

An Analysis of the Causes of Mental Illness

Authors(s):

Habibollah Taheri [1]

Publisher(s):

Ahlu Bayt World Assembly [4]

Translator(s):

Mahboobeh Morshedian [5]

Category:

General [6]

General [7]

General [8]

Journal:

Vol 17, no 4, Winter 2017 [9]

This paper delves into some of the general symptoms of mental illness, symptoms mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith, and the stages of mental illness according to the Qur'an.

Topic Tags:

undefined [10]

An Analysis of the Causes of Mental Illness

Habibollah Taheri

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

Abstract

Anxiety, depression, mental disorders, and worries are among the predicaments of human society in the present century. In recent decades, the factors contributing to, preventing, and curing these illnesses have been addressed from different angles. The resulting achievements are various cognitive, behavioural, psychological, psychodynamic, and biological theories that, of course, led to valuable outcomes.

The previous paper addressed this issue from two perspectives: the psychological perspective and that of the Qur'an and hadith. This paper delves into some of the general symptoms of mental illness, symptoms mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith, and the stages of mental illness according to the Qur'an.

General Symptoms of Mental Illness

Below is a brief list of symptoms of mental illnesses from a psychiatrist's perspective.

Symptoms that disrupt bodily functions, such as the following:

Sleep

You have difficulty sleeping. You often lie awake in bed and worry about why you cannot sleep. Sometimes you wake up and cannot fall back to sleep, and occasionally you stay awake all night, rendering you in a bad mood the next morning. These disorders may occur alone or together. Other sleep disorders include nightmares, talking in your sleep, and sleepwalking.

Appetite and eating

You either have no appetite and eat less than usual, or you have a healthy appetite but do not enjoy eating. On the flip side, you may gain extra weight by overeating, which may become a psychological obsession.

Sexual desire and sexual activities

Among the symptoms can be a lack of sexual drive, impotence, or premature ejaculation, or an increase in libido, masturbation, and sexual perversion. Unconsummated marriage, which is not uncommon, is primarily due to psychological issues rather than physical ones.

Symptoms that impair psychological functions in the following:

Behaviour

Your behaviour may disturb family members and others or put them in a very difficult situation. This behaviour may be unpleasant, obsessive, or dangerous to yourself and others. You may be hyperactive, restless, and aimless; you may beat or harass others with no apparent reason.

Being stubborn, nagging, aggressive, showing anger, and throwing objects are among some of the common symptoms of mental and psychological problems in adolescents and children. Sometimes you may become dejected, reclusive, shy, quiet, and inactive by sitting or lying down in one place for hours.

Talking and thinking

You either speak unnecessarily and excessively or become reticent or completely silent. Sometimes your words are irrelevant and cannot be understood. Sometimes you express incorrect beliefs that are not approved of by others. For example, you may say things like, “I’m bewitched,” “I’m a prophet,” “There is a worm under my skin,” “Whatever food I’m given is poisonous,” or “Someone from the heavens is connected to me.” These strong and false beliefs that others do not approve of is known as delirium.

Emotions

You may, under certain circumstances, be extremely (and unnaturally) emotional. You may laugh, cry, or be exceedingly angry for no apparent reason. Sometimes your feelings may be expressed inappropriately, such as laughing or crying in a gathering for no apparent reason; or you show no emotion, such as sitting motionless. You may also show unreasonable sadness, depression, elation, fear, and anxiety for long periods of time.

Perception

You have an impaired understanding of the signals that you receive from your five senses, receiving them incorrectly or misinterpreting them. You may experience hallucinations— such as seeing things that do not exist, hearing sounds, or feeling things on your skin. Auditory hallucinations, such as hearing voices calling you, ordering you, or insulting you, can frequently be observed in the mentally ill.

Memory

You may experience memory loss and forget important events; in other words, you forget what you saw, heard, or did a few minutes prior. You have trouble with your short-term memory (e.g., you cannot remember where you put your money, clothes, and so on), and may also have a hard time remembering whom you visited in the last few days or weeks. Experiencing long-term memory loss (e.g., you have a hard time remembering your children’s names and your relatives’ addresses) is also a symptom.

