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Understanding Neurotic Disorders form an Islamic Perspectives: Causes, Impact & Healing Approaches

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Abstract

This study explores the Islamic perspective on neurotic disorders, specifically anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and somatoform disorders. These disorders, as they are known in Western psychiatry, are interpreted from a unique perspective in Islamic belief, one that encompasses spiritual and psychological aspects. From the Islamic perspective, neurotic disorders are not just issues of mental health but indicators of spiritual disequilibrium. Based on Quranic passages, Hadiths, and classical Islamic teachings, the paper discusses the etiology and causality of anxiety and anxiety-related disorders, and the interrelatedness of the soul (nafs), mind (aql), heart (qalb), and spirit (ruh). It emphasizes the role of faith, self-knowledge, and spiritual practices in reducing the suffering that associating these conditions. This paper discusses Islamic therapies like Dhikr (remembrance of Allah), taking refuge in Allah, supplication (Duaa), and Ruqya (spiritual healing) as effective treatments for controlling neurotic disorders. The article also discusses how Islamic philosophy and psychology, as represented by early scholars like Al-Ghazali and Ibn al-Qayyim, have been offering a holistic approach to mental well-being for centuries, dealing with physical as well as spiritual aspects. Finally, the paper provides a solid grasp of how Islamic principles can be translated into current mental health care, providing hands-on understandings into coping with anxiety and other neurotic disorders in a spiritual and psychological context.

INTRODUCTION

Neurotic disorders i.e., anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive traits, are disorders that profoundly affect the emotional and mental health of an individual. In Western psychiatry, such disorders tend to fall under the umbrella of "neurosis" and include emotional reactions that are extravagant or exaggerated, resulting in detrimental consequences in behavior and thought (Ayten & Hussain, 2020). But Islamic thought provides a wholistic understanding of such disorders as relating to the interaction among the body, heart, mind (Aql), and spirit (Ruh), or what Islamic thinkers call NAQR (Nafs, Aql, Qalb, and Ruh) (Sa'ari et al., 2021). The Islamic scripture from the Quran, Hadith, and traditional Islamic scholars like Al-Ghazali offers deep understandings into the etiology and treatment of these disorders, highlighting the contribution of spiritual and emotional well-being to coping with mental health (Mitha, 2020; Kasule, 2003).



Figure 1. Showing Components of Soul

Defining Neurotic Disorders in the Quran and Hadith

Both psychological distress and emotional distress are recognized and dealt with through a spiritual lens in the Islamic way of life. The Quran uses the word *daqat* (or *deeq*) to mean feelings of anguish, worry, and distress. Such feelings are viewed as being natural to the human condition, and the Quran teaches one how to manage them. Verses like "By time, indeed, humankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds." (Quran 103:1-3) imply that there will be relief for believers who are involved in good deeds and have faith despite the hardships of life. Abu Zayd al-Balkhi was the first to distinguish between neurosis and psychosis, as well as the first to diagnose neurotic diseases and develop cognitive therapy to treat each of these disorders. He characterized neurosis as dread and anxiety, anger and violence, grief and despair, and obsession (Alkaddour, 2019).

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also stressed the power of faith in conquering life's challenges. According to Hadith, when Abu Umamah felt distressed and anxious, the Prophet instructed him on specific prayers to say for relief, highlighting the spiritual healing during anxiety (Sunan Abu Dawood). This instructs Muslims that psychiatric and emotional illnesses, such as anxiety, can be dealt with by a mix of faith, prayer, and spirituality.

Islamic Perspective on Anxiety and Neurotic Disorders

Opening Lens from the Qur'an and Early Islamic Psychology

“By time, indeed, humankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.” (Qur’an 103:1–3)

Islamic understandings of mental distress have long recognized conditions we might today classify as anxiety or neurotic disorders. Classical Muslim scholars used terms like **daqāt** or **ḍīq** to describe constriction, psychological stress, and worry. The 9th-century polymath **Abu Zayd al-Balkhī** made a landmark contribution by distinguishing between neurosis and psychosis, and offering treatments based on rational thinking, spiritual practices, and behavioral moderation (Elzamzamy & Bader, 2024; Rothman, 2019).

“Truly, in the body there is a morsel of flesh, and when it is corrupt the body is corrupt, and when it is sound the body is sound. Truly, it is the *qalb* (heart).”

Understanding Anxiety in Islam: Tests and Responses

Muslims view hardship and anxiety through the lens of divine testing:

“Do people think they will be left alone and they will not be tried?”

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits...”

Anxiety can settle in both *‘aql* (mind) and *qalb* (heart), and Islamic teachings offer ways to balance both cognitive and emotional responses.

Qur’anic Frameworks on Anxiety and Trust in Allah

“But they plan and Allah plans and Allah is the best of planners.” (8:30)

“Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.” (13:28)

“Indeed, after hardship there is ease.” (94:6)

“Allah is sufficient for us and He is an excellent trustee.” (3:173).

