

Islamic Trauma Healing Program Brief



Who is this brief for?

ITH is for mental health professionals, particularly those with cognitive behavioral experience, to support Muslim community/religious leaders in implementing this brief intervention addressing the mental health impact of trauma in their communities.

What is the purpose of this brief?

Provide background and contact information if potentially interested in incorporating this intervention into mental health psychosocial support within your organization.

What is Islamic Trauma Healing?

- 6-session lay-led group psychosocial intervention
 - Targeting psychological reactions after trauma (e.g., war, natural disasters [famine, drought, earthquakes], sexual assault, accidents)
 - Posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, somatic symptoms, well-being, posttraumatic growth
 - Targeting community reconciliation
 - Separate groups for men and women
- Integrating Islamic and scientific principles of traumatic stress healing
 - Conducted in mosques, support of local Imams/Sheikhs, sessions start and end with supplications
 - Qur'anic verses/narratives of trauma and response to suffering based on Prophet's lives (e.g., Ayyub [Job], Jusef [Joseph])
 - Turning to Allah in Dua [informal prayer] about own trauma exposure
 - Based on well-established psychosocial trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral interventions for traumatic stress, with multiple RCTS supporting these principles' efficacy.
 - Utilizes cognitive restructuring via group discussion about Prophet's lives
 - Utilizes imaginal exposure via informal prayer about trauma
 - Principles of shared community building and post-traumatic growth to promote reconciliation in community

What makes Islamic Trauma Healing unique?

- Explicit use of Islamic faith to facilitate trauma healing and community reconciliation
 - Builds on union of the "Ummah" and avoids potential sectarian concerns
- Directly addresses potential stigma of a mental health intervention
 - Shifts focus from mental health providers to community/mosques
 - Focus instead on normalizing trauma exposure and impact of trauma on community
 - No discussion of mental illness, diagnostic labels, treatment, etc.
 - Individual trauma experiences are not explicitly discussed in the groups
- Not training lay psychotherapists or counselors but leaders
 - Brief training time of 2, 4-hour training sessions with ongoing remote, text-based supervision
 - Focus on training supportive, discussion leaders and general principles of trauma healing

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- Manual step-by-step session content does the “therapeutic lifting”
- Community members with knowledge of the Qur'an and “heart for healing”
- Brief, easily up-scalable intervention in the hands of the community
 - Can be completed in a week, 2 weeks, 3 weeks, or 6 weeks
- Train the trainers model – lay leaders train the next lay leaders

Development and Data to Date

- Approach by member of Seattle Somali community in 2012, developed collaboratively over several years, with input from local Imam and Islamic scholars
 - Published Development Paper ([Bentley et al. 2021](#))
- Pilot men’s and women’s groups in Seattle, WA, with iterative feedback process funded by the Seattle Foundation and Catherine Holmes Wilkins Foundation
 - Published U.S. Refugee Pilot Trial Published ([Zoellner et al., 2018](#))
- Somaliland Trial funded by the University of Washington Population Health Initiative, training male and female group leaders.
 - Published Somaliland Trial ([Zoellner et al., 2021](#))
- Completed randomized control trial in U.S. Somali refugee communities ($N = 101$) funded by U.S. National Institute of Mental Health ([R34MH112756](#)) in Seattle, WA, and Columbus, OH.
- Ongoing randomized control trial funded by [Elrha](#) ($n = 67$) in three cities across Somaliland in partnership with Somali Youth Development & Voluntary Organization and the University of Burao.

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