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FROM SELF TO SOURCE: AN EXPLORATION OF ISLAMIC COMPASSION THROUGH QUR'ANIC SEMANTIC METHOD

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Abstract: Compassion is recognised by the World Health Organization as a key factor in mental wellbeing,¹ yet current conceptualisations are dominated by Buddhist and Western-informed contemporary psychology frameworks. This study addresses the gap in Islamic psychology by inductively exploring Islamic Compassion through Qur'anic semantic analysis of the lexeme *rahima* (رحم), to have mercy/compassion), using Toshihiko Izutsu's methodology. We analysed 16 verses containing *fi'il* (verb) forms as primary data and 10 verses with *ism* (noun) forms as supporting data, conducting syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and semantic field analyses. The findings reveal five psychological dimensions of Islamic Compassion that, while terminologically similar to contemporary theories, differ fundamentally in source (Allāh vs. self), trigger (reception vs. suffering), orientation (theocentric vs. anthropocentric), and temporal scope (timeless vs. worldly). Furthermore, Islamic Compassion operates proactively as a *fiṭrah* (innate disposition) capacity activated through spiritual-social mechanisms rather than responding to suffering. This study contributes a psychological construct that can be operationalised in Islamic psychology, demonstrates Qur'anic semantics as a viable methodology for constructing psychological concepts, and provides foundations for developing Qur'anic worldview-based interventions. This research expands rather than replaces existing perspectives, enriching cross-cultural understanding of compassion.

Keywords: *rahmah, Islamic compassion, Qur'anic semantic, Islamic psychology, Toshihiko Izutsu*

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¹ World Health Organization, *From Loneliness to Social Connection - Charting a Path to Healthier Societies: Report of the WHO Commission on Social Connection* (World Health Organization, 2025).

INTRODUCTION

We are more connected than ever, yet lonelier than we have ever been. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 2025 report reveals one in six people globally,² and more than two in five Australians,³ experience loneliness, with young people particularly acute despite unprecedented digital connectivity.⁴ Seppälä et al. predict this phenomenon and suggest two antidotes: social connections *and* compassion.⁵ These suggestions, validated by WHO findings, indicate that social connection without compassion is not significant to reduce the loneliness feeling. In other words, compassion is an essential ingredient for building meaningful relationships that alleviate loneliness and promote genuine social bonds.

Western psychological frameworks have responded with evidence-based compassion interventions,⁶ demonstrating principles that resonate with Islamic teachings, such as empathy, kindness, and concern for suffering. However, these models emerge from fundamentally different epistemological foundations. Gilbert's Compassion-Focused Therapy⁷ and Neff's Self-Compassion model,⁸ while theoretically robust and empirically validated, position the self as the source of compassion within predominantly secular, individualistic paradigm with Buddhist philosophy. For Muslim populations whose worldview is centred on Allāh as the ultimate Source of all attributes, including compassion, this represents a fundamentally different theological and epistemological paradigm.⁹

The concept of compassion is not foreign to Islam. Allāh introduces Himself primarily through compassionate attributes: *Ar-Raḥmān* (The Most Compassionate) and *Ar-Raḥīm* (The Most Merciful), as articulated in the Basmala (*Bismillāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*) that opens every surah (chapter) of the Qur'an except one. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was sent as *raḥmatan lil-'ālamīn* (a mercy to all worlds, Q. 21:107). Despite this centrality, discourse on compassion in Islamic psychology remains limited and largely conceptual,¹⁰ tending to adopt Western

² Ibid.

³ Michelle Lim and Ben Smith, "More than 40 Percent of Young Aussies Are Lonely, as Experts Call for National Loneliness Strategy," *University of Sydney*, 4 August 2025, <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2025/08/04/more-than-40-percent-of-young-aussies-are-lonely-as-experts-call-for-national-loneliness-strategy.html>.

⁴ World Health Organization, *From Loneliness to Social Connection*.

⁵ Emma Seppälä, Timothy Rossomando, and James R. Doty, "Social Connection and Compassion: Important Predictors of Health and Well-Being," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2013): 428, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2013.0027>.

⁶ James N. Kirby, "Compassion as a Transdiagnostic Target to Reduce Mental Health Symptoms and Promote Well-Being," *Nature Reviews Psychology* 4, no. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-025-00422-4>; Paul Gilbert, ed., *Compassion: Conceptualisations, Research and Use in Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2005); Kristin D. Neff, "The Development and Validation of a Scale to Measure Self-Compassion," *Self and Identity* 2, no. 3 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309027>.

⁷ Paul Gilbert, "The Origins and Nature of Compassion Focused Therapy," *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 53, no. 1 (2014): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12043>.

⁸ Neff, "The Development and Validation of a Scale," 224.

⁹ Yasser Rezapour-Mirsaleh et al., "Effects of Religious Versus Non-Religious Self-Compassion Interventions on Anxiety and Quality of Life of Iranian Infertile Women: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *Journal of Religion and Health* 64, no. 1 (2025): 323, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-024-02045-0>.

¹⁰ Jalal Alharbi and Lourance Al Hadid, "Towards an Understanding of Compassion from an Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 28, no. 7–8 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.14725>; G. Hussein Rassool, *Exploring the Intersection of Islāmic Spirituality and Psychotherapy: Healing the Soul*

compassion frameworks with Islamic terminology overlaid or provide theological discussions with limited systematic psychological operationalisation.

This epistemological gap – the absence of a comprehensive conceptual framework for Islamic Compassion rooted in the Qur’an – has prompted calls for Islamic psychology to be grounded in Qur’anic and hadith sources rather than adapted from Western frameworks.¹¹ To address this gap, the present study employs semantic analysis of the Qur’anic lexeme *rahima* (رحم, to have mercy/compassion) as a methodological instrument for conceptual exploration. Rather than “Islamising” Western compassion theories, this research builds Islamic Compassion from Qur’anic revelation through systematic linguistic analysis, then dialogues with contemporary compassion science to articulate convergences and distinctives.

The study asks: What psychological dimensions of Islamic Compassion can be extracted from semantic analysis of the lexeme *rahima* in the Qur’an? How do these dimensions relate structurally? And how can these findings contribute to a conceptual framework that is authentically Islamic and capable of engaging contemporary compassion discourse?

This study contributes to Islamic psychology and compassion science in three ways. First, it demonstrates how Qur’anic semantic analysis can generate psychological constructs without adapting Western theories. Second, it proposes Islamic Compassion as a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual paradigm that complements contemporary models through six distinctive characteristics (source-oriented, beyond suffering, revelation-rooted, circular, theocentric, and timeless). Third, it provides conceptual foundations for culturally resonant interventions that activate *fiṭrah* (innate disposition) capacity rather than cultivate skills from scratch, with implications for addressing compassion fatigue.¹²

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory-conceptual qualitative approach, using semantic analysis to inductively understand the concept of Islamic Compassion through examination of the Qur’anic lexeme *rahima*. Rather than testing pre-existing theories, this research explores meaning and conceptual nuance embedded within the Qur’anic worldview. Recognising that contemporary psychological frameworks of compassion are rooted in Western epistemology

(Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 155–57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-72724-5>; Thamaem Ushama, “Islam’s Rahmah (Compassion) as Applied by Hadrat Muhammad Rasulullaah Khatam Un Nabiyyin Sallallaahu Alaihi Wa’ala Alihi Wa Ashabihi Wa Salam,” *Hamdard Islamicus* XLIV, no. 2 (2021).

¹¹ Carrie York Al-Karam, “Islamic Psychology: Towards a 21st Century Definition and Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340020>; Moh. Abdul Kholiq Hasan, *Tafsir Tematik Ayat-ayat Psikologis* [Thematic Exegesis of Psychological Verses], vol. 1 (Efudepress, 2021), ix–x.

