Evil Eye, Jinn Possession, and Mental Health Issues: An Islamic Perspective

Book Review

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Introduction

Book reference

Title: Evil eye, Jinn possession, and mental health issues: An Islamic perspective

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About the author

G. Hussein Rassool is currently Professor of Islamic Psychology, Dean for the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Director of Research & Publications and Head of the Psychology Department at the International Open University (Islamic Online University).

Professor Hussein has a wealth academic research papers and book publications under his belt including Alcohol and Drug Misuse: A Handbook for Students and Health Professionals, Islamic Counselling, Dual Diagnosis Nursing: Nursing Management, Addiction for Nurses, Substance Use and Misuse, Dual Diagnosis: Substance Misuse and Psychiatric Disorders, Cultural Competence in Caring
for Muslim Patients, Understanding Addiction Behaviours: Theoretical and Clinical Practice in Health and Social Care, and Addiction Nursing: Perspectives on Professional and Clinical Practice.

About the book

Evil eye, Jinn possession, and mental health issues: an Islamic perspective is part of a series of books ‘Exploring Mental Health Issues’ published by Routledge.

The book is presented over 25 chapters, divided into three broader sections; content and background, evil eye and Possession Syndrome, and prevention, therapeutic and spiritual interventions.

Stated aims

Evil eye, Jinn possession, and mental health issues: an Islamic perspective ‘aims to raise awareness of the cultural considerations, religion and spirituality involved in the assessment and treatment interventions of Muslim patients with mental health problems’ by addressing the link between these often dismissed things and mental health. The complexity of this issue has often been overlooked and this book fills the missing gap in not only addressing these issues from a descriptive perspective but takes things a step further in educating the reader on how to manage the complex issues that can arise as a result of this interaction. The author argues that it is vital to consider mental disorders as a multifactorial affair, in which spiritual, social, psychological and physical factors may all play a role and need addressing to effectively treat the one with these presenting ailments.

Intended audience:

‘Mental Health Issues is an essential manual for mental health professionals, social workers and psychologists. It should also be of interest to academics and students in the healthcare sciences. The aim being to educate the target audience in Muslim beliefs and how to work with patients who hold
beliefs, such as Jinn possession, by providing accessible literature on clinical issues and practice, interventions, management and evidence-based practice.

**Critical review**

On the whole, this book clearly addresses the relevant issues successfully in accordance with its aims. However, as with all literature, there are also some shortfalls that should also be highlighted to provide a balanced review.

**Strengths**

**Much needed**

Despite the dire need for the information presented in this book to be made widely available, and openly spoken about, both in the Muslim community, as well as addressed in the education of mental health practitioners, to date it has seldom been written about. As yet, this has only contributed to and strengthened the already stigmatised issue of mental health in the Muslim community. It is little wonder that mental health practitioners in the West are unaware of the spiritual aspect of some presenting mental health ailments and often completely overlook the spiritual element in treating their patients.

This book takes the first step in providing practitioners with the educational element of understanding the Islamic perspective on mental health by providing a thorough and well described outline of the necessary topic, along with extensive evidence to support every point made. Further necessary suggestions from a practical perspective are then made about how to deal with the issues presented by the Muslim client experiencing mental health problems that may be a result of a spiritual defect requiring spiritual intervention alongside traditional medical and psychological treatment.
Without proper knowledge of the topic, and without acceptance that these things are occurring in the community and need addressing, the Muslim community will continue to brush the issue under the carpet and mental health practitioners, particularly in the West, will be none the wiser on the Islamic perspective on the matter. As a result the actual person suffering with such conditions will either be devoid of treatment either due to the stigma in seeking treatment therefore causing them to not attend, or if they do attend, then the practitioner does not have the appropriate knowledge on how to treat the issue successfully and holistically with the inclusion of the spiritual element. This book finally takes the much-needed step in breaking free from the bubble in which the community currently sits in an attempt to overcome this problem and ease the difficulties of the Muslim suffering with mental health difficulties and/or a spiritual condition such as Jinn possession.

