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## Critical Reflections on Current Status of Scholarship in Islamic Psychology – Challenges and Solutions

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# CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CURRENT STATUS OF SCHOLARSHIP IN ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY – CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

G. Hussein Rassool\*

**Abstract:** Islamic psychology, aimed at synthesising Islamic values with psychological theories, faces significant challenges despite its promise. This article presents a comprehensive review of the literature, revealing significant challenges that impede the development of an authentic Islamic psychology. The critical analysis, conducted through a qualitative review, is based on primary and secondary sources. The review critically challenges the issues of blind imitation, partialism, apologism, contradiction, epistemological biases and deconstructionism within contemporary Islamic psychology scholarship. The article emphasises their impact on knowledge creation and thought development in Islamic psychology. The key insights and recommendations resulting from the analysis of Islamic psychology scholarship include raising awareness of epistemological biases, critically evaluating assumptions, engaging directly with primary sources, embracing diverse perspectives, promoting collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches, and emphasising empirical validation. Implementing these recommendations can lead to a more authentic, inclusive and evidence-based approach to Islamic psychology. By addressing these challenges, the article suggests pathways toward the development of authentic Islamic psychology, fostering a more robust and integrated understanding that aligns with Islamic values.

**Keywords:** *Islamic psychology, psychology, imitation, partialism, apologism, intellectual humility, scholarship*

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic psychology, a field that combines Islamic principles and psychological theories, promises a deep understanding of human behaviours, cognitions and experiences from an

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Islamic perspective. Islamic psychology is defined as “the study of the science of the soul, mental processes, and behaviour according to the principles of empirical psychology, rationality, and divine revelation from the Qur’ān and Sunnah.”<sup>1</sup> The goal of Islamic psychology is to synthesise empirical psychology, rationality and insights derived from the Qur’ān and *sunna*. The synthesis of these three components suggests an attempt to create a holistic approach to understanding the human psyche and behaviour.

However, an in-depth exploration of the literature on the prevailing approaches and models exposes a diversity of challenges that hinder the development of a comprehensive and authentic Islamic psychology. Auda has identified several pitfalls in Islamic thought,<sup>2</sup> which include imitation (*taqlid*), partialism (*tajzi*), apologism (*tabrir*), contradiction (*tanaqud*) and deconstructionism (*tafkik*). These pitfalls in Islamic thought are not limited to Islamic studies but can be applied to Islamic psychology scholarship. These factors include epistemological bias, blind imitation, partialism, apologism, contradiction and deconstructionism. These aspects define the landscape of contemporary Islamic psychology, often giving rise to inherent limitations that merit careful consideration. By recognising and addressing these challenges, academics and practitioners of Islamic psychology can strive for a more robust and harmonious integration of empirical psychology and Islamic principles, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of human nature.

The article investigates the multifaceted challenges of scholarship in the field of Islamic psychology. It further proposes potential solutions to overcome these challenges and develop a more robust and authentic understanding of the field. The critical analysis, conducted through a qualitative review, is based on primary and secondary sources. The research questions, based on the article’s aims, can be summarised as:

- What are the multifaceted challenges that characterise the field of Islamic psychology?
- How do issues such as imitation, epistemological biases, varied interpretations of Islamic psychology and potential misrepresentations of foundational Islamic sources impact the development and authenticity of Islamic psychology?
- What are potential solutions for overcoming these challenges and contributing to the development of a more robust and authentic Islamic psychology?

## MISREPRESENTATION

Within the realm of Islamic psychological literature, a critical concern emerges in the form of academics’ and clinicians’ poor grasp of Islamic sources. The object of the critics is the inadequate utilisation of Islamic sources by researchers and clinicians. The Qur’ān, *sunna* and body of Islamic knowledge are often approached with a superficial understanding or, at times,

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<sup>1</sup> G. Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Psychology: The Basics* (Oxford: Routledge, 2023), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67tg>; Jasser Auda, *Re-envisioning Islāmic Scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a New Approach* (Swansea: Claritas Books, 2021).

outright misinterpretation. Researchers might inadvertently misinterpret or misuse Qur'ānic verses if they lack comprehensive understanding of the verses and broader Islamic exegesis. As a result, there is a tendency for certain interpreters to selectively apply literal readings of the Qur'ān to support their claims. It has been suggested that “clinicians and researchers usually misuse verses from the Qur'ān as evidence to support their opinions or findings without referring to the context in which the verses are used or without a proper understanding of *tafsir*.”<sup>3</sup>

The consequences of this phenomena are two-fold, with far-reaching effects. First, there arises the issue of misrepresenting Islamic teachings, as well as the parallel risk of distorting well-established psychological theories. Another critical concern lies in the practice of isolating individual Qur'ānic verses that appear to connect with certain psychological ideas, without considering their intricate and complex contextual meaning. For example, the verse that states, “Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear.”<sup>4</sup> This verse is often cited to convey the concept of psychological resilience, suggesting that individuals will never face more challenges than they can handle. However, closer examination of the context reveals that this verse primarily refers to the burden of religious obligations and accountability of individuals for their actions. This approach ignores the rich interpretive tradition (*tafsir*) that is deeply rooted in Islamic scholarship. By avoiding this intellectual tradition, interpretive depth may be lost, potentially leading to distorted understanding and unintentional misinterpretation.

