

## A Qur'anic and Prophetic Framework for Islamic Counselling in Addressing Contemporary Family and Marital Challenges

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### Abstract

In the rapidly changing dynamics of contemporary society, Muslim families are increasingly confronted with multifaceted marital and familial challenges, including emotional disconnection, communication breakdowns, and the weakening of spiritual and ethical foundations. Factors such as globalization, secular influences, and the decline of traditional support structures have exacerbated these issues, highlighting the urgent need to revisit and revitalize Islamic approaches to counselling and family guidance. This study proposes a comprehensive framework for Islamic counselling grounded in the primary sources of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Through an in-depth analysis of Qur'anic injunctions and Prophetic practices, the paper identifies key principles for nurturing emotional wellbeing, maintaining family cohesion, resolving interpersonal conflicts, and fostering ethical and spiritual integrity within the family unit. The proposed framework synthesizes classical Islamic teachings with contemporary counselling methodologies, offering a culturally and religiously congruent model for therapeutic intervention. Central Qur'anic concepts such as *mawaddah* (love), *rahmah* (mercy), *shura* (consultation), and *'adl* (justice), along with Prophetic approaches like empathy, active listening, and personalized guidance, are explored as foundational tools for effective conflict resolution and relationship strengthening. The study further emphasizes the importance of trained Islamic counsellors, community-based support mechanisms, and preventive educational initiatives in sustaining this model. By integrating spiritual principles with psychological insights, this paper contributes to the development of an authentic and holistic Islamic counselling paradigm capable of addressing the emotional, moral, and relational complexities of modern Muslim family life.

**Keywords:** Islamic Counselling, Muslim Family, Qur'anic Guidance, Prophetic Practices, Emotional Wellbeing

### Introduction

The modern Muslim family is increasingly subjected to multifaceted stressors, stemming both from internal disintegration and external cultural pressures. Rapid globalization, secular individualism, materialistic pursuits, the redefinition of gender roles, and the weakening of communal and intergenerational ties have collectively contributed to a rise in marital discord, emotional detachment, and the dissolution of family structures. Escalating divorce rates, identity crises, and psychological distress among spouses and children point to an urgent need for therapeutic models that resonate with Islamic values while addressing the psychological realities of the contemporary world. In this context, Islamic counselling emerges not as an innovation, but as a revival of an integrative, holistic approach rooted deeply in revelation (*wahy*) and Prophetic tradition (*sunnah*). Grounded in the Qur'anic conception of the human self (*nafs*), moral accountability (*taklīf*), and the ethical imperative of social reform (*islāh*), Islamic counselling views human problems through both spiritual and psychosocial lenses. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exemplified the highest standard of human interaction, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and spiritual mentoring, serving as the divinely guided archetype of a counsellor for all times.

This study aims to develop a comprehensive framework of Islamic counselling based on Qur'anic paradigms and Prophetic methodologies, particularly in the context of family and marital challenges. By systematically exploring scriptural principles and aligning them with select modern counselling theories, this research seeks to construct a theologically sound, contextually relevant, and psychologically informed model of Islamic therapeutic intervention for today's Muslim families.

### Theoretical Foundations of Islamic Counselling

A robust Islamic framework for counselling must be rooted in a sound understanding of human nature and the divine methodologies revealed through the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike secular models that often adopt a reductionist view of human beings—either biologically deterministic or purely psycho-social—Islam presents a holistic anthropology.<sup>2</sup>

It recognizes the human as a composite of body, mind, soul, and moral agency, each requiring nourishment and balance. Islamic counselling, therefore, is not merely a clinical exercise but a sacred trust (*amānah*) aimed at guiding individuals toward personal wholeness and communal harmony in accordance with divine will.

### Nature of the Human Being in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic paradigm of human nature offers a multi-layered and integrative understanding of the self.<sup>3</sup>

This Qur'anic anthropology is bound by the principle of *mīzān* (balance)—a cosmic and moral equilibrium.<sup>4</sup>

### The Prophetic Model of Counselling

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not only a messenger of revelation but also a profound counsellor, mediator, and mentor.<sup>5</sup>

His methods of interpersonal engagement are rich with psychological insight, emotional intelligence, and spiritual depth. These methods form the practical foundation for Islamic counselling.

