

Psychology, Mental Well Being and Traditional Therapeutics: Reconnecting Ancient Wisdom with the Mental Health Needs of Generation Z

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Abstract

Mental health has become one of the defining challenges of contemporary society. The increasing prevalence of psychological distress among young people, changing patterns of social interaction, digital dependence, academic and occupational pressures, uncertainty about the future, social comparison and weakening connections with traditional community structures have created a particularly complex environment for Generation Z. At the same time, there is renewed international interest in traditional, complementary and integrative medicine and its potential contribution to health and wellbeing. This Commentary explores the relationship between psychology, mental wellbeing and traditional therapeutics, with particular attention to Generation Z and the potential contribution of culturally grounded approaches. Yoga, meditation, mindfulness, contemplative practices, traditional healing systems and Islamic spiritual practices are considered from a contemporary psychological perspective. Particular attention is given to Islamic concepts including sakinah, tawakkul, sabr, shukr, dhikr, salah, compassion, social responsibility and balance. These concepts provide a culturally meaningful framework for understanding psychological resilience, emotional regulation, purpose and existential wellbeing. The discussion does not propose traditional therapeutics as substitutes for established psychological or psychiatric care. Rather, it argues for scientifically responsible engagement with traditional knowledge, particularly where traditional practices may provide culturally congruent resources for prevention, resilience and supportive mental health care. Current evidence indicates potential benefits associated with selected mind body and contemplative practices, although the strength of evidence varies and methodological limitations remain. Generation Z presents a particularly important population for this discussion because its members have developed within an environment characterized by continuous digital connectivity, rapid social change and unprecedented access to information. Their mental health needs may therefore require approaches that combine scientific psychology with culturally meaningful practices and forms of human connection. The future of traditional therapeutics in mental health may consequently depend not on returning to the past, but on understanding how ancient knowledge can be critically examined and meaningfully adapted to contemporary psychological realities.

Keywords: Traditional Medicine, Mental Health, Psychological Wellbeing, Generation Z, Islamic Psychology, Spirituality, Mindfulness, Meditation, Yoga, Dhikr, Quran, Resilience, Cultural Psychology, Integrative Mental Health

Introduction

Mental health has become one of the most important public health and social challenges of the twenty first century. Psychological distress is increasingly observed across age groups, professions, cultures and socioeconomic settings. Young people in particular are experiencing a rapidly changing psychological environment in which education, employment, relationships, identity formation and social interaction are increasingly mediated by digital technologies.

The World Health Organization reports that mental health conditions frequently emerge early in life and that many children and young people do not receive the support they need. The organization estimates that approximately one in seven people aged 10 to 19 years experiences a mental health condition. At the same time, traditional medicine is receiving renewed international attention. The World Health Organization adopted its Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025 to 2034 in 2025 [1], emphasizing evidence, safety, quality, cultural respect and appropriate integration into health systems. The convergence of these two developments creates an important scholarly question.

Can traditional therapeutic knowledge contribute meaningfully to the psychological wellbeing of contemporary populations without compromising scientific standards?

This question becomes particularly relevant when considering Generation Z. Generation Z has grown up during the transition from the predominantly physical and interpersonal social environment of previous generations to an environment characterized by smartphones, social media, algorithmic information, virtual communities, online education, digital employment and continuous connectivity. This environment has created substantial opportunities, but it has also introduced new psychological pressures. For Generation Z, the question of mental wellbeing is therefore not simply a medical question. It is also a question of identity, meaning, belonging, relationships, spirituality, attention, purpose and human connection. Traditional therapeutic systems may offer useful perspectives in precisely these domains.

Mental Well Being Beyond the Absence of Disease

Mental health should not be conceptualized solely as the absence of psychiatric illness. Psychological wellbeing includes emotional stability, resilience, meaningful relationships, personal agency, purpose, social participation and the ability to respond constructively to adversity. Ryff's [2] work on psychological wellbeing, for example, emphasizes dimensions including autonomy, environmental

mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life and self-acceptance. These dimensions have considerable relevance to traditional approaches to health. Many traditional systems do not distinguish sharply between physical and psychological wellbeing. Health is frequently understood as a condition of balance involving body, mind, behavior, social relationships and environment. This holistic orientation is increasingly compatible with contemporary bio-psychosocial perspectives.

- Engel's [3] bio-psychosocial model challenged the limitations of purely biomedical approaches by emphasizing the interaction of biological, psychological and social dimensions of illness. The continuing relevance of this perspective is particularly evident in mental health.
- Traditional therapeutics can potentially enrich this understanding by adding cultural and existential dimensions.

