

AN INVESTIGATION INTO AL-BALKHI'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE BOOK 'SUSTENANCE OF THE SOUL'

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is an important issue today because it can affect a person's daily life as an individual and their contribution to the community. The DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as the main source of diagnosing mental disorders today is from the American Psychiatric Association which came from the research of American students and animals as subjects of the research. It is culture-bound since it cannot be applied to all nations. As a Muslim, the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)) influenced the Muslims' personality and traits. It also had special values that may be contrary to American culture. Therefore, the need to explore Islamic Psychology as a solution for Muslim mental health nowadays is significant. This study explores the concept of mental health as recorded by al-Balkhi in his book 'Sustenance of the Soul'. In this book, al-Balkhi explained the strategy for maintaining mental health. The concept of mental health based on the book 'Sustenance of the Soul' is a treatise based on scientifically proven practices and with an Islamic perspective. Al-Balkhi also classified mental disorders into four main categories. He explained the symptoms for each category and the treatments. Al-Balkhi's concept of mental health can be a great tool to develop

Islamic Psychology since it is derived from the early Muslim scholars.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Al-Balkhi, Sustenance of the Soul.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The state of an individual's mental health is a crucial aspect of their overall well-being that should not be neglected. It involves their emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which allows them to achieve their full potential, handle life's pressures, work productively, and contribute positively to their community. Mental health is not only the absence of mental disorders but also a dynamic process that contributes to the success of performing mental functions, resulting in productive activities, healthy relationships, and the ability to cope with challenging situations.

It is important to adopt a balanced approach to mental health care that considers both the deficits and strengths of individuals. Focusing on deficits and disorders can create a negative perception of mental health and might not offer the most effective treatment strategies. We also need to emphasize that mental health is not only about the absence of mental disorder, but also state of mental well-being. Therefore, a holistic approach is necessary to provide effective strategy for mental health treatment (Sabella, 2013).

The objective of the study is to explore mental health within Islamic Psychology with a specific focus on al-Balkhi's

conceptualization of mental health based on the book '*Sustenance of The Soul*'.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 The significance of mental health for Muslims

Shah (1966) in Ashy (1999) stated that mental wellbeing is one of the important aspects for health. Three major components interact to impact human behavior as stated by Western psychology. The three majors are biological, psychological and socio-cultural components. Islam is a religion and a way of life that influenced Muslims from the psychological and socio-cultural aspects. According to Professor Shiabuddin Moghni, Islam shaped the personality traits of the Muslim Ummah which are different from other nations (Badri, 2020)

The standard classification of mental disorders for use by workers in the mental health field is provided by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The classification is called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) which is the main source of the mental illness classification (Sabella, 2013). American psychology which emphasizes the use of American students and animal studies as research subjects, is being realized by many Western psychologists as culture bound. French and German psychologists complained about this issue and argued that their students are influenced by the Americanization of psychology. So, if they are complaining about this situation, even though they have similarities in culture, then we as Muslims need to Islamize the psychology (Badri, 2020).

There are misconceptions and lack of awareness regarding the religious and social worlds of the global Muslim community, particularly in the context of mental health. Cultural formulations of mental illness are distinct from the historical Islamic approaches to mental health, which were based on contemporaneous medical discourse (Mitha, 2020). From the elderly and the young, whether Americans or non-Americans, even professionals or non-professionals there are stigmas and misconceptions about mental health. They do not believe that depression and anxiety exist. Serving the Muslim community needs to integrate not only the body and mind health but also the soul which also needs the work with the healers, scholars and leaders as part of the community as the early Muslim scholars have done to address mental health (Malik, 2023).

2.2 Mental Health in the Islamic Golden Era

Psychology from the Islamic perspective had a great history which led us to the 9th century. The Qur'ān and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) influenced Muslims in social sciences. In terms of human psychology, many early Muslim scholars have been making contributions to it. Although they did not use the term 'psychology', but the writing of self, individual personality, and human nature with their own term contributed to the study of psychology (Haque, 2004).

In the Islamic Golden Era (7th century - 14th century), the early Muslim scholars came from philosophy, physicians and spiritual subject matters contributed to Islamic Psychology. They use the term '*Ilm an-Nafs*' as the subject to dive into mental health. The Islamic Civilization in this era also became a pioneer of the mental health approach in the treatment of their patients in

hospitals. Some of the important physicians who contributed to the development of this subject are Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakariya ar-Razi, Abu Zayd Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhi, and Abu Ali al-Husain Ibn Sina (Rassool & Luqman, 2024).

2.3 Al-Balkhi and the Book 'Sustenance of The Soul'

Abu Zayd Ahmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhi as known as Abu Zayd al-Balkhi was born in Shamistiyan, Balkh, Khorasan. He was a student of Yusuf Yaqub ibn Ishaq as-Sabbah al-Kindi who is well-known as the Arabic Philosopher. Al-Balkhi was a polymath, an expert on geography, mathematics, medicine, and psychology (Rassool & Luqman, 2024). He lived in the Islamic Golden Era from 849 to 934 CE (Awaad & Ali, 2015).