¹² Debbie L. Stoewen, “Moving from Compassion Fatigue to Compassion Resilience Part 4: Signs and Consequences of Compassion Fatigue,” *The Canadian Veterinary Journal* 61, no. 11 (2020): 1207.

and may not adequately capture Islamic concepts,¹³ this study engages with the field of semantics as systematic methodological alternative. Specifically, Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic method is adapted to suit the research aims,¹⁴ responding to the call within Islamic psychology to build concepts from foundational Islamic sources rather than through Islamisation of Western constructs.¹⁵

Toshihiko Izutsu's Qur'anic Semantic Methodology

Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993) was a Japanese linguist who made significant contributions to Qur'anic semantic studies through a structural linguistic approach focused on the Arabic language system. His works *God and Man in the Qur'an* and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* offer a bottom-up approach, meaning analysis begins with focused linguistic data from which conceptual understanding is constructed. His method is empirical, grounded in systematic observation of word usage within the Qur'anic text.

Izutsu's method possesses several key characteristics that distinguish it from other semantic approaches:

1. Basic versus relational meaning:¹⁶ The foundation of Izutsu's method is the distinction between *basic meaning* (syntagmatic) and *relational meaning* (paradigmatic). Basic meaning not only refers to a word's lexical meaning as defined in Arabic dictionaries, but also the subjects and objects involved, along with additional contextual explanations of the verse. Relational meaning, by contrast, is the meaning a word acquires when situated within the Qur'anic semantic system, formed through its relationships with other words in the conceptual network. For example, the word *kāfir*, derived from the root *ka-fa-ra*, carries the basic meaning of “to cover” in Arabic, but acquires the relational meaning of “one who rejects truth” within the Qur'anic worldview framework.¹⁷
2. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations:¹⁸ Izutsu adopts structural linguistic concepts to analyse two types of semantic relations: first, syntagmatic relations – the horizontal relationship between a word (with its basic meaning) and other words that co-occur with it in the same context (subjects and objects); and second, paradigmatic relations – the vertical relationship between a word and words that can substitute for it (synonyms,

¹³ Abdallah Rothman and Adrian Coyle, “Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 5 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x>; Hooman Keshavarzi et al., *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care: Introducing Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 136.

¹⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Keio University, 2002), 11–71; Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran*, 2nd ed. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 24–41.

¹⁵ G. Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Psychology: Human Behaviour and Experience from an Islamic Perspective* (Routledge, 2021), 4, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429354762>; Baharuddin, *Paradigma psikologi Islami: studi tentang elemen psikologi dari Al-Quran* [The Islamic Psychology Paradigm: A Study of Psychological Elements in the Qur'an] (Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 2.

¹⁶ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 11–16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16–28.

antonyms, semantic field members). The combination of these two dimensions produces comprehensive semantic field mapping.

3. Diachronic dimension:¹⁹ Izutsu employs a diachronic dimension to trace the evolution of word meanings across three phases: pre-Qur’anic, referring to meanings in Jahiliyyah Arabic usage; Qur’anic, referring to meanings that emerged during the revelation period; and post-Qur’anic, referring to meanings found in classical *tafseer* and subsequent developments. This approach demonstrates how the Qur’an performed semantic innovation on existing Arabic vocabulary. For this study, the diachronic dimension was adapted rather than fully applied. While Izutsu’s diachronic analysis gives a picture of cultural–historical meaning shifts, this research focuses on the Qur’anic phase exclusively to discern the universal and transhistorical conceptual structure of *rahmah* as presented in the revelation. This methodological choice aligns with the study’s aim to explore a psychological framework rooted in the Qur’anic worldview. Future research may explore how the concept evolved in pre- and post-Qur’anic Islamic thought.
4. Worldview (*weltanschauung*): Izutsu proposes that the Qur’anic worldview can be discerned through linguistic analysis as its culminating outcome, which is a distinct methodological approach in understanding Qur’anic meaning.

This method was selected for its replicability (each analytical step can be verified), objectivity (departing from the Qur’anic text rather than researcher assumptions), Qur’an-specific design (developed for Qur’anic Arabic characteristics), conceptual productivity (producing theoretical structures beyond descriptive meaning), and disciplinary accessibility (not *tafseer*, thus usable by researchers from diverse fields).

Data Collection

This study focuses on tracing the semantic root of the lexeme *rahima* or the root *ra-ha-mim* (ر-ح-م). The *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage* records 342 occurrences across 11 derivatives,²⁰ while the *Quranic Arabic Corpus* records 339 occurrences across nine derivatives.²¹ This study using the *Quranic Arabic Corpus* as the baseline due to the focus on the Qur’an rather than the Arabic word per se. From 339 occurrences across nine derivatives, we employed purposive sampling,²² with the inclusion criteria: (1) verses where *rahima* appears in verb form (*fi’il*) as primary data, given verbs capture dynamic processes central to psychological experience; (2) verses where relational/contextual patterns are sufficiently rich for syntagmatic analysis; and, (3) verses representing diverse Qur’anic contexts (Makki/

¹⁹ Ibid., 32–70.

²⁰ Al-Sa’id Muḥammad Badawī and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage*, Handbuch Der Orientalistik 85 (Brill, 2008), 354.

²¹ Corpus Qur’an, “Ra Ha Mim,” in *The Quranic Arabic Corpus – Quran Dictionary*, 2017, accessed March 18, 2025, <https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=rHm>.

²² Lawrence A. Palinkas et al., “Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research,” *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42, no. 5 (2015): 534, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>.

Madani, narrative/prescriptive). This yielded 16 primary verses. Additionally, 10 noun-form (*ism*) verses were selected as supporting data to triangulate findings. While this represents 7.6% of total occurrences, the sampling prioritises conceptual saturation rather than statistical representation, consistent with qualitative semantic methodology.

Given this substantial frequency, this study focuses on verbal forms (*fi'il*) with select nominal forms (*ism*) as supporting data, excluding diachronic analysis. The delimitation reflects: (1) analytical complexity and the 16-week master's thesis timeframe;²³ (2) qualitative research conventions permitting representative sampling;²⁴ (3) focus on compassion's active dimension through verbs revealing spiritual and social relational patterns; and (4) emphasis on universal Qur'anic structures rather than cultural–historical context.

Other derivatives were documented, with detailed analysis applied only to representative verses following these criteria:

- Primary data inclusion: Qur'anic verses containing verbal forms (*fi'il*) of *rahima*, including *fi'il madi* (past tense), *fi'il mudari'* (present-future tense), and *fi'il amr* (imperative), in Makkan and Medinan contexts, selecting one verse per keyword. The 28 *fi'il* occurrences appear across 16 unique verses, with some verses containing multiple verb forms. All 16 verses were analysed comprehensively.
- Primary data exclusion: Repeated keywords with identical basic meanings.
- Supporting data: Purposive selection of 1-3 *ism* from identified derivatives providing expanded understanding of the *rahmah* concept.

The final dataset comprised 26 verses (see Table 1): 16 primary (*fi'il*) and 10 supporting (*ism*).

Table 1. Lexeme *rahima* derivations

No.	Form	Derivation	Keyword
Primary data (main analysis)			
1	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>wa-ir'hamnā</i>
2	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>rahimahu</i>
3	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>tur'hamūna</i>
4	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>watarhamnā</i>
5	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>yarhamnā</i>
6	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>sayarhamuhumu</i>
7	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>rahima</i>
8	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>watarhamnī</i>
9	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>yarhamakum</i>
10	<i>F'i'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>ir'hamhumā</i>

²³ This article has been adapted from a master's thesis.

²⁴ Ibid., 534–35.

