
Muslim Women, Counselling and Rights: An Islamic Overview

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Abstract: *This paper titled Muslim Women, counselling and Rights an Islamic Overview discussed the counselling of Muslim women and their rights in regards to the person counselling the women. Counsellor offers services for the wellbeing of individuals irrespective of gender. The paper examines the Conventional and Islamic perspectives of counselling about women and some of their rights. The paper identifies that both conventional and Islamic perspectives did not differ in addressing women's challenges. However, the two perspectives differ in approaches, techniques skills, and application. The paper also highlights some of the rights of Muslim women in terms of counselling which is not found in the Western notion of counselling of women. Also discussed are the approaches to counselling women particularly Muslim women. The study adopted a qualitative research method where secondary sources of data were utilised and analysed as its methods of analysis. It is concluded that both perspective is found to be effective and therefore it is recommended that counsellors should be familiar with both.*

Keywords: *counselling, rights, Muslim, women, Islamic perspective.*

INTRODUCTION

Counselling denotes a wide range of procedures including given advice encouragement, information, test interpretation, and psychoanalysis. Counselling is a relationship in which one person endeavours to help another to understand and solve his/her adjustment problems, especially in the following areas: Areas of adjustment are often indicated (for example, educational counselling, vocational counselling, personal social counselling), reference is usually to helping" normal counselling" but creeps imperceptibly into the fields of psychotherapy, while everyone occasionally undertakes counselling, the word is preferably restricted to professionally trained persons [1], [2].

In counselling, the client's emotions/feelings are of serious concern. It is because of the counselling service involved in guidance programmes that have made many writers define guidance as the assistance given to the individual to help them understand themselves, and their world and to make intelligent adjustments and choices basically on areas of nurturing and healing emotionally, problem management, decision making, crisis management, support and life skills training [3].

Counselling has established itself as a helping profession with an academic base. Its development has been influenced largely by the socioeconomic, occupational, and

technical changes found in Western society as well as the various personal and social problems germane to its societal organization. Although emerging as a profession only during the twentieth century, its origins can be traced back to the post-Renaissance era. It therefore has a distinct orientation, identity, and focus. The existing body of knowledge and the relevant repertoire of counselling techniques and practices address the demands of Western society within its socio-moral mod value structure. The question then arises as to whether adding the term "Islamic" to the available discipline of counselling carries any legitimacy at this stage [4].

Counselling refers to an interpersonal relationship which involves a form of interpersonal interaction between a congruent, knowledgeable as well as skilful individual (counsellor) to understand and assist another individual (client) in solving his issues. Counselling will take place if an individual seeks psychological help from a qualified and registered person to handle a counselling session to discuss certain issues involving conflict or dilemma which prevent him from enjoying his life. Normally, an individual will only seek help when they cannot solve their issues and this situation prevents them from performing their normal functions in life [5].

Counsellors of a different gender than clients can pose a problem. It is not unusual to hear that a Muslim woman would have difficulty seeking help from a male counsellor because she "cannot occupy private space together without the presence of another person". To complicate matters further, both male and female clients cannot look at counsellors of the opposite sex directly, a common practice in many Muslim families. Because of this counsellors may wrongly assume that the client is "lying" or has poor self-esteem. Physical contact as simple as a handshake is not permissible in many Islamic cultures. Males may often be expected to enter or leave a room first. The counsellor may erroneously assume this is a sign of disrespect when the client believes they are showing respect. It would also not be unusual to bring other family members to sessions even if the concern pertained to individual matters [6].

The Glorious Qur'an in many verses commands Muslims to demonstrate respect to their mothers and serve them well even if they leave Islam and remain unbelievers. The prophet (peace be upon him) states insistently that the rights of the mother are supreme. In Islam women are most respectable and honourable "If she is a wife, she is a life partner, if she is a mother, the paradise is under the feet of mother, if she is daughter it is blessing of Almighty Allah". Allah in a lot of verses states the rights of women in the Glorious Qur'an:

"When the news is brought to one of them of the birth of a female child, his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief, with shame, does he hide himself from his people because of the news he heard? Shall he retain her in contempt or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil they decide on" [7].

He also says in another place to disprove those that considered the birth of females as a taboo and element of poverty, and so they killed them: "Kill not your children for the fear of poverty, we provide for them and your" [8].

