



INTEGRATING ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES INTO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

As the global population ages, mental health challenges among older adults are becoming increasingly prevalent. Many elderly individuals experience issues such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline, which can significantly affect their overall well-being. In this context, religion—particularly Islam—offers valuable resources for emotional and psychological support. This article explores the importance of integrating Islamic perspectives into mental health services, suggesting that incorporating spiritual values can enhance the effectiveness and acceptance of mental health interventions among Muslim elderly. Finally, the article addresses key barriers to providing effective Islamic mental health services, such as stigma, lack of culturally trained professionals, and limited awareness within both healthcare and religious communities. By reviewing relevant literature and drawing on religious sources, this study highlights the potential of Islam to serve as a supportive framework for improving mental health outcomes in later life. The findings suggest that mental health strategies that align with Islamic values can help create more inclusive and compassionate care for the aging Muslim population, while also addressing systemic gaps in current mental health service delivery.

**Keywords:**

Integration, Islam, Mental Health, Older Adults

Introduction

The global demographic landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, with the proportion of older adults increasing at an unprecedented rate. In 2011, an estimated 524 million people (8% of the world's population) were aged 65 or older. Until 2050, this number is expected to nearly triple to about 1.5 billion, representing 16% of the world's population. Between 2010 and 2050, the number of older people in less developed countries is projected to increase more than 250%, compared with a 71% increase in developed countries (Jamshidi, 2015). This demographic shift brings to the forefront various challenges, particularly concerning the mental well-being of the elderly. Aging is often accompanied by a range of psychological and emotional issues, including depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline (Rakesh et al., 2023). Addressing these mental health concerns is crucial for ensuring the overall quality of life and well-being of the aged population. Religion and spirituality have long been recognized as vital components in promoting mental health, especially among older adults. Islam, in particular, offers a comprehensive framework that encompasses spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions of well-being. Islamic teachings emphasize compassion, community support, and the pursuit of inner peace, all of which can play a pivotal role in mitigating mental health issues among the elderly. Practices such as prayer (salat), remembrance of Allah (dhikr), and participation in religious gatherings provide not only spiritual solace but also foster a sense of belonging and purpose (Haidar et al., 2023). These religious activities have been associated with reduced levels of depression and anxiety, as well as enhanced cognitive function among older Muslims.

Mental Health Challenges Among Older Adults

The global demographic shift towards an aging population has brought increased attention to the mental health challenges faced by older adults. According to the World Health Organization approximately 14% of adults aged 60 and over live with a mental disorder, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent conditions (Tsounis & Travasaros, 2018). These mental health issues are often underrecognized and undertreated, partly due to the stigma surrounding them and the misconception that such conditions are a natural part of aging. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, as older individuals faced heightened risks of loneliness, stress, and sleep disturbances due to prolonged isolation and fear of infection.

Social isolation and loneliness are significant risk factors for mental health conditions in later life. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that the incidence of social isolation in the elderly was 33%, with higher rates among those over 80, living alone, and lacking higher education. Loneliness has been linked to declines in several areas of cognitive functioning, including overall cognitive ability, processing speed, and memory recall (Su et al., 2023). Moreover, a study by Wang et al. (2022) demonstrated that loneliness and its components, such as personal feelings of isolation and lack of relational connectedness, are associated with worse cognitive function among older Chinese adults living in nursing homes (Wang et al., 2022).

The bidirectional relationship between depression and cognitive decline is particularly concerning. A study under title “Anxiety, depression, and memory loss in Chagas disease” found that depression can accelerate memory loss in individuals over 50 due to changes in brain structure and elevated stress hormones, which damage brain cells (Lannes-Vieira et al., 2023). Conversely, cognitive impairments can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression by hindering social interactions. This cyclical relationship underscores the importance of early detection and intervention to prevent the progression of mental health issues in the elderly.

In Muslim communities, religious practices and beliefs play a crucial role in addressing mental health challenges among older adults (Oxhandler et al., 2018). A study conducted in Aceh, Indonesia, found that participation in *dhikr* (remembrance of God) assemblies was significantly associated with better mental health among the elderly (Anwar et al., 2024). Similarly, research by Daher-Nashif and his team highlighted that Islamic teachings provide a framework for understanding and coping with mental disorders, viewing them as tests from God and emphasizing the importance of caregiving as a virtuous act (Daher-Nashif et al., 2021). However, there remains a gap between caregivers’ perceptions of mental illness as a punishment and the Islamic perspective of it being a natural stage in human development. Addressing this gap through education and community engagement is essential for improving mental health outcomes in older Muslim adults.

