



Contemporary Fiqh of Mental Health, Stress & Suicide

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Abstract

Mental health issues, stress, and suicide are as likely to afflict a Muslim as anyone else. In the following research paper, we analyze how Islamic practice can be used to improve mental wellness and health, how stress and mental illness are linked to suicide, and conducted research on the Principle's of Fiqh as they regard to the issue of suicide. Specifically, we found that suicide is haram when conducted with complete intentionality to end one's life, it is considered makruh to wish for death but not actively take steps towards it, and it is considered not exactly halal, but rather excusable if one commits the act of suicide while not in their senses, and this is to be determined on a case by case basis and is not always definite. Finally, we close with notes on how mental illness and stigma towards suicide persist in the Muslim community, and offer reflections in which we, the authors, state our opinions regarding the findings.

Introduction

Mental Illness (Aisha S)

Mental illness is understood to result as a combination of psychological, biological, and environmental factors. The brain is one of the most highly adaptive mechanisms in the human body. Using neuronal connections and associations, every human brain develops a wide yet concrete understanding of the world around us. The fact that I associate the smell of chai with home, or the color orange with my calico cat, is one of the many ways in which humans store information - by categorizing. Over time, these connections form patterns which aids in the formation of memories, personalities, and relationships. Mental illness is recognized when patterns of thought are maladaptive, persist over a long period of time, and begin to interfere with the quality and course of life, such that it is invasive, and can result due to one's environment or biological predisposition (or a combination of both).

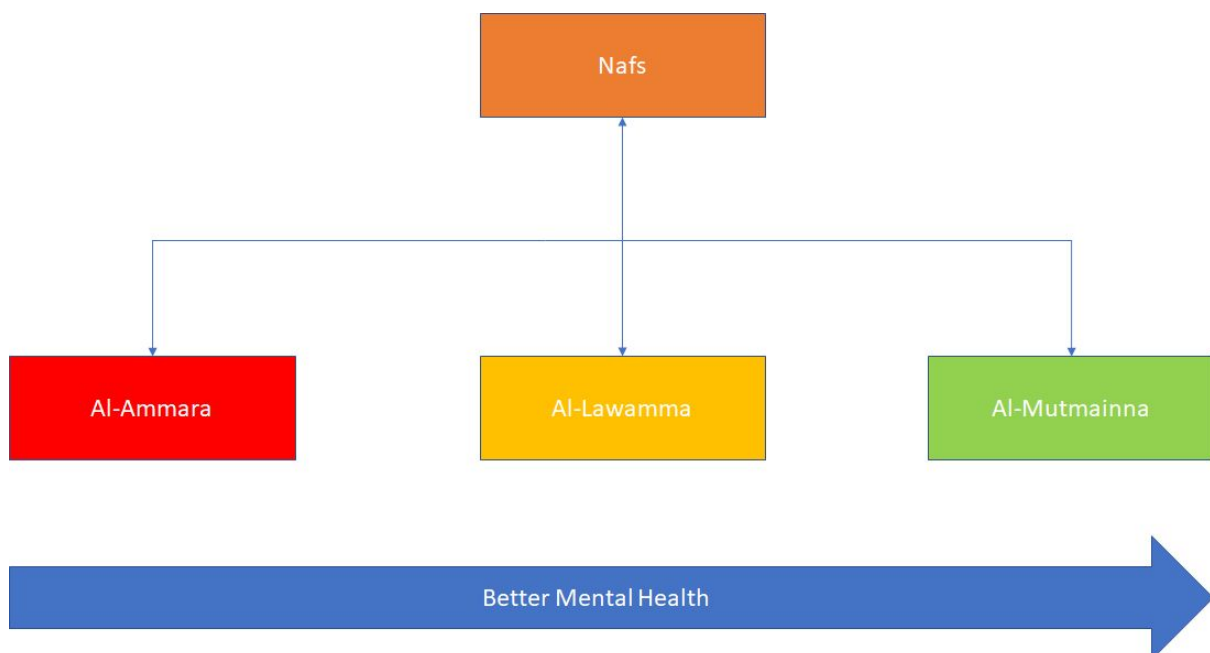
Although we experience emotion and feelings on a very external level, the intricacies of it lie within neurons and their biologically programmed response to situations. For example, the feeling of happiness is associated with the release of several neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and dopamine. Someone with clinical depression may not have enough serotonin receptors, or they may not produce enough serotonin to begin with, hence they are plagued with feelings of hopelessness. However, it is equally likely that someone had no genetic predisposition to depression, but was subjected to an environment where they were unable to express happiness, leading the brain to adapt by making less serotonin, having the same effect.