Consequently, a more complete understanding of mental wellbeing may involve five interconnected dimensions: biological health,

- psychological functioning,
- social connection,
- cultural identity and
- meaning or spirituality

For many people, particularly within religious and culturally cohesive communities, the final two dimensions are not peripheral. They are central components of how suffering and recovery are understood.

Generation Z and the New Psychology of Mental Well Being

Generation Z is generally used to describe individuals born approximately from the late 1990s through the early 2010s, although the exact boundaries vary across demographic studies. This generation has experienced childhood and early adulthood during an unprecedented expansion of digital communication. Their psychological environment differs from that of previous generations in several important ways.

Permanent Connectivity

For many members of Generation Z, communication does not end when school, university or work finishes. Social interaction continues through messaging applications, social media platforms, gaming communities and other digital environments. The consequence is a paradox. Young people may be more connected technologically while simultaneously experiencing loneliness or reduced depth of interpersonal connection.

Social Comparison

Digital platforms allow individuals to compare themselves continuously with carefully selected representations of other people's lives. The resulting comparison may involve appearance, wealth, education, career success, relationships, travel and lifestyle. Unlike traditional interpersonal comparison, digital comparison can occur continuously and at enormous scale. This creates an environment in which the psychological self may become increasingly dependent upon external validation.

Attention and Cognitive Overload

Generation Z has developed within an information environment characterized by constant notifications, rapid content changes and multiple simultaneous streams of information. Attention has consequently become a valuable psychological resource. Traditional contemplative practices that emphasize stillness, attention, reflection and intentional awareness may therefore have particular relevance to contemporary young adults.

Uncertainty and Future Anxiety

Young people face uncertainty relating to employment, economic conditions, climate change, geopolitical instability and rapid technological transformation. Such uncertainty can contribute to stress and existential anxiety. Traditional philosophies frequently contain frameworks for understanding uncertainty, adversity and human limitations. The scientific question is whether such frameworks can contribute measurably to psychological resilience.

Identity Formation

Identity development is a central psychological task during adolescence and early adulthood. Digital environments can expand opportunities for self-expression while simultaneously exposing young people to conflicting cultural expectations. For young Muslims in particular, identity may involve negotiating religious values, family expectations, local culture, global youth culture and digital communities. Culturally responsive psychological care therefore becomes particularly important.

The Digital Mental Health Paradox

The relationship between technology and mental health is not simply positive or negative. Digital platforms can provide social support, education, peer communities and access to mental health information. They can also expose young people to cyber bullying, harmful content, unrealistic body ideals and problematic patterns of use. WHO Europe reported that problematic social media use

among adolescents surveyed across 44 countries and regions increased from 7 percent in 2018 to 11 percent in 2022. This does not establish that social media alone causes mental illness. Rather, it demonstrates that digital behavior has become an important environmental factor in contemporary adolescent mental health. For Generation Z, therefore, psychological wellbeing may require the deliberate restoration of experiences that digital life can diminish: silence, reflection, physical presence, community, nature, meaningful conversation, spirituality and purposeful activity.

Traditional Therapeutics and the Psychology of Human Connection

Traditional therapeutic systems have frequently emphasized the person rather than the isolated symptom. The therapeutic relationship itself may involve listening, reassurance, ritual, social connection, shared meaning and culturally familiar forms of care. In communities where traditional practitioners remain trusted figures, they may have an important role in recognizing psychological distress and facilitating access to appropriate care. This is particularly relevant where stigma surrounding mental illness remains strong. A person may be more willing to discuss distress with a trusted community or traditional practitioner than with a formal mental health professional.

This does not mean that traditional practitioners should independently diagnose or manage serious psychiatric disorders. Rather, their potential role may include supportive engagement, culturally appropriate communication, recognition of warning signs and referral to qualified professionals. A 2024 systematic review examining interventions delivered by traditional healers for common mental disorders identified potential opportunities while also emphasizing the need for appropriate training, collaboration and referral mechanisms. The integration of traditional therapeutic knowledge into contemporary mental health care therefore requires respect for both cultural knowledge and clinical boundaries.

Mindfulness, Meditation and the Psychology of Attention

Mindfulness has become one of the most extensively investigated contemplative approaches in modern psychological research.