*Well structured*

The book is well structured from the outset with the chapters clearly outlined in a logical order, beginning primarily with providing the more basic knowledge of key Islamic terms that are relevant to the content. No stone is left unturned in terms of clearly outlining these points in such a way that even the one who has had little contact with the Muslim community ever will have a much clearer understanding of the key concepts that are necessary to understand when treating a presenting Muslim client. It then logically progresses to various common spiritual ailments themselves and addresses them each from both the Islamic and Western perspective in order to place everything in a context that is fully understandable to practitioners who have otherwise been unaware that, for example, there may be a spiritual aspect to the presentation of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Beyond this, the author then takes the best next logical step to end the book by making practical suggestions on how this new holistic approach, that includes the spiritual element can be realistically implemented to not only improve the practise of mental health treatment, but also to improve the quality of life for the one suffering with any of the given conditions.
Furthermore, the use of tables throughout is a very useful addition in presenting the information in key summarised points in a way that puts it all into context as well as clarifying some complex new information that may be difficult to digest for the one learning this information for the first time.

Even though this book is a non-fiction piece, it is presented in such a way that the reader’s attention is maintained throughout. Whether the author intended this or not, the reader will find themselves asking questions throughout that they feel the need to have answered, only to turn the page to find the answer in the very next section. Even if this was not the intention, it is certainly indicative of a good structure that ensures the reader is well engaged and captures the reader's attention throughout.

*Thoroughly researched*

It is clear that much effort has gone into researching the topic as the author has presented numerous references throughout with a list of references to refer to at the end of each chapter. This shows a deep commitment to the topic as well as a convincing argument to support all presented points. It also demonstrates a passion towards a topic that has long been avoided. The author’s extensive list of publications on similar topics makes him a credible leader in the field to put forward a convincing argument on the topic.

Not many have been brave enough to speak up about the topic, but this author has made his stance very clear and very convincing. This is the approach that is required if this issue is to be taken seriously. The author has presented both psychological and Islamic references throughout as a means to demonstrate to the reader that both the Western and Islamic approaches can be used to successfully complement one another despite opinions to the contrary. This goes a long way in providing a convincing argument to both the mental health practitioner, regardless of if they are a Muslim or not, as well as to the lay Muslim with no prior knowledge of mental health, that it is in fact entirely possible to take a more holistic and collaborative approach that tackles both the
physical and psychological side alongside the spiritual side providing the best treatment to the Muslim in need of the relevant medical, psychological and spiritual assistance.

A practical approach

Whist the needed facts are presented earlier chapters, without the practical guidance on how to actually implement these approaches, the information becomes quite redundant to a point. This book clearly outlines in the latter chapters how this information can be a successful applied by initiating a collaborative approach with efforts from both the mental health practitioners as well as the local religious leaders to deliver a holistic approach to treating presenting clients in the best possible way to meet both their psychological and spiritual needs.

Limitations

Audience

Whilst it is stated in the preface that this book is for mental health professionals and perhaps students also, it doesn’t specify whether the target audience are Muslims or not. One might assume that due to the depth of which definitions are given of numerous Islamic concepts are given that the primary target is the non-Muslim. However, this is not entirely clear as there are also parts where quite thorough explanations of mental health concepts also, which gives the impression that it may also be a text targeting the Muslim who is not very knowledgeable on mental health. Whilst this provides a very thorough approach reaching a wide audience, it may throw the reader off in confusion at times. However, it is thought the author is perhaps trying to address all the necessary parties who need to be involved in improving the situation regarding this problem.

Bias

There are several references throughout the text to the Eurocentric and Orientalist influence in shaping the current situation relating to Islamophobia and difficulties that Muslims face today. However, given that on the most part, the primary target audience will likely by Westerners, it is
possible that some of these comments throughout the book may be perceived to be offensive by those who belong to the culture which is being highlighted as responsible for the difficulties faced by Muslims today. However, a good practitioner is aware of their own bias and those possessed by others and is taught how to manage these accordingly being more open minded to alternative perspectives. However, given that it is not only fully trained professionals who may be reading this text, there may be more vulnerable readers such as students, who may be unable to manage their feelings as yet due to lack of training.

Of course it is clear that the author is a Muslim and has been affected by the impact of Eurocentrism and Orientalism, but the reader may not be aware of the experience as a non-Muslim. To some extent it is useful to know to understand the Muslim experience in the West, but perhaps this book is not necessarily the appropriate place to do so.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the author has done a fantastic job of accomplishing the aims and objectives of the book laid out in the preface. Whilst there may be some issues pertaining to the potential confusion over the intended audience, as well as the bias that may be perceived as offensive to the non-Muslim reader, there are also multiple strengths that outweigh these points. The most important thing being the urgent need for material like this text to be made available to the mental health professional, as well as religious leaders as means to confront the issue head on. The author has not left any stone unturned in terms of thoroughly educating non-Muslim as well as providing extensive supporting research and practical applications in implementing what has been learnt in the text by presenting it in a well structured and easy to read format.