No.	Form	Derivation	Keyword
11	<i>Fī'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>yarḥamkum</i>
12	<i>Fī'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>raḥim'nāhum</i>
13	<i>Fī'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>wa-ir'ham</i>
14	<i>Fī'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>wayarḥamu</i>
15	<i>Fī'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>raḥim'tahu</i>
16	<i>Fī'il</i>	<i>Rahima</i>	<i>raḥimanā</i>
Supporting data (additional, limited analysis)			
17	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Arḥām</i>	<i>arḥāmakum</i>
18	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Arḥam</i>	<i>arḥamu</i>
19	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Ruh'm</i>	<i>ruh'man</i>
20	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Raḥmān</i>	<i>l-raḥmānu</i>
21	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Raḥmat</i>	<i>raḥmatan</i>
22	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Raḥmat</i>	<i>raḥmatin</i>
23	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Raḥmat</i>	<i>waraḥmatan</i>
24	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Raḥīm</i>	<i>raḥīmun</i>
25	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Marḥamat</i>	<i>bil-marḥamati</i>
26	<i>Isim</i>	<i>Rāḥimīn</i>	<i>l-rāḥimīna</i>

Data Analysis Procedure

Before explicating the analytical stages, it is important to acknowledge that the lexeme *rahima* is polysemous, meaning a single word can contain multiple meanings. An example of polysemy within the *ra-ha-mim* root is *rahim*, which can denote “womb” (anatomical) and “compassion” (emotional). In Izutsu’s approach, polysemy is incorporated into relational meaning analysis to help construct a concept’s full context. The data processing and analysis techniques employed for this study included:

1. Basic and contextual meaning analysis: This stage identifies the basic meaning of listed words using dictionaries and Qur’anic concordance, which was conducted on all 16 *fi’il rahima* verses and 10 supporting verses. Basic meaning refers to lexical definition, while contextual meaning refers to the logical core attached to the word, examining emotional context, cultural nuance, and relationships with other concepts. For instance, the basic meaning of “mother” (*ibu*) in the Indonesian dictionary is “a woman who has given birth to someone,” expressing contextual features: [+human], [+has child], [+gives birth], [+female], [-male]. In relation to *rahima*, contextual meaning requires examination of translations and, when necessary, relevant *tafseer* of the verse.
2. Syntagmatic analysis: This stage examines grammatical structure and inter-element relations within each verse, including identification of subject, object, and contextual markers (such as prepositional particles), and noting contexts (supplication, family

relations, cause-effect of actions, etc.). The grammatical structures identified reveal relational meanings formed by the sequence and combination of these structures.

3. Paradigmatic analysis: This stage identifies relationships between words present in the verse and keyword, such as synonyms (e.g., *'afw*, *maghfirah*) and antonyms (e.g., *kāfirun*). Therefore, a word is not understood in isolation but gains diversity of meaning through encounters with other words. Through this analysis, the researchers begin positioning *rahima* within its semantic network and understanding its relationships.
4. Initial relational analysis and conceptual network formation: This stage examines how meaning is formed through relationships and constructs a conceptual network map, also termed semantic field, through: subject-object relations and contextual themes across verses (from syntagmatic analysis), polysemy and keyword positioning within synonym-antonym networks (from paradigmatic analysis), and implications for Qur'anic worldview (synthesised from all preceding stages of analysis).
5. Psychological integration: This stage traces words/contexts that are similar to or different from the psychological dimensions employed in this study's theoretical framework.
6. Synthesis and conceptual framework construction: The final stage formulates an operational definition of Islamic Compassion and constructs diagrams to provide visual representation of the concept.

RESULT

Overview of Data

The primary data consists of 16 Qur'anic verses distributed across 10 *surahs*²⁵ containing verbal forms (*fi'il*) of the lexemes *rahima*. The selection of *fi'il* as primary data reflects the consideration that verbal forms demonstrate dynamic and contextual action. *Fi'il* represents “doing compassion,” the active process of giving, seeking, and receiving *rahmah* in specific situations. Each verse underwent in-depth analysis to extract semantic components, identify contextual patterns, and map meaning relations with co-occurring lexeme.

The supporting data comprises eight nominal forms (*ism*) from the lexemes *rahima* – *arḥām*, *arḥam*, *ruh'm*, *rahmān*, *rahmat*, *rahīm*, *marḥamat*, and *rāḥimīn* – appearing in 10 occurrences distributed across nine *surahs*.²⁶ *Ism* represent “being compassion,” a quality, attribute, or state that can be possessed, bestowed, or received. The *ism* data: (1) enriches contextual understanding, complementing *fi'il* analysis; (2) deepens comprehension of Divine attributes as the source of *rahmah*; and (3) identifies root forms founded in *fi'il* data. *Ism* data was not

²⁵ Q. 2:286, 6:16, 6:155, 7:23, 7:149, 9:71, 11:43, 11:47, 17:8, 17:24, 17:54, 23:75, 23:118, 29:21, 40:9, 67:28.

²⁶ Q. 47:22, 21:83, 18:81, 19:96, 21:107, 3:159, 30:21, 9:128, 90:17, 7:151.

analysed as comprehensively as *fi'il* data but was referenced as needed when providing contextual information.

Of all *rahima* derivative occurrences in the Qur'an, *fi'il* forms comprise 9% (28 occurrences) and *ism* forms 91% (311 occurrences). Nominal forms (*ism*) include *ar-Rahmān* (57), *ar-Rahīm* (116), *Rahmah* (114), and others, representing *rahmah* as Divine attributes and quality. Verbal forms (*fi'il*) of *rahima* represent *rahmah* as an action performed by a subject toward an object. While quantitatively smaller, *fi'il* forms constitute this study's focus because they reveal *rahmah*'s (compassion/mercy) action dimensions. The *ism* dominance indicates the Qur'anic worldview emphasise *rahmah* primarily as an existential quality.

Basic Meaning

The analysis begins with identifying basic meaning from the Arabic-English dictionary, compared with the contextual meaning in the Qur'an. This reveals how the lexical meaning of the lexeme *rahima* demonstrates its psychological meaning through the Qur'anic semantic system. The root *ra-ha-mim* (ر-ح-م) has a broad spectrum: biological (womb/uterus), affective (compassion, kindness, tenderness, pity, sympathy), action (to show compassion, to show tenderness, to release), relational (blood relatives), motivational (to become good), conditional (forgiveness/mercy, generosity, granting good state, blessing), and the Divine attribute *ar-Rahmān ar-Rahīm*.

This diversity of meaning was formulated as semantic components with binary values [+] to identify the features present in the concept of *rahmah* (see Table 2). These 10 components reveal *rahmah* as a multidimensional concept encompassing biological, psychological, social, and theological dimensions in an intertwined manner.

Table 2. Binary semantic components of the root *ra-ha-mim* from the Arabic-English Dictionary

No	Dictionary explanation	Description	Semantic component	Binary value
1	Womb/uterus	Female organ	Biological womb	+
2	Blood relatives	Recognition of fundamental bonds among humans	Kinship	+
3	Compassion, kindness, tenderness	Affective dimension: gentleness, care	Tenderness	+
4	Pity, sympathy	Similar feeling toward others	Sympathy	+
5	To show compassion, to show tenderness	A concrete action	Action	+
6	To release	To free from burden/suffering	Release	+
7	Forgiveness/mercy, generosity	Releasing from fault	Forgiveness	+
8	Good state, blessing	Granting goodness full of blessing/mercy	Blessing	+
9	To guide/lead	Directing toward goodness	Guidance	+
10	Divine attribute <i>ar-Rahmān ar-Rahīm</i>	Allāh's attribute as the source of perfect and eternal compassion	Unlimited compassion	+

The basic meaning reveals compassion awareness stages within human beings; from the biological component (womb), becoming relational (kinship), affective (tenderness), actional (concrete action), and finally reaching the theological peak (Divine attribute). This structure indicates that linguistically, *rahmah* has been present in every human body born from the womb, and every action will lead back to Allāh. To understand how this system operates, the analysis proceeds by identifying syntagmatic patterns, demonstrating the relationship between lexeme *rahima* and other concepts within the co-text of verses.