## PARTIALISM AND BLIND IMITATION

Another set of challenges emerges, that of partialism (*tajzi*) and blind imitation, also known as *taqlid*. Auda suggests that “partialistic evidence that is marshalled to support a particular view, decision or approach, often leads to unintended outcomes and destroys the holistic purposes (*maqasid*) that are desired, instead of contributing to their achievement.”<sup>5</sup> Auda’s suggestion highlights the potential drawbacks of relying on partialistic evidence to support a specific view, decision or approach. This means that focusing on a narrow set of evidence may result in a distorted or incomplete understanding of the situation, decision or approach. The term “blind imitation” or *taqlid* refers to the “actions of those slavishly follow a single *Madhhab* [Islamic school of thought] regardless of errors that they see.”<sup>6</sup> In the context of Islamic psychology, both terms refer to Islamic academics and psychologists who adhere to a single school of thought or ideology, and both tend to ignore different points of view. This would inhibit the understanding of psychological insights to a specific ideological framework. For example, if a researcher concentrates solely on notions from one *madhhab*, they may miss out on useful insights from other schools of thought, resulting in a narrow and perhaps biased view of Islamic psychology. Similarly, interpreting psychological theories only through the lens of

<sup>3</sup> Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*, 187.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 2:286.

<sup>5</sup> Auda, *Re-envisioning Islamic Scholarship*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005), 287.

one's own ideological ideas might obstruct an objective and thorough understanding of the area by ignoring alternative perspectives and interpretations. The adherence to distinct schools of thought within Islamic scholarship can lead to concept fragmentation, limiting the synthesis of multiple perspectives, and rejection of valuable contributions from outside one's chosen tradition. Academic institutions and clinical service provisions are occasionally supported by ties with specific schools of thought, most notably the Hanafi *madhhab*, and led by esoteric Sufi orientations. While presenting alternative viewpoints, a singular focus on specific schools of thought or mystical orientations in Islamic psychology scholarship may steer away from the fundamental creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah* (mainstream and orthodox Sunni Muslim community), which is often referred to simply as Sunni Islam.

The tendency to prioritise certain conceptual and theoretical frameworks can influence educational practices, including the selection of course materials. For example, if a curriculum heavily emphasises the teachings and perspectives of one school of thought or mystical tradition in Islamic psychology, it may inadvertently neglect or downplay other valid perspectives and theories within the field. This type of single-minded approach can limit the breadth and depth of knowledge available to students, hindering their understanding of the diverse range of Islamic psychological frameworks and the diversity of Muslim communities. Thus, potentially perpetuating bias in the discipline.

In Islamic psychotherapy, the phenomena of promoting schools of thought or mystical orientations might have practical implications for the therapeutic aspects of clinical interventions. For example, if a therapist only uses the therapeutic interventions of one school of thought, they may unintentionally overlook significant insights and practices from other schools of thought. This can lead to a limited and perhaps unproductive approach to therapy for individuals who would benefit from more eclectic interventions. Moreover, a singular focus on a specific mystical orientation can shape the therapeutic goals and techniques employed. For instance, if a therapist primarily incorporates Sufi practices in their clinical interventions, they may emphasise spiritual purification or heightened consciousness as primary objectives, potentially neglecting other important dimensions of psychospiritual health or missing opportunities for incorporating evidence-based interventions from psychological sciences and authentic spiritual interventions.

One concerning aspect is that a significant majority within the community of Islamic psychologists may be oriented towards a single-minded approach. This means a disproportionately large number of psychologists may primarily follow and promote the perspectives of one specific school of thought or mystical orientation, potentially excluding or devaluing alternative viewpoints. This imbalance within the community of Islamic psychologists can lead to a lack of diversity and a limited range of perspectives represented. As a result, important contributions from other schools of thought might be marginalised or overlooked. This can restrict the intellectual and professional growth of the field, limiting the exchange of ideas and hindering the development of a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of Islamic psychology. To illustrate this, consider a scenario where the minority dominant group of clinicians and "educationalists" prioritise the teachings of a particular model

of clinical interventions or therapeutic approach. While this approach may have its merits, it can unintentionally exclude individuals who resonate with different perspectives or who may find other approaches more relevant to the needs of Muslim clients. Having a dominant single-minded approach within the community of Islamic psychologists risks creating an echo chamber where dissenting voices or alternative viewpoints are not adequately represented or given due consideration. This can impede critical thinking, hinder innovation in the field and limit the overall progress of Islamic psychology.

The recognition and appreciation of the significant contributions of classical academics and current thinkers who have had and continue to have a profound impact on the domain of *ilm an-nafs* (psychology of the self) is extremely important in Islamic psychology studies. This act of acknowledgment is not only critical, but a necessary component, regardless of the vast variety of schools of thought and ideological viewpoints they represent. It is a critical step in building a full understanding of Islamic psychology. These classical luminaries, including Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Al-Raghib Ar-Rāghib al-Aṣbahānī, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali,<sup>7</sup> have left an enduring mark on the exploration of human behaviours and the psyche within an Islamic framework. Regardless of these contributions’ schools of thought and ideological viewpoints, honouring them is not only a matter of academic practice, but an ethical responsibility. A holistic Islamic psychology necessitates the synthesis of many Islamic traditions’ and perspectives’ ideas, transcending strict borders and establishing an environment of free debate and enquiry.

