

Exploring the Essence of Islamic-Oriented Counseling: Insights from Iranian Therapists

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This qualitative study explores the essence of Islamic-oriented counseling through a thematic analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 13 counselors in Iran. Four significant themes emerged from the data: Divine-Oriented Counseling, Development of Islamic Counseling Framework, Holistic Islamic Perspective on Human Nature, and Islamic Counseling Techniques. The Divine-Oriented Counseling theme emphasizes the foundational principles rooted in divine guidance and adherence to Islamic Sharia, highlighting the integration of Islamic values into therapeutic practices. The Development of Islamic Counseling Framework theme focuses on constructing a psychotherapeutic framework grounded in Islamic principles. Alternatively, the Holistic Islamic Perspective on Human Nature theme centers on counselors' comprehensive understanding of human beings within an Islamic framework. The Islamic Counseling Techniques theme represents the practical implementation of Islamic-oriented counseling approaches, emphasizing the application of spiritual interventions and religious coping mechanisms. These findings underscore the importance of integrating Islamic principles into counseling practices to foster holistic well-being within an Islamic framework. The study contributes to the growing body of research on Islamic-oriented counseling, providing practical insights for practitioners seeking to better meet the needs of Muslim clients within a culturally responsive therapeutic framework.

Keywords

Islamic-oriented counseling • cultural sensitivity • spiritual interventions • Muslim clients

Introduction

The evolving therapeutic landscape highlights the crucial need to tailor interventions based on a client's cultural and religious background. Cultural competence not only strengthens

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doi: 10.3998/jmmh.6178

the therapeutic alliance but also plays a pivotal role in achieving positive treatment outcomes (Ayonrinde, 2003; Kim et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2007). For individuals with a deep Islamic faith, Islamic-oriented counseling provides a distinct platform for exploring challenges within the framework of their religious beliefs.

This emphasis on cultural sensitivity is particularly relevant in regions like Iran, where a rich tapestry of traditional practices and modern approaches to mental health co-exist (Birashk, 2013). A significant portion of the Iranian population grapples with mental health issues, and despite advancements in mental health awareness, they often lack adequate access to care (Noorbala et al., 2004; Setareh Forouzan et al., 2013; Tavousi et al., 2016). This lack of access can be attributed to various factors, including social stigma surrounding mental health, limited mental health professionals, and a healthcare system struggling to meet the growing demand (Ghanizadeh et al., 2008).

In this context, Islamic-oriented counseling has emerged as a promising approach that resonates with the cultural and religious identity of Iran's significant Muslim population (Thanagoeizadeh, 2019). This approach offers a unique space for individuals to explore their challenges through the lens of their faith, potentially fostering a sense of security and familiarity within the therapeutic process.

Islamic traditions, woven from the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, and (for Shiites) the hadiths by the twelve Imams (*A'immah al-Aṭḥār*), provide a multifaceted lens for understanding human well-being (Bhat, 2016). Central to this perspective is the concept of achieving *tawhid*, or oneness of God, which emphasizes a holistic balance between the spiritual and psychological aspects of a person (Seedat, 2021). This translates into a therapeutic approach that integrates faith with emotional and social care (Hanin Hamjah & Mat Akhir, 2014; Hefti, 2011). For instance, Islamic counselors might draw upon concepts like *sabr* (patience) and *tawakkul* (trust in God) to help clients navigate difficult emotions and life challenges (Md Rosli et al., 2021).

Islamic counseling has a rich historical lineage, with Muslim scholars such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) pioneering ways to align therapeutic interventions with religious values (Awaad et al., 2019). These early contributions laid the groundwork for the development of Islamic psychology, which continues to evolve in contemporary contexts. However, a notable research gap exists in our understanding of how Islamic counseling practices have been adapted and implemented within the specific cultural and social context of Iran (Samadi, 2022).

