REVIEW ARTICLE

Islamic Family Laws as Prevention of Psychological Disorders

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Abstract

The family environment is a major determinant of mental health across the lifespan. Chronic conflict, abuse, neglect and instability raise the risk of depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms and behavioral disorders, whereas cohesion, emotional support, justice and constructive conflict resolution protect against them. This review examines Islamic family teachings as a preventive psychosocial framework that addresses family-related stressors. It first summarizes the research evidence: unmarried adults had 1.86 times the odds of depressive symptoms compared with married adults in a seven-country study; marital distress is associated with mood, anxiety and substance use disorders and with post-traumatic stress disorder; and adverse childhood experiences are associated with an approximately 66% increased risk of later anxiety and depression. It then reviews the Qur'anic perspective, supported by classical and modern exegesis, on marriage (tranquility, affection and mercy, reciprocal rights, reconciliation, the prohibition of harm, and dignified separation), the respect and care owed to parents, the preservation of kinship ties, and the care of children. Finally, it considers the practical value of these teachings for practitioners working with religiously oriented Muslim clients, drawing on a quasi-experimental study of spiritually integrated couple therapy and a systematic review of 63 studies, while noting that study designs and contexts vary and limit generalizability. The Qur'anic teachings present marriage and parenting as ethically and legally structured relationships oriented toward compassion, justice and mutual responsibility. Clinicians may draw on them, provided that interventions are evidence-informed, culturally sensitive and respectful of clients' values and autonomy.

Keywords: *family mental health; Islamic family teachings; marital quality; filial piety; adverse childhood experiences; Qur'anic exegesis; spiritually integrated therapy*

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization consistently reports that the family environment strongly influences mental health across the lifespan. Childhood adversity is recognized as a major risk factor for mental disorders, whereas positive parenting and social support act as essential buffers against stress and mental illness [1].

Extensive psychological research indicates that family cohesion, predictable roles, emotional support, justice, and effective conflict resolution serve as protective factors for mental health. Conversely, chronic conflict, abuse, neglect, instability, and role confusion significantly increase the risk for depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms, and behavioral disorders.

Islamic teachings and family laws can be interpreted as a preventive psychosocial framework aimed at mitigating family-related psychological stressors, such as chronic conflict, abandonment, domestic instability, anxiety in children, marital hostility, and identity confusion. While outcomes are contingent upon implementation, the normative structure of Islamic ethics and law contains several mechanisms that align with contemporary protective factors identified in psychology.

2. Family Research Evidence

Substantial evidence indicates that the quality of family conditions contributes markedly to the psychological health of all family members, including both spouses and children.

2.1. Marital Status and Depression

Zhai et al. [2] demonstrated that unmarried adults are significantly more likely to experience depression than their married counterparts. The study employed large, nationally representative datasets from seven countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Mexico, South Korea, China, and Indonesia), with longitudinal follow-up and causal mediation analysis to examine why this association exists. Married participants served as the reference group for measuring the mental health impact of marital status.

The outcome variable was depressive symptoms, assessed with validated depression scales available within each national cohort. The investigators used several complementary statistical approaches, including logistic regression, meta-analysis, and effect modification analysis. Unmarried individuals had 1.86 times the odds of experiencing depressive symptoms compared with married individuals [2].

In Islamic tradition, marriage is highly encouraged as a foundational social unit. The Qur'anic directive is clear: "Marry off the unmarried among you" (Qur'an 24:32). Many mufassirūn (exegetes) explain that this command is addressed not only to individuals but also to parents, guardians, community leaders, and society at large, underscoring the communal responsibility to facilitate stable family formation.

2.2. The Impact of Marital Quality

Beyond the legal status of wedlock, the quality of the marital relationship is an equally critical determinant of mental health. Individuals experiencing serious marital distress are significantly more likely to suffer from depression than those in supportive marriages. National survey data indicate that individuals reporting marital distress have significantly higher odds of meeting diagnostic criteria for mood disorders (including major depressive disorder and dysthymia) and anxiety disorders (including generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobia) [3]. Marital distress is also associated with increased rates of substance use disorders, including alcohol and drug dependence, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [3].

The emotional climate of a marriage, characterized by support, affection, trust, and constructive conflict resolution, is a more potent predictor of psychological well-being than marital status alone [3, 4].

2.3. Impact on Offspring

Adverse family conditions in childhood exert long-term effects on the psychological well-being of offspring. A recent umbrella review reported that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, are significantly associated with later anxiety and depression, corresponding to an approximately 66% increased risk [5]. This demonstrates that harmful early family environments can impair mental health well into adulthood.