The 'nature vs nurture' discourse is as old as science itself, and it is well established that both likely have a hand in the formation of disease. The specific thought patterns and symptomatology, the rate of their pervasiveness, and the extent to which they interfere with one's ability to live a fulfilling life contribute to the categorization of a specific mental illness. The full listing of mental illnesses, how they are understood, and diagnosed is detailed in the DSM-5, which is used as a textbook of sorts by psychology specialists worldwide.

Psychologists have long understood the importance of spirituality in achieving positive mental health outcomes. The stages of spiritual growth in Islam is differentiated in the types of nafs, and its strengthening can well contribute to overall attitudes towards suffering with a disease, and has been implicated to increase positive response to treatment, as will be elaborated further by my colleague.

Mental Health (Rafique A)

Mental health can be more connected to Islam than one usually thinks. Islam offers solutions to better mental wellness problems and ways to cope with anxiety, depression, stress, etc. Islamic psychology or the science of the soul (nafs) is the philosophical study of the mind from an Islamic perspective. Nafs has been used in the Qur'an to refer to a specific part of our self that has desires as well. The Islamic concept of nafs highlights the intricate and complex make-up of the inner self.



The Qur'an describes the nafs, or self, as operating out of one of three states as shown in the above diagram:

1. **nafs al-ammara** (commanding self);
2. **nafs al-lawwama** – accusatory self; and
3. **nafs al-mutmainna** (peaceful self).

The Qur'an explains how these states control our bodies and tell us what to do. If one had a dominating nafs al-ammara, it means that they are dominated by themselves and listen, as well as follow one's desires. This stage consists of one requiring material possessions and worldly desires. On the other hand, with nafs al-lawwama we are conscious of our flaws and what is right and wrong. Finally, the best state of the soul -nafs al-mutmainna implies contentment and peace, there are no immoral desires. This is the ideal state, in which one can achieve inner peace. When our emotional needs are not being met sufficiently, the nafs al-ammara begins to control our feelings, thoughts and behaviours. The Qur'an provides guidance to weaken the influence of the nafs al-ammara. When the nafs al-lawwama is active, we become aware that something is wrong with the way we are feeling and behaving. We can then learn to challenge negative thinking leading us to our nafs al-mutmainna.

Mindfulness is a modern concept, which emphasises a mental state of awareness, focus and happiness. Mindfulness is a way in which we can become more aware of ourselves, our thoughts and our feelings, and act in a way which is mindful of ourselves and others despite our nafs and desires. So the Quranic solution is that we should always strive from the state of **nafs al-ammara** to **nafs al-mutmainna** state would help us to improve our mental health, better cope with symptoms, and lead to a better and happy life.

This practice is similar to, and can be used in conjunction with cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT explores the link between thoughts, emotions and behaviour, which aims to alleviate distress by encouraging people to develop more adaptive cognitions and behaviours. CBT is the most widely researched and empirically supported psychotherapeutic method. There is a strong evidence base that is reflected in clinical guidelines, which recommend CBT as a treatment for many common mental health disorders. CBT ultimately aims to teach people to help themselves by understanding their current ways of thinking and behaving, and by equipping them with the tools to change their maladaptive cognitive and behavioural patterns.

Stress (Abdullah M)

Stress is a “physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension.” Stress can be caused by internal factors (i.e being sick) or external factors (i.e. the environment, psychosocial situations). The body responds to stress by initiating a complex fight or flight response/hyperarousal state to overcome the perceived threat. Physiologically, the body increases breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, and blood sugar, releases nutrients for muscle use, decreases/inhibits digestion and excretion, causes pupil dilation, auditory exclusion, tunnel vision, and shaking. Primitively speaking, this response increases chances of survival by enabling a human to either fight or flee when in the presence of a threat such as a bear. The response is the same whether it is an internal or external stressor. Once the threat is no longer present, the body returns back to its original state.