### Empathetic Listening:

The Prophet ﷺ would listen attentively without interruption, validating others' feelings and concerns.<sup>6</sup>

He would remain present, even when approached by children, women, or the socially marginalized, demonstrating the Islamic ideal of *rahmah* (compassion) and *ihsān* (excellence) in communication.

The Prophetic model offers a deeply humane, spiritually uplifting, and ethically sound approach to counselling. It integrates rationality, compassion, justice, and divine orientation—components sorely needed in modern family therapy. By embedding these Prophetic practices within an Islamic counselling framework, therapists and religious counsellors can provide culturally resonant and spiritually transformative care for Muslim individuals and families facing modern challenges.

### Qur'anic Framework for Family and Marital Counselling

The Qur'an provides a comprehensive ethical and spiritual framework for family life, viewing marriage and kinship not only as social institutions but as sacred relationships designed to reflect divine harmony.<sup>7</sup>

Counselling grounded in the Qur'an addresses not only external behavioural dynamics but also internal spiritual states, encouraging holistic well-being for individuals and families.<sup>8</sup>

The Qur'anic model integrates legal, emotional, moral, and communal aspects of family life, offering profound guidance on establishing, nurturing, and repairing familial bonds.

## Foundation of Marriage and Family in the Qur'an

Marriage, in the Qur'anic worldview, is far more than a civil contract or social arrangement. It is described as a divine sign (*āyah*), signifying spiritual harmony and existential companionship between spouses. The Qur'an declares:

"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses that you may find tranquillity (*sakan*) in them, and He placed between you love (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*)."<sup>9</sup>

This verse encapsulates the emotional and spiritual purposes of marriage: tranquillity, love, and mercy. These are not merely emotional states but theological attributes reflected in the marital bond. *Sakan* implies emotional anchoring and psychological comfort; *mawaddah* suggests enduring affection rooted in mutual respect and sacrifice; *rahmah* denotes compassionate engagement even in the face of human shortcomings.

Islamic counselling, therefore, begins with reaffirming the sanctity and purpose of marriage. It encourages couples to revisit this divine vision when facing hardship, reframing their struggles within the context of spiritual growth, patience (*ṣabr*), and divine reward.

### Ethical Guidelines for Spousal Conduct

The Qur'an provides clear ethical instructions for marital conduct, prioritizing kindness, respect, and emotional sensitivity. In Surah al-Nisā', Allah commands:

"And live with them in kindness (*ma'rūf*)."<sup>10</sup>

The term *ma'rūf* encapsulates culturally appropriate kindness, fairness, and ethical treatment. It demands that spouses maintain dignity in their interactions, avoid harshness or exploitation, and honour the emotional and psychological needs of their partners.<sup>11</sup>

It also implies emotional availability, patience in communication, and fulfilling marital rights and responsibilities with sincerity.

The Qur'an's ethical guidance prohibits verbal, physical, and emotional abuse and promotes mutual consultation, equitable decision-making, and preservation of the other's dignity. From a counselling perspective, these values form the foundation for therapeutic goals, such as rebuilding trust, re-establishing healthy communication, and addressing grievances in constructive and Islamic ally sanctioned ways.<sup>12</sup>

### Conflict Resolution in Marriage

Conflict is recognized in the Qur'an as a natural aspect of human relationships, including marriage.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Qur'an outlines practical mechanisms for managing and resolving such disputes. One of the key methods is *taḥkīm*—arbitration between the families of the disputing couple. Allah commands:

"And if you fear a breach between the two, appoint [two] arbiters, one from his family and one from hers. If they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them."<sup>14</sup>

This system reflects an early model of family mediation and counselling, rooted in community responsibility and collective wisdom. The use of mediators (*ḥakamayn*) underscores the importance of impartiality, confidentiality, and sincerity in seeking reconciliation.<sup>15</sup>

The Qur'anic emphasis on mutual desire for reconciliation also highlights the spiritual element—divine assistance (*tawfiq*) is promised when both parties sincerely intend to restore harmony.

In Islamic counselling today, this verse supports structured interventions like family therapy, sharia-compliant mediation, and third-party counselling grounded in Qur'anic ethics and communal values. The goal is not simply resolution, but spiritual reconciliation and moral upliftment.