This qualitative research investigates how Iranian counselors integrate Islamic principles with psychotherapy, as examining their perspectives offers crucial insights. First, it sheds light on the specific challenges and opportunities they face, such as navigating religious interpretations and adapting practices to meet the needs of diverse clients. Second, it reveals the nuances of integrating Islamic tenets with evidence-based therapy, enriching the discourse on culturally sensitive mental healthcare. This study's focus on Iranian practitioners allows for a deeper understanding of how Islamic counseling has been adapted to the Iranian context. By capturing the lived experiences of these counselors, the research aims not only to illuminate these unique integration methods but also to potentially enhance therapeutic outcomes for clients seeking services aligned with their Islamic faith. Ultimately, this exploration can contribute to the broader field of counseling by providing a model for culturally sensitive practice applicable in various contexts where religion plays a significant role.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of Iranian counselors and therapists practicing exclusively with an Islamic approach. Given the specialized nature of dedicated Islamic-oriented counseling in Iran, the population of expert practitioners is relatively small. We utilized a comprehensive sampling strategy that approached near-total population coverage.

Participants were recruited through a key informant—a senior professional with extensive knowledge of the Islamic counseling network in Iran—who introduced the majority of participants. Two additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling when existing participants recommended colleagues. Recruitment was conducted across Tehran and Qom to ensure geographic representation.

Our comprehensive search identified 13 counselors meeting the inclusion criteria: (1) minimum five years of clinical experience, (2) exclusive practice of Islamic-oriented counseling (not occasional or selective use), and (3) recognized expertise and reputation in this specialized field. Remarkably, all 13 identified expert practitioners agreed to participate, representing complete coverage of the accessible population of dedicated Islamic-oriented counselors in the study regions.

A total of 13 counselors participated, representing diverse educational backgrounds and practice settings (see Table 1). Data saturation was confirmed through both population exhaustion—interviewing all available expert practitioners—and thematic saturation during analysis, where final interviews yielded no new codes or themes, confirming theoretical saturation had been achieved.

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Locations.

Participants Number	Academic Education	Hawza (seminary) Education	Age	Gender	Place of Practice
1	PhD in Educational Assessment	No	40	Male	Tehran
2	MSc in Counseling	Yes	44	Male	Tehran
3	PhD in Philosophy of Education	Yes	68	Male	Qom
4	PhD in Counseling	No	41	Female	Tehran
5	PhD in Clinical Psychology	No	66	Male	Tehran
6	PhD in Psychology	Yes	45	Male	Qom
7	PhD in Counseling	No	58	Male	Tehran
8	PhD in Counseling	Yes	51	Male	Tehran
9	PhD in Psychology	No	64	Male	Tehran
10	MSc in Clinical Psychology	Yes	61	Male	Qom
11	MSc in Counseling	Yes	53	Male	Tehran
12	PhD in Psychology	Yes	61	Male	Qom
13	MSc in Psychology	Yes	58	Male	Tehran

Table 2. Interview Guide.

Question Number	Interview Question
1	What is your understanding of Islamic-oriented counseling?
2	How would you define an Islamic-oriented counselor?
3	What role do Islamic principles and values play in counseling from your perspective?
4	Can you share any experiences or examples of integrating Islamic perspectives into counseling practice?

Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of The Institute for Research and Development in the Humanities (SAMT). Prior to data collection, all participants provided written informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality protections. All identifying information was removed from transcripts to ensure participant anonymity.

Data Collection

After obtaining informed consent, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Interviews were scheduled in advance and held at participants' clinics or other mutually convenient locations to ensure a comfortable and private environment. Each interview lasted up to 55 minutes and was audio-recorded using a high-quality digital recorder. A semi-structured interview guide (Table 2) ensured consistency while allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes during the conversations.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, following the six-step method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyze the interview data through familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, refinement, and write-up. We also explored relationships among themes, identifying a hierarchical structure (Figure 1) based on participants' narratives. As researchers in Iran with backgrounds in psychology and counseling, our familiarity with Islamic principles likely shaped our sensitivity to participants' narratives, potentially influencing theme identification. To mitigate bias, we maintained reflexive notes and engaged an independent researcher with qualitative expertise to code a portion of the transcripts, resolving discrepancies through consensus. ATLAS.ti software facilitated data organization, and analysis continued iteratively until data saturation was reached.