The fight or flight response is a response to acute stress and is meant to be short lived. An extremely stressful or traumatic event can cause a mental health condition called Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resulting in vivid flashbacks/nightmares and uncontrollable thoughts about the event. Chronic stress results when stressful situations are prolonged. The physiologic changes are extremely taxing on the body on a chronic basis. Chronic stress can cause hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disease, sleep disturbances, memory impairment, digestive problems, anxiety, and depression.

These changes over time affect the brain by negatively impacting attention, memory, and the way we deal with emotions. Stress- associated mental health conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression can be debilitating and increase risk for suicide if unmanaged.

Suicide (Aisha S)

Mental health and wellness is an essential part of a human’s overall health. When mental health progressively deteriorates without intervention, there is an increased risk for suicide. Suicide is defined as intentionally causing ones own death. This is a concrete action that results in killing oneself, and is performed fully with the intention to no longer live. Suicidal ideations, which are more broad in definition, can range from

fantasising about not wanting to live, all the way until inflicting self harm, with or without the conscious decision to end one's life.

Suicide results from stress factors and their subsequent impact on psychological well being. Specifically, negative thoughts that are conjured in response to stressful events, whether environmental or psychological, have the potential to persist, become invasive, and integrate into regular thought patterns the longer the stressor is ongoing or the psyche is untreated. This can give cause to physiological and psychosocial consequences, and depending on the circumstances, can give rise to a wide variety of symptoms.

It is important to note that while intervention decreases the risk of suicide, it is in no way able to cure the underlying illness. Mental illness is incredibly complex, such that symptom expression and treatment for any disorder can look very different, depending on one's personality, age, gender, sexual orientation, religious and cultural background, among other factors. Therefore, it is understood that while therapy and medication serve to improve the quality of life of those who suffer from mental illness, it may not necessarily perfect it, similar to physical health interventions that may not cure a disease, but make it much more manageable. All in all, it is a practitioner's goal to allow a patient to live as fulfilling a life as possible despite their prevailing illness, which is doubly in line with the Islamic principle of preserving life.

Mental Health in Islam (Aleesha A)

Islam provides clear guidance on taking care of your health and one of the five principal of Islamic sharia is to preserve one's life. There is much evidence throughout the Quran, Sunnah and Fiqh that demonstrates the importance of preserving one's health and wellness. Some of these are highlighted below.

- “Indeed we sent down to you the book for the people in truth. So whoever is guided - it is for [the benefit of] his soul; and whoever goes astray only goes astray to its detriment...” (Quran 39:41)

Islam is way of life that incorporates spiritual, psychological, emotional and social aspects. From its teachings, we can learn that we need to sustain a connection to him in order to achieve inner peace and happiness. Our thoughts, emotions, behavior and will all must be dedicated to getting the pleasure of Allah. The key to sound better mental health and well being from the Islamic perspective is submission to Allah

Psychology in Islam is used in everyday practices but under different guides, such as spiritualism. Islam values the importance of good mental health and emotional wellbeing. The Qur'an can be used as a guide to those suffering from emotional distress and aims to lead people to a meaningful quality of life. As Prophet (PBUH) says that

“There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment’ (Hadith).”

Islamic scholars have done significant research in this area especially Al Ghazali (RA). May Allah bless him for all his efforts. His approach to cultivating mental health is amazing and modern islamic psychology is based on some of his principles that he outlined a long time ago.

- The al Ghazali approach- The formation of Islamic Psychology is based on al Ghazali's Ihya' Ulumiddin in which the details of personality development is described. The psycho-spiritual improvement must include methods of purification of the soul (Tazkiyah al Nafs) which the ultimate objective is to attain divine happiness (al Saadah) in this world and Hereafter.

- This is based on al Ghazali's comprehensive approach in building the character or personality. It has two components, i.e. purification and cultivation. Purification means "to cleanse oneself of any thoughts and behavior that's deemed deviated from Islamic teaching (syari'at)". Cultivation is "the process of transforming oneself by continuously doing the positive and good qualities in order to attain blessing from God".