Contextual Meaning: Syntagmatic Patterns and Paradigmatic Relationships

Following Izutsu's method, syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis was conducted by identifying words that co-occur with *rahima* in the co-text of verses, with the understanding that a concept's meaning can only be grasped through its relationships with other concepts. The six semantic categories identified: basic meaning, actions (syntagmatic), forms (syntagmatic and paradigmatic), impacts (syntagmatic and paradigmatic), Divine attributes (syntagmatic), and antithetical concepts (paradigmatic) form relational patterns that reveal the systematic structure of *rahmah* in the Qur'an.

Syntagmatic Patterns: Co-textual analysis

Four categories are derived from the syntagmatic analysis: actions, forms, impacts, and attributes. In the category of actions of *rahmah*, a consistent co-textual pattern emerges: the appearance of Allāh as the sole subject or active agent demonstrating actions of *rahmah*, explicitly and implicitly. This grammatical structure reflects that *rahmah* originates and flows unidirectionally from Allāh to His creation. Seven forms of action identified through co-textual analysis are: active giving,²⁷ active protection,²⁸ active removal,²⁹ active forgiveness,³⁰ active erasure,³¹ passive reception,³² and active supplication.³³ Of these actions, the most frequently occurring is active giving (nine out of 16 verses), demonstrating that *rahmah* is primarily an action of giving (actively, continuously). Interestingly, there are active supplication (three verses) and passive reception (one verse), which indicate that *rahmah* is received and supplicated for by humans (when they are unable to experience it due to the consequences of their capacity), indicating humans cannot autonomously generate compassion but channel it from the Divine Source.

²⁷ Q. 6:16, 7:23, 17:8, 17:24, 23:75, 23:118, 29:21, 40:9, 67:28.

²⁸ Q. 11:43, 40:9.

²⁹ Q. 23:75.

³⁰ Q. 2:286, 23:118.

³¹ Q. 2:286.

³² Q. 6:155.

³³ Q. 2:286, 11:47, 17:24.

Forms of *rahmah* co-occur with concrete manifestations across four domains. Mediator domain: *rahmah* co-occurs with the words al-Qur'an,³⁴ the Messenger,³⁵ and angels.³⁶ Guidance-awareness domain: *rahmah* co-occurs with awareness of error,³⁷ knowledge,³⁸ and bestowal of love through the heart.³⁹ Social domain: *rahmah* co-occurs with guidance toward goodness,⁴⁰ and social relations.⁴¹ Finally, protective domain: *rahmah* co-occurs with prevention⁴² and protection, deliverance from punishment,⁴³ and forgiveness.⁴⁴

Rahmah's impacts demonstrate patterns across two domains: the hereafter and this world. In the hereafter domain, *rahmah* is frequently paired with ultimate victory,⁴⁵ salvation from punishment,⁴⁶ and avoidance of loss.⁴⁷ Then in the worldly domain, *rahmah* is mentioned alongside tranquillity within marriage,⁴⁸ mutual compassion in social relations,⁴⁹ and in parent–child relations.⁵⁰

Divine attributes emerge in different contexts. *Khayr ar-Rāḥimīn* (the best of those who show mercy, qualitative superlative) appears in the context of general *du'ā*,⁵¹ *Ar-Raḥmān* co-occurs with universal bestowal such as *wudd*,⁵² and *Arḥam ar-Rāḥimīn* (the Most Merciful of those who show mercy, quantitative superlative) appears in the co-text of crisis and personal suffering.⁵³

A unique finding emerges from the supporting data in Q. 9:128, the only verse that associates the Divine attribute *ar-rahīm* with a human figure (the Messenger ﷺ). This verse describes the Prophet as *ra'ūfun raḥīmūn* (most compassionate and merciful) in a specific context: deep empathy toward the suffering of the community (“*azīzun ‘alayhi mā ‘anittum*” – your suffering weighs heavily on him) followed by commitment to their welfare (“*ḥarīṣun ‘alaykum*” – he ardently desires good for you). This semantic structure shows that, although Allāh is the absolute source of *rahmah*, Divine *rahmah* can manifest in a human (in this case, the Messenger ﷺ) through integration of affective empathy and actional commitment, a prototype for the operationalisation of Islamic Compassion in human context. This co-textual pattern reveals that the mention of Divine attributes is adapted to the condition of *rahmah*

³⁴ Q. 6:155.

³⁵ Q. 23:118.

³⁶ Q. 40:9.

³⁷ Q. 2:286, 7:23, 7:149, 11:47, 17:24.

³⁸ Q. 11:47.

³⁹ Q. 17:8, 17:24, 19:96.

⁴⁰ Q. 9:71.

⁴¹ Q. 90:17, 18:81, 30:21.

⁴² Q. 11:43, 40:9.

⁴³ Q. 6:16, 29:21.

⁴⁴ Q. 2:286, 17:8, 7:151.

⁴⁵ Q. 40:9.

⁴⁶ Q. 6:16, 29:21, 67:28.

⁴⁷ Q. 7:23, 7:149, 11:47.

⁴⁸ Q. 30:21.

⁴⁹ Q. 9:71, 90:17.

⁵⁰ Q. 17:24.

⁵¹ Q. 23:118.

⁵² Q. 19:96.

⁵³ Q. 7:151, 21:83.

recipients: *rahmān* for universality, *khayr* for optimism toward the best quality, *arḥam* for conviction in the highest quantity during crisis, and *rahīm* as a model that humans can emulate.

Paradigmatic Relations: Contrast and Opposition

The antithetical concepts demonstrate four oppositions: loss (*khāsāra*), punishment (*adhāb*), loss of Divine protection, and disbelief (*kufṛ*). This opposition is asymmetrical, meaning that *rahmah* is Allāh’s permanent, active attribute, while the antithetical concepts emerge as consequences of rejection or inability to receive *rahmah*. For example, in the three verses that mention *khāsāra*,⁵⁴ the sentence structure always takes the form of conditional-supplication: “*in lam taghfir lanā wa tarḥamnā lanakūnanna mina al-khāsirīn*” (if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be among the losers). This sentence construction shows that “loss” is not a reality that has already occurred, but something to be avoided through supplication for *rahmah*. Loss here is not material or psychological in the contemporary sense, but the loss of the soul as a servant.

In six verses this contrast appears across three paradigmatic levels.⁵⁵ Action level: “*yu’adhhibu* (to punish) versus *yarḥamu* (to show mercy)”⁵⁶ demonstrates two exclusive Divine actions. Form level: *rahmah* manifests in *maghfirah* (forgiveness) and *ḥifẓ* (protection) versus punishment in *durr* (harm) and *halāk* (destruction). Impact level: *rahmah* produces *fawz* (victory) and *najāh* (salvation) versus punishment produces *khāsāra* (loss) and *khizī* (humiliation).

Supporting data from *ism* enriches this paradigmatic structure with characterological and relational contrasts. Q. 3:159 contrasts “*law kunta fazzan ghalīza al-qalb*” (harsh and hard-hearted) with gentleness (*rifq*), which is a manifestation of *rahmah*. Q. 47:22 contrasts the maintenance of kinship ties (*ṣilah al-arḥām*) with severance (*qat’*). Understanding *rahmah* requires dialectics with its opposite, as day is understood through night.

This paradigmatic contrast of *fi’il-ism* is integrated into the syntagmatic formula, becoming:

fi’il (Divine action, doing) + *ism* (attribute/forms, being) = impact (concrete)

Although the position of *fi’il* and *ism* in each verse may vary (encountering *ism* first then *fi’il* or vice versa), both consistently demonstrate concrete impact; for instance, relational (human relationships as in Q. 17:24), spiritual and psychological (as in Q. 23:118, 2:286 or 6:16).

⁵⁴ Q. 7:23; 7:149, 11:47.

⁵⁵ Q. 7:23, 7:149, 11:43, 17:54, 29:21, 67:28.

⁵⁶ Q. 29:21.

