

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON MENTAL HEALTH: AN ISLAMIC PANACEA

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***Abstract:** Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is an age-long universal problem that affects individuals' mental health regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or faith. However, the female gender is the most affected by this ailment due to the societal power structure that favours the male gender. Women and girls experience at home and in public arenas varied forms of GBV that cause them physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm. Consequentially, their mental health becomes impaired. This study explores how Islamic principles can be a panacea to GBV and its associated mental health effects by examining the Nigerian Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba ethnic groups which have a reasonable percentage of Muslims. Taking into consideration the causes of GBV and its consequences, the study emphasises the necessity for religious guidance to avert all forms of abuse and maintain mental serenity.*

Key Words: Gender-Based Violence, Islam, Mental Health, Muslim Women, Nigeria.

Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)¹ is a global phenomenon that has existed since time immemorial. The United Nations Refugee Agency considers GBV as an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed differences between males and females.² Such harmful acts may be physical, sexual, mental suffering, threats, coercion, or other deprivations of liberty.

Though some studies confirm that men too experience GBV,³ but, females are much more vulnerable to this type of violence due to

¹ In this study, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) means Violence against Women and Children.

² United Nations Refugee Agency, "Gender-based Violence;" <https://www.unhcr.org/gbv-toolkit/test/> (Accessed October 10, 2022).

³ Denise A. Hines and Kathleen Malley-Morrison, "Psychological Effects of Partner Abuse Against Men: A Neglected Research Area," *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 2, no. 2 (2001): 75-85.

some social constructs which favour the male against the female.⁴ Females sometimes experience GBV right from the pregnancy stage and continue throughout their lives in countless forms - in the home, at work or any other environment of public life involving fathers, brothers, husbands, colleagues, superiors or strangers. The high prevalence of female victims of GBV makes it often interchangeable with Violence Against Women and Children as well as being the focus of global studies. This was the case with some international organisations and researchers among others.⁵ In this respect, the UNICEF defines violence against women as,

...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.⁶

Hence, GBV can take different forms that may result in physical, sexual, and psychological harm as recognised by the UN declaration on the elimination of violence against women.⁷

Specifically, GBV becomes heightened by violent happenings around the world today due to the proliferation of warfare, uprisings, insurgencies, and natural disasters, among others. In any of these situations, women and children tend to disproportionately bear the brunt. In Nigeria for instance, the case of Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen and farmers clashes, bandit attacks, kidnapping, and communal and religious clashes are spaces for violence. These scenarios contribute to a steep rise in GBV against women and children in the country. Females continuously experience physical assault, denigration, forced and early marriage, rape, sexual exploitation,

⁴ B. R. Crisp, "The Spiritual Implications of Sexual Abuse: Not an Issue Only for Religious Women," *Feminist Theology* 20, no. 2 (2012): 133–45.

⁵ D. J. Arango, M. Morton, F. Gennari, S. Kiplesund, and M. Ellsberg, "Interventions to Prevent or Reduce Violence Against Women and Girls: A Systematic Review of Reviews," *Women's Voice and Agency Research* (Series 10; Washington DC: World Bank, 2014); <http://documents.worldbank.org/crated/en/700731468149970518/pdf/927130NWP0Wome-00Box385382B00PUBLIC0.pdf> (Accessed September 10, 2022).

⁶ UNICEF, "Domestic Violence Against Women and Children," *Innocenti Digest* 6 (June, 2000), 2.

⁷ United Nations, "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women;" www.un-documents.net/a48r104.htm (Accessed September 10, 2022).

trafficking, child labour and being used as instruments of war.⁸ Worst still, these happenings deepen domestic violence, and the victims are predominately women and girls. Such developments have several devastating physical and mental health outcomes on Nigerian females, like their counterparts globally.⁹

The ample evidence of the escalation of GBV in Nigeria is evident in the study of the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey.¹⁰ This scenario underscores the global campaigns and vigorous steps taken by the Nigerian government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and women activists to curb GBV in the country.¹¹ This lacuna shows the need to re-strategize the efforts towards addressing GBV in Nigeria and safeguard the female folk from perennial suffering. Though studies have confirmed that Nigerian men too experience GBV, especially from their wives, but their numbers are very minimal.¹²

This paper explores how the Islamic faith can be a protective factor against GBV and its mental health effects. Even though Islam is accused of condoning violence against women, the study will not only debunk that assertion but will also establish how Islamic mechanisms can help curb GBV. The study is descriptive, analytical, and exegetical, relying on related documented studies, Islamic texts and interviews. The population for the study is drawn from three Nigerian ethnic groups with reasonable percentages of Muslims (Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba). The study captures the prevalence and perception of GBV among Nigerian Muslim women, the Islamic perspec-

⁸ NPC and ICF International, "Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2013" (Abuja - Rockville: NPC and ICF International, 2014), 279-358; <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/fr293/fr293.pdf> (Accessed June 18, 2023).

