



## **THERAPEUTIC APPROACH TOWARDS SUICIDE AMONG MUSLIM FOLKS: A TREATISE DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

**Adamu Ibrahim**

Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Life Science, Federal University Dutsin-ma, Katsina State - Nigeria. Tel +2348134386907

**ABSTRACT:** *Suicide is relatively rare problem affecting people irrespective of gender, age race and religion, but in pandemic infectious disease outbreak, the practice tends to increase due to various negative psychological changes. Despite the frequent reports that are showing the rise of suicidal cases and attempts globally, the menace is almost neglected by societies. This article presents brief explanations on the suicide from the Islamic perspective, which was aimed to serve as a primer for curbing the menace in the Muslim communities in particular. In the paper, risk and protective factors for suicide are discussed, Islamic ruling on suicide, and suggested ways of helping a person with suicidal thoughts are also outlined.*

**KEYWORDS:** Suicide, COVID-19, Religious, Depression, Islamic, Pandemic, Therapeutic

### **INTRODUCTION**

Suicide is derived from the Latin word *Sui Caedere*; meaning to kill oneself (Uchendu, Ijomones, & Nwachokor, 2019). It has been defined as “the act of killing oneself, deliberately initiated and performed by the person concern in the full knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome” (The World Health Report, 2001, p. 37). Across the globe, suicide is among the top ten causes of mortality in every country and one of the three top killers of youths in the age group of 15 - 34 years (World Health Organization, 2000, p. 5). Each year, approximately 850,000 people worldwide end their lives by suicide. An additional twelve to twenty-five non-fatal suicide attempts are made for every one of these deaths (Utz, 2011, p. 278). It has been predicted that by 2020, 153 million people will die of suicide, representing one in every death. Globally, the rate of suicide shows a great variation, with countries such as Lithuania and Russia federation having a rate of about 30 deaths/100,000 (high rate), while countries such as Lesotho, Cameroon, and India have intermediate rate of about 10-29/100,000. Countries such as Nigeria, Congo, Mexico and Nepal have a rate of <10/100,000 (Uchendu et al., 2019).

It was indeed very pathetic that on the morning of the 6th of April 2019, the world was greeted with the suicide case of a lecturer at the Department of Mathematics in the University of Ibadan, the deceased ended his life after unfulfilled dreams of completing his PhD programme. Similarly, the following week on 19th April 2019, a 100-level student of Kogi State University, Ayingba, also died by suicide after she was reportedly jilted by her boyfriend. On the 14th May 2019, a 26-year-old hairdresser in Lagos ended her life after her boyfriend of two years ditched her. Another baffling case of suicide occurred on May 14th, 2019, involving one member of Pentecostal church in Lagos, who reportedly got depressed over his accommodation issues before taking his own life. Sadly, on the 15th May 2019, a



17-year-old in Jos Nigeria, was reported to have drunk sniper to end his life when he learned that he had failed the 2019 JAMB Exam (Obinna, C., Olawale, G. 2019). Similarly, in this COVID-19 pandemic outbreak many other suicide cases are reported in the headlines of reputable newspapers frequently which show the increase rate of it in this time, for such I find it worthy to write this article which I wish will help in curtailing the menace in this COVID-19 pandemic outbreak time.

### **Risk Factors for Suicide**

During COVID-19 pandemic outbreak lots of people fall in the trap of fear, anxiety and depression due to loss of relatives due to the disease contraction, stigmatization of the community to the victims and their family members that contracted COVID-19, loss of love ones and fear of not surviving by the victims, during isolation and quarantines.

According to Utz (2011) “Depression and other mental disorders, substance abuse disorders, family history of these disorders, family history of suicide, history of trauma or abuse are the risk factors for suicide” (p. 278). Similarly, Uchendu et al. (2019) stated that alcohol abuse, antisocial behavior, sexual and physical abuse, poor peer relationship, suicidal behavior among peers, family discord, broken homes and social contagion are among the predominant risk factors for suicide.

“Depression is a significant risk factor for suicide” (Suicide Prevention Resource Center [SPRC] & Rodgers, 2011, p. 3). Also, Utz (2011) explains that more than ninety percent of those who commit suicide have one of the first two risk factors (p. 278). According to WHO, globally, 300 million people - 4.4% of the world population - are affected by depression, a leading cause of suicide. The WHO also notes that 5.4% of Africans have depression. In Nigeria, WHO statistic showed that depression affected about 7 million people in 2015 (3.9%), while in 2016, suicide was the second leading cause of death amongst people between the ages of 15 - 29 (Obinna, C., Olawale, G. 2019).

### **Islamic Rulings on Suicide**

The Quran makes it clear that human life is sacred. Life cannot be taken without justification and the right to life is inherent in the tenants of Islam. Life itself is a gift from the creator that we are obliged to care for (Stacey, 2013). In Islam suicide is clearly prohibited. There are sanctions against suicide in the Quran and authentic Hadith.

Allah said:

- “And do not kill yourselves. Surely God is Most Merciful to you” (Q 4:29).
- “And do not throw yourselves in destruction” (Q 2:195).