He was a scholar who excelled in theoretical medicine, which was common during his time. He wrote a unique medical book called "*Sustenance of the Body and Soul*" (*Masalih Al Abdan wa al-Anfus*). The book has two sections. The first section, *Masalih al-Abdan*, is focused on physical health maintenance and disease prevention. The second section, *Masalih al-Anfus*, is focused on mental health and is divided into eight chapters. The book is written in Arabic (Awaad & Ali, 2015). The book '*Sustenance of The Soul*' is a translation from the second part of the book *Masalih Al Abdan wa Al Anfus*. It was translated by Malik Badri from the Arabic treatise into English translation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study is qualitative analysis through literature research. The primary source of data for the study is the book '*Sustenance of The Soul*,' which is a translation from the second part of the book *Masalih Al Abdan*

Wa Al Anfus by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi. The study also used secondary data sources, which were taken from articles related to the book '*Sustenance of The Soul*.'

4. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi emphasized the importance of maintaining good mental health in his book '*Sustenance of The Soul*'. In this chapter, he explained that taking care of our mental health is just as important as taking care of our physical health. During his time, physical health was given great importance and was frequently discussed by scholars, but mental health was often ignored. Al-Balkhi believed that a human being's physical and mental aspects are interconnected and can affect each other. He explained that we cannot achieve great physical health without maintaining our mental health and vice versa (Badri, 2013).

Similarly with physical health, we can suffer illnesses such as fever, headache etc., and our mental health can also suffer illnesses such as anger, sadness, fear, anxiety etc. However, each person has different triggers and capabilities to maintain their mental health. It also depends on how weak and strong our mental condition is. So, he promoted mental well-being by writing the book (Badri, 2013).

Tranquility and the absence of psychological disorder is the key aspect of mental well-being as mentioned by al-Balkhi in his book. If the characteristic of mental well-being is tranquility, then to maintain the mental health a person needs to make an effort to preserve and sustain one's mental well-being. We also need to regain the mental well-being if the one's mental suffers illness (Badri, 2013).

According to al-Balkhi, two factors are important for maintaining mental well-being. These factors are:

- a. External factors: It is important to protect ourselves from disruptions caused by external factors, such as seeing or hearing things that can trigger emotions like anxiety, anger, panic, sadness, or other excessive unease.
- b. Internal Factors: According to Al-Balkhi, that there is the need to protect ourselves from internal disruption by not thinking about the things that can trigger emotions like anxiety, anger, panic, sadness, or other excessive unease which will lead to heart feeling hard.

According to al-Balkhi, there are four main categories of mental disorders which are classified based on the symptoms of the disorders. The four main categories are *al-ghaḍab* (anger); *al-jaza'* (sadness and depression); *al-faza'* (fears and phobias); and *wasawes al-sadr* (obsessional disorders) (Awaad & Ali, 2015). Each of the main categories are explained with the symptoms and the intervention for the cure.

5. FINDINGS

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi was a pioneer in cognitive and medical psychology. He classified neuroses into four emotional disorders and demonstrated how cognitive therapies can treat each one. He also compared physical and psychological disorders, showing their interaction in psychosomatic disorders. Al-Balkhi emphasized the importance of healthy thoughts and feelings for emotional balance and suggested that imbalance causes sickness. Al-Balkhi classified depression into three types: normal, endogenous, and reactive (Haque, 2004).

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi emphasized the importance of mental health, stating that it is just as important as physical health. According to him, physical health can impact mental health and vice versa. Therefore, to maintain good mental health, we need to balance both our physical and mental well-being. Al-Balkhi's treatise was based on the practical and empirical of Islamic knowledge (Rassool & Luqman, 2024).

Al-Balkhi believed that a sign of good mental health is tranquility and the absence of any psychological symptoms. To achieve this, he suggested certain strategies to maintain our mental health. He also explained that to cure mental illness, we need to protect ourselves from both internal and external factors. This involves exercising self-control and seeking advice from wise individuals or physicians who can prescribe medication if necessary (Shamsuddin & Jusoh, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the concept of mental health according to al-Balkhi is tranquility and there are no manifestations of psychological symptoms. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between physical and mental health and protecting our mental well-being by managing the internal and external factors that influence it. The cure for mental illness can also be treated by both internal and external approach.

In Western psychology, various theories such as psychoanalysis, behaviorism, cognitive, biological, or others are often used as individual theories to understand mental illness. However, some of these theories may not fit with the condition of a Muslim. On the other hand, al-Balkhi sees mental health

matters as well as physical health and promotes mental well-being while maintaining and curing with a point of view. His approach considers the complexity of mental health, making it a great tool to maintain mental well-being.

This study is limited and explores the general concept of mental health according to al-Balkhi. For further research, reference sources can be enriched, symptoms can be diagnosed, and al-Balkhi's suggestions can be applied to interventions. Examining al-Balkhi's Arabic treatise can also contribute to the development of Islamic Psychology.

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