⁹ Fatima Islahi and Nighat Ahmad, "Consequences of Violence against Women on Their Health and Well-being: An Overview," *Inclusive* 1, no. 6 (2015); <http://theinclusive.org/posts/2015-01-spart-07.html> (Accessed September 10, 2022).

¹⁰ NPC and ICF, "Nigeria Demographic."

¹¹ Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition, "The Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report," submitted to the 41st Session of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (New York, June 30 – July 18); www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/BAOBABNigeria41.pdf (Accessed September 10, 2022).

¹² Anthony Abayomi Adebayo, "Domestic Violence against Men: Balancing the Gender Issues in Nigeria," *American Journal of Sociological Research* 4, no. 1 (2014), 14-19; Godfree Mathew, "Interrogating the Socio-legal Concept on Domestic Violence against Men in Nigeria: The Need for Progressive Approaches," <http://centreforafricanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/domestic-violence-against-malefolk-in-nigeria-2-2.pdf> (Accessed September 10, 2023); P. O. Diénye and P. K. Gbeneol, "Domestic Violence Against Men in Primary Care in Nigeria," *American Journal of Men's Health* 3, no. 4 (2022): 333-339.

tive on GBV, the mental health effects of GBV as well as Islamic approach to mental wellness.

Views of Nigerian Muslim Women on GBV

Though the contents of GBV are usually categorized under the umbrellas of physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harms, the details of what constitutes GBV vary from individual survivors and their contexts. For instance, the constituents of GBV, according to Muslim women respondents from Hausa, Nupe, and Yoruba ethnic groups, include: harassment of women (*Chin mutinci mata/ Idojuti obirin/ Ye egba yan inzagi*); degradation, disrespect and suppression of women (*wulankanta mata/ Ita abuku obirin/ Eya inzagi chiwan*), and other acts that amount to oppression or abuse of women (*Cin zarafin mata/ Ini obinrin lara/ Egba ya inzagi*). These respondents' perceptions of GBV correspond with an earlier study conducted in Nigeria. These women respondents gave the under-listed encounters as what some Nigeria Muslim women and girls are experiencing in both private and public domains.

Psychological/Emotional Violence

Psychological or emotional violence was averred to be the most disturbing, and yet the most underrated violence due to its hidden pressure. This includes humiliating acts like vituperation, verbal aggression, and hurtful breakup (divorce without a fair hearing). For example, a man in Katsina State allegedly divorced his 14-year-old housewife for allowing a male medical practitioner to attend to her while giving birth to his baby.¹³ Others include the humiliating practices of polygyny, abandonment, exclusion from decision-making, forceful marriage without the woman's consent, false accusations from the husband or co-wives, and widowhood mortifications.

¹³ Sandra Nwaokolo, "Man Divorces 14-Year-Old Wife for Allowing Male Doctor Take Child's Delivery," *Nigerian Tribune* (29 July 2023), <https://tribuneonline.com/man-divorces-14-year-old-wife-for-allowing-male-doctor-take-childs-delivery/> (Accessed September 10, 2023).

Physical Violence

Wife battering heavy and discounted domestic chores, child marriage, forced abortion, harmful widowhood practices, trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM), etc.

Sexual Violence

Coerced sex through threat or intimidation, rape, sexual harassment, incest, child molestation, survival sex/forced prostitution, 'marital rape,' sexual denial, etc.

Economic Violence

Denied maintenance, shirking of paternal duties on children, disallowed to work, usurping resources, prevention of people from assisting.

Causes and Drivers of GBV among Nigerian Muslims

Violence against women and girls is believed to have been caused majorly by factors like cultural beliefs, religious perceptions, societal trends and poverty as discussed below.