Sometimes you may lose your way as well.

Memory loss can occur due to old age, dementia, stroke, a brain disorder, emotional states, and stress. It is noteworthy to mention that normal people and students' frequent complaints about forgetfulness are not usually considered to be a memory disorders; rather, their concentration is disrupted by everyday stresses and worries or by anxiety and depression.

Common sense and judgement

With some mental illnesses, your intellect and common sense are impaired, and your reasoning skills are weakened. You make mistakes often and cannot do simple mathematical calculations or learn new things. In other words, you may come across as acting foolishly (i.e., mental retardation and dementia due to ageing).

Level of consciousness

With some psychiatric disorders, mostly caused by organic brain lesions, you may have a reduced level of consciousness; you have difficulty recognising your family members and cannot tell where you are and what time it is. Constant drowsiness and coma are the next stages of the disturbed consciousness. An impaired level of consciousness can be seen in people with medicine and alcohol poisoning, seizures, and sudden awakening, as well as after surgical anesthesia.

Symptoms that disrupt certain behavioural activities, such as:

Individual activities

You disregard your physical needs and personal hygiene; you do not take a bath, cut your hair, and eat. In the developed stage of the disease, you may go around barefoot or nude.

Social activities

You display inappropriate or strange behaviours towards your family, friends, classmates, and others. You insult and harass people and act inappropriately in a way that surprises them and disturbs gatherings. Sometimes you may act so recklessly that it upsets and ridicules others or makes them laugh. Disruption of family structure, communication, and management is also prevalent.

School activities

Difficulty studying, lack of concentration, trouble learning and remembering (thus trouble taking tests, academic failure, inability to participate in group activities), and conflicts with peers and teachers are all not only symptoms but also consequences of mental illness. Sometimes these are either immediate or gradual symptoms.

Symptoms of mental illness in the Qur'an and Hadith

The symptoms of mental illnesses referred to above were based primarily on medical research. However, the Qur'an, as well as religious leaders, talk about symptoms of mental illnesses that are not usually regarded by psychiatrists in general. For example, a disbeliever, a hypocrite, and an oppressor are all regarded as patients with mental imbalances whose cure is to believe in God and abandon those vices.

The symptoms of mental illnesses can be inferred from Qur'anic verses and hadith. Some of the symptoms include disbelief; hypocrisy; oppression; deviation from the divine path; committing sins; a tainted heart; envy and rancour; arrogance; vanity and selfishness; self-importance; doubt and hesitation; pessimism about God, the universe, and others; disappointment; pathological guilt; ingratitude; emptiness; suspicion and mistrust; temptations; inferiority complex; unlawfully satisfying sexual desires; hard-heartedness; and not understanding realities.

According to the Qur'an and hadith, individuals with these characteristics are considered mental patients, and religion's role in mental health is to cure such psychological ailments. The following chapters address the methods to cure these diseases.

Stages of mental illness according to the Qur'an

By studying the Qur'an, one can understand that, as with physical disorders, there are stages to mental illness. The Qur'an gives different interpretations of psychological disorders and points out their severity. The stages of mental illness according to the Qur'an are as follows:

1. Deviance

"As for those in whose hearts there is deviance, they pursue what is metaphorical in it, courting temptation and courting its interpretation" 3:7.

See also 9:117 and 61:5.

2. Sullied hearts

God says about those who deny His signs and consider the Qur'an to be the legends of their predecessors,

"No indeed! Rather their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning" 83:14.

3. Doubtfulness

"Only those seek a leave [of exemption] from you who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, and whose hearts are in doubt (ريب), so they waver in their doubt" 9:45.

4. Hard-heartedness

“So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of Allah. They are in manifest error” 39:22

See also 5:13, 5:43, and 57:16.

5. Locked hearts

“Do they not contemplate the Qur’an, or are there locks (أقفال) on the hearts?” 47:24

6. Unconverted hearts

“And they say, ‘Our hearts are faithless (غلف).’ Rather Allah has cursed them for their unfaith [so they do not understand anything], so few of them have faith” 2:88

7. Veiled hearts

“Indeed We have cast veils (أكنته) on their hearts lest they should understand it, and a deafness into their ears [so that they cannot hear the call of truth through their inner spiritual ears]; and if you invite them to guidance they will never [let themselves] be guided” 18:57.