This model is built on five constructs:

1. **Knowing Self (Ma'rifah al Nafs)** – It is client centered by focusing on the client's ability to change (knowing strength/weakness, find purpose in life, identifying problems and setting goals) by the process of self evaluation (Muhasabah al Nafs).
2. **Purification of the Heart (Takhalli)** – Demands the client's perseverance (Mujahadah) to overcome negative attributes through understanding the life of Prophets as mentioned in the al Qur'an and al Sunnah.
3. **Cultivation of the Heart (Tahalli)** – A process of re-building and strengthening of the heart to transform both body and soul/spirit. Building inner strength through tawbah and zikr until it becomes easy to perform more challenging ones such as tahajjud or fasting.
4. **Self Evaluation (Muhasabah al Nafs)** – A process of repeating each step again and again and finding answers to problems that may arise and improve it.
5. **Happiness (al Saadah)** – The ability to attain the highest level of happiness (transcendental) through Taqwa and Ihsan.

A very famous hadith of Jibreel is very relevant to explain the concept of Ihsan (i.e. spiritual excellence as mentioned above in Ghazali's approach):

Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: We were sitting with the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, one day when a man appeared with very white clothes and very black hair. There were no signs of travel on him and we did not recognize him. He sat down in front of the Prophet and rested his knees by his knees and placed his hands on his thighs. The man said, "O Muhammad, tell me about Islam." The Prophet said, "Islam is to testify there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to establish prayer, to give charity, to fast the month of Ramadan, and to perform pilgrimage to the House if a way is possible." The man said, "You have spoken truthfully." We were surprised that he asked him and said he was truthful. He said, "Tell me about faith." The Prophet said, "Faith is to believe in Allah, his angels, his books, his messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in providence, its good and its evil." The man said, "You have spoken truthfully. Tell me about excellence." The Prophet said, "Excellence is to worship Allah as if you see him, for if you do not see him, he surely sees you." The man said, "Tell me about the final hour." The Prophet said, "The one asked does not know more than the one asking." The man said, "Tell me about its signs." The Prophet said, "The slave girl will give birth to her mistress and you will see barefoot, naked, and dependent shepherds compete in the construction of tall buildings." Then, the man returned and I remained. The Prophet said to me, "O Umar, do you know who he was?" I said, "Allah and his messenger know best." The Prophet said, "Verily, he was Gabriel who came to teach you your religion."

In Islam, apart from what people actually do, their intentions have a critical role in qualifying an act. It means that God praises people if they are believers and have good intentions and wish to do good, even if

they cannot do it. Such Islamic concepts can be used in tandem with therapeutic interventions to aid in the self efficacy of those who suffer from mental illness.

Rulings on Suicide

When is it Haram? (Rafique A)

Islam explicitly forbids suicide as a verse in the Quran instructs:

And do not kill yourselves, surely God is most Merciful to you.— Qur'an, Sura 4 (An-Nisa), ayat 29

The prohibition of suicide has also been recorded in statements of *hadith* (sayings of *Muhammad*); for example:

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the Hell Fire (forever) and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself in the Hell-Fire." — Sahih al-Bukhari, 2:23:446

As noted, suicide is prohibited in Islamic law according to evidence from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the consensus of Muslim scholars. A person who commits suicide commits a major sin, though this does not take him outside of Islam. One of the core maxims in Islamic Sharia also clearly states that "Harm to be removed".

It is not even permissible to commit suicide to avoid evils such as rape and torture for instance. For example, it is impermissible for a girl to commit suicide for fear of rape; she must defend herself against her attacker even if this means killing him. If she is killed in the process, she is considered a martyr because she died to defend her honor. The same applies to those who face humiliation and torture. They should resist their assailants and it is impermissible for them to commit suicide under the pretext that it is more honorable to kill themselves than to accept captivity and torture. However, it is allowed in Islam under extreme circumstances to lie to save your life. Indeed the famous story of Ammar bin Yasir clearly explains this:

Ammar's mother was Summaya and she is known as the first martyr in Islam. She was a staunch and enthusiastic member of the new Muslim community. All the suffering she was subjected to did nothing to lessen her faith. One day in a fit of rage Abu Jahl stabbed her in the lower stomach with a spear; she died almost immediately. After this Abu Jahl and his wicked companions tortured and killed Ammar's father and brother. Ammar was a broken man. He was overwhelmed with grief and fear and did what his parents had died refusing to do; he cursed Islam and Prophet Muhammad to save his life. Abu Jahl released Ammar. The grief-stricken man ran straight to Prophet Muhammad who comforted him and reminded of God's forgiveness. The following verse of the Quran is said to have been revealed in response to Ammar's despair.