Cultural Belief

Cultural factors like stereotype prejudice, normative expectations of male and female genders, acceptance of violent attitudes of husband towards wife (to punish 'stubborn wife'), acceptance of male oppression as norm, blaming of abused women for provoking their abusers, stigmatising women (as wicked, traitor, and stupid among others), believing that financially independent women are difficult to control, endorsing discriminating attitudes towards female upbringing, education, etc. overloading girl-children with chores, etc.

Societal Trendy

Societal trending factors like trivialising violent acts against women, high cost of living emanating from official policies, etc.

Religious Perceptions

These are instances where culturally endorsed oppressive practices are used in interpreting the Islamic marital laws and/or when ignorance or

man's ego are applied and attributed to Islam. This perception makes domestic violence against women a norm that women have to concede to. Examples of these are arbitrary divorce (for selfish interests), wife battering as a man's right to discipline, unfair treatment of women in polygyny, wife subjugation as a husband's right, etc.

Poverty

Poverty, that is, the lack of basic amenities of life. Not having enough means of livelihood to support the family most times drives some parents to engage their girl-children in child labour to bring money for the family use. Sometimes underaged girls are married out to be relieved of their care or to solicit money from their husbands, etc.

Steps Taken Against GBV in Nigeria

In addressing this menace, several laws were promulgated by international, national and local agencies. Notable among the international laws are: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Children, etc. Interestingly, the Nigerian government has ratified and domesticated multiple international laws in addressing the discrimination, oppression and marginalisation of women and girls in the country.¹⁴ However, these agreements have limited effects in the states, despite the Federal government's efforts to protect women and children in line with the agreements signed.

In 1995, the government created the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to provide an avenue to address women's issues.¹⁵ Indeed, the ministry at both federal and state levels has taken great steps in curbing GBV. For instance, the National Plan of Action, which has a five-year target period (2014-

¹⁴ Al-Kyari, et al., "Institutional Assessment for the Nigeria for Women Project," World Bank Group, Washington, DC, 2018, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/207671530329469779/pdf/NIGERIA-PAD-05252018.pdf> (Accessed September 10, 2022).

¹⁵ World Bank, "Gender-Based Violence: An Analysis of the Implications for the Nigeria For Women Project," (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2019); <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/731521555064925144/pdf/Gender-Based-Violence-An-Analysis-of-the-Implications-for-the-Nigeria-for-Women-Project.pdf> (Accessed September 10, 2022).

2019) prioritised violence against women and children as a key concern and identified specific actions to manage it. They also ensured that each state domesticated GBV-related legislations and policies, among others.¹⁶

Despite these positive policy initiatives, the country's legal framework does not provide adequate protection for the victims. For example, the corrective beating of a servant, or wife, if it does not cause grievous harm, is considered legal. Also, the discrepancies in the definition of rape by the legal system in the country give room for denial of justice for female victims.¹⁷

Islamic Perspective on GBV

Islam does not discriminate or permit any act of violence against any being not to talk of fellow human. It is Allah's design, as asserted in the Qur'an, to have the creations in pairs of male and female.¹⁸ Similarly, He neither attaches superiority to man or woman except based on piety as expressed in Qur'an, *Suratu al-Hujurat* 49:13,

O mankind! we created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).

Further directives from Allah also describe man and woman as protectors of each other as affirmed in *Suratu at-Tawbah* 9:71,

The believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, wise.

The two genders are treated equally in terms of their personality, spirituality, and rights among others, while equity is focused on assigning them responsibilities; whereby both are equitably engaged to

¹⁶ World Bank, "Gender-Based Violence"

¹⁷ Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition, "The Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report."

¹⁸ Cf. Qur'an *Suratu adh-Dhariyat* 51:49, *Suratu n-Najim* 53:45 *Suratu n-Nisa* 4:1, etc.

complement each other's duties.¹⁹ Their rights are similarly allotted based on their peculiarities and needs. In the marital relationship, for instance, couples are assigned diverse marital duties which are unique to their gender.²⁰ As the husband provides family upkeep as the head, the wife makes the home flourish and nurtures the children. The complementary nature of these duties explains the indispensability of husband and wife, and the honourable positions both occupy in the family.

It should be noted that the wife's submissiveness is not meant to demean her status or the husband's headship a license for dictatorship.²¹ Rather, both of them are ordered to relate kindly and with modesty to have mutual tranquillity as well as spiritual recompense.²² Also, to avert the misconception of the husband's lordship over his wife, explicit warnings are provided to prohibit him from engaging in any humiliating acts against his wife; of these is:

O ye who believe! ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them, except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good (*Suratu n-Nisa* 4:19).