Evidence from the ACE literature further confirms that harmful early family environments increase the lifetime risk of depression, PTSD-related problems, substance misuse, suicidal ideation, and emotional dysregulation [6–8]. Conversely, supportive and emotionally secure family environments are robust buffers that promote resilience [8].

3. The Quranic Perspective on Family and Parental Care

Within Islamic tradition, the Qur'an serves as the foundational text for the social structure of the family, defining itself as a comprehensive source of guidance covering belief, worship, ethics, law, family dynamics, societal interaction, and spiritual purification (Qur'an 2:1–2).

3.1. The Concept of Family in the Qur'an

The Qur'an provides a holistic framework for the family, recognizing both the extended family (ulu al-arḥām) and the nuclear family unit. By establishing these structures, it offers a normative model aimed at fostering stability and mutual support within the household.

3.2. Parental Care and Filial Piety

Quranic provisions are particularly emphatic regarding the respect due to parents and the elderly. One of the most significant imperatives places the command to treat parents with iḥsān (excellence and kindness) immediately after the command to worship God alone:

> *"Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you show excellence (iḥsān) to your parents…" (Qur'an 17:23).*

This juxtaposition appears repeatedly throughout the Qur'an, establishing the honor of parents as a paramount moral obligation (Qur'an 2:83; 4:36; 6:151; 31:14). The text gives specific guidance on the treatment of elderly parents, emphasizing compassion and the suppression of frustration. It prohibits even minor expressions of irritation, such as saying "uff" (a word of annoyance), and mandates noble and respectful speech:

> *"…Whether one or both of them reach old age with you, do not even say to them 'uff' (a word expressing irritation), nor rebuke them, but speak to them with noble words." (Qur'an 17:23).*

Following this prohibition, the Qur'an commands a posture of profound humility and ongoing supplication for one's parents:

> *"And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them as they raised me when I was small.'" (Qur'an 17:24).*

The Qur'an consistently correlates gratitude toward parents with gratitude toward God, reinforcing the spiritual significance of filial duty. Verse 31:14 is a primary example: "Be grateful to Me and to your parents." The Qur'an also highlights maternal sacrifice with profound sensitivity, acknowledging the physical and emotional burden of pregnancy and early care: "His mother carried him in hardship upon hardship, and his weaning is in two years" (Qur'an 31:14). These verses encourage believers to maintain empathy and appreciation for mothers throughout their lives, particularly as they enter old age.

This ethical framework extends even to cases where parents hold different beliefs. Believers are instructed to prioritize kindness in the relationship with their parents regardless of ideological differences: "If they strive to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them, but accompany them in this world with kindness" (Qur'an 31:15). Believers are also encouraged to cultivate mercy and intercession through prayer, as in the recurring supplications "My Lord, have mercy upon them as they nurtured me when I was young" (Qur'an 17:24) and "Our Lord! Forgive me, my parents, and the believers on the Day the reckoning is established" (Qur'an 14:41).

The Qur'an further prescribes the standard of communication required in these interactions, namely qawlan karīman (noble speech) (Qur'an 17:23). Beyond emotional and verbal support, it mandates material care. Asked about the proper distribution of charity, the Qur'an prioritizes family: "They ask you what they should spend. Say, 'Whatever good you spend is for parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and the traveler'" (Qur'an 2:215). This establishes parents as the primary recipients of voluntary financial support.

Finally, the Qur'an portrays old age as a stage of life deserving of dignity and compassion (Qur'an 30:54; 16:70). Verse 36:68 reminds believers of the natural physiological decline associated with aging, fostering empathy and humility toward the elderly. Collectively, these verses construct a robust ethical framework in which elderly parents are not perceived as a burden but as individuals entitled to honor, gratitude, gentle speech, emotional support, physical care, financial assistance, patient companionship, and continuous prayer.

3.3. The Extended Family and Bonds of Kinship

The Quranic discourse places significant emphasis on preserving kinship ties (ṣilat al-raḥim) as a fundamental social and ethical obligation. Surah Muhammad (47:22) warns against the degradation of these bonds: "So would you perhaps, if you turned away, cause corruption upon the earth and sever your [ties of] relationship?" The subsequent verse reinforces the gravity of this prohibition: "Those are the ones whom Allah has cursed, making them deaf and blinding their sight" (Qur'an 47:23).