An Islamic Compassion Conceptual Framework

From Semantics to Psychology

Based on the semantic findings, five psychological dimensions integrated within the concept of Islamic Compassion are revealed. These dimensions are extracted from systematic linguistic patterns that emerge in the co-text of verses.

1. Cognitive dimension: Source-oriented awareness

Three forms of awareness precede the lexeme *rahima*: awareness of the limitation of knowledge (Q. 11:47), mistake and regret (Q. 7:149), and limited capacity (Q. 2:286). The structural pattern of awareness → supplication → reception demonstrates cognition as a catalyst for the capacity to receive *rahmah*. This finding resonates with the cognitive dimension of compassion in contemporary literature: Gilbert refers to “sensitivity to suffering,”⁵⁷ and Neff emphasises “mindfulness” as the foundation.⁵⁸ However, in-depth analysis of the linguistic structure of these verses reveals that “cognitive” in the context of Islamic Compassion differs fundamentally from neurocognitive processes in Western psychology.

In Q. 7:149, the sequence “*suqīṭa fī aydīhim*” (dropped into their hands) then “*ra’aw*” (they saw) then “*zannū*” (they thought) reveals awareness as a multi-layered process: (1) embodied experience (*suqīṭa* – visceral impact); (2) perception (*ra’aw* – seeing/recognising); and (3) epistemic judgment (*zannū* – realisation). The verb *ra’aw* functions as direct perception of truth, evidenced by its co-occurrence with “*qad ḍallū*” (certainty marker “*qad*” + past tense). This syntagmatic pattern distinguishes it from Western “mindfulness,” which emphasises meta-cognitive observation.

In Q. 11:47, Prophet Nuh’s awareness of the limitation of his knowledge (“*innī as’aluka mā laysa lī bihi ‘ilm*” – I ask You about something I do not know) is an acknowledgment that arises in the context of crisis, when his son refused to board the ark and ultimately drowned. This awareness is not a skill cultivated through meditation techniques, but an openness of the soul that occurs when humans are confronted with the limits of their knowledge and power.

This difference reveals a fundamental divergence in the orientation of awareness. Gilbert and Neff emphasise awareness of suffering, observing and acknowledging that the self is suffering, then generating a compassionate response through self-kindness. Islamic Compassion, conversely, emphasises awareness toward the Source. Thus, the process of recognising limitation, mistake, or ignorance then directs the soul to turn and return to Allāh as the sole source of *rahmah*. In Neff’s model: “I am suffering so I need to be kind to myself.” In Islamic Compassion: “I am limited/at fault/unknowing, so I

⁵⁷ Gilbert, “The Origins and Nature of Compassion Focused Therapy,” 19.

⁵⁸ Kristin Neff, “Self-Compassion: An Alternative Conceptualization of a Healthy Attitude Toward Oneself,” *Self and Identity* 2, no. 2 (2003): 88–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032>.

supplicate Allāh.” Awareness in this context is not about activating internal capacity for self-soothing, but about acknowledging dependence on the eternal Source.

Q. 2:286 reinforces this pattern by showing awareness of limited capacity (“*lā yukallifu Allāhu nafsan illā wus’ahā*” – Allāh does not burden a soul beyond its capacity) as a permanent condition requiring continuous supplication, not a singular achievement. This indicates that, in Islamic Compassion, awareness is not a state achieved through cognitive training then “completed,” but a quality of the soul (*nafs*) that is continually renewed in each cycle of receiving *rahmah*, creating a progressive spiral in which each experience of receiving *rahmah* deepens awareness of dependence on the Source.

Thus, although this dimension is still called “cognitive” in the psychological framework, the nature of awareness in Islamic Compassion is more accurately understood as Source-oriented awareness, not a neurocognitive process that can be trained as a skill, but an openness of the soul that acknowledges limitation and dependence on Allāh, which prepares the capacity to receive *rahmah*.

2. Affective dimension: Tenderness and compassionate love

The affective dimension refers to the emotional or feeling dimension in compassion. Gilbert calls it “emotional resonance” with suffering, while Neff emphasises “self-kindness,” tenderness toward oneself rather than self-judgment. From semantic analysis of the lexeme *rahima*, the affective dimension is identified in several patterns. First, tenderness as a form of Allāh’s compassion. In Q. 3:159, the structure “*fa-bimā rahmatin mina Allāhi linta lahum*” shows the pattern: Allāh’s *rahmah* → the Prophet’s ﷺ tenderness (*linta*) → people do not turn away. The word *linta* (gentle) appears immediately after *rahmatin*, establishing tenderness not as a trait cultivated from within oneself, but as a concrete manifestation of received Divine *rahmah*. This differs fundamentally from Gilbert’s model where individuals train themselves to be compassionate through certain techniques. The Prophet’s ﷺ tenderness is an overflow from Allāh’s *rahmah*, not a result of training in self-emotional regulation.

Q. 30:21 reveals affective gradation in marriage: *sakīnah* (tranquillity), *mawaddah* (intense love), and *rahmah* (enduring compassionate love). These three things in unity show *rahmah* as the culminating affection that encompasses understanding of the partner’s limitations, transcending fluctuations of intense emotion. Different from Neff’s emphasis on self-compassion during relational difficulties, *rahmah* in this context is about maintaining compassionate connection by recognising that marriage is a gift and sign from Allāh (“*min āyātihī*”), not merely a context for self-kindness.

Generally, the affective dimension within the lexeme *rahima* differs from Gilbert and Neff’s concepts, because humans are aware that the affection present is from Allāh (vertical) and manifested in social relations (toward others). The major question here is what about non-believers: does this mean non-believers cannot feel affection because they do not recognise that compassion comes from Allāh? Psychological research

demonstrates that the compassionate affect operates in human social relations universally across human populations, regardless of religious belief.⁵⁹

From a Qur'anic perspective, Allāh's *rahmah* is universal; every human is born with the innate capacity (*fiṭrah*) for compassionate affection. The difference: believers recognise Allāh as the Source and actively supplicate its continuity, creating a continuous cycle; non-believers enact affection from innate capacity without awareness of the Source.

3. Social dimension: Relations and kinship structure

The social dimension refers to the interpersonal and communal aspects of compassion. In contemporary psychological literature, Gilbert refers to this as “compassion for others” while Neff emphasises “common humanity,” the awareness that suffering is part of the shared human experience.

The semantic analysis on Q. 9:71 demonstrates the social dimension clearly by mentioning five characteristics of the believing community with the capacity to receive Allāh's *rahmah*: mutually advising in goodness, preventing wrongdoing, establishing prayer, paying *zakat*, and obeying Allāh and His Messenger. The verse structure shows that Allāh's *rahmah* is given to communities with pro-social characteristics, so compassion does not stop at the individual but is realised in social interaction (communal compassion). Q. 47:22 addresses the severing of kinship ties as something contrary to *rahmah*. *Arḥām* (plural form of *rahim*) refers to blood kinship relations, a fundamental social structure based on biological bonds. This shows that Islamic Compassion is not only about affective feeling but is also embedded in concrete social structures, where severing kinship is considered to have a degree of damage equivalent to corruption on earth.

Q. 17:24 presents the intergenerational social dimension through the word “*kamā*” (just as), showing the reciprocal dimension in parent–child relations, from parent to child in childhood, and from child to parent in old age. The social dimension in the lexeme *rahima* shows specific structures: *arḥām* (blood kinship), *zawj* (marital partner), intergenerational relations, and *ummah* (believing community).

Thus, while contemporary psychology focuses on the self and others, in Islamic Compassion, horizontal relations (among humans) and vertical (towards Allāh) form an endless circularity; when humans maintain horizontal relations, Allāh responds with acts of bestowing *rahmah*, which strengthens the capacity for horizontal relations.

4. Motivational dimension: The drive to supplicate and serve

The motivational dimension refers to the drive or tendency to act. Gilbert calls this “commitment to alleviate suffering” while Neff emphasises motivation for self-care.

