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Integrating Islamic Spirituality into Psychotherapy: Clinical Opportunities, Ethical Dilemmas, and Practitioner Challenges

The integration of Islamic spirituality into psychotherapy represents an important development in culturally responsive mental health practice. Drawing on scholarship in psychology, psychotherapy ethics, and Islamic studies, this paper examines both the opportunities and challenges involved in spiritually integrated therapy. As many Muslim clients seek therapeutic approaches aligned with their spiritual worldview, clinicians are increasingly called to bridge psychosocial interventions with Islamic spiritual frameworks. Such integration can enhance the therapeutic alliance, foster trust, and provide meaningful resources rooted in Quranic teachings, prophetic traditions, and spiritual practices. By recognising the interconnectedness of body, mind, and soul, therapy can move beyond symptom management to address deeper concerns related to purpose, identity, and spiritual well-being.

Spiritually informed interventions may include Quranic reflection, use of Prophetic examples for emotional guidance, *dhikr* (remembrance), *murāqabah* (contemplative awareness), *duʿāʾ* (supplication), and the cultivation of *tawakkul* (trust in God). Therapists may also adapt established modalities—such as cognitive behavioural therapy, person-centred therapy, solution-focused therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, family therapy, schema therapy, EMDR, and trauma-informed approaches—within an Islamic ethical framework. These approaches allow emotional distress to be understood not only in psychological terms but also in relation to meaning, faith, and existential coherence.

However, the integration of religious elements into psychotherapy introduces a range of ethical dilemmas and professional concerns. Challenges may arise from role confusion between therapist and religious authority, particularly where clinicians risk moving from psychological treatment into religious instruction. Tensions can also emerge between respecting client autonomy and perceived religious obligations, especially within diverse Muslim communities. Additional concerns include limited practitioner competence in Islamic theology, potential misinterpretation of sacred texts, and the inappropriate use of spiritual practices that may inadvertently reinforce guilt, shame, or spiritual bypassing. Issues of confidentiality in close-knit communities, gender and cultural sensitivities, and the risk of dual relationships further complicate practice.

While integrating Islamic spirituality into psychotherapy can enhance culturally responsive care, it requires ethical clarity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional competence. When applied with appropriate boundaries and training, such integration supports clients' faith commitments while maintaining clinical integrity and a holistic approach to mental health.



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Professor Dr G. Hussein Rassool is Professor of Islamic Psychology at the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisations, Charles Sturt University (Australia), and a pioneering scholar in the field of Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy. His work focuses on integrating Islamic ethical and spiritual principles into contemporary mental health care, counselling, and psychotherapy.

He previously served as Director of the Riphah Institute of Clinical and Professional Psychology and the Centre for Islamic Psychology at Riphah International University (Pakistan), and as founding Head of the Department of Psychology at the International Open University, where he helped establish the world's first BSc degree in Islamic Psychology.

He has authored over 34 books and more than 150 peer-reviewed publications and remains active in clinical practice as an Islamic psychotherapist. His research explores the spiritual, cultural, and psychosocial dimensions of mental health and the development of faith-informed therapeutic frameworks.