It was also narrated in the hadith that the prophet (Pbuh) said: Whoever kills himself with an iron weapon will be carrying that weapon in his hand and stabbing his abdomen with it in the hellfire, wherein he will abide for all eternity; whoever drinks poison and kills himself with it, he will be carrying his poison in his hand and drinking it in the hell (fire), wherein he will abide for all eternity; and whoever purposely throws himself from a mountain and kills himself will be in hellfire, falling down into it, and abiding therein for all eternity. (recorded by Bukhari)



## **Exemption**

Al-khater mentions an important point in relation to the aforementioned Hadith. The punishment mentioned here will be applied only to those who committed suicide intentionally while they were in sane mind. People who suffer from severe depression or other mental illness may not be considered legally responsible, depending on the severity of the disorder (Al-khater, 2001, pp. 26-27 as cited in Utz, 2011, p. 279). Similarly, Al-Jibaly (1998) makes it clear that in Islam sanity is a prerequisite for accountability. A mentally retarded person is only accountable in accordance with his sanity, and a totally insane person is totally unaccountable (p. 5). For such, Allah will judge them on the Day of Resurrection and send them to their appropriate destination. For this reason, one cannot justify the claim that everyone who commits suicide will be condemned to hell (Utz, 2011, p. 279).

## **Allah May Forgive a Suicider**

Jabir reported that At-Tufayl Bin Ad-Dawsī migrated to the prophet (Pbuh) in Al-Madinah accompanied by another man from his tribe. They both dislike their stay in Al-Madinah (because they were away from their people). At-Tufayl friend then became very sick, and was so overwhelmed with pain that he used an arrow's blade to cut his fingers at the knuckles, causing bleeding that led to his death {This is similar to the method of slashing the wrist as a suicide attempt (Al-Jibay, 2006, p. 221)}. At-Tufayl then saw his friend in a dream, and his friend looked well but his hands wrapped up. He asked him "What did your Lord do to you?" He replied, "He forgive me because I migrated to prophet (Pbuh)". He asked him, "But why are your hands wrapped like this?" He replied that he was told "We will not repair for you what you have damaged". At-Tufayl related his dream to the Prophet (Pbuh), who said: O Allah, forgive his hand as well. (Recorded by Muslim, Ibn Hibban and others).

In view of this hadith, Al-Jibay (2006) said: "This dream indicates that Allah (swt) may forgive some major Sins, such as committing suicide, as in this case" (p. 221).

## **The Status of Deceased**

The person die through suicide is to be buried as a Muslim and to be offered the rites of a Janaza (Siddiqui, 2019).

## **Protective Factors for Suicide**

The protective factors include effective mental health care {including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (SPRC & Rodgers, 2011, p. 3)}, care for substance abuse disorders, strong connections to family, community support, cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and emphasize self-preservation. Religiosity in particular, has been found to be strong protective factor against suicide. Researchers of suicide have found that rates of suicide are much lower in Muslim countries. Religiosity and religious commitment act as protective factors for both Muslims and non-Muslims. This is hypothesized to be related to basic life-preserving values, beliefs, and practices that reduce rate of suicide. For Muslims, the injunctions against suicide in religious texts, as well as the fear of eternal damnation in hellfire, are likely to play a role (Utz, 2011, p. 278).



## **The Fruitful Gems**

The Prophet (Pbuh) said: None of you should wish for death because of a calamity befalling him, but if he were to wish for death, he should say; O Allah! Keep me alive as long as life is better for me, and let me die if death is better for me (recorded by Bukhari)

The Prophet (Pbuh) also said: ...And none of you should wish for death, for if he is a good-doer, he may increase his good deeds, and if he is an evil-doer, he may repent to Allah (recorded by Bukhari).

He (Pbuh) also said: If anyone is afflicted by distress and grief, and says: 'O Allah, I am Your slave, son of Your slave, son of Your maidservant, my forelock is in Your hand, Your command over me is forever executed, and Your decree over me is just. I ask You by every name belonging to You which You have named Yourself with, or revealed in Your book, or taught to any of Your creation, or You have preserved in the knowledge of the unseen with You, that you make the Quran the life of my heart and the light of my breast, and a departure for my sorrow and a release from my anxiety, Allah will take away the distress and grief, and replace it with joy (a sound hadith recorded by Ahmad and At-Tabarāni).