"Whoever disbelieves in God after having believed in Him—not the one who is compelled (to utter a word of disbelief) under duress while his heart is at peace with faith, but the one who embraces disbelief wholeheartedly—upon such people is wrath from God, and they will suffer a great punishment." (Quran 16: 106)

A Muslim is obligated to exercise patience at times of affliction and fight injustice to the best of his ability. He is not commanded to commit suicide to escape afflictions. During times of deep trial, despair, and sadness, Muslims seek comfort and guidance in the words of Allah in the Quran. Allah reminds us that all people will be tried and tested in life, and calls upon Muslims to bear these trials with "patient perseverance and prayer." Indeed, Allah reminds us that many people before us have suffered and had their faith tested; so too will we be tried and tested in this life.

There are dozens upon dozens of verses that remind Muslims to be patient and trust in Allah SWT during these times of trial.

More Quranic Examples:

"Seek Allah's help with patient perseverance and prayer. It is indeed hard except for those who are humble." (2:45)

"Oh you who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer, for God is with those who patiently persevere." (2:153)

"Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods, lives, and the fruits of your toil. But give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere. Those who say, when afflicted with calamity, 'To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return.' They are those on whom descend blessings from their Lord, and mercy. They are the ones who receive guidance." (2:155-157)

"Oh you who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy. Vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and be pious, that you may prosper." (3:200)

"And be steadfast in patience, for verily Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish." (11:115)

"Be patient, for your patience is with the help of Allah." (16:127)

"Patiently, then, persevere - for the Promise of Allah is true, and ask forgiveness for your faults, and celebrate the praises of your Lord in the evening and in the morning." (40:55)

"No one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint, none but persons of the greatest good fortune." (41:35)

"Verily man is in loss, except such as have faith, and do righteous deeds, and join together in the mutual enjoining of truth, and of patience and constancy." (103:2-3)

When is it Makruh? (Abdullah M)

Makruh as defined by shariah means that which the Lawgiver asks us not to do, but not in a definitive manner. The person who does not do it out of obedience will be rewarded, but the one who does it will not be punished. The act of suicide, defined as intentionally killing oneself, is haram. There is no evidence in the Quran or Sunnah to suggest that it is makruh, but clearly haram. However, wishing for one's death is considered makruh if the reason is regarding worldly harm that has befallen the person.

- It is makrooh for a Muslim to wish for death if the reason for that is some worldly harm that has befallen him. Rather he must be patient and seek the help of Allah.

- A version narrated by al-Bukhaari says: “No one of you should wish for death. Either he is a doer of good and will do more, or he is a doer of evil but perhaps he may stop.”
- Al-Nawawi said: This hadeeth clearly indicates that it is makrooh to wish for death because of some harm that has befallen one, such as loss or distress caused by an enemy, or other such hardships of this world.

But if a person fears harm or fitnah with regard to his religious commitment, it is not makrooh to wish for death, according to this hadith, and several of the salaf did that. One who fears for his religious commitment because of fitnah as described below:

The fact that wishing for death in this situation is also prescribed is indicated by the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in his du’aa’: “If You should decree fitnah for Your slaves, then take my soul (in death) before I am put to trial.” Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 3233; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami’.

Since the Prophet forbade a person from wishing for death, because of an affliction that he is suffering from, then [the forbiddance] is even more severe for committing suicide, being hasty with Allah’s [decree] concerning his soul.

When is it Halal? (Aisha S)

The scholarly opinions do not state at any point that suicide is halal, rather there are instances where it is seen as excusable. We must consider that suicide most often occurs as a result of mental illness, which may or may not be well understood at the time of death. The Quran says:

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to As-Saabiroon (the patient). (2:155)

In the above verse, Allah states that believers will be tested with poverty, illness, among many other trials. In line with the clinical understanding of mental illness as disease of the mind, mental illness is understood as one of these illnesses with which one will be tested. Therefore it can be understood that mental illness, as well as suicidal ideations, can be given as a test from Allah, and Allah tests whom He wills.