⁵⁹ Kirby, “Compassion as a Transdiagnostic Target,” 250–51; Australian Psychological Society and Marion Kostanski, eds., *The Power of Compassion: An Exploration of the Psychology of Compassion in the 21st Century* (Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2007), 162.

From semantic analysis, the motivational dimension is identified in three patterns. First, motivation to supplicate *rahmah*. The form *fi'il amr* (imperative verb) such as “*irḥamnā*” (have mercy on us) and “*irḥamhumā*” (have mercy on them both) appears in six verses (Q. 2:286, 7:23, 7:149, 11:47, 17:24, and 23:118), showing verbal motivation to supplicate *rahmah*. This systematic structure is consistent: cognitive awareness → motivation to supplicate → hope to be responded with ‘*afw* (erasure of wrongdoing) → *maghfirah* (covering of wrongdoing) → *rahmah* (the gift of compassionate love that not only frees humans from negative consequences but also grants positive goodness).

Second, pro-social motivation within the community. Q. 9:71 uses the form *fi'il mudāri'* (present tense) for five pro-social verbs, which not only indicates ongoing action but also character or continuous tendency. Unlike *fi'il māḍi* (past tense), which indicates completed action, *mudāri'* indicates motivational trait (character), not state (temporary condition).

Third, reciprocal motivation, especially towards parents. Q. 17:24 presents the word “*kamā*” (just as), which shows two actions: parents providing care in the past, and children supplicating Allāh to grant compassionate love to parents in the present. The structure is not transactional but motivational to reciprocate goodness in the form of gratitude whose value only Allāh knows.

In this dimension, it is evident that the form of self-care for believers is by connecting themselves to the Divine, which is fundamentally different from Neff’s concept of self-care as an internal individual effort.

5. Behavioural dimension: Concrete actions

The behavioural dimension refers to concrete actions to manifest compassion. In contemporary literature, Goetz et al. refer to this as “compassionate action” or “helping behaviour.”⁶⁰ From semantic analysis, the behavioural dimension is identified in several forms. First, concrete actions of the Muslim community. Q. 9:71 uses *fi'il mudāri'*, which shows not only desire (motivation, internal) but also expression in action (behaviour, external), indicating the integration of motivation-behaviour in unity.

Second, gentle behaviour. Q. 3:159 presents two contrasting behaviours, gentleness versus harshness and hard-heartedness, meaning that others can not only feel but also observe the quality of a compassionate person, one indicator being gentle behaviour.

Third, maintaining kinship ties. Q. 47:22 addresses the severing of kinship relations as behaviour contrary to *rahmah*, thus requiring concrete actions such as visiting, helping, or maintaining communication.

The behavioural dimension shows integration between vertical and horizontal behaviours; behaviour emerges as an expression of internal quality (being *raḥīm*) and

⁶⁰ Jennifer L. Goetz et al., “Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review,” *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 3 (2010): 352, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018807>.

this expression strengthens the internal quality (doing *rahmah* → being *rahīm*), forming a continuous cycle.

6. Bio-Psycho-Socio-Spiritual Integration

In its development, contemporary understanding of compassion has evolved from mere emotion into a complex biopsychosocial phenomenon. Neuroscience research demonstrates that compassion involves activation of specific brain areas, particularly the anterior insula and anterior cingulate cortex, as well as the parasympathetic nervous system.⁶¹ The hormones oxytocin and vasopressin also play roles in facilitating compassionate behaviour.⁶² Compassion is understood as an integration of biological dimensions (neurobiological, hormonal),⁶³ psychological (cognitive, affective, motivational, behavioural),⁶⁴ and social (interpersonal relations, community).⁶⁵

However, the contemporary biopsychosocial approach faces fundamental epistemological limitations. Gilbert⁶⁶ and Kirby⁶⁷ refer to compassion as a “pre-determined algorithm” or stimulus-response algorithm within every human being, yet do not explain who or what determines this algorithm, how and for what purpose this algorithm exists. The limitations of the materialistic approach in contemporary psychology leave no room to answer metaphysical questions about origin and purpose. The algorithm is accepted as a “natural” condition without questioning deeper dimensions, leaving a mystery about the source and meaning of compassion.

Islamic Compassion offers an answer through the semantic structure of the lexeme *rahima*. While the contemporary biopsychosocial perspective discovers the involvement of biological factors through inductive-empirical neuroscience research, Islamic Compassion reveals this deductively-semantically through three derivational forms: *rahīm* (رَحِيم), the female biological organ where the foetus develops; *rahmah* (رَحْمَةٌ), compassionate love, a psychological experience; and *arḥām* (أَرْحَامٌ), kinship relations, a social system. These three forms demonstrate that in the Qur’anic

⁶¹ Shaun Gallagher et al., “The Pattern Theory of Compassion,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 28, no. 6 (2024): 513, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2024.04.005>; Jeffrey J. Kim, Ross Cunnington, and James N. Kirby, “The Neurophysiological Basis of Compassion: An fMRI Meta-Analysis of Compassion and its Related Neural Processes,” *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 108 (2020): 116, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2019.10.023>.

⁶² Francis Stevens and Katherine Taber, “The Neuroscience of Empathy and Compassion in Pro-Social Behavior,” *Neuropsychologia* 159 (2021): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2021.107925>; Emma M. Seppälä et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 122.

⁶³ Gallagher et al., “The Pattern Theory of Compassion,” 511.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 507–8; Fatemesadat Mirshafiei, “The Effectiveness of Self-Compassion Therapy on Reducing Parenting Stress and Improving Parent-Child Relationship Quality,” *Psychology of Woman Journal* 6, no. 1 (2025): 21, <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.pwj.6.1.3>.

⁶⁵ Kirby, “Compassion as a Transdiagnostic Target,” 250–51.

⁶⁶ Paul Gilbert, “Compassion: From its Evolution to a Psychotherapy,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 4, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586161>.

⁶⁷ Kirby, “Compassion as a Transdiagnostic Target,” 250.

worldview, compassion was designed from the beginning as biologically, psychologically, and socially integrated.

Furthermore, semantic analysis reveals a fourth dimension absent in Western biopsychosocial models: the spiritual. In every systematic pattern identified, Allāh is present as the absolute Source of *rahmah*. The structure of awareness → supplication → reception (cognitive dimension), tenderness as an overflow of Divine *rahmah* (affective dimension), motivation to beseech Allāh (motivational dimension), and the cycle of being *rahīm* → doing *rahmah* → being *rahīm* (behavioural dimension), all demonstrate a vertical orientation that integrates the horizontal dimension.

These findings reveal that, in the Qur'anic worldview, compassion is understood as a phenomenon that: (1) has biological roots, connected to birth, creation, and human *fiṭrah*; (2) is experienced psychologically, as heart awareness, affection, motivation, and behaviour; (3) is manifested in social structures, kinship (*arḥām*), marriage (*zawj*), community (*ummah*); and (4) originates spiritually from the Divine, Allāh as *ar-Rahmān* and *ar-Rahīm* who is absolute.

The empirical-inductive approach of contemporary science is fragmentary in its investigative process: neuroscience studies the brain, psychology studies emotions, sociology studies relations, only then integrated into a biopsychosocial model. Conversely, the deductive-semantic approach of Islamic Compassion presents wholeness from the beginning: *rahīm-rahmah-arḥām* is an organic unity that reflects unity in Divine creation.

Gilbert and Neff make important contributions in a secular context, while Islamic Compassion offers a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual framework for Muslim populations whose worldview is centred on Allāh. Dialogue between both paradigms can enrich each: contemporary psychology can learn about the vertical dimension and community involvement, while Islamic Compassion can adopt empirical methodologies for culturally appropriate practical applications. Islamic Compassion is not a replacement, but a complementary paradigm that expands understanding of compassion in a pluralistic global context.

Islamic Compassion: Core Characteristic

Semantic analysis reveals six core characteristics that distinguish Islamic Compassion from contemporary psychology, as summarised in the following comparison of research findings.