Prophet Muhammad was acknowledged for his best treatment of the womenfolk and his zero tolerance for GBV. This manifested in his humble interaction with his wives and children, and admonitions to the husbands. Samples of the Prophetic pronouncements against GBV are presented below:

On psychological violence, he said: "The most complete of the believers in faith, is the one with the best character among them. And

¹⁹ Jamal A. Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles* (Plainfield: American Trust Publication, 1995).

²⁰ M. Al-Jibaly, *The Fragile Vessels. Rights and Obligation of Spouses in Islaam* (Arlington, TX: Al-Kitab & Sunnah Publishing, 2000), 1-96.

²¹ Mohamed Rida Beshir, *Family Leadership Qawamah an Obligation to Fulfill, Not an Excuse to Abuse* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publication, 2009), 14-40.

²² A. J. Al-Jaza'riy, *Minhaj Al-Mustim*, vol. 1. (Riyadh - New York: Darussalam, 2001), 189-197.

the best of you is those who are best to your women.”²³ On another occasion, the Prophet said: "How does anyone of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then he may embrace (sleep with) her?" And Hisham said, "As he beats his slave.”²⁴ The Prophet's sensitivity to women's sexual gratification and aversion to sexual violence is evident in the *ahadith*,

Let none of you fall suddenly upon his wife like a lower animal. Let him send messenger before cohabitation. Someone asked: what is the messenger, O Prophet? He said: kiss and word of love.²⁵ When his semen comes out, let him keep his body sometimes upon her breasts till her semen comes out as her semen comes out late-ly.²⁶ When each of you is having intercourse with his wife, let him not ejaculate until she is ready to ejaculate as you will love to ejaculate.²⁷

Islamic scholars too give descriptions of how a wife can have gratifying sex. Al-Istambulli identifies the careful caressing of the wife's clitoris as her stimulus.²⁸ Maqsood adds that this foreplay enables a woman's Bartholin glands to secrete the oily lubricant needed to achieve sexual fulfilment.²⁹ Al-Ghazali urges a husband to have sex with his wife once in four nights. Khalif ʿUmar Ibn Al-Khattab and Ahmad Ibn Hanbali prescribe at least once in four months intervals.³⁰ The Prophet also guaranteed the economic right of a wife from her husband thus:

Mu'awiyah asked: Apostle of Allah, what is the right of the wife of one of us over him? He replied: That you should give her food when you eat, clothe her when you clothe yourself, do not strike her on the

²³ At-Tirmidhi, *Jami` at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith 1162, <https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:1162> (Accessed July 12, 2023).

²⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith, 6042, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6042> (Accessed July 12, 2023).

²⁵ M. F. Karim, *Imam Ghazali's Ihya Ulum-id-Din*, 11 (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1982), 43.

²⁶ Karim, *Imam Ghazali's*, 43.

²⁷ A. Al-Hashimiy, *Mukhtar al-Hadithun Nabwiyya*, (Beirut: Dar El Fikr, 1427-1428/2007), Hadith 84.

²⁸ M. M. Al-Istambulli, *The Bride's Boon Tuhfat al-ʿArous*, trans. A. Eliwa (Al-Mansoura: Dar Al-Manarah, 1420/1999), 104.

²⁹ R. W. Maqsood, *The Muslim Marriage Guide* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2000), 125.

³⁰ S. Sabilq, *Fiqh us-Sunnah*, III, trans. F. A. Z. Matraji (Beirut: Dar el-Fikr, 1996), 63.

face, do not revile her or separate yourself from her except in the house.³¹

Islamic Mechanisms for Averting GBV

To enable human survival as a social being and enhance healthy interaction between both genders, Islam laid down regulations to check excesses. To control male obsession owing to his huskiness, the *Shari'ah* put the following guides in place to shield the female gender from male lewdness. Some of these protective mechanisms are presented below.

Healthy Interaction between Male and Female

To enhance a healthy interaction between the opposite sex, restrictions are placed on their seclusion, indiscriminate mingling indecent joking together, etc.³²

Dressing Islamically

Islam prescribes a modest dress code for a Muslim woman to honour her dignity and protect her from maltreatment. *Hijab* and *niqab*, loosely translated into English as 'veil' and 'face veil', respectively, refers to a loose cloth worn by a woman to cover her 'awrah (parts of the body that should be covered) from *non-mahram* men (*mahram* refers to an unmarried kin).³³ The Qur'an states in Surat al-Nur:

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (*Suratu al-Ahzab* 33:59).

