

Misconceptions on Mental Health In Muslim Communities

A guide for families and professionals



Contents

Why do people suffer from mental ill health?	
Myth 1: Mental Illness is due to lack of faith	2
Myth 2: You've got nothing to be depressed about!	3
Symptoms of Mental ill health	
Myth 3: Suicidal thoughts take you out of Islam	3
Myth 4: Praying will fix mental III health	4
Treating mental health	
Myth 5: Ruqya will cure mental health illness	5
Myth 6: I will be rewarded for not seeking help	6
Maintaining mental wellbeing	
Myth 7: Meditation and mindfulness are forbidden in Islam	7
Types of Mental ill health	
Myth 8: People with mental ill health can't be good partners parents	or 8
Mental health advice and support	9



This guide aims to raise awareness of mental ill health through addressing some myths common in the Muslim community.

This does not mean these are the beliefs held by all Muslims, or that these are the only misconceptions that exist within the community.

This guide should be read in conjunction with our other guides on misconceptions and mental illness.

Why do people suffer from mental ill health?

Myth 1: Mental illness is due to lack of faith

People who are suffering from anxiety, depression or other types of Mental Illness can often be told that this is due to their lack of faith and trust in Allah. Some think that if a person truly believed in qadr (predestination) and Allah's power over all things then they wouldn't be anxious or depressed.

Your child can't just 'snap out of it'. It can feel like a constant battle and can be exhausting.

We can't say exactly why people develop mental illnesses,

however we do know that certain factors can increase people's risk of developing mental illnesses, including inherited traits. Some limited research suggests that mental health problems may be linked to a lack of chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine in the brain.

What we do know is that just as physical illnesses happen to people who have strong faith, so do mental illnesses. No one is to blame for their own mental illness.

Cancelling plans does not mean your child doesn't value their relationships, they may feel too overwhelmed to go.

Even the Prophet Muhammad went through periods of extreme sadness in his life, such as during the "Year of sorrow" in which his wife and father figure passed away, and also after the death of his son Ibrahim.

Then he wept more and said, "The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord, O Ibrahim! Indeed we are grieved by your separation."

Bukhari; Book 23, hadith 1228



Myth 2: You've got nothing to be depressed about!

Family and friends can sometimes compare their experiences to the experiences of someone facing mental health difficulties. They may feel that they have been through

Depression and being sad are not the same thing. Depression is a persistent sadness that can last for very long periods.

worse and had to cope and carry on, so there is no need for a person with ill health to get help or even be unwell in the first place.

Traumatic events may trigger anxiety disorders in some people however there doesn't always have to be an obvious cause or event that someone is "stressed" or "depressed" about. For others anxiety may be linked to underlying health issues or side

effects of medication.

Mental illness isn't something that only happens when something obvious has happened. People react to things in different ways, knowing that others have been through worse issues and traumas in their life doesn't make what the person is going through any less to them.

Mental illness also isn't something that only happens to those without family and friends. Having a good support network is definitely a protective factor, but talking to those around you isn't always enough to help you get better.

Your child may feel like a burden, leading them to avoid family/friends, to hide how they truly feel.

Symptoms of mental ill Health

Myth 3: Suicidal thoughts take you out of Islam

And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful [Qur`an 4: 29].

Suicide is something that is considered a sin in many religions, Islam included. In Islam thinking about committing an action is not the same as carrying out that action.

"Allah says to the angels: If my servant intends a bad deed, do not record it unless he does it"

However the concept of sin only applies to those who are mentally well. If one is in a state of mind in which they are unable to think clearly, as can be said for a person who is mentally distressed and thinking about suicide, then Islam does not expect anything of them. They are not thought to be accountable for their thoughts or actions and no act of worship, such as praying and fasting, is obligatory on them.



"The pen is lifted from the sleeper until he awakes, the child until he grows up, and the insane until he regains his senses."

We're sorry for shouting at you. **Mood swings**, anger and blaming sometimes take over. Asking someone if they have had thoughts about ending their life will not put the idea into the head, if you think someone is considering ending their life, then you should ask them directly and help them to reach out for the support they need.

Although act of ending one's life is considered a sin it is not something that means they are no longer Muslim, supplications can still be made for the person. It is still an obligation on the Muslim community to provide them with an Islamic funeral prayer and burial.

Myth 4: Praying will fix mental illnesses

Many people feel that praying regularly and consistently will make everything better. It is definitely recognised that praying can help and spirituality has an important role in the prevention and treatment of mental illness.

Spirituality helps people understand their interpretation of the meaning of life and provides a sense of connection to something bigger them themselves. It also can help to develop mind-sets of gratitude and self-regulation.

Achievements you might see as small, are big to your child e.g. getting out of bed These bring them closer to recovery.



As well as this the structure, routine and predictability that performing five daily prayers can be beneficial to people who are mentally unwell.



"Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest". Ouran 13:28



However many types of mental ill-health can include symptoms such as lack of motivation, low energy, disrupted sleep, loss of willpower and loss of control over aspects of behaviour. If someone is experiencing those symptoms then they may be finding it hard to get out of bed, or engage in productive behaviour.