Islamic Views on Mental Health and Aging:

Islamic teachings offer a holistic and compassionate view of aging and mental well-being. In Islam, aging is seen not as a burden but as a stage of life deserving of respect, support, and spiritual elevation (Alfain et al., 2023). The Qur’an and Hadith repeatedly emphasize the moral duty of children and society to care for the elderly, particularly parents (Al-Qur’an, 17:23). Islamic psychology, rooted in classical scholars such as Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, integrates spiritual, emotional, and physical health, recognizing the interplay between the body (*jism*) and soul (*nafs*) in achieving mental balance (Arroisi & Himaya, 2023). This integrated model provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the complex mental health needs of older Muslims. However, modern healthcare systems often neglect this religious dimension, creating a disconnect between the mental health services offered and the spiritual expectations of Muslim elders (Gaire & Khagi, 2020).

Spiritual practices such as prayer (*salat*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and Qur’anic recitation are widely used coping mechanisms among Muslim seniors facing mental health challenges (Mustaffa et al., 2021). Empirical studies confirm the psychological benefits of these practices. For instance, Anwar et al. (2024) found that elderly individuals who regularly attended *majelis zikir* (spiritual gatherings) in Aceh reported significantly lower levels of anxiety and depression (Anwar et al., 2024). Similarly, Ayesha et al., 2022 reported that routine spiritual engagement contributed to better emotional regulation and increased life satisfaction among aging Muslims (Ayesha et al., 2022). These practices offer a sense of purpose, community, and transcendence that buffer the psychological impact of loneliness and aging-related decline (Aflakseir & Mahdiyar, 2016). Importantly, such practices align with the broader Islamic notion of *tawakkul* (trust in God), fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

The integration of Islamic values into mental health interventions for older adults has gained increased scholarly attention in recent years. Faith-based therapy and culturally tailored interventions that incorporate Islamic teachings have been shown to improve psychological

outcomes and treatment adherence among Muslim elders (Saad Najam et al., 2019). Shamsuddin et al., 2022 emphasized the significance of Islamic psychospiritual science as a holistic model that addresses aging not just physically, but also spiritually and socially (Shamsuddin et al., 2022). This model advocates for a four-dimensional well-being approach—spiritual, emotional, physical, and social—which reflects Islamic epistemology and promotes successful aging (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). Yet, while promising, these interventions remain underutilized in mainstream clinical settings due to a lack of trained professionals and institutional support for religiously informed care models.

Despite growing literature on Islam and mental health, several gaps remain. One pressing issue is the cultural stigma surrounding mental illness, which persists in many Muslim communities and can deter older adults from seeking help (Reynolds et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is limited clinical training on how to integrate Islamic spirituality into geriatric mental health care (Md Rosli et al., 2020). While some progress has been made through community-based initiatives and Islamic psychology programs, broader systemic change is needed. Future research should explore intergenerational caregiving within Islamic cultures, the role of mosques and religious leaders in destigmatizing mental health, and the development of standardized Islamic mental health frameworks that are evidence-based and culturally sensitive. This would help bridge the divide between faith and health services, ensuring that older Muslims receive holistic support for their mental and spiritual well-being.

Islamic Teachings and Principles on Mental Health:

Islamic teachings offer a comprehensive, spiritually grounded framework for mental well-being, emphasizing the balance between emotional, psychological, and spiritual health. Islam recognizes mental health as a vital component of holistic well-being, with foundational texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith promoting inner peace, resilience, and trust in divine will (Mesbah, 2024). Core concepts like *tawakkul* (trust in God), *sabr* (patience), and *shukr* (gratitude) function not only as religious values but also as psychological coping strategies for distress and adversity (Daher-Nashif et al., 2021). These teachings encourage believers to seek both spiritual remedies and professional help, aligning with the Islamic principle of pursuing treatment (*tadawi*) when ill (Rahmadhanty et al., 2023). Moreover, the Qur'an emphasizes self-awareness, mindfulness, and emotional regulation (e.g., 13:28, 2:286), concepts increasingly echoed in modern therapeutic modalities (Al-Kandari, 2011). As a result, Islamic teachings continue to be integral in shaping Muslim attitudes towards mental health, particularly among older adults who view faith as a source of stability and hope in later life.