Furthermore, there is a widespread practice of “cherry-picking,” which is fundamentally a form of partialism in the broader context of published papers and books. “Cherry-picking is the presentation of favourable evidence with the concealment of unfavourable evidence.”<sup>8</sup> Cherry-picking can occur as a result of a variety of circumstances, including cognitive bias, confirmation bias (preferring information that matches previous ideas) and even the desire to support a specific argument or viewpoint. In the literature of Islamic psychology, researchers frequently engage in a cherry-picking process, in which they purposefully select particular data, examples or details that confirm a predetermined conclusion while neglecting or dismissing opposing or nuanced information. This selective bias reinforces their opinions or integrates information that accords with their school of thought, frequently at the expense of ignoring opposing viewpoints. Though not unique to Islamic psychology, this approach has important implications, possibly weakening the objectivity and integrity of scientific debate within the subject by fostering a biased portrayal of ideas and opinions. As an example, a common trend can be observed in which references to individuals or ideas that align with our own are prioritised in citations, while those holding opposing viewpoints may be excluded.

<sup>7</sup> G. Hussein Rassool and Mugheera M. Luqman, *Foundations of Islamic Psychology: From Classical Scholars to Contemporary Thinkers* (Oxford: Routledge, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Chittaranjan Andrade, “HARKing, Cherry-Picking, P-Hacking, Fishing Expeditions, and Data Dredging and Mining as Questionable Research Practices,” *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 82, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.20f13804>.

Furthermore, there is a distinct tendency among academics to miss material that offers challenges or conflicts to their theories.

Frequently, research efforts and scholarly works originating from Islamic scholars based in Africa, Asia and Oceania are overlooked, as there is a discernible bias towards favouring scholars from Western hemispheres, Muslims Orientalists or those who resonate with comparable schools of thought, orientations and ideologies. This trend is an example of bias and manipulation in Islamic psychology. As a result, the works and literature produced by current intellectuals in those regions have limited visibility. It is worth noting that some of these less recognised professors have contributed more articles and research than some of the more visible “pseudo-Islamic,” “pseudo-clinicians intellectuals” or “Muslim psychologists” in Western environments.

## EPISTEMOLOGICAL BIASES

In relation to bias in Islamic psychology, critics often target research bias, which is a common occurrence in mainstream psychology and can be applicable to Islamic psychology research. Bias in research is defined as “an error in the conception and design of a study - or in the collection, analysis, interpretation, reporting, publication, or review or data - leading to results or conclusions that are systematically (as opposed to randomly) different from truth.”<sup>9</sup> These biases can be unintentional and result from a variety of causes, including subjectivity in research design, sample selection, and data interpretation. It is critical for Islamic psychology researchers to be aware of and address these biases to ensure the integrity and validity of their research findings.

Sample selection bias in Islamic psychology refers to a situation in which the participants chosen for a study or research project are not representative of the greater population of interest within the Islamic context. This bias can occur when some groups are over- or underrepresented in the sample, resulting in skewed or incorrect conclusions that may not apply to the entire range of individuals or communities within the Islamic context. For example, if a study on the effectiveness of Islamic oriented cognitive behaviour therapy in Muslim communities only includes participants from a specific geographical area or cultural background, the conclusions may not appropriately reflect the diverse range of experiences and viewpoints prevalent across the Islamic world. This prejudice jeopardises the generalisation and validity of research findings. Selective reporting bias arises when researchers publish only findings that support their hypothesis while ignoring those that do not. This bias can result in an erroneous depiction of the entire range of results. In Islamic psychology research, this could mean publishing papers that show favourable impacts of Islamic practices on mental health while dismissing studies that show no significant effects. Selective reporting bias can exhibit in a variety of ways in

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<sup>9</sup> Miquel Porta, ed., *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199976720.001.0001/acref-9780199976720-e-142>.

Islamic psychology research, perhaps leading to an inadequate or inaccurate representation of findings.

In addition, there are epistemological biases, which occur when researchers or academics rely extensively on secondary materials or the opinions of other scholars rather than engaging directly with primary texts like as the Qur'ān and *sunna*. Accordingly, epistemological bias

is about the abandoning of the indigenous paradigms and biases that arise from their own existential and historical situations as a result of encountering the Western framework and paradigm as not only a foreign source but also believed to be dominant even among the Arab writers and researchers. The danger of this phenomenon is so pervasive that it tends to distort the whole process and gives serious effect to the future of the affected culture and civilisation.<sup>10</sup>

This means that a tendency to view knowledge via specific lenses shaped by cultural, ideological or historical variables might distort psychological theories and therapies.

