital programmes, and mediation settings, ensuring that interventions address both internal moral refinement (through sincerity, patience, and spiritual accountability) and relational conduct (through consultation, truthfulness, service, and cooperative engagement), ultimately orienting couples toward sustained flourishing. Training institutions may further adapt the framework into curricular materials to enhance practitioners' spiritual literacy and their capacity to facilitate virtue-based marital transformations. More broadly, the model invites practitioners to situate marital challenges within wider spiritual and moral contexts rather than reducing them to communication deficits or emotional incompatibility alone, thereby enabling more holistic and enduring forms of healing aligned with the Islamic vision of family life.

Finally, this conceptual study opens important avenues for future research. Empirical studies are required to operationalize and validate each virtue as an evaluable therapeutic construct. Qualitative research involving counsellors, couples, and religious practitioners may explore how the 8S processes manifest in real-world counselling contexts, while mixed-methods studies could examine the framework's impact on marital satisfaction, emotion regulation, and long-term relational stability. Comparative research may also investigate how the 8S model aligns with or diverges from existing Islamic counselling practices across different cultural settings, including BP4 programs in Indonesia, Malaysian premarital modules, and mediation practices in Gulf contexts. Ultimately, by grounding marital counselling within a coherent, virtue-based Islamic psychological system, the 8S Tazkiyah-Based Framework offers a promising foundation for advancing both scholarly inquiry and professional practice in Muslim family well-being.

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- Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the **International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)** for providing the necessary academic resources, institutional facilities, and continuous support throughout the course of this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who contributed valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the quality and scholarly rigor of this paper. The authors also wish to express their sincere appreciation to Mr. Bishrul Rifath for his dedicated assistance, continued encouragement, and valuable support throughout the research and manuscript preparation process.
- Funding Statement:** No external funding was received for this research. The study was conducted using the personal financial resources of the author.
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling (IJEPC).
- Ethics Statement:** Option B (For Studies Not Involving Human or Animal Subjects)
This study did not involve any human participants, animals, or sensitive data requiring ethical approval. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in accordance with accepted academic integrity and ethical publishing standards.
- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. [Prof.Dr. Dawood Al Hidabi was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study.]
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