

ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY: PARAMETRICAL ISSUES IN DEFINING THE DISCIPLINE

(Psikologi Islam: Masalah Parametrik dalam Mendefinisikan Disiplin)

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary research trends in Islamic Psychology generally characterized as it might better be referred to as ‘Islam and Psychology’ that may be due to the lack of an agreed upon definition or a theoretical model, and the research is coming from a broad array of various disciplines including psychology, theology, philosophy, history, and mental health etc. The major areas that constitute the building blocks of Islamic Psychology are such as nafs, fitra, reliance, attachment to god, rooh, action, tawheed, taqwa, jihad al-nafs, etc. However, much of the scholarship published on the Islamic concepts tends to be philosophical in nature and often somewhat unusable partly because the terminology has not been translated or operationalized into psychological nomenclature. Islamic Psychology is ideally a domain in which scholars and practitioners from a number of basic and applied disciplines are engaged including but not limited to psychologists, psychiatrists, religious studies scholars, theologians, imams, philosophers, historians, anthropologists and others and they all think about Islamic Psychology in different ways and have specialized knowledge and expertise that they can share through collaboration as these broad disciplines and sub disciplines are also a part of the paradigm. The definitional clarity is the key challenge in developing a discipline that is certainly seems to be the case with discipline of Islamic Psychology because scholarship is happening and not bound in any sort of

organized or comprehensive way. This paper discusses the parametrical concerns and issues in researches in defining and developing Islamic Psychology as a discipline.

Key Words: Islam, Psychology, Islamic Psychology, Parameters, the Discipline

ABSTRAK

Trend penyelidikan kontemporari dalam bidang Psikologi Islam secara umumnya lebih baik disebut sebagai 'Islam dan Psikologi disebabkan kekurangan definisi yang dipersetujui atau model teori dan penyelidikan tersebut berasal daripada pelbagai cabang ilmu termasuklah psikologi, teologi, falsafah, sejarah, kesihatan mental dan sebagainya. Bidang utama yang menjadi sandaran kepada Psikologi Islam ialah nafs, fitrah, kebergantungan, keterikatan kepada tuhan, roh, tindakan, tauhid, taqwa dan jihad al-nafs. Walau bagaimanapun, artikel yang diterbitkan berkaitan konsep Islam lebih cenderung sifat falsafah dan tidak dapat digunakan sebahagiannya disebabkan terminologi yang belum diterjemahkan atau dioperasikan dalam tatanama psikologi. Psikologi Islam idealnya adalah domain berikutan para sarjana dan pengamal disiplin asas dan tidak terhad kepada ahli psikologi, ahli psikiatri, agamawan, ahli falsafah, sejarawan, ahli antropologi dan mereka memikirkan Psikologi Islam dengan kaedah yang berbeza dan mempunyai pengetahuan dan kepakaran khusus yang dapat dikongsi melalui kolaborasi disebabkan disiplin dan subdisiplin ilmu yang luas. Hal ini merupakan sebahagian daripada paradigma. Penjelasan mengenai definisi adalah cabaran utama dalam memperluaskan disiplin seperti yang berlaku dalam disiplin Psikologi Islam disebabkan artikel yang diterbitkan tidak bergantung dalam mana-mana kaedah yang tertentu mahupun menyeluruh. Justeru, kajian ini membincangkan permasalahan dan isu parametrik dalam penyelidikan dalam menentukan dan memperluaskan Psikologi Islam sebagai disiplin ilmu.

Kata Kunci: Islam; psikologi; psikologi Islam; parameter; disiplin

INTRODUCTION

The issues on defining of Islamic Psychology bring forth sufficient attention on integrating of Islam and psychology that most of research studies over the last decade have focused on cultural or religious adaptations of mainly western theoretical models (Haque et al. 2016). A unique Islamic theoretical framework for an Islamic psychology has yet to be established rather than integrating or adopting prevailing western theories (Badri 1979). The scientific discipline necessitates as there should be a minimum of consensus concerning the meaning of core issues such as concepts, constructs and definitions. Definitional clarity is can greatly boost the emergence of the discipline though it does not essential outright for development or establishment of a cumulative

knowledge base. This issue may be visible in the case of Islamic Psychology because the knowledge is developing as it is just not happening in any kind of systematic or comprehensive way. The main prerequisite for defining the discipline will be firstly to understand the conceptual framework regarding the issue.