The other issue is relying on scholarly opinions without consulting primary sources, which can lead to several challenges. One major source of concern is the possibility of concept misrepresentation or misinterpretation in Islamic teachings and practices. Researchers in Islamic psychology frequently dive into complex notions such as the *nafs* (self), *akhlaq* (virtues), *qalb* (heart) and *fitrah* (natural inclination). Overreliance on secondary sources may result in misunderstanding these principles. From a religious, philosophical or psychological standpoint, the *nafs* is defined ontologically in many ways. If a researcher depends entirely on the interpretation of a single scholar or theological school, they risk missing the concept's complexity and multidimensional nature. Epistemological biases can also lead to reductionism, simplification or limitation of complex and diverse Islamic notions to fit known psychological paradigms. This reductionist approach may ignore the complex interplay of spiritual, psychological and social components within Islamic teachings. For example, reducing *tawakkul* (faith in God) to a psychological coping mechanism ignores Islam's rich spiritual components.

Statistical manipulation is the purposeful handling of data and statistical analysis to portray conclusions that are biased or misleading. Misuse of statistics often happens in advertisements, politics, news, media,<sup>11</sup> medicine<sup>12</sup> and research literature. This method can result in skewed interpretations, erroneous conclusions and misrepresentation of the genuine nature of the research. The famous book *How to Lie with Statistics*<sup>13</sup> is useful for the novice.

<sup>10</sup> Amilah Awang Abd Rahman, "BIAS: Epistemological Bias in the Physical and Social Sciences," *Bangladesh Journal of Integrated Thoughts* 17, no 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.52805/bjit.v17i2.245>.

<sup>11</sup> Bernardita Calzon, "Misleading Statistics Examples – Discover the Potential for Misuse of Statistics & Data in the Digital Age," *datapine*, last modified January 6, 2023, <https://www.datapine.com/blog/misleading-statistics-and-data/>.

<sup>12</sup> Pablo Millares Martin, "Rapid Response to: 'Covid-19: Politicisation, "Corruption," and Suppression of Science,'" *BMJ*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m4425/rr>.

<sup>13</sup> Darrell Huff, *How to Lie with Statistics*, revised ed. (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1993).



## APOLOGISM

One of critics of Islamic psychology is the apparent degree of apologism in the literature. Apologism is a “limitation whereby the objectives, concepts and values of other paradigms are adopted, as well as the institutions in which they are manifested.”<sup>14</sup> This refers to the act of defending or justifying a specific viewpoint, frequently to an extreme or uncritical extent.

In the context of Islamic psychology, apologism can manifest when scholars or researchers defend certain perspectives or interpretations without objectively addressing potential criticisms or limitations. An example of apologism develops within the discourse of Islamic psychological literature, as shown by the quote: “Therefore, in its untrained state, the *nafs* is hedonistic and can expand its appetite. It is possible to liken the *nafs* in this sense to Freud’s conceptualisation of the id.”<sup>15</sup> In the statement, the verb “liken” means to represent as the same, comparable or compare. For example, the provided statement appears to exhibit apologism by drawing a direct comparison in their characteristics and functions between the Islamic concept of *nafs* and Freud’s psychological construct of the “id,” without critically considering the differences and implications. Apologism becomes evident when authors uncritically align two concepts, potentially oversimplifying the complexities of each framework. Within the confines of the same publication, the irony becomes evident as this form of apologism is echoed in the subsequent statements by Badri, the Father of Modern Islamic Psychology:

There is the seminal theory of the three structures of personality-namely the id, ego and super ego-are the same as the spiritual ego states of the soul that are mentioned in the holy Qur’ān. They claimed that the commanding soul *nafs ammārah* stands for the id, the soul *nafs*, is exemplified by the ego, and the tranquil soul *nafs muṭma’innah* stands for the superego. This undermined the richer and metaphysical nature of the Qur’ānic concepts.<sup>16</sup>

Badri further illustrates this point by sharing a personal observation: “I personally witnessed many Muslim psychologists strongly defend this false belief as if Freud were a spiritually motivated scholar!”<sup>17</sup> Badri’s remark draws attention to the potential consequence of adopting interpretations that align closely with Western psychological theories, like Freudian concepts, thus overlooking the profound metaphysical depths present in Qur’ānic concepts, reducing them to psychological parallels.

There is a concerning trends in Islamic psychoanalysis, where some practitioners advocate for assimilation of Freudian doctrines within an Islamic framework, which is a troubling tendency.<sup>18</sup> This defence may be interpreted as a type of apologia, in which Freud’s views are

<sup>14</sup> Auda, *Re-envisioning Islamic Scholarship*, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Hooman Keshavarzi and Bilal Ali, “Foundations of Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy (TIIP),” in *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care: Introducing Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy*, ed. Hooman Keshavarzi, Fahad Khan, Bilal Ali and Rania Awaad (New York: Routledge, 2021), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Malik Badri, “Preface,” in *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care: Introducing Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy*, ed. Hooman Keshavarzi, Fahad Khan, Bilal Ali and Rania Awaad (New York: Routledge, 2021), xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Parker and Sabah Siddiqi, ed., *Islamic Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Islam* (Oxford: Routledge, 2019).

raised to a spiritual or doctrinal level. This flawed attachment to some theories, regardless of their consistency with Islamic principles, raises concerns regarding academic judgement and critical examination. This trend may also be found on Muslim blogs, where people enthusiastically express a deep liking for Freudian principles, easily integrating them into the field of Islamic psychology. This zealous advocacy of Freudian notions within an Islamic environment poses several critical issues. Oversimplification of complicated ideas, distortion of Islamic teachings and contempt for spiritual significance are examples of these.