## Parenting and Intergenerational Ethics

The Qur'an deeply emphasizes the parent-child relationship, framing it within a paradigm of gratitude, compassion, and spiritual mentorship.<sup>16</sup>

Parents are commanded to show mercy and children to uphold kindness and respect. One of the most profound examples is found in the narrative of Luqmān's advice to his son:

**“And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents... [Luqmān said:] ‘O my son! Do not associate anything with Allah... establish prayer... and be humble in your walk and lower your voice.’”<sup>17</sup>**

Luqmān's counselling integrates spiritual instruction (*tawhīd*), moral guidance, and behavioural discipline—all delivered with wisdom and emotional intelligence. His tone is gentle, persuasive, and emotionally attuned. This becomes a model for intergenerational counselling: combining affection with accountability, dialogue with direction.

In the Islamic counselling context, parenting is understood not merely as a set of duties, but as a form of mentorship (*tarbiyyah*) aimed at nurturing holistic well-being—faith, character, emotional regulation, and social responsibility. Counselling helps restore the balance of rights and responsibilities in families, facilitating healthy boundaries, respect for elders, and psychological support for youth undergoing identity and spiritual struggles.

In summary, the Qur'anic framework for family and marital counselling is both spiritually grounded and psychologically insightful. It emphasizes the sanctity of relationships, the ethical standards for conduct, structured methods of conflict resolution, and the importance of nurturing intergenerational harmony. These principles, when properly integrated into counselling practice, offer Muslim families a sacred and effective roadmap for navigating the challenges of modern life.

## Prophetic Framework for Family and Marital Counselling

The Prophetic model of counselling stands as an ideal embodiment of emotional intelligence, spiritual maturity, and relational wisdom.<sup>18</sup>

The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ offers a practical and divinely guided approach to family and marital issues, marked by compassion, equity, and individualized care. Unlike rigid or punitive approaches, the Prophetic method is relational, process-oriented, and centered on restoring harmony (*islāh*) while preserving human dignity. This framework is essential for constructing an Islamic model of counselling that is both spiritually authentic and psychologically effective.

## Prophetic Communication Style

The Prophet ﷺ demonstrated a masterful communication style characterized by *lutf* (gentleness), *hilm* (forbearance), and *shafaqah* (empathy). He was an active listener, giving full attention to the speaker without interruption or dismissal. His facial expressions, posture, and tone conveyed interest and care. He famously declared:

**“The best among you is the best to his family, and I am the best among you to my family.”<sup>19</sup>**

This hadith not only establishes relational excellence as a measure of faith but also highlights the Prophet's exemplary behaviour in domestic settings—marked by patience, service, emotional sensitivity, and humour. He would mend his own clothes, engage in playful moments with his wives, and show tenderness even during conflict. For Islamic counselling, this style sets the gold standard: non-confrontational, emotionally attuned, and rooted in mutual respect.

## Managing Marital Disputes

The Prophet ﷺ approached marital disputes with discretion, emotional maturity, and spiritual insight. He avoided public confrontation and never resorted to verbal humiliation or coercion.<sup>20</sup>

One key example is the dispute involving his wives Hafsa and 'Ā'ishah (RA), where emotional tensions were managed through private dialogue, reassurance, and emotional validation. The Prophet did not suppress their feelings but addressed them within a framework of love, fairness, and forgiveness.

In another instance, when Fatimah bint Qays sought his advice after her divorce, he provided counsel that considered her emotional safety, social stability, and spiritual well-being. These incidents demonstrate that the Prophetic method prioritizes private resolution, tailored advice, and gentle correction over confrontation or authoritarianism.

Islamic counselling derived from this model should emulate the Prophet's principles: addressing disputes in a safe, private space; avoiding blame; and fostering dialogue that restores trust and affection.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Marital Harmony**

Contemporary psychology recognizes emotional intelligence—self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and social skills—as crucial for relational health. Remarkably, the Prophet ﷺ exemplified these principles in his daily interactions long before the term existed.<sup>21</sup>

He recognized and responded to his wives' emotional cues with sensitivity. When Ṣafīyyah (RA) felt insecure about her background, the Prophet gently affirmed her status and lineage. When 'Ā'ishah (RA) expressed jealousy or distress, he neither dismissed nor rebuked her but engaged with empathy and humour, often defusing tension without diminishing her emotions.