Review of Related Studies

Smither & Khorsandi (2009) studied the implicit personality theory of Islam. The study analysed how Islamic sources are supporting Muslims on their personality dynamics, motivation, the self, the realm of conscious, and adjustment. It is analysed that these sources can be highly useful in defining cultural and social issues in relation to personality.

Mohd Abbas (2011) studied a contrastive study with Freudian theories in connection with dynamic personality theory of Iqbal by historical and content analysis methods. This study as a philosophical psychology will be a contrastive analysis on the personality theories of Freud. Dynamics like personality factors, philosophical perspectives on life, society, and education much have influenced their conceptualization of theories.

Fatimah Abdullah (2014) studied the virtues and character development in the ethical perspectives of Islam and Positive Psychology. It investigated the relationship between new approach in psychology namely, positive psychology which emphasised the positive aspects of emotions and the age old values of virtue ethics. Study concludes that the integration of virtue ethics and some aspects of modern Psychology which are in harmony with the worldview, ethical principles, ethical values and norms of Islam not only can be sources of action guides and but also serve as effective methods of management of emotions that steer to self-development and interpersonal relationship skills.

Aydin (2010) conducted a comparative study of concepts of the self in Islamic tradition and western psychology. The study discussed concept of self and related Sufi phrases such as *nafs*, *nafsul ammara nafsul lawwam*, *nafsul mutamainna* in relation Freudians psychological concepts such as id, ego and super ego. The study concludes that these dimensions of the self and Sufi are not available in the terminology of the West as most of these dimensions belong to Islam itself.

Abdul Aziz (2018) conducted as critical study on *Fitrah* in the perspectives of Islamic approach. The study an conceptual of *fitrah* in the light of four principles. First, the meanings of *fitrah* are derived from the verses of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Second, the meanings of *fitrah* form the pattern of *fitrah* which consists of three elements;

'*aqidah*' (faith and belief in Islam), '*ibadah*' (an act of worship and submission to Allah based upon the law of Allah, i.e., *shari'ah*) and '*akhlaq*' (disposition, ethics of a person). Third, as a system, *fitrah* consists of some related psychological elements, namely, Self (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*), intellect ('*aql*) and spirit (*ruh*). Finally, the principle of aesthetic is appropriate literary techniques which literary texts employ to portray the *fitrah* in an aesthetic manner.

Bonab & Koohsar (2011) studied reliance on God as a core construct of Islamic psychology. The study discussed that reliance on God has cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and relational components. In a cognitive conception, individuals perceive God as the first order cause of everyday events. In the emotional level, individuals attain readiness and inclination to put their trust in God, and find Him sufficient to take care of them. Its behavioural component which is easily observable means carrying out individuals' plan through permissible and lawful means of action. In a relational level seeking God's proximity and believing in His availability and support are considered crucial.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted purely through qualitative methodology. The design of the study was qualitative analysis of psychological concepts in light of Quran and Hadith and a meta-analysis of more than twenty studies published around the world that focused to define Islamic psychology or some basic concepts of psychology in the perceptive of Islam. The main research question is what is Islamic psychology and how well defined it in the existing literature. The study also investigated the parametrical issues in defining the discipline.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the contemporary research studies on the label of Islamic Psychology might be better referred to as 'Islam and Psychology'. The main issue for not finding a conceptual definition may be by the lack of an agreed upon definition or systematic theoretical model though there are some theoretical framework in bits and parcel. It is also responsible that the theoretical framework is forming from a broad array of fragmented disciplines such as psychology, theology, Arabic literature, philosophy, history etc.

