

# Mental Health and Islamic Teachings: A Positive Perspective for Clinicians

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**Abstract:** Islamic teaching offers a rich framework of beliefs and practices that can promote psychological well-being and resilience. In recent years, researchers have noted a “growing body of evidence” linking religious practice with mental health benefits, and have urged clinicians to develop “greater religious sensitivity” to unlock these “healing aspects of religiosity” . This emphasis is especially important in care for Muslim patients, given that Islam is a major world faith and the Muslim population is rapidly growing in many countries. Clinical experts highlight that engaging with patients’ religious values can support coping and recovery. In this article, we survey key Islamic concepts including tawakkul (trust in God), sabr (patience), dhikr (remembrance of God), and community solidarity showing how each aligns with modern mental health practice. We draw on scriptural sources and contemporary Islamic scholarship to illustrate how these teachings foster emotional resilience, stress management, and healing.

**Keywords:** Mental health, Islamic Teaching, psychology, Religion.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Islam is fundamentally a rich and diverse world religion followed by over 1.8 billion people worldwide – nearly a quarter of humanity. Meaning "submission" (to the will of God), Islam offers a complete way of life centered on faith, worship, ethics, and community. Islam provides Muslims with a code of behavior, ethics, and social values, which helps them in tolerating and developing adaptive coping strategies to deal with stressful life events. Islam teaches how to live in harmony with others “Seek the life to come by means of what God has granted you, but do not neglect your rightful share in this world. Do good to others as God has done good to you. Do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for God does not love those who do this,. Do good to others as God has done good to you. Do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for God does not love those who do this” (Quran, 28:77).

## II. SOME FOUNDATIONAL ISLAMIC CONCEPTS IN MENTAL HEALTH

### A. Trust in God (Tawakkul) as a Coping Strategy

The concept of **tawakkul**, or reliance on God, is central in Islam. Tawakkul entails making one’s best effort while ultimately trusting God’s care. In the Quran, believers are reassured that they need not worry once they have done their part: “*And whoever fears Allah and keeps his duty to Him, He will make a way for him...and whoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him*” . This verse (Quran 65:2–3) promises that God “suffices” those who trust in Him, implying that anxiety can be alleviated by confidence in divine wisdom. In practice, tawakkul encourages patients to set realistic goals and then accept outcomes beyond their control. This pattern resembles the concept of **cognitive reappraisal** or acceptance in therapy: by framing events as part of God’s plan, patients shift from self-blame (“Why is this happening to me?”) to a more hopeful perspective. As one Muslim mental-health writer observes, belief in divine destiny (*qadar*) “shifts our thinking from agonizing over questions like ‘Why me?’ to more self-empowering frameworks that offer hope, a deepened sense of God-consciousness, and solace” . In other words, faith in God’s wisdom provides a built-in cognitive reframe, reducing

rumination and sense of helplessness. Empirical work supports the importance of religious trust for well-being. For example, a recent study found that tawakkul (trust in God) has significant positive correlations to decrease anxiety, depression and stress. In Islamic counseling, tawakkul is often paired with active coping: one “puts in full effort” and then “leaves the result to Allah,” which can alleviate the pressure of uncertainty. By drawing strength from Quranic assurances, clinicians can help Muslim patients internalize a sense of support beyond themselves. As one guide notes, Islam provides “the strongest anchor by which to navigate life: a deep attachment to God” through regular worship, prayer, and remembrance.

### **B. Patience (Sabr) and Endurance**

Closely related to tawakkul is the virtue of sabr (patience, perseverance), which Islam repeatedly links with spiritual reward and inner strength. The Qur’an explicitly reassures believers that trials are expected but not endless: “And We will surely test you with something of [the misfortune]. But give good tidings to the patient. Those who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return’” (Quran 2:155–156). This passage promises closeness to God and reward for those who endure adversity with patience. Similarly, Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “If Allah wills good for someone, He afflicts him with trials.” In other words, difficulties are framed not as punishment but as means of growth. Clinicians can invoke this perspective to help patients reframe hardships as temporary tests that can build character and meaning. Islamic teaching also emphasizes that every person’s burden has a limit: “Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear” (Quran 2:286). This promise reassures patients that, even when feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, grief, or depression, they possess the inner capacity to endure. It echoes the concept of resilience: understanding that one can survive even the hardest storms. Mental-health professionals have even noted a concept of “sabr therapy” in popular discourse, highlighting patience training as an ancient coping strategy. One recent summary observes that the Prophet’s “Peace be upon him” counsel of patience “is echoed in therapeutic practices such as ‘sabr therapy’ used by many psychologists”. In an Islamic framework, patients are encouraged to cultivate steadfastness: to face difficulties calmly, maintain hope, and draw on prayer and community support for strength.