This level of psychological insight reflects deep understanding of human emotion, and a prophetic priority of *taṭīb al-qulūb*—soothing the hearts. Islamic counselling must adopt this emotionally intelligent posture, encouraging clients to explore and articulate their feelings in safe, non-judgmental environments while offering responses that guide, not shame.

### **Counselling in Crisis Situations**

While the Prophetic approach prioritizes reconciliation and emotional healing, it also acknowledges that not all marriages are salvageable.<sup>22</sup>

In cases of abuse, neglect, or psychological harm, the Prophet ﷺ permitted separation with *'adl* (justice) and *karāmah* (dignity). His engagement with Khawlah bint Tha'labah—whose husband had uttered a culturally oppressive form of divorce (*ḡihār*)—is a landmark example.

Khawlah complained directly to the Prophet ﷺ about the emotional trauma and social injustice she endured. In response, Allah revealed:

**“Certainly has Allah heard the statement of she who argues with you [O Muhammad] concerning her husband...”<sup>23</sup>**

This incident demonstrates that emotional pain is valid in the Islamic legal and spiritual framework. Divine revelation itself intervenes to protect the emotional integrity of a woman facing marital oppression. The Prophet listened without rebuke, upheld her dignity, and facilitated justice.

Such examples mandate that Islamic counselling frameworks address abuse and dysfunction with seriousness, ensuring that spiritual values are not misused to justify harm. Clients must be supported with empathy, informed about their rights, and offered guidance that reflects both compassion and legal integrity.

In conclusion, the Prophetic model for family and marital counselling is profoundly holistic: it is emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded, and spiritually uplifting. It affirms the sanctity of family while recognizing the complexity of human emotions and relationships. For counsellors operating within Islamic paradigms, the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ provides a timeless, comprehensive, and divinely guided blueprint for restoring emotional health, spiritual balance, and relational harmony in the modern world.



## Contemporary Marital and Family Challenges: Islamic Counselling Perspectives

Modern Muslim families are navigating unprecedented challenges, shaped by technological, cultural, and psychological shifts.<sup>24</sup>

These disruptions have led to emotional detachment, identity confusion, gender tensions, and spiritual decline. An Islamic counselling approach, rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, offers holistic solutions that engage the heart (*qalb*), mind (*'aql*), soul (*rūḥ*), and society (*mu'āsharah*).

### Rise of Divorce and Marital Breakdown

The rising divorce rates in Muslim societies, particularly among the younger generation, often reflect the internalization of secular individualism, unrealistic expectations, and poor conflict resolution skills.<sup>25</sup>

The erosion of *sabr* (patience), *shūrā* (consultation), and spiritual commitment contributes to the fragility of marriages. Islamic counselling can serve as a preventive and restorative tool by:

- Emphasizing premarital education based on Qur'anic principles and Prophetic wisdom;
- Promoting emotional intimacy through practices of *mawaddah* and *rahmah*;
- Equipping couples with conflict management strategies rooted in forgiveness, dialogue, and shared religious purpose.

### Communication Breakdown and Emotional Disconnection

Digital dependency has transformed human interaction, leading to decreased face-to-face communication and increased emotional detachment. Islamic teachings encourage *mu'āsharah bi-l-ma'rūf*—living with kindness, empathy, and mutual understanding.<sup>26</sup>

### Counselling based on this principle focuses on:

- Active listening and attentiveness to emotional cues;
- Rebuilding emotional presence within marriage;
- Encouraging shared spiritual activities, such as praying together and Qur'an recitation, to refuge intimacy.

### Mental Health and Family Dysfunction

Mental health struggles—depression, anxiety, trauma—affect familial relationships and disrupt parenting, spousal roles, and conflict resolution. Such an integrated approach offers both transcendental and therapeutic healing.

### Parenting Challenges in Modernity

Parents now contend with behavioural disorders, screen addiction, academic stress, and the loss of moral grounding.<sup>27</sup>

The Prophetic model of parenting exemplifies early ethical development, affection, and personalized instruction. Islamic counselling strategies include:

- Dialogue-based parenting, as seen in Luqmān's advice.<sup>28</sup>
- Balancing authority with affection, using the principle of *tarbiyyah*;
- Cultivating identity and religious resilience through *ta'ālīm*, role modeling, and spiritual anchoring.

“Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock.”<sup>29</sup>

### Integrating Qur'anic-Prophetic Framework with Modern Counselling Practice

Islamic counselling does not reject modern psychology but evaluates and filters it through the lens of divine revelation.<sup>30</sup>

Various therapeutic models can be meaningfully integrated with Islamic teachings. For instance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) aligns well when reframed through Islamic cognition. Core Islamic concepts such as *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) can replace irrational fears, *husn al-zann* (positive assumptions) help counter negative thought patterns, and *taqwā* (God-consciousness) acts as a moral compass for behavioural change. Similarly, Narrative Therapy finds harmony with Islamic teachings by encouraging the re-authoring of one's life story using Qur'anic and Prophetic narratives—for example, drawing from the patience of Prophet Ayyub or the resilience of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon them), and the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ during times of suffering, injustice, or familial trials.

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), which emphasizes emotional responsiveness and secure attachment, also reflects Prophetic practices.<sup>31</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ demonstrated profound emotional intelligence by expressing love and reassurance, such as his affection toward Khadījah and 'Ā'ishah (RA), encouraging vulnerability and emotional openness, and creating emotionally safe spaces in marital life. Additionally, Solution-Focused Therapy is enriched by Islamic principles like *niyyah* (intentionality), *ṣabr* (patience), and *shukr* (gratitude). These values empower clients to reframe personal challenges as spiritual opportunities, set goals with the aid of *du'ā'* and reliance on Allah (*tawakkul*), and celebrate small victories through gratitude. Importantly, all such integrations must be filtered through Islamic epistemology to avoid secular biases or contradictions with Islamic theology.

### Practical Model of Islamic Family Counselling

A practical Islamic counselling model rests on a qualified counsellor and a structured approach. An Islamic family counsellor should be well-versed in Sharī'ah, particularly in areas like family law, ethics, and spirituality, while also being trained in modern counselling methods, such as trauma-informed care and active listening. Personal integrity, *akhlaq* (Prophetic character), *amanah* (confidentiality), and *ḥikmah* (wisdom) must define their professional conduct.

The counselling process typically involves three stages. The assessment phase explores emotional, behavioral, and spiritual dynamics through client narratives and Qur'anic reflections to understand the relational context.<sup>32</sup> The intervention stage applies Prophetic strategies including *islāh* (reconciliation), *du'ā'*, empathy, and emotional coaching, while clarifying familial roles and expectations in accordance with Sharī'ah. In the resolution stage, the goal is to restore harmony with dignity and justice; however, if reconciliation is not possible, ethical separation (*ṭalāq* or *khul'*) should be facilitated with guidance and spiritual support.

Islamic counselling draws on a rich toolbox that includes Qur'anic stories—like Prophet Yusuf's emotional intelligence and forgiveness, or Prophet Musa's mentorship of others. Hadith narratives, such as Umm Salamah's strategic wisdom or Khawlah bint Tha'labah's advocacy, also serve as instructional and motivational examples. Additionally, spiritual tools like *du'ā'*, *dhikr*-based journaling, and reflective *tawbah* (repentance) help personalize and spiritualize the therapeutic journey.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Islamic counselling provides a unique framework of psychosocial healing by integrating spiritual depth, emotional intelligence, and ethical guidance. Unlike secular models, it situates human suffering, healing, and personal growth within a theological and eschatological worldview. The Qur'an and Sunnah collectively offer an ethically grounded and spiritually nourishing paradigm for addressing the complex emotional, relational, and social challenges faced by Muslim families today.

To realize the full potential of Islamic counselling, several key recommendations are proposed: (1) develop academic programs that combine Islamic sciences with modern psychology; (2) establish counselling centers within mosques, Islamic schools, and community organizations; (3) encourage empirical research and publication of case studies to assess the efficacy of Islamic counselling methods; (4) promote premarital and parenting education based on Qur'anic and Prophetic principles; and (5) provide basic training in counselling skills for imams and religious scholars to effectively respond to the emotional and familial needs of the community.

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