



WRITE FOR US! DONATE ISLAM SOCIETY LIFE CULT

#LIFE

# Cultivating Mental Well-Being in the Muslim Community [Part I]: Debunking Myths, Steps Toward Seeking Support



Published May 18, 2023

By Rania Awaad, M.D.





***Authors:*** Rania Awaad, MD, Ayisat Adegbindin, Sanah Ahmed, Aisha A

## Introduction

Within Muslim communities, mental health remains a topic often shrouded in stigma and misunderstanding, despite its importance in bettering our health. Mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological, and overall well-being, influencing our ability to make decisions.<sup>1</sup> Many individuals hold the misconception that mental health challenges can only be cured spiritually. However, this misconception is false and neglects the importance of professional support.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Muslims are encouraged by Islam to take care of their holistic health and well-being. It is crucial to discuss mental health in the context of Muslim communities, working to mitigate these disparities and promote Muslim mental health. Muslims may experience compounded health challenges due to their intersecting identities. Religious discrimination faced by Muslims can contribute to significant mental health issues including anxiety, depression, alcohol use, and subclinical paranoia.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, American Muslims were found to have a high rate of suicide attempts. Our Muslim predecessors emphasized the significance of physical well-being; they also recognized and prioritized mental health, demonstrated through

rich Islamic history surrounding mental health.<sup>5</sup> As a group of researchers at the Stanford Muslim Mental Health and Islamic Psychology (MMHIP) aim to debunk the myths surrounding mental health and Islam, provide guidance on seeking therapy, and shed light on the types of mental health professionals available to support Muslims in their journey towards improved mental well-being.

**Myth #1:** *“Seeking therapy is a sign of weakness or a lack of faith.”*

---

### Keep supporting MuslimMatters for the sake of Allah

Alhamdulillah, we're at over 850 supporters. Help us get to 900 supporters this month. All it takes is a small gift from a reader like you to keep us going for just \$2 / month.

The Prophet (SAW) has taught us the best of deeds are those that do good consistently, even if they are small. **Click here to support MuslimMatters with a monthly donation of \$2 per month.** Set it and collect blessings from Allah (swt) for the khayr you're supporting without thinking about it.

**Fact:** Seeking therapy is a good step toward healing and bettering your mental health. It is not intended to decrease one's faith; rather, it supplements one's reliance on Allah سبحانه وتعالى by making use of the resources and assistance that are available to us.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: The Prophet ﷺ would say the following du'a:

“O Allah! I seek refuge with You from worry and grief, from incapacity, laziness, from cowardice and miserliness, from being heavily in debt and being overpowered by others.”

يَا أَيُّهَا اللَّهُ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ مِنَ الْوَجَعِ وَالْحُزَنِ، وَالْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ، وَالْجُبْنِ وَالْبُخْلِ، وَضَلَعِ الدِّينِ، وَغَلَبَةِ الرِّجَالِ .

[Sahih al-Bukhari 6369]

This supplication illustrates the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ recognized that these emotions carry heavy weight. Psychological challenges, such as worry and grief, are not trivial emotions that we feel – they are significant. Therefore, we should consider seeking treatment, while also asking Allah ﷻ to protect us from these challenges.

**Myth #2:** “*The Prophets were immune to psychological challenges*”

**Fact:** The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ experienced intense sadness in a year-long episode of bereavement after the death of his wife, Khadija رضي الله عنها, and his father, Abu Talib. This period of intense grief is known as the “Year of Sadness,” highlighting the experience of the Prophet ﷺ in coping with loss and demonstrating that even the most resilient individuals can face psychological challenges. The Prophet ﷺ taught us about reframing that can help us reduce the stigma associated with suffering. Yahya Suhaib bin Sinan reported that: The Prophet ﷺ said,

“How wonderful is the case of a believer; there is good for him in every adversity that befalls him, and this applies only to a believer [...] and if adversity befalls him, he can

patiently and that is better for him” [\[Muslim\]](#).