Studies that discuss concepts that are proposed to constitute the building blocks of Islamic psychology such as *fitra* (Mohamed 1995 & 2009), reliance and attachment to God (Bonab & Koohsar 2011; Bonab, Miner, & Proctor 2013), *rida* (Khalil 2014), *action* (Koshravi & Bagheri, 2006), *tawheed*, *taqwa*, *tawba*, and *jihad al-nafs* for

example. Many conceptualizations have also examined Islamic perspectives of the ‘self’ such as *ruh*, *qalb*, *aql*, *nafs*, *ihsas*, *irada* etc. (Abu Raiya 2012 & 2014; Keshavarzi and Haque 2013; Keshavarzi and Khan 2018; Rothman & Coyle 2018) sometimes discussing how these ideas equate to western conceptions labelling them as some sort of Islamic personality theory.

The perceptions that incorporate Islamic concepts or spiritual therapies in to psychotherapy based on such as *dhikr*, *ruqya* etc. (York Al-Karam 2015), pointing towards the potential of Islamic integrated psychotherapy. Some scholars have discussed converging and diverging concepts between western psychology and Islamic theology. Others have suggested that Islamic psychology is simply *tasawwuf*. Still others claim that the work of early Muslims scholars such as al-Ghazali, al-Balkhi, Ibn Sina, and al-Razi is Islamic Psychology (Haque 2004; Badri 2013).

The scholarly discussions that have contributed to the knowledge domain, but not sufficient to bring about a comprehensive answer to the pervasive and nagging question ‘what Islamic psychology is’. It is discussed whether it is the Islamization of the existing discipline of psychology whereby Islamic theological explanations are given for psychological phenomenon. It is also discussed that whether Islamic psychology is interested only in the spiritual aspect of a person. It is also discussed scope of mental disorders and concerned therapies in Islamic perspectives as the diseases of the heart (*qalb*) or *nafs* and Islamic model of the self in psychotherapy as *prayer*, *dhikr*, *ruqya*, or other spiritual therapies into the mix (Keshavarzi & Haque 2013; Haque & Keshavarzi 2014; 2018; Rothman 2018). The fragmented broad array of studies as mentioned appears that Islamic psychology is defined or conceptualized according to a particular scholarship as discussed which is usually based on specific work. It is obvious that Islamic psychology as a discipline has to be acquired further definitional clarity for flourishing and contributing to the broader knowledge economy.

The observations of al-Ashath al-Kindi (801-866) and Abu Zaid Al-Balkhi (850-934) are also paramount in defining and developing the construct of Islamic psychology. Al Kindi’s studies on pain can be considered as the first to explain the term ‘sorrow’ as a spiritual grief that is the result of deep distress, depression and suffering as he argued that visible pain can be cured (Hamarnah 1984). al-Kindi contributed to psychology in the area of studies on sleep and dreams and the Eradication of Sorrow as well. He used cognitive methods to cure depression and defined the soul through free will that can be considered as the forerunner of current cognitive behavioural therapies of psychotherapy (Ahmed 1948).

Abu Zaid Al-Balkhi (850-934) was the first to define the medical psychology and also the first to explain in detail state of neuroses and psychoses and its difference.

Al-Balkhi categorized neurotic disorders and demonstrated in detail with suggesting the importance of using rational and spiritual therapies to cure specific disorders (Haque 1998). He classified neuroses into four major emotional disorders that are anxiety, fear, aggression and anger, depression and sadness, and obsessions (Haque 1998). He studied an interaction effect between physical and psychological disorders and believed that these interactions cause some psychosomatic disorders in human (Mohamed 2008).

Sayyid Qutb discusses the basis of the Islamic concept of human psychology in relation to some Quranic verses. The verses 7-10 from surah *al-Shams*, “*By the soul and its moulding and inspiration with knowledge of wickedness and righteousness*” discuss the truth about man, and relate this truth to the various phenomena of the universe. *Successful is the one who keeps it pure, and ruined is the one who corrupts it*”. Other verses “*And [We have] shown him the two paths*”. (*al-Balad*) and: “*We have shown him the right path, be he grateful or ungrateful*” (Verse, 3 Surah *al-Insan*). The duality in man’s make-up is discussed in *Sūrah* 38, *Ṣād*, which says: “*Your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am creating man from clay. When I have fashioned him, and breathed of my spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him.*” Sayyid Qutb is also cardinal in defining or developing a base for Islamic psychology mainly based on these verses from the Quran.