Classic Islamic scholars connect sabr with psychological well-being. For instance, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (13th century) wrote in his treatise *The Path to Patience* that cultivating patience leads to “inner tranquility and resilience,” helping individuals navigate challenges without despair. Likewise, Imam al-Ghazali (11th century) taught that patience purifies the soul and promotes spiritual growth. Modern Islamic psychologists interpret these teachings as encouraging positive coping. They note that patience in the face of adversity improves emotional stability and allows a person to withstand stress without becoming overwhelmed. In practice, a therapist might help a Muslim patient see their suffering as temporary and purposeful, invoking these sources to support a hopeful attitude. For example, a counselor might remind a patient of the Quranic promise that “only those who are patient shall be paid their reward in full” (Quran 39:10), reinforcing endurance. In all, the principle of sabr offers both a spiritual and a practical foundation for resilience: it gives meaning to suffering and teaches that “those who endure trials with patience are promised blessings and closeness to Allah”.

### **C. Remembrance of God (Dhikr) and Prayer as Mindfulness**

Islamic practice offers concrete tools akin to meditation and mindfulness for reducing stress and fostering emotional relief. The Qur’an explicitly links dhikr (remembrance of God) with inner peace: “Those who believe and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah—Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured”. In simple terms, “in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.” This verse (Quran 13:28) suggests that focusing the mind on the divine can soothe anxiety, much as secular mindfulness calms the mind. In daily life, Muslims observe rituals that reinforce this remembrance. The five daily prayers (ṣalāh), offered at set times, are a primary example. These prayers involve physical actions, recitations, and a quiet focus on God. Scholars have noted that prayer functions like a meditative practice: one Islamic psychology commentary lists “prayer, supplication (du‘ā’), and God’s remembrance (dhikr)” as “constant sources of protection and avenues for therapeutic relief”. In other words, regular prayer provides moments of reflection and release amidst a busy life. Empirically, studies find that religious coping methods like prayer and chanting reduce stress and emotional distress in various populations. Clinicians might therefore encourage a distressed Muslim patient to engage in prayer or quiet remembrance (repeating short phrases like “Subḥānallāh” or “Lā ilāha illā Allāh”) to center themselves. A therapist could frame this as a form of spiritual self-care that activates parasympathetic relaxation, similar to secular breathing exercises.

The Prophet Muhammad (“Peace be upon him”) himself emphasized the calming effect of worship. He famously said, “The coolness of my eyes has been placed in prayer.” As one account explains, “when [the Prophet] felt overwhelmed or troubled, he instinctively and routinely sought refuge in God through prayer”. This example models the idea that turning to dhikr and

ṣalāh in moments of anxiety yields comfort. Besides formal prayer, Islam also encourages contemplative reflection (tafakkur) and mindfulness (murāqaba). These include tafakkur (deliberate contemplation) on the names of God or on one's blessings. Yaqeen Institute scholars note that Islamic tradition has long practiced forms of tafakkur (deliberate contemplation): "These practices include tafakkur (deliberate contemplation), dhikr (remembrance of God), silence, and murāqaba (mindfulness)". In sum, Islamic ritual acts as built-in contemplation: the faithful are trained from childhood to pause, breathe, and focus on sacred words. Mental health professionals can view these as culturally congruent techniques: encouraging dhikr or mindful prayer simply aligns therapy with patients' own faith habits.

#### D. Community Support and Compassionate Care

Islamic doctrine places great emphasis on social connectedness and caring for others, which also support mental well-being. The concept of the Ummah – the worldwide Muslim community – implies that individuals are never truly alone in their struggles. The Prophet Muhammad "Peace be upon him" taught that the faithful are like one body: "The example of the believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy is just like a single body: when one limb suffers, the whole body responds with wakefulness and fever." In practice, this hadith means that if a community member is in distress, others should help. Muslim communities often reflect this principle through family support, counseling by imams, and charitable aid (zakat/sadaqah) for the needy. For a patient facing isolation or depression, a therapist might encourage seeking support from family, friends, or a local mosque as a source of comfort. Social support is well known to buffer stress, and Islamic teaching makes it a religious duty.