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that

³¹ Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith 2142, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:2142> (Accessed October 10, 2023).

³² H. Al-Haj, *A Guide to Male-Female Interaction in Islam* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2015), 67-80.

³³ Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, "Making Sense of Hijab and Niqab in Contemporary Western Societies," *Intellectual Discourse* 17, no. 1 (2009), 26.

they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain bliss (*Suratu n-Nur* 24:31).

Conscientious Performance of Wifehood and Mothering Duties

This is when a wife acts in accordance with the following hadith,

It was narrated that Abu Hurairah said: "It was said to the Messenger of Allah: 'Which woman is best?' He said: 'The one who makes him happy when he looks at her, obeys him when he commands her, and she does not go against his wishes with regard to herself nor her wealth.'"³⁴

Similarly, when she devotes herself to the uprightness of her children through tight monitoring and proper guidance as discussed by Juwayriyah,³⁵ these conscientious efforts will grant the wife spiritually fortified strength against abuses, as well as prevent her children from being prey to evils and abuses through her prompt interventions.

Islamic Ethical Behaviours

There are many ethical behaviours that believers are urged to imbibe in their dealings to make people care for them. These include being patient, kind-hearted, selfless, good dispositions, humble, compassionate, generous, etc.³⁶

Healthy Parting (Divorce)

When all reconciliation means have been exhausted and peace cannot be restored, then 'parting' is commanded in Qur'an 4:35,

³⁴ An-Nasai, *Sunan an-Nasa'i*, Hadith 3231, <https://sunnah.com/nasai:3231> (Accessed September 5, 2023).

³⁵ Juwayriya Badamasiuy, "Parenting Under the Shari'ah in the 21st Century: Prospects and Challenges," *The Journal of the Islamization of Knowledge and Contemporary* 1, no. 1 (2010).

³⁶ Al-Jaza'riy, *Minhaj Al-Muslim*, 287-291.

If ye fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation: for Allah hath full knowledge, and is acquainted with all things.

This will prevent odious provocative actions and reactions from the couple.

Mental Health Effects of GBV on Nigerian Muslim Women and Girls

There are studies on the disastrous effects of GBV on not only the victims but also on their close associates and society in general.³⁷ However, the effect it has on mental health is baneful; it disrupts its functioning and coherency. This state inadvertently causes victims to embrace further destructive steps against themselves and others around them. By way of definition, mental health is, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and can contribute to his or her community.”³⁸

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This has a bearing on thinking, feeling, and acting. There are different categories of mental health problems, but few ones that are attributable to violence against women and children include the following: depression, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress (PTSD), borderline personality disorder, mood disorder, substance use disorder, sleeping and eating disorder, paranoia, dissociation and dissociative disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and neurodevelopmental disorder.

It is important to note that mental health is taken with levity in Nigerian societies. This is connected with the societal stigmatization of

³⁷ Lori L. Heise, Jacqueline Pitangy and Adrienne Germain, “Violence against Women: The Hidden Health Burden,” *World Bank Discussion Papers no. WDP 255* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2019), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/489381468740165817/Violence-against-women-the-hidden-health-burden> (Accessed June 19, 2023); Islahi and Nighat Ahmad, “Consequences of Violence.”

³⁸ World Health Organization, “Health and Well-Being;” <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/health-and-well-being> (Accessed September 5, 2023).

the victims and the belief that the ailment is incurable. Even, when it becomes obvious that it is a mental problem, it is assumed to either be a demon attack or the effect of a spell, until the situation becomes worse. Unfortunately, women are usually the victims due to their vulnerability to GBV among others. In this circumstance, women do not also get attention like their male counterparts, based on societal prejudices. Their condition is often misinterpreted as a pretence, jealousy, or karma, among others. This scenario does not only complicate their condition but also makes them vulnerable to more violent behaviours.³⁹ Hence, there is a need to identify signals of mental health issues as listed below:

Feeling sad and down; Inability to sleep or Over-sleeping; Excessive fears, anxiousness, and worries; Significant tiredness and Low energy, e.g., Self-care; Weight or appetite changes; Confused thinking/Reduced ability to concentrate; Emotional outburst; Withdrawal from friends and activities; Substance abuse, etc.⁴⁰

