



Guidance from Islamic Teachings for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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Abstract: OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder): Obsession means "intrusive thoughts," & compulsion means "relief-seeking behavior." OCD is like having a 'mental loop' that gets stuck, playing unwanted thoughts or urges over and over and then feeling forced to certain things to try and 'unstick' (an attempt to break free from the loop) it, even though it never really works, or we can say that OCD is a neurobiological experience where the mind's 'alarm system' becomes hyper-sensitive generating persistent, intrusive mental 'static' (obsession) that demands resolution. This resolution is sought through repetitive ritualized behaviors (compulsion). Most of the research outputs on OCD are based on an irreligious perspective; thus, this research aims at religiously explaining the concept of OCD and also focuses on 'causes' and 'solutions' to overcome with the help of the Qur'an, hadees and some work of early Muslim scholars.

Keywords: *Islamic Cure, OCD, Obsessions, Compulsions, Islamic Guidance, Spiritual Therapy, Religious Interventions.*

Introduction

OCD is characterized by obsession (recurring, unwanted thoughts, urges, or images) and compulsions (repetitive behaviors or mental acts that individuals feel driven to perform). These obsessions and compulsions cause significant distress and interfere with daily life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In an Islamic context, this can manifest as repeatedly performing ritual purification (wudu) or prayers, constant doubts about the validity of one's religious actions, and fear of committing blasphemy (The act of showing disrespect or irreverence toward God or things considered holy.). A common manifestation of OCD, particularly within religious communities, is scrupulosity—guilt and anxiety about moral

issues—often linked to religious beliefs and personal distress (Abdul Razak, 2014). In the Islamic worldview, intrusive thoughts are sometimes referred to as *waswasa*, understood as the whispering of Shaytan (Satan), which can lead to obsessive doubts and anxiety (Şen, 2017). Islam emphasizes balance and moderation, and excessive rigidity in religious practice may signal underlying psychological distress rather than piety.

Imam Abu Hanifa(d.767 CE) said; "*waswasa* (whisperings)is from Shaitan, and the cure for it is to turn away from it and not indulge in it." He advised that excessive thoughts about purity or prayer should be ignored to prevent falling into unnecessary hardship. Imam al-shafi'i(d.820 CE) said; "when a person is afflicted with excessive doubts about his wudu or prayer, he should move on and not let it dominate his mind." He emphasized that following excessive doubt leads to hardship and religious extremism. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855 CE) said, "When a person repeatedly doubts his prayer or purification, he should ignore it, as this is from Shaitan." Imam Ahmed discouraged overanalyzing acts of worship, recognizing that it leads to spiritual exhaustion.

Ibn Taymiyyah(d.1328 CE) Said; "*waswasa* is a type of illness; the more a person indulges in it, the stronger it becomes. The solution is to run away from it and rely on certainty." He explained that OCD-like thoughts worsen when given attention and should be dismissed. His advice: "If you feel whispers regarding purification, prayer, or faith, do not dwell on them. Say '*A'udhu billahi min ash-shaytan ir-rajim*' and move on.

"Now, let's have a glance at the teachings of early Muslim philosophers on OCD/Waswasa.

Al-Farabi(d.950 CE) said; Al-farabi, known for his works on logic and psychology, emphasized the role of rational control over excessive thought." The mind must discipline the soul, for excessive preoccupation with doubtful thoughts leads to an imbalance in character." He believed that excessive doubts could harm a person's ability to think clearly and act with wisdom. Ibn Sina(Avicenna)(d.1037 CE), in his "*canon of medicine*," he discussed obsessive thoughts in medical and psychological terms, describing them as an ailment of the mind." Repetitive doubts and baseless fears are a disease of the imagination; the cure lies in strengthening reason and avoiding excessive introspection." He saw excessive doubts as a form of mental disorder that required discipline and redirection of the mind.

Al-Ghazali(d.1111 CE) said; "Waswasa is the whispering of Shaytan to lead a person into confusion. If one indulges in it, it increases. The cure is to ignore it and place trust in Allah." He warned that excessive doubts in faith or worship could lead to spiritual paralysis and recommended Reliance on certainty (yaqeen). Ibn Rushd(Averroes)(d.1198 CE) said, As a

philosopher and jurist, Ibn Rushd addressed the psychological impact of Waswasa, which is, "The soul is disturbed when it is caught between certainty and doubts. Wisdom lies in distinguishing true doubt from baseless fear."

As we have seen, they all mentioned the severity of OCD, and most of them explained that we can prevent OCD by not paying attention to it(thoughts), they also talked about the cause of OCD, which is; "whispering of Shaytan" It's true but, this is the most common cause. Some other reasons/causes and solutions are mentioned.

