

International Seminar on Counseling and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Perspective

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A three-day international seminar jointly organized by the Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and the International Institute of Islamic Thought Malaysia (IIITM) was held August 15-17, 1997, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Inaugurating the seminar, the Honorable Rector Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman expressed happiness with the number of participants who are trying to look at human problems from an Islamic perspective. He said that intense research and hard work are needed to establish an Islamic framework of understanding human behavior and that scholars should not be impatient during this process. He reminded the participants that Muslim psychologists derive their understanding from the Qur'an and the Sunnah and that therefore their vision is different from other psychologists and counselors. He also said that Muslim psychologists have to delve deeply into themselves to gain self-understanding and self-strength before they can help others. The conference was marked by keynote addresses that were delivered by renowned Muslim psychologists from around the world.

Dr. Malik Badri of Sudan highlighted the achievements and discoveries of early Muslim scholars in the field of psychotherapy. He pointed out that Ibn Sina explained the learning of adaptive and maladaptive behavior on the basis of associative learning principles. He said that Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali also explicated the developments of feeling of revulsion toward natural and useful objects in terms of stimulus substitution similar to today's conditioning concept. Dr. Badri further men-

tioned that Al-Ghazali and Al-Balkhi had already given the explanations for the processes of stimulus generalizations and reciprocal inhibition before modern psychology.

Dr. Abou-Hatab from Egypt criticized the behaviorist model of psychology, which is regarded as scientific and objective but which discards the entities of the mind and soul. He indicated that in the positivistic notion of science, religion was regarded as subjective, personal, and unmeasurable. However, the postpositivistic view of science has uncovered the pseudo-objectivity and measurability of science, and now it stands closer to the notion of religion.

Dr. Manzurul Haq from Bangladesh focused on the purpose and reasons of man's creation and the root causes of the psychological and social problems. He indicated that man is composed of both spiritual and bodily components, where the former is a source of strength and the latter is a source of weakness. He argued that a person's striving is determined by the nature of the goals set by him, that is, whether the person regards the world as an end goal or as an instrument for the hereafter. He explained his understanding of personality from an Islamic perspective and suggested that the actualization of divine potential by the individual is the driving force in personality development.

Dr. Azhar Ali Rizvi from Pakistan highlighted the shortcomings of the western models of therapy, indicating that western models are only partial, as they focus on either individuation or socialization. He identified faith and spirituality as vital components of psychotherapy that are often neglected in the western models. He mentioned the growing awareness of some western professionals about religion and indicated that the work of earlier Muslim thinkers and philosophers could be of great impetus to psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective.

In addition to the four keynote addresses, thirty other papers were presented on different themes. A majority of presenters from IIUM are international faculty representing Muslim countries, particularly the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. Major themes and the papers presented under those themes could be divided roughly into the following five categories:

I. Qur'anic Insights into Psychotherapy

- The Qur'anic Insights into Psychotherapy, *Abdul Khaliq Kazi, IIUM*
- The Impact of Islamic Revelation on Psychotherapy, *Ziad Al-Daghamin, IIUM*
- Iman-Centered Therapy, *Nadiyah Elias, University Utara Malaysia*
- Spiritual Health: A Preventive Approach, *Zakariyya Abdel-Hady, Glasgow University, UK*
- Psychotherapy and Counseling in Islam, *Jatinder Kaur, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India*

- Prevention of AIDS: Islamic Solutions, *Waheeda Khan, Jamia Millia Islamia New Delhi, India*
 - Moral and Spiritual Aspects of Counseling, *Mumtaz Fatima Jafari, IIUM*
 - Psychotherapy from an Islamic Perspective, *Mohamad Abdur Rashid, IIUM*
 - Mental Health and Prevention in Islam, *G.H. Mobaraki, Seid Alshohada Hospital, Isfahan, Iran*
- II. Counseling Approaches Based on Early Muslim Philosophers
- The Moral Therapy of Isfahani (10th Century), *Yasien Mohamed, Department of Arabic Studies, South Africa*
 - The Criteria of Counseling in Islamic Perspective and Practical Structure for Psychotherapy, *S.A. Hosseini, Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, Iran*
 - Psychotherapy in Iran, *Shahrenaz, Mortazavi & Ferdowsi Sima, University of Shahid Beheshti, Teheran, Iran*
 - Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani as one of the Earliest Cognitive Therapists, *Sabeena Watanabe, IIUM*
 - Islamic Counseling for Moral and Spiritual Development: An Introduction to the System of Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Zafar A. Ansari, IIUM*
- III. Human Nature and Personality from an Islamic Perspective
- The Human Being in Qur'an: Subject Matter and Methodology, *Mustapha Achoui, IIUM*
 - The Islamic Conception of Personality: Definition, Dimension, the Psychospiritual Growth and Well-being, *Jamil Farooqui & Saiyad Fareed Ahmad, IIUM*
 - Mental Health and Prevention in Islam, *G.H. Mobaraki, Seid Alshohada Hospital, Isfahan, Iran*
 - Mental Health in the Verses of the Holy Qur'an, *S.A. Bayanzadeth, J. Bolhari & A. Ramasani, Tehran Psychiatric Institute, Iran*
- IV. Empirical Studies
- The Effect of Behavioral Parent Training on the Reduction of Externalized Behavioral Problems in Preschool Children, *M. Kalantari, H. Molavi, and M.R. Abedi, University of Isfahan, Iran*
 - Visual Recognition at Birth: Evidence for the Integration of Visual and Auditory Cues in Early Processing of Information, *Fatama Zohra Sai, IIUM*
 - Attitude Toward Capital Punishment: An Islamic Perspective, *Alay Ahmad, University of Peshawar, Pakistan*
 - The Relation of Islamic Beliefs and Practices to Mental Health of University Students, *Zahra Habibi, Bu Ali Sina University Hamadan, Iran*
 - The Islamic Approach to the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress: A Case Study of an Australian Muslim Girl, *M. F. El-Sendiony, The American University in Cairo, Egypt*
 - Religious Conversion: The Personal Experience of Muslim Converts, *Rafic A. Al-Banavvi, Jeddah Psychological Center, Saudi Arabia*