Islamic Approach to Mental Serenity

There is no doubt that complexities in life, including that of GBV, pose a serious challenge to mental wellness. Islam as a way of life offers guidance and principles to navigate any human encounters in life (*Suratu Al-Anaam* 6:38). At its core, Islam provides a framework to find tranquillity, inner peace, and freedom from any shackles of mental health-related issues. Allah only guaranteed the mental serenity of human beings to their closeness with Him through which their hearts become purified and guided as contained in Qur'an *Surat al-Maa'idah* 5:35 among others, "... And if anyone believes in Allah, (Allah) guides his heart (aright): for Allah knows all things" (*Surat at-Taghaabun* 64:11).

This closeness and purification of the heart, as emphasized in the Qur'an, can be achieved by total submission to Allah's commandments and conscious connection with Him,

³⁹ Opinions expressed at different fora by mental health experts such as, Dr. Oluwabunmi Buhari, Psychiatrist, University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UIITH), Kwara State, Nigeria (Personal interview, September 10, 2022).

⁴⁰ Health Direct, "Nine Signs of Mental Health Issues;" <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/signs-mental-health-issue> (Accessed September 30, 2023).

O ye who believe! give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calleth you to that which will give you life; and know that Allah cometh in between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall (all) be gathered (*Surat al-Anfaal* 8:24).

O ye who believe! do your duty to Allah, seek the means of approach unto him, and strive with might and main in His cause: that ye may prosper.

In this endeavour, there should be a deliberate intention that one wants to break the shackles of mental issues (anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder etc.). This is in line with the Prophetic tradition that every action must be preceded by intention, as averred in *Suratul Ar-Rad* 13:11 "... verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls)."

Hence, Islamic scholars identify the under-listed as potent ways of seeking closeness with Allah and attaining mental tranquillity.⁴¹ These will purify the mind and shield it from being vulnerable to evil thoughts and actions.

Observance of Compulsory and Supererogatory Prayers

Praying at the stipulated times strengthens human relationship with Allah as well as distancing him/her from abominable characters as asserted in *Suratul al 'Ankabuut* 29:45,

Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee, and establish regular prayer: for prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of Allah is the greatest (thing in life) without a doubt. and Allah knows the (deeds) that ye do.⁴²

Recitation of and Listening to the Qur'an

O mankind! there hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts, and for those who believe, a guidance and a mercy (*Suratu Yunus* 10:57).

⁴¹ Aisha Utz, *Psychology from the Islamic Perspective* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2011), 301-321.

⁴² See also *Suratu Taha* 20:124 and *Suratu Hud* 11:114 among others.

Embrace listening and frequent recitation of the Qur'an loudly directly from the Book or from memory. Prophet Muhammad asserts that evils cannot live where *Suratu al-Baqarah* is being recited. Certain selected Qur'anic verses are especially recommended for curing psychological ailments in particular (Ahmad, 2010, 388). Of these excerpts are, *Suratu al-Fatiha*, 1:1-7, *Suratu al-Baqarah* 2:1-5, 102, 255-257, *Suratu al-Hijir* 15:16-18, etc.

Supplication to Allah (Dua'a)

Turn to Allah, complain to Him, beg Him for your needs, and believe in Him. This is explicitly captured in the *Suratu al-Baqarah* 2:186,

When My servants ask thee concerning me, I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way.

Besides, the Qur'anic prayers embrace the Prophetic traditions recommended for human concerns and challenges as contained in collections like Citadel of Believers (*Hisnul Muslim*).⁴³ Even though prayers for one's needs can be done anytime, special times are identified to quicken their acceptance. These are, after the completion of each of the daily *Salat*, during midnight prayer (*Tahajjud*), early morning period (*Fajr*), and at the time of breaking fast.

Contemplation (Tafakkur and Tadabbur)

Engage in constant contemplation (*Tafakkur* and *Tadabbur*) on Qur'anic recitations. Reflect on the orderliness and serenity of the surroundings and the universe in general (*Suratu Fussilat* 41:53). Listen to Islamic lectures and admonitions. These are in abundance online, in print and audio as well as in our immediate environments. Listen to the ones that stir and resonate with your soul, not the ones that distance you from Allah. Avoid negative media and people that may provoke negative thoughts.

⁴³ Sa'id bin Ali bin Wahaf Al-Qahtani, *Hisnul Muslim, Citadel of the Believer*, trans. Omar Johnstone (Rayidh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, Nd.).