Although contemporary mindfulness programs are often presented in secular psychological language, many of the underlying practices have historical roots in religious and contemplative traditions. From a psychological perspective, mindfulness involves intentional attention

to present experience with reduced automatic reactivity. Potential mechanisms include attention regulation, emotional awareness, metacognition and stress regulation. These mechanisms are particularly relevant to Generation Z. A generation exposed to continuous information and rapid digital stimulation may benefit from practices that intentionally cultivate sustained attention and psychological presence. The potential value of contemplative practices should nevertheless be examined scientifically rather than assumed from their historical origins. Research has reported benefits associated with mindfulness based interventions for anxiety, depression and psychological stress, although outcomes vary across populations and intervention formats. The most appropriate interpretation is therefore that mindfulness represents a potentially useful psychological practice whose effectiveness depends upon context, implementation, individual characteristics and the nature of the problem being addressed.

Yoga and the Mind Body Relationship

Yoga occupies a distinctive position within the discussion of traditional therapeutics because it incorporates physical movement, breathing, attention and contemplative elements. Modern clinical research has investigated yoga for anxiety, depression, stress and general psychological wellbeing. A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2023 reported potential reductions in anxiety and depressive symptoms associated with yoga based interventions [4], although the certainty of evidence was limited by methodological concerns and heterogeneity among studies. Yoga may therefore be relevant not only because of physical activity but because it can combine movement with breathing, attention and relaxation. This multidimensional character is particularly relevant to contemporary psychological health. For individuals experiencing high levels of digital engagement and sedentary behavior, structured physical and contemplative practices may provide opportunities to reconnect attention with bodily experience. The role of yoga in mental health should nevertheless remain complementary to appropriate psychological and medical treatment where clinical disorders are present [5-7].

An Islamic Perspective on Mental Well Being

Islam offers a rich conceptual framework concerning human psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

Islamic thought does not separate the human being into completely independent physical and spiritual components. Concepts such as the *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh* and *aql* have historically been used to describe dimensions of the human person associated with self, heart, spirit and intellect. These concepts should not be treated as direct equivalents of modern

psychiatric or neuroscientific constructs. Nevertheless, they provide a philosophical framework through which Muslim communities may understand psychological experience. Islamic teachings emphasize balance, moderation, responsibility, patience, gratitude, social connection, compassion and remembrance of God. The Qur'an states: "Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest." (Qur'an 13:28) [8]. The concept of *sakinah*, often translated as tranquility or inner calm, provides a particularly relevant Islamic perspective on psychological wellbeing. Similarly, *sabr* represents patience and perseverance in adversity, while *shukr* represents gratitude. *Tawakkul* involves reliance upon God while maintaining appropriate effort and responsibility [9].

These concepts can be understood as elements of a broader psychological orientation toward uncertainty and adversity. Importantly, this should not be interpreted as suggesting that religious practice prevents mental illness. Mental disorders are complex conditions influenced by biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. Islamic spirituality may provide meaning, coping resources and social support, but it should not be used to blame individuals for psychological illness or to discourage appropriate professional treatment [10].

Dhikr, Salah and Qur'anic Engagement

Islamic devotional practices provide an important area for contemporary research into spirituality and psychological wellbeing.

- *Dhikr*, the remembrance of God, involves repeated remembrance and invocation.
- *Salah*, the prescribed prayer, combines bodily movement, recitation, attentional focus and spiritual orientation.

Qur'anic recitation and listening provide another form of structured contemplative engagement. These practices may have psychological relevance through several pathways. They can provide structured pauses during the day, encourage reflection, reinforce meaning, facilitate emotional regulation and strengthen perceived connection with a wider spiritual framework [11-13]. A systematic review examining Qur'an recitation, listening and memorization identified studies reporting associations with anxiety, stress, depression, sleep and quality of life, while also noting limitations in the available evidence. A separate systematic scoping review identified studies examining *salah*, supplication, Qur'anic reading, memorization and listening in relation to anxiety, depression, stress and coping. The authors emphasized the limited amount of research from Western settings and the importance of culturally appropriate mental health approaches. These findings are promising but should be interpreted carefully [14-15]. The available literature

does not justify the conclusion that Qur'anic engagement is a universal treatment for psychiatric disorders. Rather, it provides a scientific basis for investigating culturally congruent spiritual practices as potential resources for psychological wellbeing and supportive care.