Kill not your children because of the fear of poverty, we provide sustenance for you and them. Allah in the Glorious Qur'an has summed up the issue of equality in a single verse, which reads: "O mankind! Verily we have created you from single pairs of a male and a female and made you into nation and tribes that you may know each other" [9], [10].

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised secondary sources of information and qualitative content analysis as its techniques for analysis. The secondary sources involve data collected from

textbooks, journals, the internet, published and unpublished works and write-ups. The approach used in writing this paper is a literature study approach.

The literature study is the same as research in general, but the research data obtained is secondary data using the literature study method. The three steps that the researcher will take in preparing this article include: first, finding and collecting reference sources that are relevant to the theme of this research. Second, several scientific papers that have been collected are then processed and elaborated, to comprehensively explain the inter-sections of this article. Third, as the last step, the researcher concludes by specifically referring to the title raised in this study, Muslim Women Counselling, rights from the Islamic viewpoint [11], [12].



Figure 1. Research Title, Authors, and Affiliations

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Women and Their Rights

A woman is defined as an adult female considered inferior to a man, with distinct characteristics from the opposite sex. In Nigeria, an adult is described as a person of 18 years old. Though a female person below 18 years is not regarded as an adult in Nigeria, the word “woman” is used in this dissertation to refer to a female irrespective of age or marital status [13].

Rights are entitlements that accrue to a person based on their position as members of the human family. Human rights can be defined as demands or claims that an individual or group is expected to make on the society where he or she resides, some of which are backed up and protected by law. The general concept of human rights is that every individual irrespective of age, gender or origin is entitled to enjoy existing rights without any discrimination. These rights which accrue to us as members of the human family are inalienable in nature (cannot be taken from us), inherent (inborn) and apply to all equally (universality). Women’s rights are fundamental human rights that were enshrined by the United Nations for every human being on the planet nearly seventy (70) years ago. These rights include the rights to live free from violence, slavery, discrimination, education, property possession, health, fear of hearing, dignity and to earn fair and equal wages [14], [15].

According to Inter Press Service on a Global Scale, women cultivate more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Sahara Africa and the Caribbean, they produced 80% of basic foodstuffs. In Asia, there is about 50% of food production, and in Latin

America, they engaged in subsistence farming, horticulture, poultry and raising small livestock. Yet women often get little recognition for that. Many go unpaid. Many societies don't pay them which requires them to buy equipment etc., forgetting that there is a change in the traditional roles of the globe. UNICEF noted that women faced a lot of discrimination as regards lives in line with work and pay. This underpayment is due to low-status jobs compared to men, thus equality in employment. So also feticide and infanticide-where there is a clear economic or cultural preference for sons, and misuse of pregnancy diagnostic tools can facilitate feticides. Motherhood and old age of women are essential periods when the pernicious effects of both poverty and inequality are combined [16]–[18].

Counselling in Islamic

Counselling in Islam is a form of support and guidance provided to individuals who seek assistance in dealing with personal, emotional, or spiritual issues. It is based on the principles and teachings of Islam, including the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) [19].

Islamic counselling aims to help individuals understand and apply Islamic teachings and values in their lives, and find solutions to their problems within the framework of Islam. It encompasses psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects, taking into consideration the importance of faith and spirituality in a person's well-being. Islamic counsellors use a variety of techniques and approaches to provide support, including actively listening, building rapport, providing advice based on Islamic teachings, and helping individuals develop coping strategies based on faith. They may also refer individuals to other professionals if necessary, such as psychologists or psychiatrists, for further assistance [20].

Some common issues addressed in Islamic counselling include marital conflicts, family problems, grief, depression, anxiety, addiction, and personal development. The main goal is to guide individuals towards a path of personal growth, self-awareness, and spiritual well-being while adhering to Islamic principles and values. It is important to note that Islamic counselling is not a substitute for professional mental health care. Islamic counsellors work in conjunction with other healthcare professionals to provide holistic support to individuals, taking into account both the psychological and spiritual dimensions of their well-being [21].