Results

Thematic analysis revealed four core themes encapsulating the essence of Islamic-oriented counseling: Divine-Oriented Counseling, Development of Islamic Counseling Framework, Holistic

Islamic Perspective on Human Nature, and Islamic Counseling Techniques. These themes are hierarchically interrelated, as illustrated in Figure 1, with the structure emerging from participants' narratives during the analysis. Specifically, participants consistently described divine guidance and adherence to Islamic Sharia as the foundational principle (e.g., "interventions should be derived from a divine source" [Participant 3]), which informed the construction of a broader counseling framework. This framework, in turn, shaped a comprehensive understanding of human nature within an Islamic worldview, which then guided the development of specific counseling techniques. For example, participants noted that divine principles underpin the creation of a psychotherapeutic framework (e.g., "Islamic counseling means counseling within the framework of Islamic principles" [Participant 10]), which informs a holistic view of human nature and the application of tailored therapeutic strategies. This hierarchical organization was developed through iterative reflection on the data, ensuring that the relationships among themes were grounded in participants' accounts. The structure, depicted in Figure 1, provides a coherent model for understanding the interconnected nature of Islamic-oriented counseling principles. Table 3 presents an overview of the central organizing concepts related to each theme.

Theme 1: Divine-Oriented Counselling

The foundational layer of the hierarchy, Divine-Oriented Counseling, establishes the core principle of aligning therapeutic practices with divine guidance. This theme encapsulates counselors' commitment to aligning counseling with Islamic tenets, emphasizing God's will and Sharia adherence as the foundation of Islamic-oriented counseling. Participants emphasized that interventions must derive from divine sources to ensure efficacy and moral integrity, as Participant 3 stated, "These interventions should be derived from a divine source that does not produce negative outcomes." This reflects a shared belief that divine guidance imbues counseling with a "religious foundation" (Participant 3), preventing harm and ensuring alignment with Islamic principles.

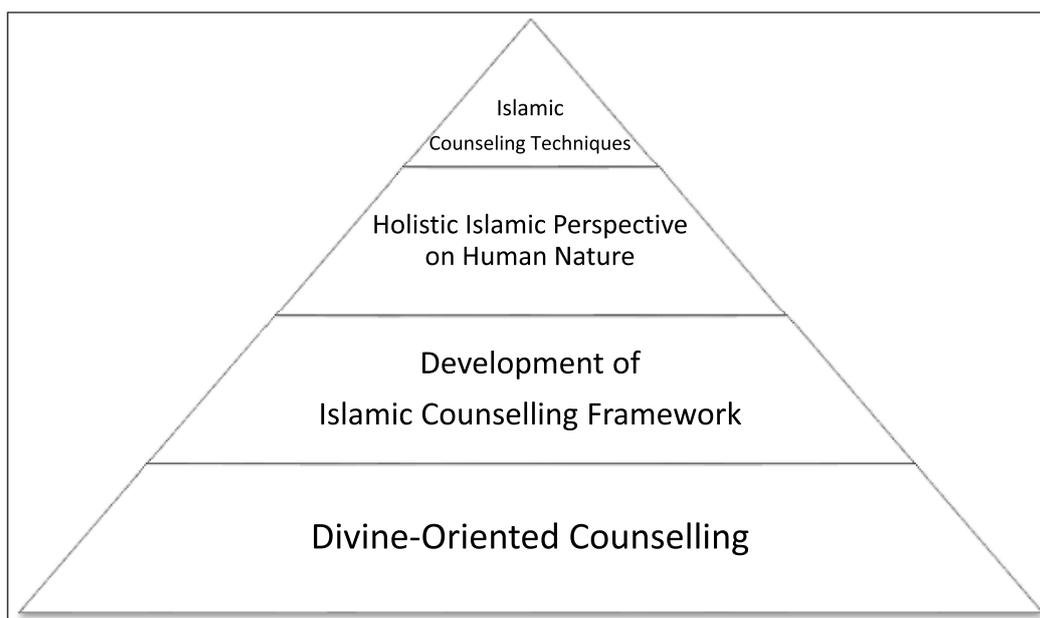


Figure 1. Hierarchical organization of themes in Islamic-oriented counseling, derived from participants' narratives, reflecting the progression from divine guidance to practical therapeutic techniques.

Table 3. Central Organizing Concepts of Islamic-Oriented Counseling Themes.