Historically, Islamic scholarship has contributed significantly to the understanding of mental disorders. Pioneers such as Abu Zayd al-Balkhi and Al-Razi in the 9th and 10th centuries recognized psychological disorders as distinct from physical illnesses, advocating for cognitive and spiritual healing practices (Ghaly, 2009). Al-Balkhi, for instance, categorized mental illnesses and recommended therapeutic techniques involving positive thinking and behavioral interventions, which mirror contemporary cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (Khan et al., 2023). This intellectual legacy supports the notion that Islam has long acknowledged the complexity of mental well-being. Recent literature affirms the compatibility of Islamic teachings with modern psychological paradigms. Studies have demonstrated that religious coping mechanisms like *dua* (supplication), Qur'anic recitation, and communal worship improve emotional regulation and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression among Muslim elders (Achour et al., 2019). Such findings underscore the importance of re-integrating

traditional Islamic mental health paradigms into current healthcare frameworks to enhance culturally congruent care for aging Muslim populations.

The role of Islamic spiritual practices in promoting mental wellness is increasingly supported by empirical evidence. For instance, *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) has been shown to alleviate depressive symptoms and foster a sense of tranquility among older Muslims (Minarti et al., 2022). Similarly, regular participation in religious gatherings, including Friday prayers and *majlis zikir*, enhances a sense of belonging and community engagement, both of which are protective factors against loneliness and psychological distress (Purwanto et al., 2023). These rituals not only serve spiritual purposes but also fulfil psychosocial needs essential for healthy aging. Thus, Islamic religious observances serve as culturally relevant mental health strategies that complement medical treatment, especially when addressing age-related psychological vulnerabilities.

Despite the richness of Islamic teachings on mental well-being, several challenges impede their integration into mainstream mental health services. Cultural stigma associated with mental illness remains prevalent in many Muslim communities, often causing denial, underreporting, and reluctance to seek professional help. Furthermore, many mental health practitioners lack training in Islamic spiritual care, limiting their ability to provide culturally responsive support to elderly Muslim clients (AlBedah et al., 2025). While some interventions—such as faith-based therapy models and Islamic CBT—have been developed, their application remains limited due to institutional, educational, and policy-related barriers ((Anwar et al., 2016). To address these gaps, scholars recommend the creation of standardized frameworks for integrating Islamic principles into mental health interventions and the inclusion of imams, religious counselors, and family members in care planning. This approach can bridge the spiritual-psychological divide, ensuring that the mental health needs of older Muslims are met with dignity, empathy, and cultural relevance.

Prospects and Challenges in Integrating Islamic Perspectives:

The integration of Islamic perspectives into mental health services has garnered increasing attention in recent years, particularly concerning the well-being of older Muslim adults. Islamic teachings emphasize holistic health, encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, which aligns with contemporary approaches to mental health care (Salman et al., 2025). The Qur'an and Hadith provide guidance on coping mechanisms, resilience, and the importance of seeking help during times of distress, underscoring the relevance of incorporating Islamic principles into therapeutic practices (Md Rosli et al., 2020). This integration is especially pertinent for older adults, for whom religious practices and beliefs often play a central role in daily life and coping strategies.