Counselling in Islam emphasizes the biological, social, and spiritual aspects of individuals. It emphasizes religious and cultural values. It also emphasizes the importance and beneficial effects of the family and social bonds against all-out individualism and selfish concerns. The functions of Muslim counsellors are closely related to their goals in life, personality and characters. Nobody could deny that their responsibility to help their clients in achieving their psychological balance and well-being is a big contribution to the client's current and future life. It is already Islamic in nature. Not only his own life but also his family, society as a whole and most importantly his aqidah [22].

Islamic Approach to Counselling

Islam is a complete and comprehensive way of life, it is a unique and global civilization and an ideology per-excellence. Islam has its academic disciplines, such as Islamic Political Science, Islamic sociology, Islamic psychological theory, and Islamic Guidance and Counselling. Islamic counselling is religious and moral, it has no limitations no discrimination, no subjective, and no exploitation [23]. [24].

Islam means counselling, the Prophet (peace be upon him) clarified this in a hadith, and when his companions asked him for counselling to whom? He replied that it is

counselling to Allah, and his book, and his messenger, and the Muslim leaders and the general masses. This underlines the significance of counselling in Islam [25].

Islamic perspective of counselling is rooted in the teachings of Islam, which guide how individuals can achieve physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. It incorporates religious beliefs and practices in the therapeutic process, emphasizing the importance of connecting with Allah and seeking His guidance and support. One key principle in Islamic counselling is the belief that Allah is the ultimate healer and source of comfort. Muslims are encouraged to turn to Allah in times of distress and seek solace in prayer and supplication. Islamic counsellors often help clients build a stronger connection with Allah and encourage them to seek His guidance and support in coping with life's challenges [26].

Islamic counselling also emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility and accountability. Individuals are encouraged to reflect on their actions, seek forgiveness for any wrongdoings, and take steps towards self-improvement. Islamic counsellors may focus on helping clients recognize their strengths and weaknesses, develop self-awareness, and work towards self-improvement through religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and charity [26].

Another important aspect of Islamic counselling is the integration of Islamic teachings and values in the therapeutic process. Islamic counsellors may incorporate verses from the Quran, stories from Islamic history, and the example of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to provide guidance and support for clients. The goal is to help clients align their beliefs and actions with Islamic principles, leading to a more balanced and fulfilling life. In addition to religious teachings, Islamic counselling also draws on psychological principles and techniques. Counsellors may use techniques such as active listening, empathy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy to help clients identify and challenge negative thought patterns, develop healthier coping strategies, and improve their overall mental health [20], [27].

Counselling in Islam is worship, it attracts rewards from Allah SWT it is a form of Da'wah-extending the message of Islam to others through preaching or Nasihat-counselling, therefore, it must be done in the name of Allah employing wisdom and a very good method of counselling, no body guides and counsels better than the one who extends the guidance and counselling of Allah SWT and that of his messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) [28].

Islam counsels both human beings and jinns, both male and female, both rulers and the ruled both the learned and the learners, both the old and the young, and the believers and the non-believers. Islamic counselling is all and all-encompassing leaving no stone unturned. It counsels married couples and unmarried ones: it counsels parents and their children. Counselling in Islam is a universal and free service to all. It does not wait for any client to come and seek counselling services [2].

Those who undertake, the task of counselling in Islam are important personalities carrying out a very important Divine assignment which was once upon a time placed on the shoulders of distinguished leaders of humanity, serving as the messenger of Allah among their respective communities and nations. In other words, guidance and counsellors are very important officers carrying out very important functions in our communities. They should, therefore, know what is expected of them in carrying out very important functions in our communities, they should know that a successful delivery of their services could earn them paradise in the hereafter. Their Islamic functions are spiritually based and may earn them salaries and allowances, according to the Prophets (peace be upon him). "If someone has been guided to the right path through you is better for you to own a crowd of red camels" [29].

The biggest guidance and counselling, therefore, is to guide someone to Islam or to counsel him to abandon evil practices. Muslim guidance and counsellors, therefore, understand that their professional service should not start and end with the following teachers, as well as members of their immediate communities. Their guidance and counselling services should include students and their parents as well as teachers and all subordinate, staff in the schools, and colleges. This makes their service a general and universal one, it also makes them and their services very crucial and even indispensable [30].

Guidance and counsellors in the Islamic scheme of things are important personalities who are considered the direct inheritors of the prophets and messengers of Allah SWT. This is because the messenger of Allah Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) says: “Verily, the Ulama (who conduct Da’wah or guidance and counselling services are the rightful inheritor of prophets)” [31].