Themes	Central Organizing Concepts
Divine-Oriented Counseling	God-centeredness and divine guidance – Adherence to Sharia principles – Integration of Islamic values into counseling practices
Development of Islamic Counseling Framework	Utilization of Islamic ontology, epistemology, and methodology – Compilation of Islamic teachings in counseling – Redefining psychological concepts based on Islamic sources
Holistic Islamic Perspective on Human Nature	Comprehensive view of human beings in Islamic anthropology – Integration of spiritual, emotional, and psychological dimensions – Critique of one-sided views of human beings in psychological theories
Islamic Counseling Techniques	Application of spiritual interventions and religious coping mechanisms – Development of customized Islamic counseling methods – Integration of spiritual, cognitive, and emotional therapies

This divine guidance directly informs the counselor's facilitative role in fostering clients' spiritual connection to God. Counselors viewed their role as intermediary, cultivating a monotheistic relationship with clients and attributing healing to divine intervention. Participant 4 articulated: "The Quran views counseling as a prophetic act... I am not the one who effects change; there is a higher power," highlighting limited human agency. Yet, tensions emerged on how strictly divine principles were applied. While Participant 2 emphasized, "The Islamic advisor must specifically benefit from Islamic teachings," suggesting rigid Sharia adherence, Participant 10 introduced variability: "Islamic counselors treat all clients equally, and for non-believers, we employ rational and logical approaches to advance the discussion." This flexibility suggests a pragmatic adaptation for non-religious clients, revealing a subtle contradiction between strict orthodoxy and client-centered inclusivity.

The goal of psychological change was spiritual transformation, fostering a closer relationship with God, as Participant 6 noted, "Islam's goal in psychological changes is to create a change within us so that our relationship with God... is always a monotheistic one." However, interpretive nuance arises in how this transformation is achieved. Participant 10's assertion, "The moral framework is common to all humans," suggests divine principles can be universally applied, contrasting with Participant 3's stricter view that techniques "contrary to religion... are certainly harmful." This tension highlights differing emphases on universal versus exclusively Islamic frameworks.

Counselors drew on Quranic guidance and the Imams' behaviors, as Participant 5 stated, "The interactions of the A'imma al-Aṭhār with people... teach me how... the Imam addressed individuals with psychiatric problems." These sources informed practices, but variability in application—balancing strict adherence with adaptive rationality—reflects nuanced approaches within a shared divine-oriented framework, shaped by the counselors' Iranian Islamic context. Building on this divine-oriented foundation, the next theme explores how counselors construct a comprehensive Islamic counseling framework to operationalize these principles.

Theme 2: Development of Islamic Counselling Framework

This theme centers on conceptualizing a counseling framework grounded in Islamic principles, emphasizing a foundation rooted in Islamic philosophy and worldview. Counselors stressed the need for a profound understanding of Islamic tenets, as Participant 7 noted: “Fundamental education involves instilling an Islamic worldview, including ontology, anthropology, and epistemology.” This underlines the importance of Islamic knowledge in shaping counseling practices authentically aligned with religious principles.

This philosophical foundation guides counselors in deriving practical principles, methods, and steps from Islamic sources. They are derived from Islamic sources like the Quran and hadiths to ensure alignment with religious tenets, as Participant 10 stated: “Islamic counseling means counseling that takes place within the framework of Islamic principles, Islamic teachings, and Islamic concepts.” However, variability emerged in how counselors integrated non-Islamic elements. Participant 1 suggested, “A third approach involves creatively integrating psychological schools to develop techniques compatible with both religion and psychology,” indicating an openness to blending Western methods. In contrast, Participant 2 adopts a purist stance: “If we want to define Islamic psychology, we must extract the content of psychology from Islam, from zero to one hundred.”

This framework offered a unique definition of mental health, linking psychological well-being to faith, as Participant 12 articulated: “In terms of explanation, the Islamic counselor must have the knowledge that... weakness of religious beliefs leads to harm and psychological damage.” Tensions arose between this spiritual focus and practical applications. Participant 1’s integrative approach suggests compatibility with secular psychology, while Participant 7 warned against “repeating Freud’s words and... attach[ing] four hadiths to it,” critiquing hybrid models as diluting Islamic authenticity, highlighting a contradiction between purist and integrative perspectives.

Counselors emphasized expertise in Islamic psychology, which prioritizes prevention, as Participant 2 noted: “In fact, Islamic scholars did not look at it in a pathological... way, but rather in a preventive way.” This distinguishes Islamic frameworks from conventional ones, yet Participant 1’s openness to psychological schools suggests variability in preventive focus. The counselor’s dual role—providing therapy and guidance—was central, with Participant 3 stating: “The concept of counseling... guidance... training, these are all... in harmony with each other.” These nuances and tensions reflect diverse approaches to constructing an Islamic framework, shaped by the counselors’ shared commitment to Islamic principles within Iran’s context. This Islamic counseling framework informs the Islamic understanding of human nature.