## CONTRADICTION

Contradiction (*tanaqud*) “manifests in scholarship when there is an attempt to integrate two bodies of knowledge that do not emanate from the same basic beliefs and worldview.”<sup>19</sup> For instance, this inconsistency is visible in the methods of so-called Islamic psychotherapists, who include complementary therapies that may be incompatible with Islamic teachings. Some mental health therapists may strive to blend complementary therapies and New Age spiritual practices or ideas into Islamic mysticism. Attempting to incorporate concepts of energy healing, *chakras* or meditation from New Age sources with Islamic beliefs, for example, might lead to inconsistencies. Islamic spirituality is based on monotheism and specific practices guided by the Qur’ān and *sunna*, while New Age activities often stem from different philosophical and spiritual foundations.

Buddhist-inspired mindfulness or mindfulness-informed interventions, which aim to promote relaxation and self-awareness, have grown in prominence over the past decade. These approaches, influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions, are considered part of a “third wave” of behavioural and cognitive therapies.<sup>20</sup> Mindfulness-based interventions have been described as “Although secularised, these mindfulness-based interventions are derived from and influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism.”<sup>21</sup> However, from an Islamic perspective, mindfulness is considered “the virtue of *muraqabah*.”<sup>22</sup> *Muraqabah* is defined as “the constant knowledge of the servant and conviction in the supervision of the Truth, glory be to Him, over one’s outward and inward states.”<sup>23</sup> It is worth highlighting that the acceptability of incorporating mindfulness techniques under the guise of the Sufi practice of *muraqabah*<sup>24</sup> within the Islamic traditions hinges on various factors, such as the underlying intent, approach

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>20</sup> Steven C. Hayes, “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Relational Frame Theory, and the Third Wave of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies,” *Behavior Therapy* 35, no. 4 (2004), [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894\(04\)80013-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894(04)80013-3).

<sup>21</sup> Justin Thomas, Steven W. Furber and Ian Grey, “The Rise of Mindfulness and its Resonance with the Islamic Tradition,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 20, no. 10 (2017): 973.

<sup>22</sup> Justin Parrott, “How to be a Mindful Muslim: An Exercise in Islāmic Meditation,” Yaqeen Institute for Islami Research, last modified June 12, 2023, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/how-to-be-a-mindful-muslim-an-exercise-in-Islāmic-meditation>.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tuwayjirī, *Mawsū’at Fiqh Al-Qulūb fī daw’ al-Qur’ān wa-al-Sunnah* [Encyclopedia of the Jurisprudence of the Hearts in the Light of the Qur’an and the Sunnah] (‘Ammān: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawlīyah, 2006), 2:1997.

<sup>24</sup> Nazila Isgandarova, “Muraqaba as a Mindfulness-Based Therapy in Islamic Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 58 (2019).

taken and how well it aligns with Islamic principles. However, some esoteric mindfulness practices may use meditation techniques rooted in Buddhist traditions, which may contradict Islamic beliefs. Some types of mindfulness, for example, emphasise emptying the mind, which may be seen as incompatible with the Islamic practice of constant awareness of Allah (*dhikr*). Qur'ānic evidence emphasises the importance of remembering Allah: “So remember Me; I will remember you.”<sup>25</sup>

Some examples of complementary therapies that might not be universally acceptable within Islam include Reiki and energy healing; hypnotherapy and past life regression; crystal healing; homeopathy with non-halal substances; reflexology; and certain forms of meditation. Complementary therapies, while often beneficial for many individuals, can sometimes clash with Islamic principles due to cultural, ethical or religious considerations. It is essential for individuals considering complementary therapies to consult with knowledgeable Islamic scholars, practitioners or counsellors who understand the practices and religious context. It has been suggested that,

Whilst some have argued that these elements can be removed to make the therapeutic approach *halāl*, caution is urged on relying on a practice that has its original basis in something that is incompatible with Islam. This especially holds true when there are plenty of alternatives that are *halāl* and compatible with Islam that derive the same benefits as those that are questionable.<sup>26</sup>

## DECONSTRUCTIONISM

Deconstructionism, as a post-modern, deconstructionist philosophy, is making its mark across the discipline of Islamic psychology. Rooted in the post-modernist movement, deconstructionism or *tafkik* is a philosophical approach that “does not actually mean ‘demolition;’ instead it means ‘breaking down’ or analysing something (especially the words in a work of fiction or nonfiction) to discover its true significance, which is supposedly almost never exactly what the author intended.”<sup>27</sup> In the Islamic context, where tradition and interpretation are important, deconstructionism is emerging as a technique for challenging dominant interpretations and revealing hidden assumptions. It has been argued that, “in the deconstructionist endeavour, Islam as a religion becomes a cultural phenomenon that is amenable to deconstruction in terms of the relationship between knowledge and authority.”<sup>28</sup> This method tries to critically analyse and examine the sources of knowledge and authority within Islam, potentially leading to a re-evaluation of long-held beliefs and interpretations. This perspective raises important questions regarding the nature of knowledge and power in Islam. It rejects the notion that there is a single, unchanging view of Islam and emphasises the religion’s diverse and developing nature.