Another important area of counselling in Islam is guiding someone with a special problem, Muslim counsellors are to counsel those who may find themselves with a special problem, they need to be brought closer to the counsellor, enjoy his sympathy and be rest assured that the problems they are in are simple and easy to solve. And that many other students before them have gone through similar problems that were completely solved. This sort of assurance has a positive psychological effect on the minds of the patient and that is almost 50% a cure for the sickness! [32], [33].

The guidance services in Islam cover the following areas; Guiding someone into the Islamic fold guiding someone to do good deeds, guiding someone to avoid doing evil guiding someone to choose a better career, guiding someone to have a better and meaningful course combination, guiding someone to plan history his study time very well guiding someone to overcome his anxiety someone to psychological and social problems, guiding some to plan his/her life generally in a better way, guiding someone chooses a right life partner and guiding someone to live a better and enjoyable married life. This basic service is expected to provide Islamic counselling to plan a successful and better life [34].

Muslim Women and Counselling

In Islam, women have certain rights and are encouraged to seek counselling when needed. Islam promotes equality and justice for all individuals, regardless of their gender. Muslim women, like men, are entitled to emotional support, guidance, and counselling when they face difficulties or challenges in their lives. Islam recognizes the importance of mental health and well-being and encourages individuals to seek help and support in times of need. The Quran emphasizes the importance of seeking knowledge, guidance, and counsel from trustworthy and knowledgeable individuals. Therefore, Muslim women are encouraged to actively engage in seeking counselling and support to address their concerns and difficulties [35], [36].

In addition, Islam places great emphasis on the rights and dignity of women. Women have the right to a happy and fulfilling life, free from any form of abuse, mistreatment or oppression. If a Muslim woman is experiencing any form of injustice or mistreatment, she is encouraged to seek guidance and support from knowledgeable individuals, including counsellors, who can help her navigate through her challenges. Islamic counselling takes into account the cultural and religious context of Muslim women, incorporating Islamic teachings and values into the counselling process. It is important to note that Islamic counseling is not limited to religious matters, but also addresses various psychological and emotional issues [11], [37].

Muslim women need to approach counselling within a framework that respects their religious beliefs, values, and practices. Islamic counselling aims to empower women and help them overcome their challenges while staying true to their faith. Counselling

women concentrate on psychological factors relating to women's behaviour and development. It focuses on a broad range of issues such as discrimination against women, the possibility that structural differences exist in men's and women's brains, the effect of hormones on behaviour, and the causes of violence against women [34].

Counselling women presents many challenging issues and fascinating possibilities. For instance, middle-aged women who are brought up traditionally and are exposed to new situations and demands of the highly industrialized modern life have difficulty in confronting their roles and exhibiting and identifying crises. When a middle-aged woman finds that her child is grown up and her husband is busy with his occupational demands, she finds her position becoming less important. As such, she may develop emotional problems and need suitable outlets for her creative energies and time. But she may not be trained to take up a job at her age. So one important area of counselling with women concerns counselling middle-aged women [38].

Another area of special concern for women's counselling is the issue of violence against women. It should be noted that both men and women are victims of violence. However, women suffer both from sorts of violence as men, as well as other forms of violence that happen only or mostly to women, maybe because they are women. Violence is using or threatening force; causing injury. It may be physical, emotional, or mental and is caused by a person (or people) against others now the following recommendations should be noted by counsellors to minimize maltreating women and dehumanizing them in societies:

1. Counsellors are to be aware of what is going on, especially related to the condition of women.
2. Counsellors are to assist victims of maltreatment among women, whatever they are.
3. Counsellors are to organize awareness campaigns for women to protect themselves from sexual harassment.
4. Counsellors are to liaise with governments at all levels and NGOs to establish centres for counselling women and to give them the right to express themselves.
5. Counsellors to provide gender awareness for the public.
6. Counsellors are to collaborate with the government and or philanthropists to establish women's centres.
7. Counsellors are to enlighten women to respect themselves and, their dignity and to dress decently [39].