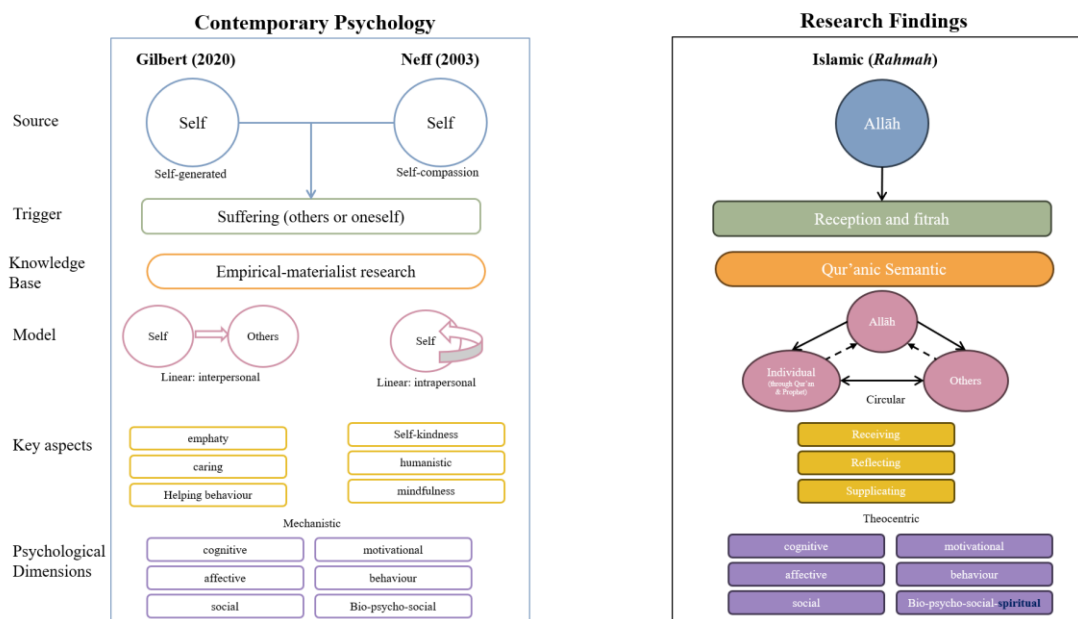


Figure 1. Compassion conceptual comparison between contemporary psychology and research findings

1. Source-oriented: Allāh as the Absolute Source

The most fundamental difference lies in the source of compassion. Gilbert’s and Neff’s models position the self as the source, self-generated compassion and self-compassion. Conversely, Islamic Compassion positions Allāh as the absolute and unlimited Source. In every systematic pattern identified, compassion flows from Allāh to humans (and all His creation), not produced autonomously by individuals. This theological positioning carries profound psychological implications, addressing compassion fatigue,⁶⁸ the exhaustion of being compassionate frequently experienced by help professionals. As Nursi argues, human beings possess infinite emotions and desires that cannot be fully satisfied by finite worldly objects or limited human capacities.⁶⁹ The human heart’s infinite longing for perfect compassion reflects its origin in the Infinite Divine. When compassion is understood as an individual effort drawn from limited internal resources, fatigue become inevitable. However, when oriented toward Allāh as the Infinite Source, believers access a wellspring of *rahmah* that elevates human limitation. Therefore, renewal of compassion comes not through the technique of training alone, but also through reconnection with the Infinite Source, through supplication, Qur’anic engagement, and remembrance, enabling sustained compassion action and finding ultimate fulfilment not in temporary worldly satisfaction but in connection with the Eternal.

⁶⁸ Stoewen, ‘Moving from Compassion Fatigue to Compassion Resilience Part 4’.

⁶⁹ Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, Risale-i Nur, trans. Şükran Vahide (Sözler Publications, 1960), 30, <https://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=en#content.en.203.30>.

2. Triggered by reception and *fiṭrah*: Beyond suffering

Contemporary models focus on suffering as the primary trigger for compassion, whether one's own (Neff) or others' (Gilbert). However, not everyone can recognise the presence of "suffering." In semantic findings, Islamic Compassion is triggered not only by suffering, but by the reception of *rahmah* and *fiṭrah* (innate capacity since birth from the womb).

Q. 3:159 demonstrates the Prophet's ﷺ tenderness as a direct consequence of receiving Allāh's *rahmah*, not from identifying the Companions' suffering. The structure receiving (from Allāh) → reflecting (to others) → supplication (back to Allāh) shows that compassion begins from receiving Divine *rahmah*, which enables humans to respond to suffering and other conditions requiring tenderness and compassionate love. Furthermore, the connection *rahim* (womb) → *rahmah* (compassionate love) reveals that every human born from the womb already possesses innate capacity (*fiṭrah*) for *rahmah*, making compassion an inherent identity in creation, not a reactive response to suffering.

3. Revelation-rooted: Knowledge from Divine revelation

The knowledge base about compassion in contemporary psychology is empirical-materialist research, through neuroscience, experimental psychology, and observational studies conducted inductively from observed phenomena. Islamic Compassion, conversely, begins with Divine revelation as the knowledge source (deductive), which is systematically analysed through inductive semantic methodology to extract conceptual structures.

This epistemological difference is crucial: while both approaches may use inductive analytical processes, Islamic Compassion's foundation is revelation (deductive source), whereas contemporary psychology's foundation is empirical observation (inductive source). The Qur'an is not discovered through research but received as revelation, then systematically understood through linguistic analysis.

This difference in knowledge source has important implications. The empirical approach is fragmentary; neuroscience studies the brain, psychology studies emotions, sociology studies relations, only then integrated. The inductive-semantic approach of Islamic Compassion presents wholeness from the beginning: *rahim-rahmah-arḥām* is an organic unity that reflects unity in Divine creation (*tawḥīd*). Furthermore, while empirical research discovered the involvement of oxytocin and the parasympathetic system in compassion after decades of research, the Qur'anic semantic structure has revealed the integration of biological (*rahim*), psychological (*rahmah*), and social (*arḥām*) dimensions since 14 centuries ago.

4. Circular model: Allāh-individual-others

Gilbert's and Neff's models are linear-interpersonal: self → others (Gilbert) or self → self (Neff). Islamic Compassion operates in a circular model with two axes: vertical

(human–Allāh) and horizontal (human–human), which mutually reinforce in a continuous cycle.

The systematic patterns identified show the flow: Allāh gives *rahmah* → humans receive and channel to others → Allāh responds with greater *rahmah* → the cycle continues. Q. 9:71 exemplifies: the believing community that maintains horizontal relationships (mutually advising, preventing wrongdoing, maintaining kinship ties) is responded to by Allāh with vertical action “*sa-yarhamuhum Allāh*” (Allāh will bestow *rahmah* on them), which strengthens their capacity for subsequent horizontal actions. This circular model distinguishes Islamic Compassion from linear approaches that separate self-compassion and compassion for others as two different constructs.

5. Key aspects: Receiving, reflecting, and supplicating

Key aspects of compassion in contemporary psychology are cause-and-effect: empathy (recognising suffering) → awareness → helping behaviour. Islamic Compassion recognises that this process can become paralysed and needs to return to God: receiving (from Allāh), reflecting (to others), and supplicating (back to Allāh).

The supplicating dimension marked by the repeated appearance of the word “*irhamnā*” in six verses (Q. 2:286, 7:23, 7:149, 11:47, 17:24, and 23:118) with a tiered hierarchy (*afw* → *maghfirah* → *rahmah*) demonstrates that compassion is not only about doing (helping others) but also about being (acknowledging dependence on the Source). This orientation towards Allāh transforms compassion from a cultivated skill into a spiritual quality that is renewed through continuous connection with Allāh. Furthermore, in every psychological dimension, vertical orientation integrates and gives meaning to horizontal actions.