Theme 3: Holistic Islamic Perspective on Human Nature

This theme involves understanding human nature through an Islamic lens, integrating spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions. Counselors emphasized reconciling Islamic teachings with scientific inquiry, acknowledging scientific evolution while upholding divine truths, as Participant 11 noted: “While techniques may evolve, the core principle of God’s existence remains unchanged.” This reflects a cohesive view where faith anchors human understanding, yet counselors varied in focus. Participant 5 highlighted practical applications: “When God said, ‘Whoever puts his trust in God, He will provide for him...,’” emphasizing trust as a psychological trait rooted in divine guidance.

This reconciliation of faith and science informs counselors' critical engagement with Western psychological concepts. Counselors distinguished Islamic views from Western psychology, particularly on concepts like self-forgiveness, with Participant 7 stating: "Western psychologists say, 'Forgive yourself.'... in Islam... go ask God for forgiveness." This underscores divine reliance, but Participant 12 offered a nuanced perspective: "An Islamic counselor is defined as someone with a coherent understanding of humanity and a strong connection to God," suggesting a broader definition of human wholeness. Social well-being was integral, balancing individual and communal needs, as Participant 1 explained, "In some places we have divergences... counseling that is based on religious teachings takes into account both the interests of the individual and... group."

Islamic teachings were seen as aligned with *fitrah* (primordial nature) and 'Aql, (intellect or rational faculty) universally applicable, with Participant 10 asserting, "The moral framework is common to all humans." However, Participant 6 focused on spiritual specificity: "The main goal of Islamic teachings is to maintain this monotheistic relationship constantly" This subtle difference highlights the varied emphases on universal versus Islamic-specific notions of human nature. Counselors critiqued Western psychology's lack of holism, as Participant 4 noted: "The main difference... is that each... looks at humans from a single angle. They are not holistic." They assert that Islamic teachings, conversely, integrate a plethora of human facets.

Counselors prioritized spiritual growth over symptom relief, with Participant 6 stating, "Islam is not satisfied with [the individual's current situation]... but... wants to move this individual towards more sublime goals." These variations—spiritual depth versus practical trust or universal versus Islamic-specific focus—illustrate a unified, holistic perspective on human nature, enriched by diverse emphases within the Iranian Islamic context. This holistic perspective on human nature directly shapes the practical application of Islamic counseling techniques.

Theme 4: Islamic Counseling Techniques

This theme explores the development and application of therapeutic methods in Islamic-oriented counseling, emphasizing the integration of Islamic principles into diverse interventions. Counselors drew on Islamic sources to craft techniques tailored to psychological and spiritual needs, such as adopting Quranic tones (*baligh*, *sadid*, *layyin*) to address emotional distress. Participant 4 explained: "The Quran employs various tones, which can be adapted for different clients' needs," highlighting how a *layyin* (gentle) tone might soothe anxiety, while a *baligh* (eloquent and persuasive) tone inspires motivation. This approach leverages the Quran's linguistic richness, yet counselors varied in emphasis. Participant 7 focused on structured spiritual practices: "Certain techniques ..., such as dhikr, are well-defined and follow a specific protocol," suggesting a systematic approach to spiritual engagement.

Religious coping mechanisms were central, fostering resilience and stress management, as Participant 5 noted, "Religious coping... reduces tension." Most counselors integrated practices like *salat* (prayer) to anchor clients emotionally; however, Participant 2 emphasized practical tools, "The Islamic counselor should instruct the client in practical methods derived from Islamic teachings," such as time management derived from prophetic habits. Customized educational-therapeutic packages addressed individual needs, with Participant 10 detailing: "In the Islamic approach... there are techniques like tawakkul... du'ā, and even ziyārah... to reduce grief." These packages blend tawakkul to alleviate anxiety, *ma'rifatul-nafs* (self-awareness) for introspection, and *ziyārah* (pilgrimage) for communal healing, reflecting holistic support. Participant 9, however, prioritized relational techniques: "The relationship between consultant and client must be... based on Islamic principles," emphasizing empathy modeled on prophetic interactions.