Counselling Women in Islam

Counselling women in Islam involves, assisting them to solve and overcome difficulties, distress or general dissatisfaction with life to bring about positive change and enhance their well-being, also to learn long-term life skills to tackle unhelpful thoughts and create new thought patterns, through which they to gain new insight and feel empowered and beside all to tackles: anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, stress, relationship issues separation and divorce. Any Muslim he or she needs counselling should not shy away from seeking help. Allah the Almighty said: "Ask those who know; if you do not know" [40].

Islamic counselling for women is a process in which the counsellor, helps her understand the causes of their problems and guides her through the process of learning to make good life decisions. While general counselling aims at the well-being of the body and mind, Islamic counselling raters to the soul offers spiritual development as well, and helps the client get closer to Allah the creator [41].

Islamic counselling provides solutions to women in most of their problems, for them to solve and overcome, according to Islamic counselling speaking to someone and venting out your feelings can make you feel better, just having someone listen to you and care for you solves a major part of the problem, this is because you can take about your problems to those close to you like friends, family members, but at times, they are unable to provide a reasonable and responsible solution you need, counselling given you an outside perspective, through an expert experience, based utmost confidentiality, and truthfulness which will give birth to a meaningful result. Counselling women in Islam is one of the issues of great importance, this is because of the priority given to solving, addressing and analysing the problems faced by women in the society. The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor is it a fully settled one [42].

When counselling a Muslim woman, it is important to be respectful of her cultural and religious beliefs while also providing a safe and supportive environment. Here are some guidelines for counselling a Muslim woman:

i. Cultural sensitivity: Understand that Muslim women may have different cultural norms, values, and expectations. Be aware of and respectful towards these differences.

ii. Privacy and confidentiality: Assure the client that their personal information and counselling sessions will remain confidential.

iii. Religious beliefs: Recognize and respect the importance of the client's religious beliefs in their life. Be open to discussing relevant aspects of their faith and how it may impact their experiences and healing process.

iv. Non-judgmental attitude: Create an atmosphere of acceptance and non-judgment. Remember that individuals may be hesitant to seek counselling due to cultural or religious stigmas, and it is important to make them feel safe and comfortable.

v. Fostering open communication: Encourage the client to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns openly. Build rapport and trust to facilitate a productive counselling relationship.

vi. Female counsellor preference: In some cases, Muslim women may feel more comfortable speaking with a female counsellor. Whenever possible, try to accommodate their preference.

vii. Modesty: Be mindful of cultural and religious practices of modesty. Avoid making assumptions or comments about clothing choices but instead, focus on providing a comfortable environment where the client feels safe to express themselves.

viii. Intersectionality: Recognize that Muslim women may not only face religious challenges but may also face intersectional issues related to gender, race, and ethnicity. Understand the impact of these overlapping identities on their experiences.

ix. Spiritual support: If appropriate and welcomed by the client, incorporate spiritual teachings, practices, or resources that align with their faith to provide emotional healing and support.

x. Referral network: Develop a network of resources that are culturally sensitive and cater to the specific needs of Muslim women, such as support groups, counsellors, or community organizations. Having these referral options readily available can be an invaluable resource for your client [42], [43].

These points as mentioned above will significantly play a role in uplifting the standard of women in our societies and they will receive professional, selfless and humanitarian services rendered by professionals [14].

CONCLUSION

Overall, Islamic counselling seeks to help individuals achieve holistic well-being by integrating religious teachings, psychological techniques, and personal responsibility. It aims to provide clients with the tools and support they need to navigate life's challenges and grow closer to Allah. Seeking counselling is encouraged in Islam for both men and women and Muslim women have the right to avail themselves of counselling services when needed. Islamic counselling provides a supportive and culturally sensitive approach that incorporates Islamic teachings, values, and principles while addressing the diverse needs of Muslim women. It should be taken into cognizance that, every individual is unique, and it is important to prioritize their individual needs and preferences when providing counselling. Counsellors do not discriminate between gender in terms of Counselling and other considerations. Islam shares the same view as far as women are concerned. Therefore, it is recommended that counselling practitioners should learn both conventional and religious aspects of counselling for better service delivery to women. Similarly, Counselors should be familiar with religious perspectives both on issues related to women to handle relevant problems effectively and problems related to women in general.

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Author Contribution

All the authors contributed to the paper, and have read and approved the final draft of the paper, and therefore, declared no conflict of interest.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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