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<sup>25</sup> Qur’ān 2:152.

<sup>26</sup> G. Hussein Rassool and Hannah Morris, “Use of Complementary Therapies by Muslims: Halāl or Harām?” *Journal of Integrated Sciences* 1, no. 1(2020).

<sup>27</sup> Merriam Webster, s.v. “Deconstruction,” accessed August 22, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deconstruction>.

<sup>28</sup> Auda, *Re-envisioning Islamic Scholarship*, 65.

At its core, Islamic liberation psychology recognises that the teachings of Islam emphasise justice, compassion and equity. It seeks to apply these principles to psychological practices in a way that challenges oppressive structures and empowers individuals to reclaim their agency and dignity.<sup>29</sup> The creed of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah* encompasses the beliefs and practices of the majority of Muslims. Within this creed, there is a strong emphasis on adhering to the established teachings of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* as the primary sources of guidance. One of the major concerns raised by adherents of this creed in the context of Islamic liberation psychology is the potential impact of questioning authoritative interpretations of these foundational texts. This concern is rooted in the fear that revisiting established interpretations could lead to theological uncertainty, fragmentation and divergence from traditional teachings. There is apprehension that a more open approach to interpretation, as envisaged by the proponents of Islamic liberation psychology, could potentially pave the way for a range of understandings that may not align with traditional Islamic beliefs and practices. This divergence in interpretation might introduce ambiguity and confusion into matters of faith, morality and social norms.

Rassool made a critical review of Islamic liberation psychology.<sup>30</sup> He argues whether

liberation psychology applies equally to different regions and countries on a global scale is debatable, especially in Muslim majority countries, with different political, psychosocial, and religious identities. In addition, liberation psychology is based on liberation theology which is Jesuit Christian based theology.<sup>31</sup>

He concludes that adoption of a liberation psychology from an Islamic perspective does not fit the creed of followers of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah* because of its extensive overtones and nuances that oppose Sharia, the teachings in the Qur'ān and *sunna*. He suggests that Islam does not need to be liberated by the shackles of liberation psychology in whatever forms or approaches. Allah says in the Qur'ān,

Today I have completed your religion for you, perfected My favour upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion. (Al-Mā'idah 5:3, interpretation of the meaning). There is absolutely no need to apply hermeneutical principles to guide the reading of the Qur'ān and open up possibilities for inauthentic exegeses of the Qur'ān from the lens of Orientalist Muslims and feminisms.<sup>32</sup>

Allah knows best.

## EDUCATIONAL DEFICITS AND SCHOLARSHIP

A significant challenge is the educational landscape, which is typified by a scarcity of academics, doctors and researchers who are fluent in Islamic studies and psychology. The lack

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> G. Hussein Rassool, "A Critique of Islamic Liberation Psychology," *International Journal of Islamic Psychology* V, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5.

of appropriately prepared individuals in both fields jeopardises the comprehensive progress of Islamic psychology and clinical practice in Islamic psychotherapy. This educational gap exposes the cohesive progress of Islamic psychology, since individuals who are underprepared in both disciplines risk deviating from the path, resulting in an insufficient synthesis of concepts. The prophetic wisdom, echoed through the words of Ibn Sirin and the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), underscores the paramount importance of holistic education for scholars. Their wisdom reminds us that the preparation for scholarly research demands a conscientious immersion in Islamic teachings and psychological methodologies. Ibn Sirin's admonition – “This knowledge is a religion, so consider from whom you receive your religion”<sup>33</sup> – captures a pivotal aspect of the challenge facing Islamic psychology.

This lack of in-depth knowledge of these fundamental Islamic texts is a major topic of worry in the study of Islamic psychology. The deficiency in comprehensive knowledge also extends to broader Islamic studies, encompassing jurisprudence (*fiqh*), biography of Prophet Muḥammad (*sirah*), sayings or traditions attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*), theology (*aqeedah*), Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsir*) and the profound wisdoms embedded in Islamic traditions. However, the absence of comprehensive awareness of these sources among Islamic psychology students and researchers compromises the validity of psychological models and theories developed within the Islamic framework. Moreover, a superficial engagement with the Qur'ān and *sunna* can inadvertently lead to the misuse or misinterpretation of verses and teachings to support preconceived psychological notions.

The label “Islamic psychology” is more than a trendy phase as it carries significant weight and implications. A disturbing trend has evolved as a result of its sincere pursuit: the use of the phrase “Islamic psychology” to designate a wide range of psychological and pathological concepts, practices and interventions. However, as interest in Islamic psychology has grown, there has been a trend to apply the title “Islamic” to a wide range of psychological notions, including psychopathology, without sufficient validation or conformity with Islamic principles. The misuse of the label “Islamic psychology” presents in numerous ways. In certain cases, mainstream psychological theories or therapies are attributed to an Islamic background without full analysis of their compatibility with Islamic ideals. Certain cognitive-behavioural approaches or mindfulness interventions, for example, may be classified as “Islamic” solely on their potential alignment with self-improvement concepts found in Islamic teachings.