**Myth #3:** *“Religious scholars can address all mental health concerns.*

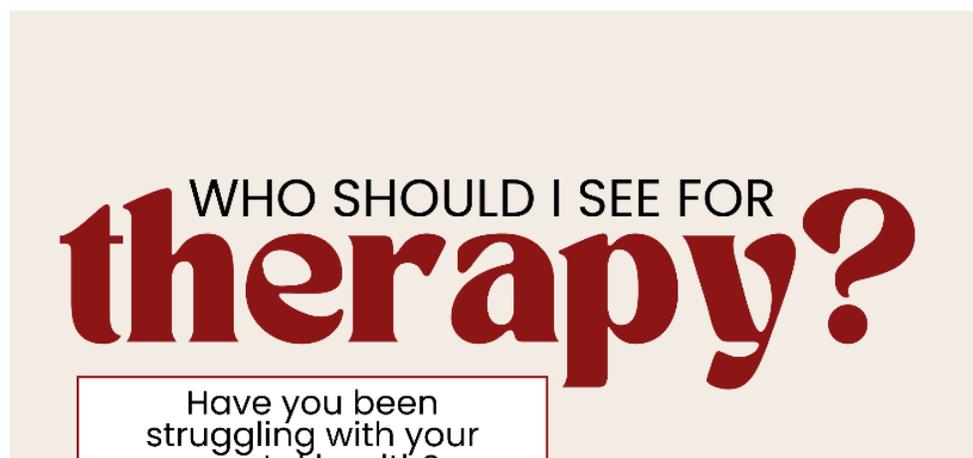
**Fact:** While religious leaders offer valuable spiritual guidance, they may not have the specific training to address complex mental health issues. The Prophet ﷺ said,

“There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created for it a treatment.”

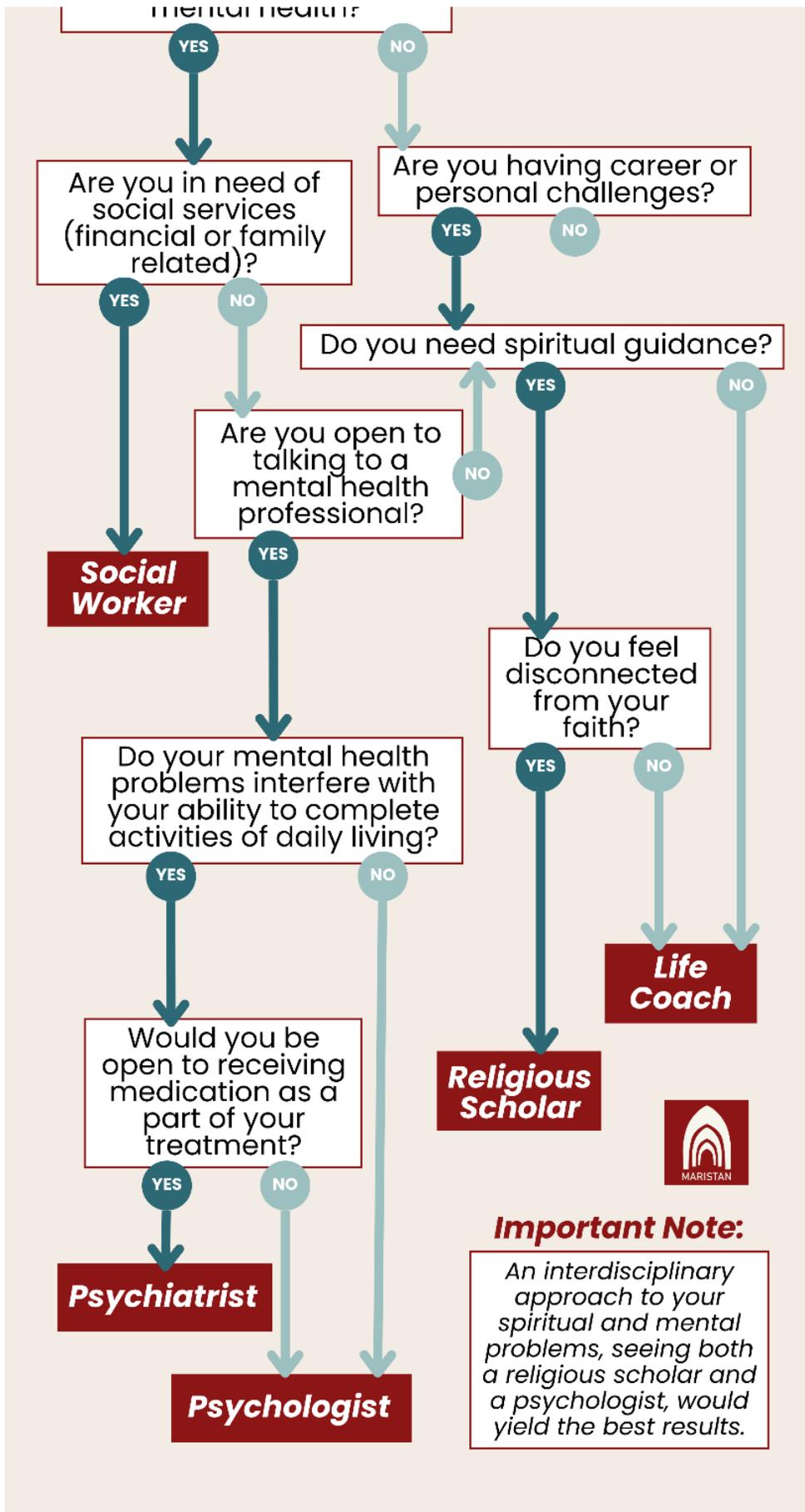
[\[Sahih Al-Bukhari 5678\]](#)