Collaboration was key, promoting active client engagement, as Participant 13 stated, “Both clients and counselors should be active participants.” This fosters empowerment, creating a dynamic therapeutic alliance. These variations—structured spiritual protocols, practical life skills, relational empathy—illustrate a cohesive Islamic counseling framework with nuanced priorities. Counselors’ diverse emphases, shaped by their Iranian Islamic context, enrich the application of techniques, ensuring flexibility to meet clients’ spiritual, emotional, and practical needs while remaining rooted in Islamic teachings.

Discussion

This study employed thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with counselors in Iran to explore the essence of Islamic-oriented counseling. The analysis revealed four core themes, forming a pyramid structure. The foundational theme, “Divine-Oriented Counseling,” emphasizes the centrality of faith in therapeutic interventions. Building upon this base, the “Development of Islamic Counseling Framework” theme highlights the construction of a unique Islamic therapeutic framework. The “Holistic Islamic Perspective on Human Nature” theme broadens the scope, emphasizing the interconnectedness of spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being within an Islamic worldview. Finally, the “Islamic Counseling Techniques” theme sits at the apex, representing the practical application of these core principles through interventions tailored to an Islamic context. These findings illuminate the distinctive nature of Islamic-oriented counseling, grounded in a faith-based, holistic approach.

The prominence of the “Divine-Oriented Counseling” theme in our study underscores the centrality of faith in therapeutic interventions for Muslim clients, aligning with research on spirituality in counseling for Muslim populations (Hamdan, 2007). Our findings reveal a counselor-prioritized focus on divine guidance, extending beyond acknowledging spirituality to create a therapeutic space where Islamic values and principles actively inform the process (Rothman & Coyle, 2020). This approach holds profound significance, as the Quran emphasizes seeking guidance from Allah in navigating life’s challenges (Qur’an 2:156). By prioritizing divine guidance, counselors may foster *rida* (contentment with God) within clients, promoting peace and acceptance alongside addressing psychological distress (Khalil, 2014). Tamin (2016) found that Quranic contemplation in counseling enhanced the characteristic of patience in adolescents, reflecting improved emotional and spiritual well-being. In essence, the “Divine-Oriented Counseling” theme indicates that Islamic counseling transcends incorporating religious elements; it creates a therapeutic experience grounded in Islamic principles, promoting spiritual well-being alongside psychological concerns.

The “Development of Islamic Counseling Framework” theme in our study extends beyond the mere integration of Islamic elements into counseling. It delves into the construction of a unique therapeutic framework built upon Islamic principles (Rothman & Coyle, 2023). This resonates with prior research supporting advocating for the integration of Islamic teachings into cognitive and behavioral counseling practices (Cucchi, 2022). However, our findings move beyond mere integration. The focus on Islamic ontology, epistemology, and methodology suggests a more fundamental shift (Iqbal & Skinner, 2021; Siregar, 2020). Islamic ontology, which explores the nature of existence, may inform counselors’ understanding of human nature within an Islamic worldview, acknowledging the role of the *nafs* (soul) and its connection to the spiritual realm (Khan, 2020). Islamic epistemology, concerned with the nature and acquisition of knowledge, might guide counselors in utilizing Islamic sources like the Quran and Hadith alongside

psychological theories (Zayed, 2014). Islamic methodology, which focuses on methods of reasoning and knowledge production, emphasizes reasoning and tailored method development, and could influence the development of therapeutic techniques tailored to an Islamic context. This could involve, for example, reframing mental health struggles as a potential insecurity in attachment to God (Ghobary Bonab et al., 2013) or incorporating Islamic concepts of *sabr* and *shukr* (gratitude) into coping mechanisms (Alfain et al., 2023; Chalmiers et al., 2023). Kadafi et al. (2021) found that Islamic counseling, using a *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification or refinement of the self) framework, increased mindfulness and reduced anxiety in students, demonstrating its practical application. Ultimately, this theme suggests a distinct Islamic approach to counseling, potentially offering a more rigorous, congruent, and meaningful therapeutic experience for Muslim clients.

