

Psycho-spiritual processes among Dutch Muslims

A quantitative study of heart-based cognitive disruption, spiritual coping and spiritual heart balance from the perspective of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya

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Background

Existing psychological models around intrusive thoughts, religious coping and spiritual well-being do not always align with the religious and spiritual worldview of Muslims. This research reformulates these constructs from the psycho-spiritual perspective of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya — with core concepts such as qalb (heart), nafs (self/desires), tawakkul (trust in Allah), tazkiyah (inner purification) and sakīnah (inner tranquillity) — and examines how these four processes relate to one another among Dutch Muslims.

Research question

“How can existing, validated measurement scales for intrusive thoughts, religious coping and spiritual well-being be revised from the psycho-spiritual perspective of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and how do these variables relate to one another within a Dutch Muslim population?”

SUB-QUESTIONS

1. How are intrusive thoughts, religious coping and spiritual well-being conceptually and psychometrically defined in the existing literature?
2. How can core concepts from Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (qalb, nafs, tazkiyah, tawakkul, sakinah) be translated into measurable items?
3. To what extent are the reformulated scales reliable and internally consistent within a Dutch Muslim population?
4. What is the relationship between intrusive thoughts, positive/negative religious coping and spiritual well-being?
5. To what extent does religious coping mediate the relationship between intrusive thoughts and spiritual well-being?

Method

Quantitative cross-sectional survey research among Dutch Muslims aged 18 and older, via an online questionnaire (Google Forms). Recruitment through social media, Islamic networks, spiritual care organisations and personal networks; more than 2,500 people were given access to the survey.

353

fully completed responses

346

valid respondents (analysis)

5%

margin of error at ~98.4% confidence

Key findings

Four new psycho-spiritual measurement scales were developed for this research and psychometrically tested using factor, reliability and mediation analyses in SPSS.

● Heart-based Cognitive Disruption

Significantly related to both positive and negative spiritual coping, and to spiritual heart balance ($\alpha = .890$).

- Disturbing, recurring thoughts that are hard to stop
- Mental absence and inattentiveness
- Doubt about what is true or right
- Thoughts and feelings that steer one's thinking

● Positive Spiritual Coping

Strongly related to spiritual heart balance, and partially mediates the relationship between cognitive disruption and heart balance ($\alpha = .866$).

- Seeking calm through the remembrance of Allah (dhikr)
- Trusting that Allah guides one's situation for the best (tawakkul)
- Remaining patient in difficult situations (ṣabr)
- Reflecting on one's own behaviour and intentions

● Negative Spiritual Coping

Strikingly, also positively related to spiritual heart balance; inner struggle does not automatically indicate less spiritual health ($\alpha = .883$).

- Difficulty entrusting one's situation to Allah
- Inner distraction and little connectedness to Allah
- Doubt that disturbs one's faith
- Desires that determine one's choices

● Spiritual Heart Balance

Partly explained by both positive and negative spiritual coping, which partially mediate the relationship with cognitive disruption ($\alpha = .889$).

- Inner peace, even in difficult situations
- Deep inner contentment and stability
- Connectedness to Allah in daily life
- Purity of intentions

Recommendations

- **Additional qualitative research.** In-depth interviews or focus groups can give more insight into how Muslims actually experience inner struggle, tawakkul and spiritual heart balance.
- **Development into a therapeutic model.** The four constructs offer a foundation for interventions for Islamic spiritual caregivers, psychologists, imams and other care professionals.
- **A more balanced sample.** Replicate the research with greater male representation; women were strongly overrepresented in this study (81.8%).
- **Testing in other populations.** Test the scales among other cultural and ethnic Muslim populations, within and outside the Netherlands.
- **Longitudinal follow-up research.** Follow respondents over a longer period to see how spiritual coping and heart balance develop across different life stages.

In closing

This research shows that the psycho-spiritual perspective of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya offers valuable entry points for understanding mental, emotional and spiritual processes among Dutch Muslims. The developed scales form a first scientific foundation for Islamic-oriented diagnostics, spiritual care and therapeutic interventions. The full, interactive results can be explored via the dashboard accompanying this thesis.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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