It is the responsibility of every individual to seek all possible treatments for their mental health. Seeking help from mental health professionals does not undermine or diminish the role of imams. Mental health professionals, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, receive clinical training in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions.

## Who Should I See for Therapy?



Along with our co-partner [Maristan](#), researchers at the [Muslim Mental Health](#) and [Islamic Psychology](#) curated this flow



the intention of your decision on which health professional be the best to see. This is not a complete list of mental health professionals, it is a starting point for those not familiar with seeking help for mental health issues they may be facing. We also realize that the answer to these questions may not be a simple yes or no, so we have provided some helpful insights to consider when approaching them.

- *Have you been struggling with your mental health?*

Whether it be due to school, relationship issues, faith, struggling with

mental health is s  
that many people  
experience. Answ  
this question if yo

been experiencing difficulties such as disrupted sleep, irritability, loss  
change in appetite, worsening physical symptoms, and/or low energy  
physical manifestations of worsening mental health are best treated a  
possible. Answer *no* to this question if your mental health has been in  
state.

- *Are you in need of social services (financial or family related)?*

Social services are typically accessed through a plethora of governme  
agencies, depending on the state. Answer *yes* if you are facing difficu  
as food insecurity, are behind on rent or utility bills, and/or are havin  
domestic problems. Remember, reaching out for help when you are in  
sign of strength. Answer *no* if you feel comfortable with your ability t  
food, electricity, and housing.

- *Are you having career or personal challenges?*

Without proper guidance, some life situations can be difficult to navi  
may feel stagnant and have no clear sight of what we want to do next  
*yes* if you feel like you are lacking purpose or direction in your life, or  
like you are not progressing in your career or personal life. Answer *n*  
feel comfortable with where you are in life and have clear goals and k

to reach them.

- *Are you open to talking to a mental health professional?*

Mental health professionals are helpful if you are struggling with a known mental health concern, or you just need a safe space to express yourself without judgment. Answer *yes* if your mental health or emotional concerns are impacting your daily life and function. Answer *no* if you already have a support system you can confide in. However, it is important to note that people who have a reliable support system could benefit from therapy.

- *Do your mental health problems interfere with your ability to complete activities of daily living?*

Moderate to severe mental illness can manifest in disruption of activities of daily living and should be addressed if they have gotten to this point. It takes courage to recognize and admit that we need help, even with the people closest to us. Recognizing that there is a problem and addressing it is a first step toward progress. Answer *yes* if your mental health struggles are interfering with your ability to maintain your hygiene, prepare meals, communicate, and/or use public transport. Answer *no* if your mental health problems are not severe enough to impact your ability to complete activities of daily living.

- *Would you be open to receiving medication as a part of your treatment?*

When you are battling mental health issues, there are complex changes in brain chemistry at play. Medications can help to stabilize brain chemistry and

work on external factors through therapy and lifestyle changes. Answer *yes* if you are experiencing difficulties such as significant, persistent psychological symptoms such as depressed mood, anxiety, dysregulated eating, or disrupted sleep. Please be sure to consult with a psychiatrist before taking any medication to treat your symptoms. Answer *no* if you are not open to and/or have consulted a psychiatrist about your symptoms already.

- *Do you need spiritual guidance?*

Answer *yes* if you are looking to deepen your relationship with the divine, learn and grow in your personal spirituality. Answer *no* if you are content with your religious and spiritual beliefs and do not seek guidance in these areas.

- *Do you feel disconnected from your faith?*

When dealing with mental health issues or mental illness, it is not uncommon to feel disconnected from our faith. Misconceptions that having a mental health problem is a sign of weak faith also contribute to this sense of distance. However, we know as Muslims that like any other illness, mental illness is a test from Allah سُبْحَانَكَ وَتَعَالَى and He only tests those He loves. Answer *yes* if you need advice on ways to become more connected to your faith and provide steps you can take to do so. Answer *no* if you feel comfortable with your current state.