What's easy for you may be very difficult for you child. Try not to judge when things you might find small, makes them feel uneasy. Extra pressure on people experiencing mental ill-health might make symptoms worse. When supporting someone who is experiencing this it is always good to encourage them but try not to get frustrated or express disappointed if they don't follow your suggestions and advice. Remember it is not a rejection of you, or of their faith.

Although praying may help with certain types of mental ill-health, by itself it is not likely to totally alleviate the issue and other forms of help should also be sought.

Treating mental ill health

Myth 5: Ruqya will cure mental illnesses

"We send down in the Qur'ān that which is a cure and a mercy for the believers." (17:81-2)

Ruqyah is the recitation of the Quran and other supplications that are used as a means of healing. This is something that can generally be done by yourself or by your family members at home. This is definitely beneficial for Muslims.



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Just as when someone has a physical illness they would seek medical help alongside performing ruqya, the same should be done for mental ill-health. This does not indicate a lack of faith or belief in the ability of the words of Allah to heal. Islam tells us to take physical actions as well as spiritual ones, doing what we need to do and then putting the results in the hands of Allah.



"Tie your camel and place your trust in Allah."

Ruqya is also used to treat jinn possession, the evil eye and black magic which are beliefs that exist in Islam. Muslims with mental ill-health can often believe that they are affected by these, preventing a person from seeking a treatment that could help. It is best to rule out other possibilities before making assumptions about the reasons for mental ill-health and approach treatments from a medical and spiritual perspective simultaneously.



"There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment."

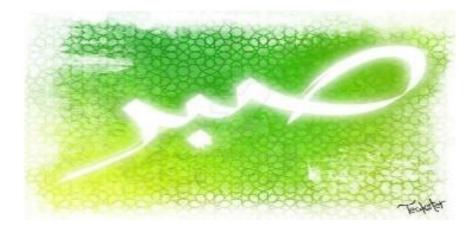
Without treatment people may try self-medicating. This is when people abuse substances to mask symptoms of a mental health issue. People may also engage in behaviours that mask symptoms. This can provide temporary relief, relaxation and a break from reality.

But this can:

- worsen their mental health in the long-run:
- increase mental health problems
- damage relationships
- cause poor coping skills
- cause an addiction to that substance(s)
- result in risky or harmful behaviours

Medication usually accompanies therapy, like behavioural therapy or talking therapies. It can take 4-6 weeks or more at the right dosage, to determine if medication is alleviating symptoms. Finding the right medication can be difficult; it might take 2-3 attempts to find the right one.

Myth 6: I will be rewarded for not seeking help



Believing there is a reward for suffering does not preclude us from attempting to stop our suffering. Sabr means to patiently persevere, to try to change our situation. So alongside accepting Allah's will Islam allows you to take practical steps to solve your situation and alleviate your suffering such as seeking help.

"So be patient with gracious patience."

Quran 70:5

Maintaining Mental Wellbeing

Myth 7: Meditation and mindfulness are forbidden in Islam

Mindfulness is being fully present in the moment through being aware of what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and feeling as well as focusing your thoughts.

Mindfulness can help us deal with patterns of negative thinking in addition to reducing stress and anxiety.

Mindfulness meditation is sitting quietly focusing on your sensations, your breathing and trying to control your thoughts when they start to wander. It doesn't involve any form of worship.

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In fact quiet reflection is something recommended in Islam and is similar to the

Prophet Muhammad's acontemplation in the Cave of Hira when he received the first verses of the Quran. There are many verses in the Quran in which Muslim's are encouraged to contemplate on their surroundings and the signs of creation.

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: Behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect

Ouran 45:13



Types of Mental Health

Myth 8: People with mental ill-health can't be good partners and parents

Just like people with any other illness, when acknowledged, treated and managed, people with mental ill-health can be productive members of society and lead full lives. They can definitely be great partners and excellent parents. Research has shown approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year.

Different types of mental ill-health do affect people differently and have different impacts on people's lives. Some forms of mental ill-health may require ongoing treatment, where as others may last only a short time.

Types of mental ill health that people may experience are:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- OCD
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders

More about these can be found on our website and other information guides.



Mental Health advice and support

Good Thinking UK https://www.good-thinking.uk/

Mental Health Foundation https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/

NHS Mindfulness https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/

MIND https://www.mind.org.uk/

NHS Every Mind Matters Hub https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/childrensmental-health/

Young People and Families

Young Minds https://youngminds.org.uk/

Place2Be https://www.place2be.org.uk/

Headstart https://www.place2be.org.uk/

Bounceback https://bouncebacknewham.co.uk/

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families https://www.annafreud.org/

Faith based resources

How to be a Mindful Muslim https://yaqeeninstitute.org/justin-parrott/how-to-be-amindful-muslim-an-exercise-in-islamic-meditation/

Trust in Allah but tie your Camel https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/bacp-childrenyoung-people-and-families-journal/march-2020/trust-in-allah-but-tie-your-camel/

Muslim Youth Helpline Blogs https://www.myh.org.uk/blog

Inspirited Minds Blogs, Mental Health advice and information https://inspiritedminds.org.uk

Every young person deserves a good childhood



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Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young Muslims e. nalini.naidoo@childrenssociety.org.uk

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