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Care, Emotions, and Spiritual Meaning: A Psycho-educational Framework Inspired by Ibn al-‘Arabī for Muslim Mental Health Practice

Mental health practitioners working with Muslim clients frequently encounter emotional distress that is articulated not only in psychological terms but also through religious and spiritual meanings. In such contexts, standard therapeutic approaches to emotions - often focused on regulation, symptom reduction, or cognitive reframing - may be conceptually limited for clients who seek care that resonates with their Islamic worldview. This gap is particularly evident in psychoeducational settings, where emotions are commonly explained in mechanistic or value-neutral terms that can feel disconnected from clients' moral and spiritual frameworks.

This paper proposes that Ibn al-‘Arabī's conception of emotions can inform a culturally and spiritually responsive psychoeducational model for Muslim mental health care. Drawing on his understanding of emotions as spiritual states (*aḥwāl*) that disclose dimensions of the divine names, the study reframes affective experiences as meaningful states that carry ethical and spiritual significance, rather than as merely internal reactions to be managed or eliminated. Within this perspective, emotions such as fear, sorrow, joy, and love are understood as signals that invite attentiveness, reflection, and care, rather than immediate correction.

Approached from a practitioner-informed standpoint, the paper outlines how this conceptual framework can be translated into psychoeducational practice with Muslim clients across clinical, pastoral, and community-based settings. It explores how emotional experiences may be explained in ways that acknowledge both psychological processes and spiritual meanings, helping clients contextualize distress without pathologization or moral judgment. This approach also assists practitioners in navigating common challenges in Muslim mental health contexts, including clients' expectations for spiritually meaningful guidance, the ethical use of religious language, and the maintenance of professional boundaries.

Rather than proposing a new therapeutic technique, the paper presents a care-oriented psychoeducational framework that practitioners can integrate into existing clinical or support practices. By situating emotional life within an ethical and spiritual horizon familiar to Muslim clients, this approach contributes to more compassionate, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded forms of care and support. In doing so, it responds directly to the concerns of care and support practitioners in Muslim contexts and contributes to broader interdisciplinary discussions on care ethics, spiritual support, and applied Islamic psychology.



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Zeynep İrem Çeven is a psychologist and PhD candidate in Islamic Studies at Istanbul University. She holds a BA in Psychology and dual master's degrees in Developmental Psychology and Islamic Studies. She has undertaken formal training in Arabic and Persian, and has studied Ottoman Turkish.

Her academic work lies at the intersection of psychology and Islamic intellectual traditions, with a particular focus on childhood and family dynamics in Muslim contexts. Her doctoral research examines the concept of childhood in the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī, situating it within classical Islamic metaphysical frameworks.

Alongside her research, she has more than fifteen years of experience in mental health and psychoeducational contexts, working primarily with children, adolescents, and women. She has received clinical training in psychotherapy, including various contemporary therapeutic approaches.

She completed the Islamic Psychology Diploma Programme at Cambridge Muslim College and has pursued further training in Islamically integrated psychotherapy. She currently works as a practicing psychologist and serves as a consultant and translator in the field of children's literature.