## Types of Mental Health Professionals

# TYPES OF mental health professionals



Profession (Education)	Qualifications	Prescribe Medication	Take Insurance	How
<b>Psychiatrist</b> (MD or DO)	Assesses both the <b>mental and physical</b> aspects of <b>psychological problems</b>	YES	YES	By appointment, private office
<b>Psychologist</b> (MA, PhD, PsyD, or EdD)	Helps people cope with <b>stressful</b> situations, overcome <b>addictions</b> and manage <b>chronic illnesses</b> ; administers <b>assessments</b> to <b>diagnose</b> a condition or gain more insight into a client's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.	NO	NOT TYPICALLY	By appointment
<b>Islamic Psychologist</b> (MA, PhD, PsyD, or EdD + Islamic Psychology training)	Possess the same training as psychologists, and have training in <b>Islamic psychology</b> , the study of the <b>nafs or self</b> and the psyche from an <b>Islamic perspective</b> .	NO	NO	By appointment
<b>Social Worker</b> (MSW or LCSW)	Provides <b>social services</b> , teaching, consultation and other non-clinical social services to those in need	NO	NO	Asking you to use your local health or social service agencies.
<b>Marriage &amp; Family Therapist</b> (MFT)	Treats the full range of mental and emotional disorders while addressing how those conditions affect relationships within a couple or family	NO	NO	By appointment
<b>Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor</b> (MA/MS Counseling)	Works with people to overcome mental health, emotional, and substance abuse issues	NO	NO	By appointment
<b>Life Coach</b> (BA & certification)	Counsels and encourages clients through <b>personal or career challenges</b>	NO	NO	By appointment
<b>Religious Scholar</b> (BA, MS, PhD, and/or Ijazah in religious studies)	Provides <b>religious and spiritual guidance</b>	NO	NO	By appointment at a mosque

- *Psychiatrist, MD or DO*

Trained to diagnose mental health disorders and prescribe medication, psychiatrists are qualified to assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological problems. As medical doctors, their form of healing often involves medication and some also offer talk therapy. Like most doctors, they typically accept insurance, and you can access them by scheduling an appointment.

- *Psychologist, MA, PhD, or PsyD*

Psychologists can help people learn to cope with stressful situations,

addictions, manage their chronic illnesses, and perform tests and assessments that can help diagnose a condition or tell more about the way a person feels, and behaves. Typically, they cannot prescribe medication and may not accept insurance. You can access them by scheduling an appointment.

- *Social Worker, MSW or LCSW*

Social workers provide social services, teaching, consultation, and other clinical social services to those in need. They can help to navigate government agencies that provide help to those in need and serve as advocates for clients. They do not prescribe medication and may not take insurance. You can access them by asking your doctor to refer you to one or by contacting your local public mental health or behavioral health agencies.

- *Marriage and Family Therapist, MFT*

Marriage and family therapists treat a wide range of mental and emotional disorders, as well as addressing how those conditions affect relationships within a couple or family. They are able to provide both individual and family sessions to best assess and address the needs of their clients. They do not prescribe medication and, depending on the provider, may or may not accept insurance. Marriage and family therapists can be accessed by scheduling an appointment.

- *Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, MA/MS Counseling*

Licensed professional clinical counselors work with people to overcome

health, emotional, and substance abuse issues. They have a master's or doctorate degree in counseling or psychology and can perform individual, group, or family therapy. Counselors differ from psychologists in the assessments they conduct. Counselors will conduct a biopsychosocial assessment, psychologists will conduct comprehensive psychological evaluations since they have a doctorate degree in psychology. They do not prescribe medication and, depending on the provider, may or may not take insurance. You can access a counselor by scheduling an appointment.

- *Islamic Psychologist, MA/MS, MFT, LCSW, Ph.D., PsyD, MD or L*  
*Islamic Psychology Training*

Islamic psychologists receive the same training as other licensed mental health clinicians mentioned above **plus** have training in Islamic psychology, which is the study of the psyche from an Islamic perspective. Unless the Islamic psychologist also has psychiatric credentials, they cannot prescribe medication and may not accept insurance. You can access them by scheduling an appointment. Be sure to do your research beforehand, so you know the person you speak to has formal Islamic Psychology training and the relevant knowledge to answer your questions.

- *Life Coach, BA, and certification*

Life coaches can guide you through the process of setting goals that challenge you on a path toward a more fulfilling, meaningful life, and then hold you accountable as you work toward those goals. They are **not** professionals.

health providers. They do not prescribe medication and do not take medication. You can access them by making an appointment with a life coaching service near you.