Classical tafsīr (exegesis) exhibits remarkable consistency in interpreting these verses as a condemnation of two interconnected evils: fasād (spreading corruption) on earth and taqṭīʿ al-arḥām (severing the bonds of kinship) [9, 10]. Ibn Kathīr extends the application of these verses beyond their immediate historical context, elevating them to a permanent ethical principle for the community [9]. Al-Qurṭubī argues that the Quranic pairing of corruption with the severance of kinship indicates a causal relationship, suggesting that familial disintegration acts as a catalyst for broader social instability [10].

Contemporary Islamic scholarship frequently invokes this framework to posit that the preservation of kinship is not merely an individual virtue but a necessary safeguard against societal decay. Ibn ʿĀshūr offers a robust modern analysis, characterizing these verses as an articulation of a universal social law rather than a localized historical critique [11]. He holds that family solidarity constitutes one of the principal foundations of civilization and that the erosion of familial relationships inevitably precipitates systemic societal corruption [11]. Sayyid Qutb emphasizes the sociopolitical philosophy inherent in these verses, arguing that the family is the essential pillar of the Islamic social order rather than a peripheral or strictly private institution [12]. Within this context, maintaining the extended family structure is viewed as a protective mechanism for both the individual psyche and the collective social fabric.

3.4. The Nuclear Family: The Sanctity of Marriage

In the Islamic tradition, marriage is portrayed not merely as a legal contract but as a comprehensive institution designed to foster individual well-being, family flourishing, and the moral health of the community. A central verse on the purpose of marriage is found in Surah Ar-Rum: "And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy" (Qur'an 30:21). This verse highlights four essential components of marital health: sakīnah (psychological tranquility), emotional security, mawaddah (romantic affection), and raḥmah (compassion).

Classical commentators, including al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī, explain that sakīnah refers to the cessation of loneliness and the attainment of emotional stability within the marital bond [9, 10, 13]. This concept is echoed in Surah Al-A'rāf: "He created you from a single soul and made from it its mate so that he might find tranquility with her" (Qur'an 7:189), reinforcing the idea that marriage serves as a primary remedy for human isolation.

The Quranic metaphor of the "garment" in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:187), "They are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them," further illustrates the nature of this relationship. Scholars interpret the metaphor as signifying protection, modesty, emotional warmth, intimacy, and the concealment of faults [14]. Ibn ʿĀshūr notes that because clothing remains in closest contact with the body, the imagery conveys the unparalleled depth of intimacy and mutual care required between spouses, and that no other relationship in the Qur'an is described with such intimate imagery [11].

The Qur'an commands kind conduct within marriage in verse 4:19: "Live with them in kindness (waʿāširūhunna bil-maʿrūf). If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something while Allah places much good in it." This is among the clearest Quranic injunctions governing marital behavior. The term maʿrūf conveys kindness, fairness, respect, gentleness, generosity, and honorable behavior. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpret the verse as obliging spouses to maintain good conduct even during disagreement or diminished affection [9, 13].

Reciprocity and mutual rights are affirmed in verse 2:228: "And women have rights similar to those upon them according to what is reasonable." Commentators, including al-Qurṭubī, treat this verse as foundational for reciprocal obligations, fairness, and balanced responsibilities within marriage [10]. While Islamic law stipulates distinct roles, the verse asserts a fundamental baseline of mutual respect and balanced responsibility.

When marital conflict arises, the Qur'an emphasizes reconciliation and preserving the family. Verse 4:128 states that reconciliation is best, encouraging spouses to negotiate, forgive, and compromise where possible. Classical exegetes stress that reconciliation should be pursued before separation whenever it can be achieved with justice [9, 10, 13]. The Qur'an also prescribes arbitration by family mediators where serious discord is feared: "If you fear a breach between the two, appoint an arbitrator from his family and an arbitrator from her family. If they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them…" (Qur'an 4:35).

The Qur'an prohibits harm and abuse within marital relations. Verse 2:231 warns: "Do not retain them intending harm so that you transgress," a clear prohibition against emotional abuse, manipulation, coercion, or retention of a spouse to inflict suffering. The principle that ḍarar (harm) is not permitted in marital relations is affirmed by classical jurists and exegetes.

Even when marriage ends, the Qur'an requires dignity and fairness. Verse 2:229 instructs: "…Either retain them in a fair manner or release them with kindness," and verse 65:2 calls for parting honorably and in accordance with justice.

