

## Islamic Bibliotherapy for Mental Health: A Systematic Review of Qur'anic Text-Based Interventions

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### Abstract

Mental health challenges are increasing globally, including in Muslim communities, where conventional psychological approaches often overlook spiritual and existential aspects of healing. Bibliotherapy—a method using selected reading materials such as stories, poetry, or scripture to facilitate emotional expression, cognitive restructuring, and meaning-making—when grounded in Islamic tradition becomes Islamic bibliotherapy: a psychospiritual intervention utilizing Qur'anic verses, prophetic stories, prayers, Islamic metaphors, thematic ayat, and Islamic literature to foster peace, resilience, and spiritual growth.

This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) synthesizing empirical and conceptual works on Islamic bibliotherapy for mental health, following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Thirteen studies—comprising experimental and qualitative research, conceptual analyses, bibliometric mapping, and scoping reviews—were analyzed to identify approaches, Islamic texts used, target populations and contexts, psychological–spiritual outcomes, and research gaps.

Findings show that Islamic bibliotherapy enhances spiritual coping, emotional regulation, and narrative healing through reflective reading of QS Maryam and QS Al-Insyirah, metaphor-based counseling, narrative integration of Prophet Ayyub's story, and dissemination of Islamic fiction. Despite positive outcomes—reduced anxiety, increased hope, and strengthened resilience—most studies lack standardized protocols and spiritually sensitive tools. Islamic bibliotherapy holds strong potential as a culturally grounded, spiritually enriched modality, yet requires methodological refinement and broader application.

Keywords: Islamic bibliotherapy; Qur'anic therapy; mental health; Islamic psychology; narrative healing; psychospiritual intervention

### Introduction

The global rise of mental health challenges highlights the urgent need for holistic and culturally grounded interventions. In Muslim societies, where religion and spirituality play a central role in meaning-making and resilience, conventional psychology often fails to address the deeper spiritual dimensions of well-being. Against this backdrop, Islamic bibliotherapy has emerged as a psychospiritual intervention that integrates Qur'anic texts, prophetic stories, prayers, metaphors, and Islamic literature into therapeutic practice. This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of Islamic bibliotherapy interventions for mental health, synthesizing thirteen empirical, conceptual, and bibliometric works published between 2010 and 2024, following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. By analyzing intervention approaches, Islamic texts employed, target populations, psychological–spiritual outcomes, and research gaps, the review provides a comprehensive mapping of the field while positioning Islamic bibliotherapy as a potential model for contemporary Islamic psychotherapy.

The findings reveal that Islamic bibliotherapy is applied through multiple approaches: structured narrative counseling incorporating Qur'anic stories as counter-narratives; reflective bibliotherapy centered on prophetic stories such as Ayyub, Yusuf, and Maryam; psychoeducational interventions using Qur'anic verses and prayers; digital bibliotherapy employing platforms like Wattpad; and counseling models inspired by Qur'anic metaphors such as light, darkness, and water. Islamic texts employed range from specific surahs (Maryam, Al-Insyirah) to thematic verses on mercy and patience, as well as supplications, dhikr, metaphoric symbols, and Islamic fiction rooted in Qur'anic values. Target populations have included children, adolescents, pregnant women, patients with chronic illnesses, university students, and heart disease patients, with interventions adapted to their psychosocial needs. Conceptual works have also framed bibliotherapy within Islamic psychology, existential psychotherapy, and Qur'anic hermeneutics, thereby extending its theoretical foundation.

Psychological and spiritual outcomes consistently point to the therapeutic power of Qur'anic bibliotherapy. Studies report reduced anxiety among pregnant women and children, improved self-acceptance and resilience in patients with chronic illness, strengthened meaningmaking and hope in adults facing family alienation, enhanced emotional awareness

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and empathy among adolescents, and deepened spiritual calm in cardiac patients. Conceptual literature reinforces these outcomes by highlighting Qur'anic values of patience (ṣabr), hope (rajā'), repentance (taubah), and trust in God (tawakkul) as transformative elements. These results align with logotherapy and meaning-making coping theories, as well as narrative identity theory, which all emphasize that reframing suffering through spiritual narratives fosters resilience and existential growth.

Despite these promising outcomes, the review identifies significant limitations. Empirical research remains limited, with small samples, short durations, and few control groups. Intervention models lack standardization, with studies designing ad hoc approaches without validated protocols or measurement instruments. Participant representation is imbalanced, with overemphasis on women and children and underrepresentation of men, the elderly, trauma survivors, and marginalized populations. Conceptual clarity is also lacking, as bibliotherapy interventions sometimes overlap with devotional practices such as tilawah or religious learning, blurring the line between therapy and worship. Moreover, most studies employ generic psychological scales, with no instrument specifically designed to capture bibliotherapy's unique effects on meaning, narrative identity, or spiritual transformation. The absence of curated therapeutic text repositories also limits replicability, as selections are often based on researcher intuition rather than systematic classification.

The discussion situates these findings within both psychological and Islamic frameworks. Qur'anic bibliotherapy resonates with logotherapy's emphasis on the will to meaning, narrative therapy's reliance on storytelling, and positive psychology's concern with resilience and hope. At the same time, it draws on Islamic traditions of tazkiyat al-nafs, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and Sufi allegories. Al-Ghazali's use of stories in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Ibn Qayyim's emphasis on patience and spiritual calm, and Rumi's allegorical narratives all serve as precedents for therapeutic storytelling in Islamic contexts. Qur'anic symbols such as light (nūr), water, and the straight path also illustrate the intersection of spiritual metaphor and psychological meaning-making. Meanwhile, the adaptation of bibliotherapy into digital media, as demonstrated through Wattpad interventions among Muslim youth, reflects the potential of this model to remain relevant in the digital age. These findings underscore the epistemological contribution of Islamic bibliotherapy to the broader project of Islamic psychology: grounding therapeutic practices in revelation while engaging contemporary psychological theory.

This review makes several contributions. Academically, it formulates a typology of Islamic bibliotherapy that integrates empirical evidence, psychological theory, and Islamic scholarship, thereby strengthening the epistemological foundation of Islamic psychology as a distinct paradigm. Practically, it offers guidance for therapists, counselors, and educators on incorporating Qur'anic stories, verses, prayers, and metaphors into structured therapeutic interventions. By highlighting both its promise and limitations, the review charts directions for future research: developing standardized protocols, broadening target populations, creating culturally sensitive measurement tools, and curating therapeutic text repositories. Furthermore, digital adaptations should be refined to ensure accessibility while preserving the spiritual depth and transformative potential of Qur'anic texts.

In conclusion, Islamic bibliotherapy represents a timely, culturally rooted, and spiritually enriched intervention for addressing the mental health challenges of Muslims in the digital era. It not only reduces anxiety and strengthens resilience but also fosters meaning-making, identity reconstruction, and spiritual growth. By bridging classical Islamic scholarship and modern psychotherapy, it provides a pathway for integrating sacred texts into mental health care in ways that honor both faith and science. The systematic review of thirteen studies affirms Qur'anic bibliotherapy as a promising yet underdeveloped field requiring rigorous research, interdisciplinary theorization, and practical innovation. As the demand for culturally grounded therapies grows in a globalized and digitized world, Islamic bibliotherapy stands out as a model of healing that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to contemporary psychological needs.