## **CONCLUSION: PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC MECHANISM OF ACTION**

Life is an unending succession of moments. At the two extremes there are joyful moments that make our hearts soar and dark moments that plunge us into sadness and worry or even despair. Gladness and its opposite sadness are part of the human condition, however when we lose control over our emotions we can easily fall into despair. God the most merciful, compassionate, and beneficent has instructed us to inculcate these attributes and treat each other with respect and fairness. This includes not leaving anyone alone with their problems and worries. God has promised us that He is well aware of the situations that we face and He has given us weapons with which to face them. God also tells us not to mock, scorn, insult, abuse or put down one another. A little bit of support and care might help someone avoid the sin of ending his/her own precious life (Stacey, 2013). Amongst the ways to which one can use to help someone that is suffering from suicidal thoughts especially in pandemic outbreaks like that of COVID-19 includes but not limited to:

- ❖ The psychotherapist should try as much as possible to help the client understand the temporal reality of this world, aid the client to focus on the hereafter, as well as helping the client to recall the purpose and effects of distress and afflictions (Utz, 2011, p. 297).
- ❖ Remind the person to have complete reliance on Allah, be contented with the decree of Allah, focus on the blessings of Allah and persevere:

The person should be reminded that God is Merciful and that no matter what situation we find ourselves in, He is ready to forgive and help. Farid (1996) said; being content alleviates any suffering by reason of the heart's immersion in the spirit of certainty and knowledge. If the contentment increases in its intensity, then it removes the experiencing of any suffering altogether (p. 61). If we are mindful that God has control over all things and that He ultimately want us to live forever in Paradise, we can begin to leave our sadness and worry



behind. In Sharia, perseverance means keeping the self from complaining, and the hands from beating cheeks and tearing clothes (as an expression of grief). Allah has made perseverance a tireless horse, a relentless cutting sword, an invisible, victorious army, an indestructible, formidable fortress. It and victory are inseparable companions (pp. 45-46). Allah has made mention of the virtues of perseverance in the Holy Quran in different places, among which are; Q 2:155 - 157, 3:120, 3:146, 3:200, 8:46, 14:5, 16:126, 23:111, 31:31, 32:24, 34:19 and 42:33.

If we face our fears and anxieties with complete trust in God and if we show patience and gratitude with all our circumstances, sadness and worry will disappear or at least feel lighter. Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) said: Indeed, amazing are the affairs of a believer! They are all for his benefit. If he is granted ease then he is thankful, and this is good for him. And if he is afflicted with hardship, he perseveres, and this is good for him (recorded by Muslim).

And for all, Allah said: “So verily, with hardship, there is ease” (Q 94:5).

❖ Remind the person to strengthen his/her relationship with God: This can be achieved by:

- i. Observing five daily obligatory prayers: prayer energizes the soul, bring comfort to heart, and helps us transcend to a higher level of awareness.

Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) used to say to Bilāl: O Bilāl, give the call to prayer, and bring comfort to my heart (recorded by Abu Dawood).

Many studies now show the evidence of reduced rates of depression, melancholy, sorrow and pessimism among individuals who perform their prayers regularly (Ayad, 2008, p. 399).

- ii. Reading the Quran: Reading the Quran leads to total peace, awe and submissiveness to Allah the time we start listening and pondering over the meanings. Quran combines guidance, compassion and healing to enlighten your path, your life and your soul.

“...Say, it is - for those who believe - a guidance and healing...” (Q 41:44)

So, to start your journey to a prosperous life, healthier body and enlightened soul: the Quran is the first and most important step. A study was performed in Morocco as a preliminary examination of how, in everyday life, faith enhances the feeling of well-being. The study found that the recitation of the Quranic verses offered homemakers a way to deal with stress and to manage the emotions that caused the anguish and disturbed their hearts and bodies. The researchers describe the Quranic power of comfort and solace as ‘*Medicine for the Heart*’ (Ayad 2008, p. 441).

- iii. Making Dhikr-Allah (Remembrance): Remembrance of Allah dispels worry and melancholy from the heart, adorns it with delight and joy, fills the heart and face with light, and cloaks the one who remembers Allah with dignity, gentleness and freshness (Farid, 1996, p. 21). Similarly, Ayad (2008) explains that chanting your daily remembrance allows you to enjoy many benefits, part



of which is: it dissipates distress and grief, relieves the anguished heart and brings you joy, happiness, tranquility and serenity (p. 418).

“...Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (Q 13:28).

- iv. To be mindful of Allah and make lots of Du'a (supplication) to him: Supplication is a direct connection between you and Allah. It fills heart with humility and devotion, love and longing. It relieves sadness and strengthens the faith (Ayad, 2008, p. 434). A hadith states: There is nothing dear to Allah as supplication (by His worshipers) (a sound hadith recorded by Ahmad).

Have complete faith in Allah and believe that He wills only what is best for you, do not be impatient for the answer. The Prophet said: One's supplication will be granted if he is not impatient (recorded by Bukhari and Muslim).

Pray and be sure that Allah is always there for you. Prophet said: Allah is ever generous and if a servant raises his hands to Him (in supplication), He hates to return them empty (recorded by Tirmidhi, Abu Dawood and Ibn Mājah).

- ❖ Solving the problem as much as possible and showing care and affection to the person. (Even as those as simple as letters, SMS, Mail, or Facebook/Whatsapp/Telegram messages and postcards). One needs to develop skill of listening without judgment, and offering empathy. Listen to the person and let the person say what he/she need to say, try your possible best to solve the problem, do all you can to let the person know that there is still someone there for them, who is just willing to listen and not to judge but rather to help. Show the person that you still love him/her (Siddiqui, 2019).

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