Islamic Psychology and Contemporary Psychological Science

Islamic psychology has attracted increasing scholarly attention as researchers seek to understand mental health within culturally and spiritually meaningful frameworks. A central issue is whether psychological science should be culturally neutral or culturally responsive. Psychological theories developed predominantly within Western contexts may not fully capture the experiences of populations whose understanding of selfhood, family, spirituality and community differs substantially [16]. For Muslim populations, religious identity can influence religious coping, interpretation of adversity, family relationships, moral reasoning, concepts of responsibility, experiences of suffering and approaches to professional mental health care. A systematic review examining Muslim communities and the acceptability of cognitive behavioral therapy identified cultural and religious considerations that can influence engagement with psychological treatment. This suggests an important direction for clinical psychology. Evidence based psychological therapies do not necessarily have to be culturally detached [17-18].

Psychological interventions can be adapted to respect a person's worldview while retaining their underlying therapeutic principles. For example, concepts such as cognitive appraisal, behavioral activation, emotional regulation and coping can potentially be discussed using language and examples that are meaningful within Islamic traditions. This is not a rejection of contemporary psychology. It is an argument for culturally competent psychology [19].

Generation Z and Islamic Spirituality

The relationship between Generation Z and spirituality deserves particular attention. Young Muslims are increasingly navigating multiple cultural environments simultaneously. A young person may encounter Islamic teachings at home, secular educational environments at university, global youth culture through social media and diverse interpretations of religion through online platforms. This can create both opportunities and tensions. Digital platforms have made Islamic lectures, Qur'anic education, religious scholarship and spiritual communities accessible to young people across geographical boundaries. At the same time, online religious content can vary greatly in quality, interpretation and authority. Generation Z may therefore need forms of Islamic

psychological education that are intellectually credible, psychologically informed and culturally relevant [20].

- The traditional concept of dhikr, for example, may be presented not only as a devotional practice but also as an opportunity for intentional attention and reflection.
- Salah can be explored as a structured interruption of continuous daily activity, providing recurring opportunities for physical movement, reflection and spiritual orientation.
- Sabr can be discussed in relation to perseverance and adaptive coping.
- Shukr can be considered alongside contemporary research on gratitude.
- Tawakkul can be distinguished from passivity by emphasizing responsible effort combined with acceptance of outcomes beyond personal control.

Such interpretations should be developed carefully and with appropriate Islamic scholarship. The purpose is not to convert religious concepts into psychological techniques. Rather, psychology can provide one scientific language through which some dimensions of established religious practices may be studied [21].

The Psychology of Meaning in an Age of Uncertainty

One of the central psychological questions for Generation Z concerns meaning. Contemporary societies provide unprecedented choice, information and personal freedom, yet increased choice does not necessarily produce psychological security. Young people may experience uncertainty regarding identity, career, relationships, social status and future prospects. Meaning and purpose can provide an organizing structure through which individuals interpret these experiences. Traditional religious and philosophical systems have historically addressed these questions directly [22-24]. Islam provides an explicit conception of human purpose, responsibility and accountability. From an Islamic perspective, human existence is associated with worship, moral responsibility, stewardship and service. From a psychological perspective, purpose in life has been associated with dimensions of psychological wellbeing. These perspectives are not identical, but they can be examined alongside one another. For a young person experiencing uncertainty, a sense of purpose may alter the psychological interpretation of adversity. Failure may become an experience from which learning is possible rather than evidence of personal worthlessness. Difficulty may be interpreted as part of a broader life journey rather than as evidence that life has no meaning. Such interpretations can potentially influence resilience, although the specific psychological mechanisms require further empirical investigation [25].

Social Connection, Family and Community

Traditional societies have often emphasized extended family and community relationships.

Modern urban life can weaken these structures. Generation Z may maintain hundreds or thousands of digital connections while experiencing limited face to face social interaction. The distinction between connection and belonging is therefore important. A person can be socially connected digitally while experiencing profound loneliness. Traditional communities can provide forms of belonging through family, neighborhood, religious institutions and collective activities. Within Islamic societies, the mosque, family and wider community have historically served not only religious functions but also social functions. Collective prayer, Ramadan gatherings, charitable activities, communal meals and family relationships can create repeated opportunities for interpersonal connection [26]. Such experiences may have psychological significance through social support and shared identity. Research into religion and mental health broadly suggests that religious involvement can provide sources of meaning, coping and social support, although relationships between religion and mental health are complex and cannot be assumed to be uniformly positive. The challenge for contemporary communities is therefore to preserve the beneficial social dimensions of tradition while remaining attentive to individual differences and avoiding stigma surrounding mental illness [27].

Mental Health Stigma and Traditional Communities

Traditional and religious communities can sometimes unintentionally contribute to mental health stigma when psychological illness is interpreted exclusively through moral, spiritual or supernatural explanations. This can delay professional assessment.