Endurance with Hope in Allah

O ye who believe! seek help with patient perseverance and prayer; for Allah is with those who patiently persevere (*Suratu al-Baqarah* 2:153).

... and never give up hope of Allah's Soothing mercy: truly no one despairs of Allah's Soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith (*Suratu Yusuf* 12:87).

And He provides for him from (sources) he never could imagine. And if anyone puts his trust in Allah, sufficient is (Allah) for him. for Allah will surely accomplish his purpose: Verily, for all things has Allah appointed a due proportion (*Suratu at-Talaq* 65:3).

Practice Offering Gratitude to Allah for His Uncountable Blessings

This is the act of appreciating Allah in all circumstances, and acceptance of whatever challenge one may be confronted with faith. Besides, what Allah has bestowed humans of comfort are too numerous to count as declared below,

And He giveth you of all that ye ask for. But if ye count the favours of Allah, never will ye be able to number them. Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude (*Surat Ibrahim* 14:34).

Embrace expressions like, *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to Allah), *Innal-Laha ma'ni* (Allah is with me), etc., in all circumstances and at all times. Prophet Muhammad eulogized this disposition thus:

Strange are the ways of a believer for there is good in every affair of his and this is not the case with anyone else except in the case of a believer for if he has an occasion to feel delight, he thanks (God), thus there is a good for him in it, and if he gets into trouble and shows resignation (and endures it patiently), there is a good for him in it.⁴⁴

Also, Prophet Sulaiman's appreciative prayer (*du'a*) is mentioned in *Suratu An-Naml* 27:19 for believers to emulate. Besides, the religious

⁴⁴Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith 2999; <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2999> (Accessed June 19, 2023).

connotation of being grateful to Allah, it also has a profound effect on the subconscious human mind and trains it to think positively.

Seeking for Forgiveness Often

Since every human is prone to errors, and sins (Qur'an 3:31, 24:22, etc.), which may disconnect him from Allah and due to His magnanimity on man, He taught him various words of forgiveness as contained in the following:

Say: "O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! despair not of the Mercy of Allah. for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. Turn ye to Our Lord (in repentance) and bow to His (Will) before the penalty comes on you: after that ye shall not be helped" (*Suratu az-Zumar* 39:53-54).

So, embrace the forms of seeking forgiveness, such as *Astaghfirullah*, *Ghufuranaka robbana wailayka l- masir*, etc.

Fortification of Physical Body Through

A. Purification of body

This includes washing after passing urine or excreta (*Istinja'*), ablution (*Wudu'*), ritual bath (*Ghusl*) as ordered in *Suratu al-Maida* 5:6, *Suratu an-Nisa* 4:43 etc. Allah says in *Suratu al-Baqarah* 2:222,

They ask thee concerning women's courses. say: They are a hurt and a pollution: so keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean. but when they have purified themselves, ye may approach them in any manner, time, or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.

Prophet Muhammad equally said, "Purify this body and Allah will purify you ..."⁴⁵

B. Praying at the Stipulated Differing Times

Constancy in the observation of five daily compulsory prayers (*Fard*) and the supererogatory (*Nawafil*) payers (*Tahajjud*, *Raka'at*

⁴⁵ Abu Qasim Sulayman ibn Ahmad Al- Tabarani, *Al-Mu'jamul Awsat*, vol. 5 (Cairo: Dar al-Haramayn, 1995), 204, Hadith: 5087.

tain al-fajr, Duha, Shafi'i and Witr, Nawfil) after obligatory salat, etc. relieve human from wearisomeness besides the spiritual gains. Postures in *Salat* i.e., Raising of hand for (*Takbiratul ihram*), Standing erect, Bow (*Ruku'*), Prostration (*Sujud*), and sitting in between the prostrations give the body the needed exercises for mental wellness as corroborated by mental health professionals.⁴⁶

C. Fasting (*Saum*)

Fasting during the month of *Ramadan* and the voluntary are recommended practices (*Suratu al-Baqarah* 2:183-185). Beyond the religious rewards, fasting is scientifically established to improve mood and purify the mind, body, and soul. It also repairs the immune system and detoxifies the body of harmful chemicals.⁴⁷

D. Giving Charity (*Sadaqah*)

Numerous verses of the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet unequivocally encourage Muslims to give charity besides the compulsory *Zakat*. Its eminence was attributed to the immense benefits to the givers and the receivers. Allah says:

The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. Allah giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth: and Allah careth for all and He knoweth all things (*Suratu al-Baqarah* 2:261).