The metaphor of the “Emperor's New Clothes” revolves around a ruler who is deceived into believing he is adorned in splendid attire, despite being naked, as his courtiers fear to admit the truth. Similarly, the subject of Islamic psychology has seen an increase in the number of people identifying as scholars and practitioners, sometimes without the essential rigour, skills or scholarly grounding. There is also an influx of new names appearing on educational courses and conference posters in Islamic psychology, suggesting a burgeoning community of scholars in this field. However, beneath this façade of abundance lies a paradox – the quality and

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<sup>33</sup> Khatib at-Tabrizi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, trans. James Robson, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat>, book 2, *ḥadīth* 69.

authenticity of the scholarship often do not match the quantity of names or are without the necessary rigour, expertise or scholarly foundation. The proliferation of online resources, including courses, webinars and social media, allows individuals to gain surface-level knowledge and present themselves as experts. Furthermore, these developments unintentionally contribute to an “illusion” of a sizable scholar community in Islamic psychology.

The timeless wisdom of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) resonates across generations, such as his warning about the signs of the Hour and the potential misdirection posed by so-called scholars is relevant in the realm of Islamic psychology, where the convergence of faith and knowledge requires careful judgement. For example, in a *hadīth*, Allah’s Messenger (pbuh) said, “Some eloquent speech is as effective as magic.”<sup>34</sup> The Prophet’s (pbuh) warning concerning people who appear learned because of their eloquent discourse is especially relevant in the field of Islamic psychology, where the merger of religion and knowledge necessitates careful discernment. While fascinating, elegance of speech can occasionally hide a lack of substantive scholarly depth. It is narrated by Abu Dharr that the Prophet (pbuh) said,

Verily, you are in a time of many scholars and few preachers. Whoever leaves a tenth of what he knows will be ruined. There will come a time for people of few scholars and many preachers. Whoever adheres to a tenth of what he knows will be saved.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps it is apt to use the metaphor of new-found innumerable Islamic psychologists coming out of the “lizard hole”<sup>36</sup> is that of “donkeys carrying books.”<sup>37</sup> The metaphor of donkeys carrying books conveys the idea that mere accumulation of knowledge, or its outward appearance, does not necessarily equate to genuine understanding or wisdom. Just as a donkey laden with books remains a donkey, the appearance of expertise does not guarantee true understanding or genuine contributions to the field. This metaphor resonates in the context of the influx of self-proclaimed Islamic psychologists or scholars who may lack the profound understanding and scholarly rigour required in the field of Islamic psychology.

## PROSPECTS AND SOLUTIONS

The domain of Islamic psychology is not without its challenges, as discussed in the previous sections. From blind imitation and epistemological biases to contradictions and a shortage of genuine experts, the field grapples with multifaceted complexities.

However, opportunities for growth, evolution and transformation exist within these challenges. Partialism and blind imitation can hinder the growth and development of Islamic psychology scholarship. They restrict the wide range of interpretations inherent in Islamic

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari>, book 76, *hadīth* 81.

<sup>35</sup> Abu Amina Elias, “Hadith on Fitnah: Time of Few Scholars, Many Preachers,” Daily Hadith Online, June 6, 2017, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2017/06/06/fitnah-few-ulema-many-preachers/>.

<sup>36</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, <https://sunnah.com/muslim>, book 47, *hadīth* 7.

<sup>37</sup> Qur’ān 62:5.

traditions, distorting the holistic and interrelated knowledge with a comprehensive web of meanings. Scholars must try to avoid blind imitation and partialism to create a well-rounded and advanced understanding of Islamic psychology. This involves acknowledging the contributions of various perspectives while critically evaluating their compatibility with Islamic teachings and contemporary psychological knowledge.

Epistemological biases can lead to reductionism, which is the simplification or reduction of complex and diverse Islamic conceptions in order to fit into well-established psychological paradigms. This reductionist approach may overlook the intricate interplay of spiritual, psychological and social components within Islamic teachings. Addressing religious or secular epistemological biases can lead to a more thorough understanding of Islamic psychology. This involves critically assessing one's prejudices, engaging directly with primary sources, fostering open dialogue and embracing a variety of viewpoints to ensure that Islamic psychology stays authentic, rigorous and representative of the depth of Islamic teachings. To overcome reductionism produced by epistemic prejudice, researchers should take a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach. Researchers should adhere to rigorous statistical standards, ensure transparency in reporting methodologies and identify the limitations and potential biases in their study design and analysis to avoid misuse of statistics in Islamic psychology research. This method ensures that statistical analyses appropriately reflect the complexity of the research issue, resulting in a more authentic and reliable understanding of Islamic psychology. Addressing the limitations of selection bias through scientific rigour and insightful interpretations can help the field grow.

When applied to Islamic liberation psychology, the concept of deconstruction raises significant problems about its conformity with Islamic teachings. While deconstruction can help solve social and psychological inequities, it must be used with caution within Islamic teachings to prevent undermining essential values and ethics. In effect, there are no possibilities or remedies regarding Islamic liberation psychology. There are no paths to alignment and reconciliation between Islamic liberation psychology and key ethical values in Islamic traditions. Although some may regard this as an unnecessarily autocratic approach, ethical and moral principles in Islamic traditions cannot be compromised because they guide several perspectives of Islamic thought and practice. The preservation of Islamic principles is critical to the vast majority of Muslim communities within the Islamic faith. The tendency to engage in apologetics in order to reconcile Islamic teachings with psychological notions may limit the field's legitimacy. Academics and researchers can negotiate this difficulty by retaining academic integrity while acknowledging the various interpretations of Islamic psychology that are possible. A focus on identifying common concepts while acknowledging differing viewpoints provides for comprehensive and authentic representation.