As known, any affliction is a test from Allah and staying positive throughout the course of illness is a difficult feat, but Allah rewards those who are patient.

Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) once said: “No misfortune or disease befalls a Muslim, no worry or grief or harm or distress – not even a thorn that pricks him – but Allaah will expiate for some of his sins because of that.” (Agreed upon. Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 5641)

The hadith above confirms that a Muslim who continues in their struggle for the sake of Allah, whether it be a physical or mental illness, they will be rewarded for the battle they maintain.

In the case that suicide is completed, we look to the following hadith:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The Pen has been lifted from three: from the sleeper until he awakens, from the child until he reaches puberty and from the insane person until he comes to

his senses.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (4403), al-Tirmidhi (1423), al-Nasaa’i (3432) and Ibn Maajah (2041).

In regards to insanity, al-Mawsoo‘ah al- Fiqhiyyah (16/99) defines it in three ways:

1. A mental disorder such that the person cannot do or say things in a proper manner.
2. The loss of the ability to distinguish between right or wrong and/or to recognize the consequences of one’s actions.
3. The loss of the ability to understand situations from all possible angles.

In the case of mental illness, pervasive and maladaptive thought patterns can manipulate one’s sense of reasoning and understanding of situations. In the case of major depression disorder (MDD), the amygdala (the region of the brain correlated with emotions) is enlarged as a result of high stress exposure. This can cause a dysregulation or escalation of emotions and can affect processes associated with reasoning, judgement, and the like.

As another example, symptoms of psychosis interfere with one’s ability to distinguish reality from delusions. Psychotic disorders include but are not limited to schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, and delusional disorder, and are marked by an inability to distinguish reality from hallucinations or delusions. Many patients suffering from psychotic symptoms cite hallucinations that urge one to harm themselves or others, the form of voices or intrusive thoughts. Similarly, these can impede one’s judgement and can cloud one’s sense of reality, leading to risk taking behaviors such as excessive smoking, drinking, and others.

As is the case with any illness, early intervention and effective treatment can help the patient mitigate their symptoms and live as fulfilling a life as possible despite them. Even with treatment, some forms of mental illness are so aggressive that the symptoms can only be mitigated to a certain degree. In cases such as these it is difficult to determine whether or not one is in their senses if they successfully complete the act of suicide.

Based on the above evidence, it is understood that while the taking of one’s life is undoubtedly haram, it is difficult to understand at what point one qualifies as ‘within their senses’. The truth of whether or not one is in this state is ultimately between a believer and their Creator, and a human is unable to discern such. It remains a matter of Allah’s judgement as to whether the human could be considered in the state of insanity.

The fourth core maxim states that “*Certainty is never annulled except by certainty; it can never be annulled by mere doubt.*”

From this, we can extrapolate that when a Muslim completes suicide, it is in no way permissible to regard him as a disbeliever or a sinner, as we must have conclusive evidence that one was in their senses when the act was committed. As we have demonstrated, certain mental illnesses can completely manipulate one’s sense of reasoning, which may induce shortsightedness, an inability to understand the consequences of one’s actions, or can influence one’s ability to understand a situation from multiple angles. In addition, there may be Muslims who, due to a number of reasons, were never able to be diagnosed with a mental illness, or never sought treatment for it. Therefore, since we can never rule out insanity, we cannot condemn the actions of a Muslim who passed away due to suicide, because certainty cannot be established by doubt alone.

In conclusion, the act of suicide is haram when committed with complete and full intention and a sound mind. However, the argument of whether one is in a state of soundness is unclear, such as when one is suffering from a mental illness, knowingly or unknowingly. Decisively, it is impossible to determine based on assumption alone whether or not someone intentionally committed the act with a clear mind. This remains in Allah's knowledge and his alone, and Allah knows best.

Additional Notes

Mental Health in the Muslim Community (Aisha S)

Muslim populations are at risk for mental illness in the same way that all populations are at risk for mental illness. It is estimated that at least 1 in 3 people suffer from anxiety or depression in the United States alone, and it is necessary to say that many cases go unreported or undiagnosed. This is especially the case in the Muslim community, both locally and abroad. This is because, in addition to barriers that persist in the US regarding mental health access (such as expenses, lack of resource, etc), the Muslim community disproportionately seeks treatment or diagnosis for mental health issues due to stigmatization.