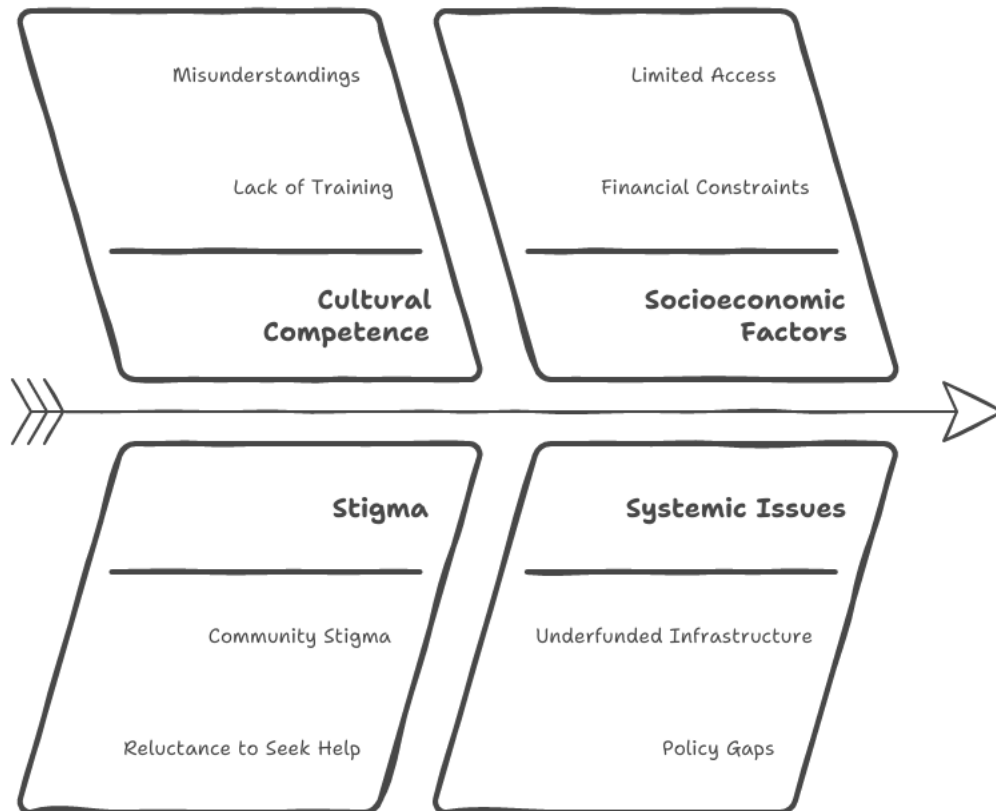
Empirical studies have demonstrated the efficacy of Islamic-based interventions in improving mental health outcomes among Muslim populations. For instance, a randomized clinical trial found that an Islamic-based intervention significantly reduced depression and anxiety levels among participants (Fitriyana & Merida, 2023). Similarly, a systematic scoping review identified various interventions utilizing the Qur'an—such as recitation, memorization, and listening—to alleviate symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, thereby enhancing quality of life and coping mechanisms (Owens et al., 2023). These findings highlight the potential benefits of integrating Islamic practices into mental health services, particularly for older adults who may find solace and strength in their faith traditions.

Despite the promising outcomes associated with Islamic-integrated mental health interventions, several challenges impede their widespread implementation. One significant challenge is the lack of cultural competence among mental health practitioners, which can lead to misunderstandings and reduced effectiveness of care (Hoshmand et al., 2024). Additionally, stigma surrounding mental health issues within some Muslim communities may discourage individuals from seeking professional help, further complicating efforts to provide effective care (Bradbury, 2020). Moreover, the diversity within Muslim populations necessitates tailored approaches that consider varying cultural, linguistic, and theological backgrounds, underscoring the need for adaptable and inclusive mental health services.

On the other side, Socioeconomic factors further exacerbate the barriers to effective Islamic mental health services. Moreover, older adults in Muslim communities may face financial constraints, limited transportation options, and inadequate health insurance coverage, all of which can restrict access to mental health care. Additionally, systemic issues such as underfunded mental health infrastructures and a shortage of specialized services tailored to the needs of older Muslims contribute to the treatment gap. These structural challenges highlight the importance of policy interventions aimed at improving the availability and affordability of culturally appropriate mental health services.

To address these challenges, collaborative efforts between mental health professionals, religious leaders, and community organizations are essential. Furthermore, incorporating Islamic principles into existing therapeutic frameworks—such as cognitive-behavioural therapy—can enhance their relevance and effectiveness for Muslim clients (Hofmann, 2021). Ongoing research and training are necessary to develop culturally sensitive interventions that respect and integrate Islamic perspectives, ultimately improving mental health outcomes for older Muslim adults. Figure below shows challenges in integrating Islamic perspectives into mental health.

Challenges in Integrating Islamic Perspectives into Mental Health



Calculation

The integration of Islamic perspectives into mental health services for older adults faces multifaceted challenges that hinder their effectiveness. One significant barrier is the pervasive stigma associated with mental illness within many Muslim communities. This stigma often leads to the perception of mental health issues as a source of shame, resulting in reluctance to seek professional help. Additionally, cultural beliefs attributing mental illness to supernatural causes, such as possession by jinn or punishment from God, further complicate the acceptance of conventional mental health interventions. These misconceptions not only delay treatment but also divert individuals towards spiritual healers instead of qualified mental health professionals. To address these barriers, collaborative efforts between mental health professionals, religious leaders, and community organizations are essential. Engaging imams and other Islamic leaders in mental health education and intervention can bridge gaps between religious beliefs and psychological practices, fostering greater acceptance and utilization of mental health services among Muslim populations. Furthermore, incorporating Islamic principles into existing therapeutic frameworks—such as cognitive-behavioural therapy—can enhance their relevance and effectiveness for Muslim clients. Ongoing research and training are necessary to develop culturally sensitive interventions that respect and integrate Islamic perspectives, ultimately improving mental health outcomes for older Muslim adults.

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