6. Timeless: Bio-psycho-socio-spiritual integration

Psychological dimensions in contemporary models are limited to cognitive, affective, and social, integrated within a biopsychosocial framework. Islamic Compassion adds a fourth dimension: spiritual, forming a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual model that transcends the temporal boundaries of worldly life.

The etymological triad *rahim* (womb) – *rahmah* (compassion) – *arḥām* (kinship) suggests bio-psycho-social integration is encoded at the lexical level of the Qur’anic language system. This differs from contemporary psychology where integration is achieved inductively through multi-disciplinary research (neuroscience discovers biology, psychology studies emotion, sociology examines relationships). In the Qur’anic worldview, these dimensions are semantically unified from the outset, with the spiritual dimension (Allāh as *ar-Rahmān*) functioning as the ontological ground that the other dimensions presuppose.

In the context of human life, the structure of Islamic Compassion encompasses three phases: (1) since creation in the womb, *rahim* as the first-place humans receive *rahmah*; (2) throughout worldly life, in every triggering situation (difficulty, wrongdoing, social

interaction, worship); and (3) until the hereafter, as “the supreme triumph.” In other words, Islamic Compassion is not a one-time moment, but a continuous process that, from the Qur’anic worldview, has no beginning and no end.

From the entire semantic analysis and psychological discussion above, Islamic Compassion can be defined as: *rahmah* that originates from Allāh, mediated through the Qur’an and Prophet ﷺ, received by humans and the entire universe, manifested in concrete forms (cognitive, affective, social, motivational, behavioural), and producing impacts in the hereafter and this world. This process occurs continuously, from the Divine perspective without beginning or end, yet in the human context begins from creation in the womb, continues throughout life in triggering situations (difficulty, wrongdoing, social interaction, worship), until the hereafter.

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2 illustrates the flow of compassion as a circular process with five main components: (1) Allāh as the unlimited Source, providing a solution to compassion fatigue arising from dependence on limited internal resources; (2) Mediators (the Qur’an and Prophet ﷺ mediated by angels), channelling *rahmah* and providing knowledge as well as concrete examples of how to practise compassion; (3) Universal recipients, believers (*mu’minūn*), universal-conditional (all creatures under certain conditions), and the universe (all that is created), demonstrating that every human born from the womb already possesses the capacity to be compassionate; (4) Psychological manifestation in three continuous stages (receiving from Allāh → reflecting to others → supplicating back to Allāh) with hierarchical gradation (*‘afw* → *maghfirah* → *rahmah*); and (5) Dual impact in this world and the hereafter. Curved arrows depict the recurring pattern, while downward arrows show the hierarchical process, creating a spiral model where each cycle deepens awareness and strengthens compassionate capacity.

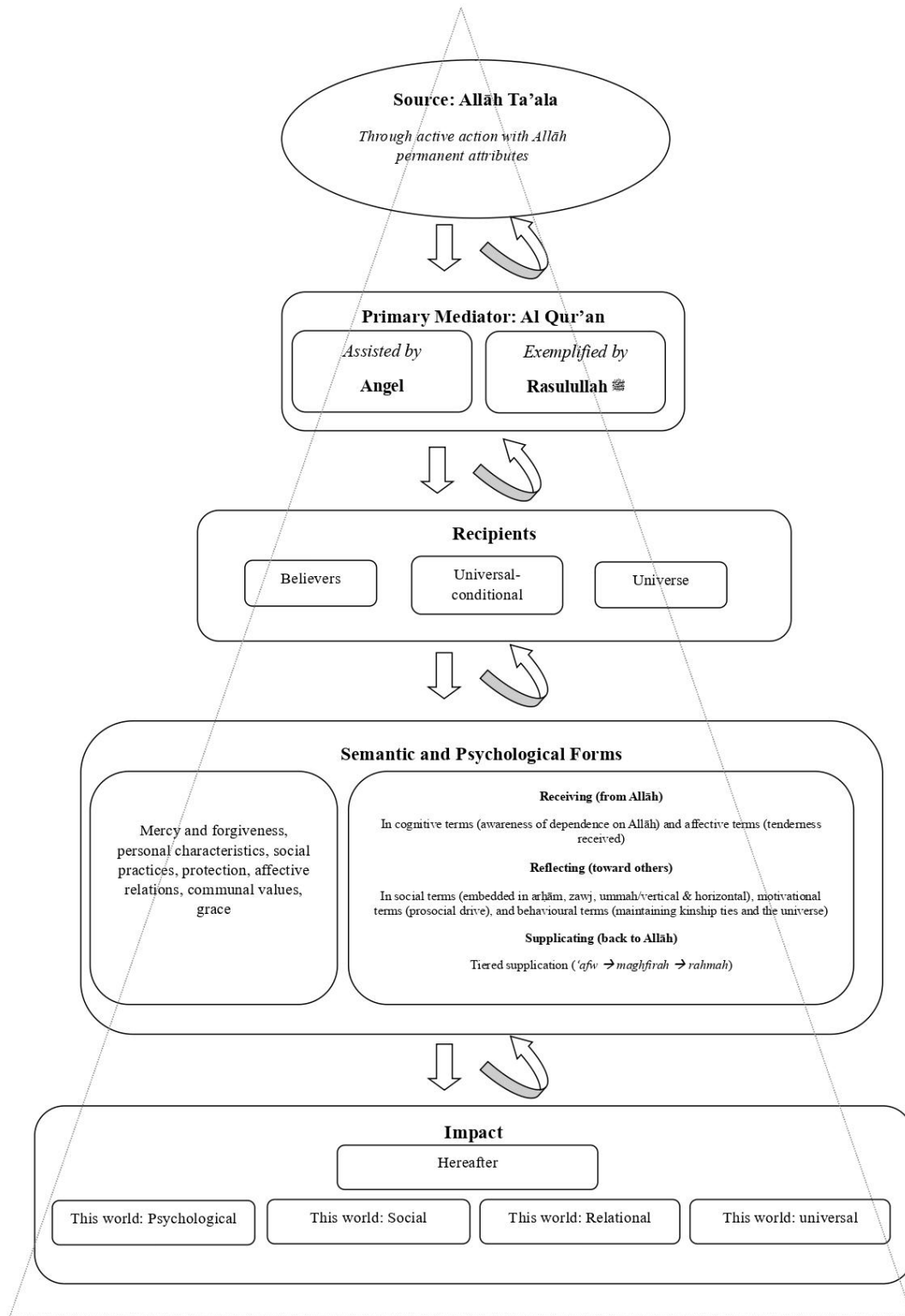


Figure 2. Islamic Compassion framework

CONCLUSION

This study explored a conceptual framework for Islamic Compassion through semantic analysis of the lexeme *rahima* in the Qur'an, employing Toshihiko Izutsu's methodology across 16 verses containing *fi'il rahima*. The analysis identified five integrated psychological dimensions. These dimensions form a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual model that distinguishes Islamic Compassion from compassion constructs in contemporary psychology. Then elaborating Islamic Compassion is characterised by six core features.

This study makes three principal contributions. Methodologically: it validates Qur'anic semantics as a rigorous and replicable method for constructing Islamic psychology concepts without Islamising Western theories. Theoretically: it offers an alternative paradigm of compassion fundamentally different in aspects of source, trigger, orientation, and mechanism. Practically: it opens possibilities for developing clinical interventions for Muslim populations aligned with the Qur'anic worldview, focusing on activating innate capacity (*fitrah*) rather than cultivating skills from scratch.

Future research can explore the *ism rahima* forms, develop the Islamic Compassion scale, and initiate concrete intervention modules. Islamic Compassion is not a replacement, but a complement in the global discourse on compassion, offering a revelation-rooted perspective capable of dialoguing with modern science. For the one in six people experiencing loneliness globally, and particularly for Muslim populations seeking culturally resonant interventions, this research opens pathways for compassion-based healing grounded in the Qur'anic promise.

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