For a variety of reasons, mental illness is regarded with great stigma in the Muslim community. Many Muslims wrongly conflate mental illness with Jinn possession, and while the influence of Jinn can play a hand in predisposition to illness and exhibit characteristics that resemble symptom expression, it is important to note that these are distinctive in many respects, and in the case of possession, a scholar or professional must be able to deduce such, and not an individual.

Another cause for stigmatization is the conflation of spiritual and psychological health. As seen in our analysis of the stages of nafs, spiritual wellbeing can contribute to the ways in which one interacts with or experiences their illness. However, too many Muslims falsely believe that spiritual healing can result in recovering from mental illness. While praying, fasting, and remaining close to Allah may act as positive coping mechanisms and serve to alleviate symptoms, it does not nullify the illness in the same way physical illnesses, such as diabetes and cancer, cannot be prayed away but are coped with and understood accordingly.

In this fashion, it is understood that spiritual growth may serve to reframe stressful situations in the same way as cognitive behavioral therapy, and the two must work closely together. However, simply undergoing treatment does not guarantee recovery in the case of any chronic illness, so while spirituality may contribute to dealing with symptoms, it will not cure them.

Some Important Statistics Regarding Suicide (Aleesha A)

Unfortunately, the rise in suicides among Muslims is in line with national statistics, which show increases across age, gender, race, and ethnicity, according to a report released in June by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Suicide is now the second-leading cause of death among people ages 15 to 34. The report says nearly 45,000 people killed themselves in 2016, more than twice the number of homicides, prompting calls to recognize it as a public health crisis.

For centuries, Islamic scholars have examined suicide from every angle — what happens to the soul, what kind of burial is allowed, and so on — and the debates continue today, evolving with new medical information about mental health and depression. Without a consensus, communities decide on an uneven, case-by-case basis how to deal with suicides. Depending on where a family lives, they could find an accepting Muslim response that includes counseling, fundraising for burial, and an Islamic funeral, or they could get cast out into the wilderness, unable to wash, bury, or pray for their dead among other Muslims.

According to studies of Muslims who've attempted suicide, among the main drivers are family environment, cultural conflicts, mental illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and financial loss. There's also a body of research showing that religion can act as a deterrent against suicide, with some Muslims crediting fear of committing such a grave sin as the main reason they're alive. What the studies don't show, however, is a blueprint for what to do when suicide occurs in a Muslim community with no clear stance on how to handle the body or console surviving relatives. It remains a topic of great debate.

Conclusion

In closing, mental illness occurs as a result of a variety of environmental, biological and psychosocial factors. We have found that in training the nafs, one is able to better navigate the symptoms of mental illness and benefit their mental health. Stress can contribute to negative thought patterns which can lead to mental illness, therefore increasing the risk of suicide. Additionally, we have established suicide as a process that is vastly different per the individual, beginning with an event or a series of which, which may lead to ideations, self harm, and possibly suicide.

Based on our understanding of Fiqh, the interpretation is in regards to the process, such that one is forbidden from taking their own life simply in direct response to a tragic event, or with complete intention to end their life. Suicidal ideations, however, fall into the category of makruh, because one wishes for death but does not actively seek dying. Finally, we see that in the case of insanity, which is hard to discern, suicide can be considered not halal, but excusable.

Navigating mental health in the Muslim community can be difficult given the stigma that pervades it. This is incredibly detrimental because many Muslims who experience mental health issues do not receive proper treatment, leaving them at higher risk for suicide as a result. This despondency has led to many communities having mixed opinions about Muslims who choose to end their lives, denying them rituals such as burials and janazah.

In any state of mind, whether one is healthy or suffering from illness, it is always best to have patience and trust in Allah's plan.

*"Those who Believed and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah: verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest."
Quran: Sura Ar Rad (The Thunder) Ch 13 Ayat 28*

Author Reflections:

Abdullah M:

I strongly agree that suicide is haram. Whether one is held accountable or not depends on whether they were sane at the time of the action. To my knowledge, I cannot refute the ruling that suicide is haram given the strong and clear evidence in the Quran and Sunnah.