Etiology Of OCD From Islamic Point Of View

OCD is often viewed as a product of faulty cognition; when individuals are unable to distinguish between their own thoughts and the whisperings of Shaytan (Satan), it reflects a deeper psychological and spiritual issue. The confusion between thoughts and beliefs signals a cognitive distortion rooted in fear and guilt. Shaytan "creates doubt in the mercy of Allah within us," leading people into obsessive anxiety. When a person's connection with deen (faith) weakens—when they forget Allah's mercy, fail to seek refuge in Him, or doubt His power—they become more vulnerable to spiritual disturbance.

These spiritual imbalances form the foundation of religious OCD symptoms. A person's inner peace or restlessness depends significantly on the strength of their belief system. The Qur'an warns that when people neglect their faith, difficulties may arise in both this life and the Hereafter (Qur'an 13:28). As Hamdan (2008) explains, strengthening spiritual awareness and trust in Allah is essential for restoring inner stability. Waswasa can be seen as a trial from Allah, testing the believer's patience and sincerity. The Qur'an encourages turning to Allah's mercy as a source of healing: "Do not lose hope in Allah's mercy..." (Qur'an 39:53). Deuraseh and Abu Talib (2005) emphasized that early Muslim scholars recognized spiritual distress as a trial meant to build character and encourage remembrance of Allah.

Surah An-Naas reminds believers to seek refuge from the evil whisperer, Shaytan, who plants doubts in people's hearts. Regular recitation of Surah Al-Falaq and Surah An-Naas is a prophetic practice to shield the mind and soul from obsessive intrusions.

Surah Ta-Ha(20:124)

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى ١٢٤

"And whoever turns away from my remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed (difficult) life, and we will raise him on the day of judgement blind"

When someone neglects their connection with Allah, their life becomes spiritually empty, leading to stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.

(Surah Al-Ankabut(29:69)

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ٦٩

"As for those who struggle in our cause, we will surely guide them along our way. And Allah is certainly with the good-doers".

"If someone feels distant from their face, they should describe with reconnect through prayer, Qur'an, and good deeds, and Allah will guide them.

Surah yasin(36:82)

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ٨٢

"All it takes, when He wills something to be, is simply to say: "Be!" And it is!

"This verse highlights Allah's effortless control over all things.

Surah Al-Imran(3:159)

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ١٥٩

"It is out of Allah's mercy that you'O perfect' have been lenient with them. Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have certainly abandoned you. So pardon them, ask Allah's forgiveness for them, and consult with them in conducting matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him".

After making efforts and decisions, leave the outcome to Allah.

These are some causes of OCD from an Islamic point of view. When a person indulges in worldly things or neglects certain aspects of our deen(faith), it can lead to *spiritual, emotional, and even psychological disorders*. strengthening one's relationship with Allah and Living according to His Guidance leads to inner peace and emotional balance.

"Because a person's trust(*Tawakkul*) is what leads him to difficulties and also helps him to come out of the difficulties". So make sure whenever you receive any intrusive thoughts and you find yourself in a difficult position, try your best and then leave the rest to Allah with Trust/Yaqeen.

How To Overcome With OCD

waswasa As a trial for believers testing his patience and their faith(50:16). Trusting in Allah to ignore baseless whispers from Shaitan. Strengthen your faith in Allah with the help of the Qur'an.

Surah Az-zumar(39:53)

﴿قُلْ يٰٓعِبَادِیَ الَّذِیْنَ اَسْرَفُوْا عَلٰۤی اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوْا مِنْ رَّحْمَةِ اللّٰهِ ۚ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ یَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوْبَ جَمِیْعًا ۚ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ الْغَفُوْرُ الرَّحِیْمُ ٥٣﴾

"Say, O Prophet, that Allah says, "O My servants who have exceeded the limits against their souls! Do not lose hope in Allah's mercy, for Allah certainly forgives all sins. I He is indeed the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

This verse reminds us that no matter how weak our faith becomes, we can always turn back to Allah, and He will forgive us.

Surah Al-Baqarah(2:153)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ١٥٣

“O believers! Seek comfort in patience and prayer. Allah is truly with those who are patient”.

Surah- Naas(114:1-6)

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ١ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ٢ إِلَهِ النَّاسِ ٣ مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ٤ الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ ٥ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ٦

“Say, O' Prophet, " I seek refuge in the Lord of Humankind, the Master of humankind, the God of humankind, from the evil of the lurking whisperer who whispers into the hearts of humankind from among jinn and humankind”.