The supplication in Surah Al-Furqan underscores the shared spiritual goals of spouses and the desired outcomes of a healthy marriage: personal happiness, righteous progeny, and an enduring family legacy: "Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us leaders of the righteous" (Qur'an 25:74). Exegetes such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī note that while love often characterizes the early stages of marriage, mercy (raḥmah) and mutual responsibility sustain the relationship through hardship and old age [9, 10].

In summary, the Qur'an portrays marriage as a relationship built on love, mercy, tranquility, justice, and mutual respect. It repeatedly commands spouses to deal with one another in maʿrūf, to protect rather than harm each other, to seek reconciliation when conflicts arise, and to preserve one another's dignity even if the marriage ends. Classical exegetes consistently understood these verses as establishing an ethical ideal in which marriage is a covenant of compassion, cooperation, and moral responsibility as well as a legal contract delineating reciprocal rights and responsibilities [9–11, 13]. This ethical framework aligns with contemporary research identifying supportive marital environments as significant protective factors for mental health and social stability.

The Prophet Muḥammad likewise emphasized kindness within the family: "The best of you are those who are best to their families."

3.5. Childcare in the Qur'an

The Qur'an consistently presents children as blessings and trusts from God and prescribes comprehensive obligations for their care. Verses affirm divine control over procreation: "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills. He grants female children to whom He wills, and grants male children to whom He wills" (Qur'an 42:49–50). The Qur'an strongly condemns harming or misappropriating children's property (Qur'an 4:10) and instructs parents to protect their families from spiritual harm: "O you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire…" (Qur'an 66:6).

Luqman's advice to his son (Qur'an 31:13–19) offers one of the Qur'an's most complete models of parenting: belief in God, avoidance of idolatry, gratitude, kindness to parents, humility, restraint from arrogance, gentle speech, and moderation in behavior. The passage exemplifies compassionate instruction and wise counsel rather than coercion.

Infant and early-childhood care are addressed explicitly. The Qur'an directs breastfeeding for two full years: "Mothers shall breastfeed their children for two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing period" (Qur'an 2:233). The same verse assigns the father responsibility for the mother's maintenance and clothing during nursing and stresses mutual consultation about weaning and protection from hardship. The Qur'an repeatedly commands justice and excellence in social relations: "Indeed, Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to relatives" (Qur'an 16:90). Special protection for orphans is emphasized: "Indeed, those who consume the property of orphans unjustly are only consuming fire into their bellies" (Qur'an 4:10), and children's identity is to be preserved: "Call them by the names of their fathers; that is more just in the sight of Allah" (Qur'an 33:5).

Overall, the Quranic perspective on child care encompasses physical needs, emotional nurturing, moral education, spiritual formation, financial provision, legal protection, and preservation of dignity and identity. Parents are entrusted to raise children with compassion, justice, and wisdom, and society is called to safeguard vulnerable

children, especially orphans. These principles have informed classical Islamic teachings on parenting and continue to underpin contemporary discussions of child welfare in Islamic thought [9–11, 13].

4. Practical Value for Practitioners

The foregoing discussion demonstrates the potential practical value of Quranic family teachings for professionals working with religiously oriented Muslim clients facing marital or family problems. Spiritual and religious resources may be integrated into therapeutic approaches where culturally appropriate and ethically sound.

4.1. Empirical Studies

Recent empirical work has examined spiritually integrated couple therapy in predominantly Muslim contexts. Mohannaei and Sheikhiani (2026) evaluated a couple-therapy program based on positive psychology and religious spirituality, using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design with a control group. The intervention integrated religious beliefs (shared spiritual values, prayer, forgiveness, patience, compassion, gratitude, religious coping, and commitment strengthened through spiritual meaning) into marital counselling. The authors reported statistically significant improvements in marital satisfaction and adjustment in the intervention groups compared with the control group; the sample comprised married couples attending psychology clinics in Bushehr, Iran [15].

A systematic review by Raesi et al. (2025) synthesized 63 empirical studies and concluded that religious beliefs, religious education, and spiritually integrated interventions are consistently associated with greater marital satisfaction, improved marital adjustment, reduced psychological distress, stronger family resilience, and healthier family relationships [16]. These findings suggest that spiritually informed interventions can benefit marital functioning in religious populations, although study designs, cultural contexts, and intervention content vary and limit generalizability.

5. Conclusion

Qur'anic teachings present marriage and parenting as ethically and legally structured relationships oriented toward compassion, justice, and mutual responsibility. Where appropriate, clinicians may draw on these resources when working with Muslim clients, provided interventions are evidence-informed, culturally sensitive, and respectful of clients' values and autonomy.

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