These verses have been described as **cognitive reappraisal anchors**, shifting the anxious mind from catastrophizing to trust (*tawakkul*), a mechanism comparable to modern therapeutic reframing (Yusuf & Elhaddad, 2020).

Prophetic Supplications on Worry and Depression

“O Allah, I seek refuge in You from worry and sadness, weakness and laziness, cowardice and miserliness, and from being overwhelmed by debt and the tyranny of men.”
(*Hadith of Abu Umāmah*)

Rather than pathologizing distress, the Prophet ﷺ normalized it while offering **du‘ā’** as a practical intervention. This aligns with recent findings that religious coping is associated with lower perceived stress and better outcomes in mental health (Rassool, 2023).

Classical Muslim Thought on Psychological Roots of Distress

Hazrat ‘Alī: “Free your heart from hate, for hate is a sickness.”

Scholars like **Ibn al-Qayyim** and **al-Ghazālī** taught that **distress originates from a disruption in the soul's connection to Allah**. Greed, distraction, and spiritual apathy were seen as *diseases of the heart* (*qalb*) (Awaad et al., 2020).

NAQR Model: Integrated Wellness in Islam

Grounded in the teachings of al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Qayyim, the NAQR model promotes wellness across **Nafs (desires)**, **Aql (intellect)**, **Qalb (heart)**, and **Rūḥ (spirit)** (Rothman & Yücesoy, 2024).

1. Nafs (Desires)

“O (you) the one in complete rest and satisfaction! Return to your Lord...” (Qur’an 89:27–30)
Unchecked nafs causes imbalance; training it through worship, gratitude, and moderation is key.

2. Qalb (Heart)

“If whole, all the body is whole... Truly it is the heart.”

“A sound heart” (qalb salīm) is free from hypocrisy (26:89), and is nourished by *dhikr*.

3. ‘Aql (Mind)

“Will you not then understand?” (23:80)

“Made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?” (21:30)

Structured thought, reflection, and *tadabbur* promote resilience and clarity.

4. Rūḥ (Spirit)

“And [Allah] breathed into him from His spirit.” (32:9)

The spirit is nourished through prayer, solitude, sincerity, and private acts of devotion.

Evidence-Based Islamic Treatment Methods for Anxiety

1. Isti‘ādhah (Seeking Refuge)

“If an evil whisper from Shayṭān tries to turn you away, then seek refuge in Allah.” (41:36)

Interrupts anxiety loops and promotes metacognitive awareness.

2. Dhikr (Remembrance)

“Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.” (13:28)

Modern studies confirm that paced, rhythmic remembrance reduces stress and activates the parasympathetic system, lowering heart rate and cortisol (Rassool, 2021).

3. Du‘ā’ (Supplication)

“O Allah, make the Qur’an the life of my heart...”

Du‘ā’ transforms internal stress into relational surrender, activating **hope and agency**.

4. Ruqyah (Spiritual Healing)

Recite Qur’an over the body with focus on breath and placement of hand. Ruqyah combines **self-regulation** with divine focus.

5. Ṣalāh and Daily Rhythms

“Your prayers are like a flowing river...”

Structured ṣalāh stabilizes biorhythms and creates space for reset five times daily. This routine is correlated with psychological coherence and mood regulation (Kasapovic, 2022).

6. Cognitive Restructuring

“Pay attention to what benefits you... and do not say ‘If only...’ Say, ‘It is the decree of Allah...’”

This mirrors **cognitive-behavioral therapy** strategies in modern psychology and was articulated by al-Balkhī 1,100 years ago (Rothman, 2019).

7. Aromatherapy (Sunnah Scents)

Use of musk, oud, sandalwood noted in prophetic practice. Smells can condition the nervous system toward calm during dhikr and du‘ā’.

8. Tafakkur (Meditation)

Contemplation of natural signs is worship. This aligns with **mindfulness-based therapy** but centers it on God-awareness.

9. Sleep Hygiene and Recovery

“We made your sleep for rest and the night as a covering.” (78:9–10)

Wind-down with du‘ā’, witr, ruqyah, and calming ritual aids recovery and circadian health.

10. Nigella Sativa (Black Seed)

“There is healing in black cumin for all diseases except death.”

Emerging studies show mood and immunity benefits (still under scientific review).

Wasāwis (Obsessive–Compulsive Concerns)

“Say: I seek refuge... from the evil of the whispers...” (Qur’an 114:1–4)
The Prophet ﷺ said to ignore intrusive doubts, seek refuge, and avoid engagement.

Integration with Clinical Care

While Islamic practices provide **psychospiritual anchoring**, they complement, not replace medical intervention. Combining dhikr, du‘ā’, and ṣalāh with **therapeutic models** (CBT, ERP, somatic therapy) has been proposed in clinical models of Islamic psychology (Elzamzamy & Bader, 2024).

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