A prophet's advice: the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) advised believers to seek refuge in Allah from the whispers of Shaitan and to focus on their faith and good deeds. Regularly read Surah Al-falaq and Surah An-Naas especially when intrusive thoughts arise. The most comfortable words are *"If Allah helps you, none can defeat you," and the most fearful words are "If he forsakes you, who is there that can help you after him"?* Al-e-Imran(3:160)

Hadith/Hadees

Hadith: Ignoring doubts in Wudu and Salah.

"If one of you feels something in his stomach, and is unsure whether he has broken his wudu or not, he should not leave the prayer unless he hears a sound or smells an odor (Sahih Muslim 362).

Lesson: Ignore doubts in wudu, Salah, and purity. If you're unsure, assume you are pure.

Hadith: Keeping the mind busy with good deeds; keeping yourself engaged in good deeds helps reduce obsessive thoughts.

The prophet said, "Be mindful of Allah, and he will protect you; Be mindful of Allah, and you will find him before you" (Jami' at-tirmidhi 2516).

Lesson: Stay busy with Qur'an recitation, dhikr/zikr, charity, and learning to avoid overthinking.

Hadith: Allah's forgiveness for those who repent.

The prophet said; "Allah the almighty says, O son of Adam, as long as you call upon me and ask of me, I will forgive you for what you have done and I will not mind, *O son of Adam*, if your sins reach the clouds of the sky and then seek my forgiveness, I will forgive you." Subhan-Allah (Jami' at-tirmidhi 3540).

Lesson: No sin is too great for Allah to forgive; what matters is sincere repentance.

Hadith: strengthening one's deen. The prophet said: "Indeed, this religion is easy, and no one overburdens themselves in the religion except that it will overcome them, so be moderate, seek closeness (to Allah), give glad tidings, and seek help through worship in the morning, evening and part of the night (Sahih Al-Bukhari 39).

Lesson: Islam is meant to be practiced with balance do not make it too hard on yourself.

Opinion

Existing psychological theories and therapeutic approaches suggest that OCD can be managed by learning to ignore intrusive thoughts, avoiding over-engagement with them, and redirecting attention to more constructive behaviors. These are practical methods grounded in cognitive-behavioral therapy. However, traditional Islamic scholarship offers deeper spiritual remedies. As Al-Ghazali (*trans.2001*) said, "The cure is to place trust in Allah."

This paper proposes that if one can develop strong Tawakkul—trust in Allah's wisdom and power—they can overcome OCD. By regularly reciting the Qur'an, particularly Surahs that bring spiritual comfort, and by truly believing "Allah is with me, He understands me, He will support me, guide me, and provide me with the cure", one can rise above not only OCD but any life challenge. Trust, belief, and reliance on Allah are at the heart of recovery (*Rassool, 2015*).

Negative thinking, such as saying "my fate is bad" or "I'll never be healthy again," weakens one's faith and invites hopelessness. Constantly blaming fate can discourage people from putting in sincere effort. Islam discourages this kind of despair and instead encourages hope (raja), patience (sabr), and action (Tawakkul). *Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk (2005)* highlight that Islamic belief systems can reduce hopelessness and foster resilience in Muslim mental health patients.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ; "*Allah the Almighty said: 'I am as My servant thinks of Me. I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself. If he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering better than it. If he draws near to Me by a handspan, I draw near to him by an arm's length. If he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.*" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 7405; Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2675).

These teachings emphasize that Allah responds to positive expectations and sincere spiritual efforts. The path to overcoming OCD, therefore, is as much about the heart as it is about the mind.

Conclusion

This research highlights the deep connection between Islamic teachings and the understanding of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Through the Qur'an and Hadith, it is evident that Islam provides both spiritual and practical guidance to help individuals struggling with intrusive thoughts and compulsive behaviors. The Qur'an, as a timeless source of wisdom, addresses human struggles, including mental distress, and offers solutions rooted in faith, patience, and reliance on Allah (Qur'an 2:286).

The sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasize balance in religious practice, the rejection of excessive doubt, and complete trust in divine mercy. Furthermore, early Muslim scholars interpreted intrusive thoughts not as signs of personal weakness, but as spiritual tests and psychological challenges. Modern studies support these traditional insights, showing that religious coping can reduce distress in Muslim patients (Rajab et al., 2014; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011).

Islamic healing practices—such as the recitation of selected Qur'anic verses, remembrance of Allah (dhikr), and spiritual mindfulness—are increasingly recognized for their therapeutic value (International Journal of Depression and Anxiety, 2021). These teachings align well with psychological methods that emphasize inner peace, self-awareness, and resilience.

Ultimately, this research reaffirms that Islam offers a holistic approach to mental health—uniting the heart and mind in divine connection. By embracing these teachings, individuals struggling with OCD can find comfort, clarity, and healing within their faith.

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