The “Holistic Islamic Perspective on Human Nature” theme highlights a significant divergence in how human nature is conceptualized, with implications for therapeutic practice. Our study underscores the need for psychological models that integrate spiritual dimensions, as emphasized in Islamic psychology (Abdul Razak, 2012). This perspective resonates with Islamic concepts like *fitrah*, positing humans’ innate inclination toward God (Bhat, 2016; Jayanti et al., 2020). Counselors’ critiques point to a broader challenge in aligning Western psychological frameworks with Islamic views on human nature (Saqib & Amjad, 2021). For instance, some approaches focus primarily on cognitive or behavioral aspects, potentially neglecting the spiritual dimension (Chidarikire, 2012). By integrating these aspects, Islamic counseling offers a comprehensive approach to well-being, as demonstrated by Draganovic et al. (2024), who found that Islamic therapy interventions enhanced clients’ spiritual connection and reduced unhealthy habits. Ultimately, this holistic approach underscores the transformative power of Islamic counseling in fostering both spiritual growth and psychological resilience.

The theme of “Islamic Counseling Techniques” highlights a sophisticated and practical application of faith-based principles. While this aligns with prior research advocating for integrating Islamic techniques into therapy (Shah & Shah, 2021), our findings demonstrate an approach that moves beyond simple inclusion. This tailored model emphasizes spiritual interventions and religious coping mechanisms not merely for symptom reduction (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013), but to foster profound healing. For instance, interventions such as prayer and *dhikr* (remembrance of God) can address the roots of psychological distress by cultivating a client’s sense of peace and reliance on a higher power (Najam et al., 2019). The efficacy of such methods is quantifiable, as seen in interventions like *Wudu* therapy, which reduced anger scores by 15.4% (Reza et al., 2024). Furthermore, counselors can develop customized techniques from core Islamic concepts, such as using *tawhid*, to help clients find greater coherence and meaning in their lives (Haque, 2018). By synthesizing such principles with evidence-based practices, therapists can create interventions that not only resolve immediate concerns but also nurture enduring psychological and spiritual resilience.

This study significantly advances the understanding and practice of Islamic-oriented counseling by offering three distinct contributions that build upon previous conceptual work (e.g., Haque, Khan, Keshavarzi, & Rothman, 2016; Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013). First, unlike prior theoretical explorations, our research provides an empirically derived, hierarchical model illustrating how Islamic principles are operationalized in practice, culminating in “Islamic Counseling Techniques” and presenting a comprehensive, actionable framework. Second, this study addresses a crucial gap by focusing on the implementation of Islamic counseling within the specific cultural and social context of Iran, introducing a novel Shia perspective that informs practice through influences like the behaviors of the Imams, a significant contrast to predominantly Sunni-focused prior research. Finally, our findings offer rich, practical insights into

the nuanced application of specific therapeutic techniques, detailing how counselors translate core principles into concrete interventions. These techniques include adapting communication based on Quranic tones, integrating concepts like *tawakkul* and *du'ā*, (personal prayer) and grounding relationships in prophetic empathy, thereby providing an actionable and culturally responsive framework.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that warrant consideration. The relatively small sample size of 13 expert Islamic-oriented counselors from Iran inherently restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The homogeneity of our sample, comprising solely Shia Muslim counselors with shared commitments to Islamic principles, while offering a unique perspective, limits the applicability of the findings to diverse counseling contexts, including non-Muslim or multicultural settings. Given that this study was conducted exclusively in Iran with Shia Muslim participants, its findings may have limited generalizability to all Muslims, particularly Sunni Muslims, who constitute the global majority. While Shia and Sunni Muslims share substantial common principles, subtle contextual differences may influence counseling practices. Furthermore, the study's focus on Iran's specific cultural and religious context constrains the transferability of its findings to other cultural or religious frameworks. Finally, while our familiarity with Islamic principles aided interpretation, it was balanced through reflexive practices and independent coding to ensure objectivity. Nonetheless, this familiarity may have subtly shaped the interpretive lens, potentially limiting alternative perspectives.

Future research should address the limitations outlined above to further advance the field of Islamic-oriented counseling. We recommend expanding the sample to include counselors from diverse Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries, incorporating both Shia and Sunni perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic counseling practices globally. Exploring varied Islamic counseling approaches across different cultural settings would also enhance the transferability and applicability of findings. Additionally, involving researchers with diverse backgrounds could enrich interpretive breadth and provide a more multifaceted analysis of the complex dynamics at play in Islamic-oriented counseling.

Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of The Institute for Research and Development in the Humanities (SAMT).

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