- A culturally informed approach should therefore distinguish between spiritual support and clinical diagnosis.
- A person may benefit from prayer, Qur'anic recitation, family support and spiritual counseling while simultaneously requiring psychological or psychiatric treatment.

The central principle should be that spiritual resources can coexist with professional health care. The Islamic intellectual tradition itself contains a long history of scholarship concerning medicine, the human psyche, ethics and human behavior. Contemporary Muslim mental health services can build upon this intellectual heritage while incorporating modern clinical standards [28].

Traditional Therapeutics and the Future of Generation Z

The relevance of traditional therapeutics to Generation Z will depend partly upon whether traditional knowledge can communicate with contemporary young people in a credible and meaningful manner. Young people are unlikely to accept a practice simply because it is old. They increasingly ask questions about evidence, mechanism, authenticity and relevance. Traditional therapeutic practices can be investigated using modern scientific methods while preserving their cultural meaning. For example, researchers could investigate whether structured practices involving meditation, breathing, movement, prayer, Qur'anic recitation or contemplative reflection influence:

- stress
- sleep
- attention
- emotional regulation
- perceived social support
- resilience
- life satisfaction
- anxiety
- depressive symptoms
- quality of life
- sense of meaning

Research should use appropriate controls, validated psychological instruments and sufficiently rigorous study designs. At the same time, researchers should recognize that not every meaningful human experience can be reduced to a single biomarker. The scientific study of spirituality therefore requires methodological sophistication [29].

Artificial Intelligence, Digital Culture and Traditional Wisdom

Generation Z is also the first generation to encounter artificial intelligence as an increasingly ordinary component of education, communication and personal life. AI systems can provide information, conversational support, educational content and access to psychological resources. However, AI cannot automatically provide the human dimensions of care. It cannot replace genuine friendship, family relationships, professional therapeutic alliance, community belonging or spiritual guidance. This creates an interesting opportunity for traditional therapeutics. Digital technology can be used to make traditional practices more accessible while preserving human supervision. Examples include:

- Digital Qur'an Learning
- Guided Mindfulness
- Online Psychological Education
- Virtual Access to Qualified Counselors

- Digital Wellbeing Tools
- Traditional Knowledge Archives
- Culturally Adapted Mental Health Education
- Evidence Databases for Traditional Practices

However, digital dissemination must distinguish evidence based information from unsupported therapeutic claims. For Generation Z, scientific credibility and digital accessibility should therefore become complementary rather than competing priorities [30].

Conclusion

Psychology, mental wellbeing and traditional therapeutics are converging at an important moment in the history of health care. The contemporary mental health environment is fundamentally different from that of previous generations. Generation Z has grown up in a world of permanent digital connectivity, rapid technological change, continuous information exposure and evolving social identities. These developments have created new psychological challenges while also providing unprecedented opportunities for communication and access to knowledge. Traditional therapeutic systems offer perspectives that may be particularly relevant to these challenges because they frequently emphasize reflection, balance, community, meaning, physical activity, emotional regulation and spiritual orientation. Islamic traditions provide an especially rich example [31].

Concepts such as *sakinah*, *sabr*, *shukr*, *tawakkul* and *dhikr*, together with practices such as *salah* and Qur'anic engagement, provide a culturally meaningful vocabulary for discussing psychological resilience, purpose, emotional regulation and inner tranquility. Contemporary research has begun to investigate these relationships, including studies of Qur'anic engagement and mental health and emerging research on Islamic mindfulness. The evidence remains developing and should be interpreted with scientific caution. The future of traditional therapeutics should therefore not be understood as a return to the past. It should be understood as an opportunity for dialogue between accumulated human knowledge and contemporary science [32].

- Traditional knowledge can provide hypotheses, cultural meaning and community resources.
- Psychology can provide rigorous methods for studying cognition, behavior and emotional regulation.
- Medicine can provide diagnostic and clinical safeguards.
- Neuroscience can investigate mechanisms.
- Religious scholarship can preserve theological authenticity.
- Public health can address accessibility and equity.
- Young people themselves can help determine which

forms of traditional knowledge remain meaningful in contemporary life.

The central challenge is therefore not choosing between tradition and science. It is learning how to examine tradition scientifically without stripping it of its cultural meaning, and how to apply modern science without disconnecting mental health from the human need for identity, community, purpose and meaning. For Generation Z, this may be one of the most important questions facing the future of mental wellbeing.

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