What can be given as charity implies anything to anyone that brings relief; this includes but is not limited to, food, money, assistance to the vulnerable, removal of obstructions on the way, etc. The benefits attached to charity are beyond the Islamic-oriented ones (extinguishes sin, eases hardships etc.). It has been scientifically proven to

⁴⁶ Muslim Empowerment, "How to Overcome Depression and Anxiety in Islam- 4 Rules and 4 Stages," <https://muslimempowerment.com/overcome-depression-anxiety-islam-4-rules-4-stages> (Accessed June, 19 2023).

⁴⁷ Y. A. H. Ahmad, *Islamic Medicine the Key to a Better Life*, trans. Nasiruddin A-Khattab. (Riyadh - New York: Darussalam, 2010), 342-354.

activate the mesolimbic system in the brain, which releases dopamine (happy neurotransmitter).⁴⁸

Solidification of Social Relationships

Social relationships are held in high esteem in Islam and every individual has obligations and rights from and to the relations to establish a healthy coexistence.⁴⁹ Regulations are given based on connectivity, be it marriage, kinship, or common interest to guarantee discipline and show the valuableness of people.⁵⁰ The comprehensive system of Islam details the thinking, influence, and interactions of the community, which is centred on the fear and consciousness of Allah as contained in numerous verses of the Glorious Qur'an such *Suratu Aali' Imran* 3:103,

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you) and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: that ye may be guided.

This Islamic social network consequently leads to emotional intimacy, belongingness, instrumental support and physical affection as envisioned by Islam. Interestingly, modern-day scientific research establishes these social support domains as instrumental to the optimum functioning of human mental and physical health.⁵¹ Hence, the reciprocal goodness of people spurs peaceful coexistence which mitigates mental tension. In this instance, worries can be shared with families, close associates, and pious Islamic scholars among others. Amazingly, the above Islamic approach to mental wellness is acknowledged for its efficacy by Mahmud and Mustapha in their work, where Muslim med-

⁴⁸ Muslim Mindset, "How to Overcome Depression and Anxiety in Islam- 4 Rules and 4 Stages," *Muslim Empowerment*; <https://muslimempowerment.com/overcome-depression-anxiety-islam-4-rules-4-stages/> (Accessed 19 June, 2023).

⁴⁹ Al-Jaza'iry, Minhaj Al-Muslim, 145-223; Utz, *Psychology from the Islamic*, 223-246.

⁵⁰ Al-Jaza'iry, Minhaj Al-Muslim, 145-223; Utz, *Psychology from the Islamic*, 223-246.

⁵¹ C. J. Hale, J. W. Hannum and D. L. Espelage, "Social Support and Physical Health: The importance of Belonging," *Journal of American College Health* 53 (2005), 276-284.

ical experts were engaged to confirm the suitability or otherwise of the Islamic approach in building mental wellness.⁵²

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated that GBV persists among Nigerian Muslims despite state intervention. Furthermore, it argues that appropriating and engaging the teaching of Islam on gender equality, based on the Qur'an, could be a better way to address the issue of GBV. The Qur'an teaches that both genders play complimentary roles at both domestic and societal levels; hence zero tolerance for any act of violence against any of the genders, especially, the female. The aspect of protecting the mental health of the female victims was emphasized because of the consequential effects on their roles (as the bedrock of the family sanctity). With the affirmation of the Islamic approach to mental serenity, it behoves all and sundry to serve Allah diligently, not just for religiosity's sake, but for the well-being of all.

Considering the above, the study recommends that women should embrace closeness to Allah as the only protection against any harmful acts and the assurance of their mental serenity. This closeness can be achieved through devotional activities including conscientious performance of their obligations. Furthermore, an 'Islamic Family Help Desk' should be established, where emerging gender issues or family matters can be professionally handled to showcase the egalitarian nature of both genders in Islam. Lastly, conferences, workshops, and talk shows with all genders in attendance should be organized periodically as a means of ongoing religious and civic education.

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⁵² M. Mahmud and R. Mustapha, "Cultivating the Mental Wellness Using Islamic Approach: An Expert Approach and Suggestion," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Science* 12, no. 4 (2022): 1223-1233.