- *Religious Scholar, BA, BS, MA, MS, Ph.D., and/or Ijazah in religious studies*

Religious scholars provide religious and spiritual guidance to people. “religious scholar” can include, but is not limited to: sheikh/sheikha, mufti, alim/alima, and ustadh/ustadha. They are **not** professional mental health providers unless they are dually trained as one. You can typically find your local scholar by making an appointment to speak with them. It is important to do your research beforehand, so you know that the person you speak to has the right knowledge to answer your questions.

*[For more information and Muslim mental health resources, go to: <https://maristan.org/resources>.]*

## Conclusion

Addressing mental health within the Muslim community is critical for overall general well-being and reducing stigma. It is essential to clear up many common misconceptions surrounding mental health and Islam. Seeking treatment is not a sign of weakness or a lack of faith, instead, it may bring us closer to our faith. <sup>6</sup> The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ experienced challenges, like so many of us, and emphasized the importance of managing grief and stress. While religious scholars offer vital spiritual guidance, they might not have the specific

needed to handle complex mental health concerns. Working with mental health specialists alongside religious scholars provides for a more holistic approach.

This article's flow chart offers guidance on what type of practitioner is most appropriate when wanting to seek therapy. Mental health practitioners, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and life coaches, offer unique approaches when it comes to mental health care. It is important to carefully research and search for a mental health professional that is right for you. Some mental health professionals can incorporate an individual's spiritual and religious concerns, while others may be experienced in serving a specific subpopulation. Understanding their roles and qualifications can help individuals make informed choices about seeking support.

By openly discussing mental health and seeking appropriate care, we can create a supportive environment that encourages people to utilize their resources alongside other resources to improve their psychological well-being. We hope that this article serves as a resource to promote understanding, compassion, and improved mental health outcomes within the Muslim community.

***Related:***

– [Our Struggles – Mental Health And Muslim Communities | The Family Youth Institute – MuslimMatters.org](#)

– [Suicide and Mental Health in the Muslim Community – MuslimMatters.org](#)

---

## Keep supporting MuslimMatters for the sake of Allah

Alhamdulillah, we're at over 850 supporters. Help us get to 900 supporters this month. All it takes is a small gift from a reader like you to keep us going for just \$2 / month.

The Prophet (SAW) has taught us the best of deeds are those that do good consistently, even if they are small. **Click here to support MuslimMatters with a monthly donation of \$2 per month.** Set it and collect blessings from Allah (swt) for the khayr you're supporting without thinking about it.

**RELATED TOPICS:** #FEATURED #FEATURED LIFE #ISLAM #MENTAL HEALTH #MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS #MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH #MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING #MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT #MUSLIM COMMUNITY #MUSLIM MENTAL HEALTH #PSYCHIATRIST #PSYCHOLOGIST #THERAPY

### DON'T MISS

**Rethinking How We Teach The Topic Of Sirah In K-12 Settings**

### UP NEXT

**Structural Cohesion In The Quran [Series]: Surah Al Fatihah**



**Rania Awaad, M.D.**



Rania Awaad M.D., is a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Stanford University School of Medicine where she is the Director of the Stanford Muslim Mental Health & Islamic Psychology Lab, Associate Director of the Division of Public Mental Health and Population Sciences, and Co-Chief of the Diversity and Cultural Inclusion Section in department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. She is also the Executive Director of Muslim Mental Health Research. Her research and clinical work are focused on the mental health of Muslims. Her courses at Stanford range from teaching a pioneering course on Islamic Psychology, instructing medical students and residents on

integrating culture and religion into medical care to teaching undergraduate and graduate students th of xenophobia. Some of her most recent academic publications include an edited volume on “Islam Psychiatry” (Springer, 2019), “Applying Islamic Principals to Clinical Mental Health” (Routledge, 2020) upcoming clinical textbook on Muslim Mental Health for the American Psychiatric Association. She i instructor at the Cambridge Muslim College, TISA and a Senior Fellow at Yaqeen Institute and ISPU. I serves as the Director of The Rahmah Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating M and girls. She has previously served as the founding Clinical Director of the Khalil Center-San Francis Professor of Islamic Law at Zaytuna College. Prior to studying medicine, she pursued classical Islam Damascus, Syria and holds certifications (ijāzah) in Qur’an, Islamic Law and other branches of the Isl Follow her @DrRaniaAwaad She is also a researcher and the Director of the Stanford Muslims and M Lab where she mentors and oversees multiple lines of research focused on Muslim mental health.

*YOU MAY LIKE*



**Ramadan In The Quiet Moments: The Spiritual Power Of What We Don't Do**



**30 Nights with the Qur’an: A Ramadan Series for Muslim Teens**



**Keep Zakat Sacred: A Poor, Not A Political T**

1 COMMENT

*TRENDING*