- Qur'an Memorization: A Psychological Experiment, *Nina Abdullah, IIIT, Herndon, USA*
- V. Others
- The Role and Relevance of Counseling Psychology in a Developing Country—The Case of Ethiopia, *Yusuf O. Abedi, Addis Abbaba, Ethiopia*
 - Psychotherapy in a Vacuum: Irrelevance of Asocial and Value-Alien Western Approaches to Muslim Societies, *Ashiq Ali Shah, IIUM*
 - Dilemmas and Doubts: The Perspective of a South African Muslim Woman Psychologist, *Zubeta Paruk, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa*
 - The Impact of Anonymity in Religious Expressions, *B. Birashk, J. Bolhari, R. and Ghosemabadi, Tehran Psychiatric Institute, Iran*
 - Work and Family Roles in Relation to Well-Being: A Comparison between British and Malaysia Women, *Noraini Mohd Noor, IIUM*
 - Readability and its Relation to IQ: Implications to Teaching and Identifying Dyslexic Students, *Eskandar Fathi-Azar, University of Tabriz, Iran*
 - A Comparison of Sexual Identity and Emotional Disturbance between Feminine and Masculine Boys: An Islamic Perspective, *Sharifah Muzlia Binti Syed Mustafa, and Pusat Pendidikan Persediaan, Institute Technology Mara, Malaysia*

As is evident from the above distribution, the majority of papers were presented on Qur'anic insights into psychotherapy. The speakers primarily emphasized that the Qur'an indicates symptoms of mental and bodily illnesses. The Qur'an not only identifies different illnesses and their causes but also offers their remedies. Concepts like faith (*iman*) and correct action (*'amalun salihun*), have been used as basic concepts in different verses of the Qur'an. Moreover, a content analysis of these verses reveals conceptual categories like mental health and family, psychosocial problems, and stress and coping. Papers on psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective emphasized the need to incorporate Islamic teachings and methods in psychotherapy. Speakers agreed that counselors and psychotherapists practicing Islamic psychotherapy must be familiar with and well-trained in Islamic shari'ah. The speakers on the moral and spiritual aspects in counseling and psychotherapy termed the practice of psychotherapy a "moral undertaking." They highlighted the importance of the moral values and spirituality in psychotherapy from the Islamic perspective and identified moral and spiritual weaknesses such as jealousy, simulation, and greed as causes of psychological disorders.

The empirical papers did not necessarily cover the psychotherapeutic or counseling aspects at all, but they did touch upon other realms of psychology. It was encouraging to see that Muslim psychologists are conducting and publishing empirical research at the international level. Iranian psychologists were especially keen about this matter, and they

shared with us their journal, *Andisha Raftaar*, which publishes various psychological studies in Persian and abstracts in English.

Another set of papers addressed the issue of human personality from Qur'anic and Islamic perspectives highlighting how the Qur'an describes the physical, spiritual, cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of human beings. Methodologies to be used to study human beings were also suggested. It was also argued that an Islamic personality founded on Islamic traits and spirituality could quell psychological problems.

Another theme of the papers related to the counseling approaches based on the contributions of the early Muslim philosophers. Counseling models for the moral and spiritual development were proposed based on the writings of Ashraf Ali Thanawi, *Moral Therapy of Isfahani*, *Criteria for Counselors* (based on the teachings of Imam Sadiq), and *Cognitive Therapy of Abdul Qadir Jilani*.

The last category of papers consisted of those that did not clearly fit into the divisions listed above. These presentations were important, however, to the theme of the conference and addressed issues relevant to specific cultures.

In a special session on the Islamization of psychology on the last day of the conference, presentations were followed by an open discussion. It was argued that most misunderstandings in psychology have been created by incorrect assumptions about man, ranging from the Darwinian concept of the animalistic nature of man to the model of man as information-processing unit. These models neglect the spiritual aspect of man. It was pointed out that psychology could not do without metaphysics. The idea of quantification may be fascinating, but it often leads to an illusion about knowledge, especially if the method of quantification is incorrect.

Participants agreed that the conference was successful in establishing a network of Muslim psychologists to communicate on issues of counseling and psychotherapy and other issues from the Islamic perspective. They also agreed that such conferences should be conducted at least every three years. An International Association of Muslim Psychologists was also formed, with representatives chosen from several Muslim countries. Concluding remarks were given by Dr. Jamal Barzinji (acting dean of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, IIUM). Dr. Mahfooz Ansari (conference chairperson and head of the Department of Psychology, IIUM) read the recommendations for short- and long-term plans in psychology.