The expansiveness in describing Islamic psychology can lead to uncertainty, blurring the lines between what truly matches with Islamic ideals. As the scope of interpretation broadens, problems arise about how to distinguish between worthy contributions that sustain the ethos of Islamic teachings and those that superficially draw from Islamic notions. As a result, striking a balance between openness to other ideas and adhering to the essential principles of Islamic

psychology becomes critical. This takes careful navigation to ensure the area remains focused on its intended goals, while encouraging scholarly study and enhancing discoveries. Use of complementary therapies that contradict Islamic values might raise ethical and religious difficulties. The paradox arises in attempting to combine therapeutic approaches that may contravene Islamic teachings, possibly jeopardising the faith's integrity for therapeutic purposes. These inconsistencies can cause cognitive dissonance in practitioners and clients alike, impeding the integration of Islamic faith and psychological wellbeing. Adopting a rigorous ethical screening procedure, cultural sensitivity, educational initiatives, collaboration, the development of Islamic-adherent therapies and open contact with clients are all opportunities. By embracing these answers, practitioners can negotiate the inconsistencies that come from the use of supplementary therapies that are not always accepted in Islamic traditions.

Due to the scarcity of actual experts, there is an opportunity for collaboration, mentorship and rigorous academic preparation. Prospects lay in developing a new generation of scholars and practitioners with the breadth of knowledge needed to fulfil the role of an Islamic psychotherapist. Knowledge integration in undergraduate psychology curricula, mentorship programmes, academic and clinical supervision development, and stringent certification processes can solve the shortage of true specialists. Collaboration between experienced researchers and rising talent helps assure real knowledge transmission, establishing a lively and sustained scholarly community. As a result, thorough knowledge of Islamic psychology involves not just a mastery of psychological theories, but also solid grounding in the comprehension of Qur'ānic verses and their applicability to psychological discourse. Examining academic output, particularly publications and citations in peer-reviewed journals and other reputable literary resources, is one method for determining the credibility of persons claiming to be experts in Islamic psychology.

Finally, the close connection between Islamic values and psychological ideas depends on full understanding of both fields. Taking on this task will necessitate a diverse approach. It demands commitment on the part of psychology students and researchers to delve thoroughly into the Qur'ān and *sunna* using *maqasid* methodology, cultivating a knowledge that goes beyond surface-level involvement. Integrating Islamic studies into the curriculum of psychology education can also help to bridge the gap and build a more comprehensive understanding.

## CONCLUSION

The path to authentic Islamic psychology, which aims to reconcile Islamic ideals with psychological theories, is beset with difficulties that demand critical study and purposeful efforts. Blind copying, partialism, apologism, epistemic biases, contradiction and deconstructionism, as well as other difficulties in contemporary Islamic psychology studies, have been cited as impediments that must be addressed. The issues confronting true Islamic psychology necessitate a diversified approach to resolution. It is critical to approach study and



debate with an open mind and dedication to completely interact with varied opinions, interpretations and sources to retain the scientific rigour and authenticity of Islamic psychology. One important quality that many contemporary researchers and academics might be missing is intellectual humility, which means being open to the idea that they could be wrong about something. In simpler terms, it involves being willing to admit when you are mistaken or do not have all the answers. This intellectual humility trait, an aspect of openness, “is the capacity to accept that your beliefs and opinions might be wrong.”<sup>38</sup> The findings of a study suggest that those “with higher intellectual humility seem to open themselves up to learning about contrasting perspectives.”<sup>39</sup> Intellectual humility is a key pillar that allows researchers to transcend the limitations of blind imitation and confront partialism with an open mind. Intellectual humility may even be especially valuable for successful work collaborations on a worldwide scale, rather than being parochial, as it is now between researchers and practitioners in Islamic psychology.

Avoiding apologism, overcoming constraints and eliminating inconsistency with Islamic principles and practices contribute to the growth of a holistic and unified Islamic psychological framework. The promise of true Islamic psychology can be achieved by weaving the fabric of Islamic principles with psychological ideas in a deliberate and balanced manner. The process of managing these problems is ongoing, necessitating constant thought, conversation and dedication to the growth of knowledge while respecting Islamic principles and teachings. Islamic psychology may emerge into a credible and meaningful discipline that truly integrates Islamic spirituality and psychology knowledge by promoting an environment of free discourse, scholarship and collaborative exploration. The need to break the elite cadre of Islamic psychologists in the West is of utmost importance.

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<sup>38</sup> Tenelle Porter and Karina Schumann, “Intellectual Humility and Openness to the Opposing View,” *Self and Identity* 17, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>39</sup> Elaine Fox, “Why Intellectual Humility Matters,” The British Psychological Society, July 28, 2022, <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/why-intellectual-humility-matters>.

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