Islamic Psychology: Parameters in Definition

Every academic discipline has certain standard components such as a definition of the discipline, a conceptual or theoretical framework, philosophical assumptions upon which the discipline is based, the nature of the discipline, research methods used in the discipline and main subjects of the discipline. Defining terms or discussing methods used to come up with new ones are essential components of basic conceptual or theoretical framework. A review of a number of publications that have the term ‘Islamic Psychology’ in the title reveals two basic trends as studies either discussed about Islamic Psychology without properly defining it, or presented a definition but supplemented no discussion on the methodology adopted to for the definition.

The study of Hamid (1977) does not provide a clear definition of Islamic Psychology but provides an outline of what it is not in Mandate for Muslim Mental Health Professionals: An Islamic Psychology. Skinner (1989) also does not come up with a definition of Islamic Psychology on his study on Islamic psychology in relation to traditions, paradigms. Khosravi and Bagheri (2006), discuss Islamic psychology in connection to some constructs but lacks clear definition. Siddiqui & Malek (1996), define Islamic psychology as ‘the study of persons who have complete surrender and submission and obey the laws of God’. This definition is also lacks in supplementing

the methodological details as is neither totally unclear how they arrived at that definition nor is it clear how useful this definition might be within the domain of modern psychological science.

Vahab (2004) defines ‘the study of the manifestation of God in nature as reflected in the behavioural patterns of all living and non-living organisms in all walks of their lives use the Islamic paradigms’. The parameters of this definition look like more in line with the approach of Islamization of the discipline as what the Quran and hadith have to say about a variety of content of psychology. Ward (2017) provides a potential ecological framework in which the discipline could be conceptualised, but does not attempt to define the discipline properly.

Unpacking the Definition

Psychology and Islam are two terms which are very general and broad and do not have much meaning when it comes to delineating a specific scope of faculty so they need to be broken down. In that regard, whatever Islamic Psychology scholarship one wants to engage that can be used to conceptually root it and connect it to other work being done in the field. The studies simply identify what part of psychology and what part of Islam are engaging with what topic, at what level, and using what research methods, which will most likely be dictated by the profession or discipline in which the researchers are primarily concerned.

Defining terms and setting parameters for a discipline or particular scope of scholarship is not unique to Islamic psychology since the researchers in the domain of psychology of religion and spirituality have long struggled to define the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ as how these terms overlap, how they are different, and how one can study something that is not even properly defined. The research studies end up having to rely on operationalized definitions of terms as opposed to generally agreed upon concepts. This issue is pertained to other religious or spiritual psychology traditions such as Christian Psychology, Buddhist Psychology, or even Transpersonal Psychology have faced similar issues in defining what is meant by those terms and what the parameters are of those fields as well.

The parameters to define ‘Islam’ are also crucial in defining Islamic Psychology as a discipline. Much has been written about this topic both historically and contemporaneously, as some argue that in order for something to be Islamic, it must be rooted in the Quran and/or Sunnah. Others argue that it could also simply be something done by a Muslim or congruent with Islamic teachings or philosophy etc. though there is no universal agreement.

CONCLUSION

The scholarship related to Islamic Psychology will look somewhat different depending on the primary field in which one is situated. Islamic Psychology for a theologian, researchers of religious studies, or medical anthropologist might look different than Islamic Psychology conducted by a psychologist or a historian because these scholars usually use different research methods. It can be conceptualised by working in multidisciplinary teams, work being produced by them has the potential to be broad, deep, rich, and being of great importance in a variety of scholarly contexts. There is necessity for bringing Islamic Psychology to academics as scholarship developed on Transpersonal Psychology, Buddhist Psychology and Christian Psychology. The Islamization of psychology has been underway for the past few decades. As the discipline of Islamic Psychology establishes itself, it would be the strong recommendation that scholarship be conducted by multidisciplinary teams, especially in these early days. Psychologists and professionals in related disciplines do not usually have depth of theological knowledge and theologians or religious studies scholars are not schooled in psychology.

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