It is important to take care of one's mental health in Islam. One needs to nourish the mind, body, and soul. If the mind is not healthy, this will have a negative impact on the soul and body and vice versa. We cannot neglect the mind and its state of health. Ibadat will suffer if one is depressed and stressed at all times because it is difficult to obtain khusu without mental clarity. There is an emphasis on exercise for the body to maintain good health. There needs to be more emphasis on the mind to maintain a good state of mental health.

Medically speaking, mental illness should be treated through a biopsychosocial approach. This is to mean that one needs to treat the illness by addressing the physiological pathology, a person's thoughts, emotions, and behavior, and to also address their socio-economical; socio-environmental, and cultural aspects that may be contributing to their illness. Yes, there are medications that can be taken to alter/change the neurotransmitters in the brain, but this is one approach. In addition to medications, one should see a therapist. This will help to control thoughts, emotions, and behavior and develop coping techniques as well as a better understanding of oneself and their illness. The social/cultural aspect would refer to addressing their illness by means of their economic situation, family circumstances, and culture/religious beliefs. I do not think they are mutually exclusive, but rather in agreement. The Islamic perspective in treatment is similar, but also focuses on increasing one's faith in Allah and the hereafter, increasing righteous deeds, and remembering Allah/asking for forgiveness.

Aisha S:

I definitely have mixed feelings about these findings, though I do believe that Islamic discourse needs to be much more deliberate and sensitive in how they address issues such as suicide and mental illness, because they seldom make distinctions between self harm, suicidal ideations, or the act of suicide itself.

Psychologically speaking, once someone is diagnosed with or is experiencing mental illness, there is already a pervasive and consistent thought pattern that has overtaken the human psyche. Knowing this, I would understand that alot more cases of suicide occur due to a loss of senses than we initially choose to believe. Additionally, the stigma surrounding mental health disallows Muslims from receiving proper diagnosis and treatment, which puts them at an increased risk for suicide.

In the same way that people battle diabetes or multiple sclerosis, those who suffer from mental illnesses are doing their utmost to fight it everyday, by going to therapy, taking their medication, or even speaking up

about it. For this reason, I believe it is paramount to increase access of mental health resources to the Muslim community, as well as fight our own internalized ideas of what mental illness means.

All in all, the battle against mental illness should not be confined to the ones who suffer from it, rather, Muslims as a community should be united in confronting the issues we face - because as a collective, we work better and remain steadfast in the worship of Allah (SWT).

“Verily, the believers are like a structure, each part strengthening the other,” and the Prophet clasped his fingers together. [al-Bukhari]

Aleesha A:

I do agree that suicide is obviously haram, especially since it is even mentioned in the Qur’an, but I do feel that cases like these need to be better handled by the Muslim community. It could be simply by consoling the family that is going through a rough time like this. After reading different Muslim suicide cases across the world, there are many cases where the mosque and the community block off the family and fail to provide things like a janazah, which every Muslim is supposed to have. It is already hard for the family to take in that one of their relatives has taken their own life, and we should in no way make it harder for them.

Mental health and the factors that lead to suicide itself need to be addressed more. Depression and anxiety are mental health problems that are increasing within the Muslim community everyday. We should be aware of the fact that people around us could be going through such problems and we should always be ready to help and provide support.

This is why Islam itself provides us with so many ways to cope with mental stress and maintain a good mental health. Prayer purifies the soul and helps us maintain a connection with Allah (SWT). Whether it be these day to day Ibaadat that help keep us in check or taking medicine to help treat mental illnesses- mental health is a very critical issue, especially in today’s world.

Rafique Awan:

I do believe that suicide is haram due to all the evidence that was put together in the paper. After writing this paper, I have also come to realize that we, as Muslims, need to do more in order to prevent suicide and depression. I also concluded that positive thoughts lead to positive feelings and positive actions, which overall leads to a better mental health. Islam gives us Muslims the key to happiness and sound mental health. Just like meditation, the five daily prayers offer serenity and inner peace. I also learned of the different types of nafs that a person can have and how spirituality has a direct connection to our mental health.

Overall, Islam bestows upon us ways to better our mental health and sets the guidelines for us to follow so that we may live our life as peacefully as possible.