See also 17:46.

8. Sealed hearts

“Thus does Allah seal (يطبع) the hearts of those who do not know” 30:59

See also 7:100–101, 9:87 & 93, and 63:3.

9. Closed hearts

“Allah has set a seal (غشاة) on their hearts and their hearing, and there is a blindfold on their sight, and there is a great punishment for them” 2:7

See also 45:23.

10. Blind hearts

“Have they not travelled over the land so that they may have hearts by which they may apply reason, or ears by which they may hear? Indeed, it is not the eyes that turn blind, but the hearts turn blind —those that are in the breasts!” 22:46

11. Diseased hearts

“Yet you see those in whose hearts is a sickness rushing to them [i.e., to make friends with the

Jews and Christians], saying, ‘We fear lest a turn of fortune should visit us [and we may need their help].’ Maybe Allah will bring about a victory [in favour of Muslims], or a command from Him, and then they will be regretful for what they kept secret in their hearts” 5:52

See also 2:10, 9:125, 24:50, and 74:31.

Except for the eleventh category, which encompasses all mental disorders, each of the above categories signifies one type of spiritual disease (i.e., mental disorder). They can be categorised as follows:

First, the disease of the inner heart deviates. In the next stage, deviation from the right path sullies and darkens the heart. Since the heart of the deviated is tainted, it doubts all divine facts and doctrines, and the words of the prophets,

“so they waver in their doubt” 9:45.

The sceptic cannot adhere to facts or truth and thus cannot be guided. The sullied, doubtful heart is now hardened and is inflexible about the truth—sometimes becoming harder than stone since it’s possible for water to gush forth from a stone. Hard-hearted people are in error and never reach their goals.

Concerning the story of the cow of the Israelites and the dead person coming back to life, God says:

“Then your hearts hardened after that; so they are like stones, or even harder. For indeed there are some stones from which streams gush forth, and indeed there are some of them that split, and water issues from them, and indeed there are some of them that fall for the fear of Allah. And Allah is not oblivious of what you do” 2:74

So far, with the first four stages, willpower was involved. But eventually, due to a person’s deviated beliefs and improper actions, God disrupts their perception—that is, they lose their senses one after the other—in which they neither hear the call of truth nor understand it; and they will have no way out of this stage.

As long as the spiritual disease of the inner heart is in one of the first four stages (i.e., deviance, sullied heart, doubtfulness, or hard-heartedness), one can be cured and saved from a risky situation. However, when the inner heart is in any of the latter stages—particularly the stages of the sealed or closed hearts—there will be no rescue, and nothing but a painful punishment awaits them.

A sealed or closed heart leads to complete blindness for which there is no guide. In other words, those with such a heart have willfully broken their cane and have made their guide detest them, thus abandoning them.

In short, like physical illnesses, mental illnesses can either be curable, stagnant, or incurable: The first three stages of the heart are curable diseases, stages four to seven stagnant, and stages seven to ten incurable. The last stage, the diseased heart, is general and encompasses all the other stages.

For those looking for a more in-depth understanding of the symptoms of the eleven stages of the spiritual disease of the inner heart, please refer to the commentaries and hadiths of the verses mentioned.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/message-thaqalayn/vol-17-no-4-winter-2017/analysis-causes-mental-illness-habibollah-taheri>

Links

- [1] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/habibollah-taheri>
- [2] <https://www.al-islam.org/user/login?destination=node/48834%23comment-form>
- [3] <https://www.al-islam.org/user/register?destination=node/48834%23comment-form>
- [4] <https://www.al-islam.org/organization/ahlul-bayt-world-assembly>
- [5] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/mahboobeh-morshedian>
- [6] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/general-belief-creed>
- [7] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/general-education-society>
- [8] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/general-laws-worship>
- [9] <https://www.al-islam.org/journals/vol-17-no-4-winter-2017>
- [10] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/undefined>