Charity and altruism are also enjoined for emotional benefit. The Prophet "Peace be upon him" said: "Whoever relieves the distress of a believer, Allah will relieve his (own) distress". By framing helping others as a way of lightening one's own burden, this teaching can motivate patient to engage in community service or mutual aid. Even small acts of kindness, like assisting a neighbor or volunteering, are deeply valued in Islam. Psychologically, such actions increase a sense of purpose and connection. Clinicians can incorporate this by suggesting that patients engage in social activities consistent with their faith. For many Muslims, attending congregational prayers or study circles also provides routine and peer support. In summary, Islamic principles encourage both giving and receiving support. Therapists should recognize and encourage these community bonds as part of a holistic recovery plan.

#### E. Integrating Islamic Principles in Therapy

The above teachings naturally complement modern therapeutic approaches. For example, **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** often uses re-framing and acceptance strategies that parallel Islamic ideas of tawakkul and sabr. Therapists can work with patients on reinterpreting negative thoughts: a Muslim patient might reframe "I can't handle this" into "Allah will not burden me beyond my ability (Qur'an 2:286)". Similarly, mindfulness-based interventions align well with Dhikr and prayer practices. Encouraging a patient to practice mindful breathing during prayer can enhance relaxation. **Positive psychology** concepts like gratitude also have roots in Islam: regularly saying "al-ḥamdu lillāh" ("praise be to God") cultivates thankfulness, which is linked to greater well-being. In fact, Islamic scholarship explicitly emphasizes gratitude (*shukr*) along with patience and trust as character strengths. A therapist might invite a patient to keep a "blessings journal" framed in Islamic terms, noting things they are grateful for each day. In community or group therapy contexts, invoking the ummah can foster a supportive environment. Group work with Muslims may benefit from discussing shared faith narratives about hope and resilience. For instance, discussing how the Prophet's "Peace be upon him" companions endured hardship with patience and mutual support can normalize patients' struggles and inspire courage. Moreover, clinicians should consider spiritual coping as part of the treatment plan. Many Muslim scholars today "recognize the need for both spiritual and clinical treatments to address mental health struggles". This means that, for a practicing Muslim, counseling that is respectful of and integrated with their faith can improve engagement and outcomes. Practical steps include asking patients about their religious coping, incorporating appropriate prayers or scripture into therapy if desired, or collaborating with knowledgeable religious leaders when helpful. In essence, Islamic doctrine provides a culturally congruent framework for many evidence-based techniques. By framing therapy goals in line with Islamic values (for example, promoting sabr as patience ordained by God, or noting that seeking help is itself an act of fulfilling God's trust), clinicians can make psychological interventions more meaningful. As one Islamic mental-health resource advises, turning to one's faith is not a sign of weakness but a source of empowerment: "There is no shame in seeking help to be healthy and whole, that is in itself a way of honoring the life that God has given to you. It is an act of worship. In this way, Islamic teachings can be seen as tools in the clinician's toolbox, reinforcing resilience and well-being from both spiritual and scientific angles.

### III. CONCLUSION

Islamic teachings offer a rich, affirmative perspective on mental health. Concepts such as Tawakkul (trust in God), Sabr (patience), Dhikr (remembrance), and communal solidarity are deeply rooted in the Quran and Hadith and have clear psychological implications. These practices encourage positive coping, cognitive reframing, mindfulness, and social support – all elements recognized by modern mental health research as promoting well-being. By understanding these principles, mental health professionals can better support Muslim patients in leveraging their faith as a resource. As one review notes, the evidence suggests religiosity is “moderately associated with greater well-being” and lower anxiety and depression, especially when clinicians respectfully integrate faith into care. In sum, rather than viewing religion as a barrier, therapists should view Islamic teachings as a reservoir of strengths. When used alongside conventional therapy, these beliefs and practices can help Muslim patients cultivate resilience, manage stress, and find comfort amid life’s trials.

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