From crisis to strength: Islamic pathways to resilience through *tawhid*

Ruhaya Hussin[1]*

Department of Psychology, Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences, International Islamic University, Malaysia

**Corresponding author*: ruhaya@iium.edu.my

Abstract: A crisis is a profound disruption of normal functioning that challenges a person's psychological equilibrium and requires adaptation. This article explores resilience — the ability to bounce back from adversity - and the coping strategies that facilitate this recovery process. Islam offers valuable perspectives on coping with crisis through the lens of spiritual strength and community support. Two events from the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw.) have been examined from the perspective of resilience and coping with crisis. In addition, four evidence-based coping strategies are elaborated in an Islamic framework: planful problem solving through istikharah (orienting prayer), seeking community support (ummah), cognitive restructuring through remembrance (dhikr) and careful differentiation between productive rumination and counterproductive escape-avoidance behaviour. The article concludes that tawhid (divine unity) serves as a foundational principle that unifies these approaches and provides Muslims with a coherent framework for cultivating resilience through the recognition of divine wisdom and purpose in life's challenges.

Human existence is characterised by unavoidable encounters with adversity that challenge psychological equilibrium and require adaptive responses. The American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology (2024) (American Psychological Association, 2024) defines a crisis as a situation (e.g., a traumatic change) that triggers significant cognitive or emotional distress in those affected. These situations manifest themselves in a wide range of experiences, from global phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters to personal challenges such as experiencing racial injustice, depression, trauma, eating disorders, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts. Crises often manifest themselves through observable symptoms: neglect of personal hygiene, changes in sleep habits, significant weight fluctuations, drop in performance at work or school, pronounced mood swings (including irritability, anger, anxiety and sadness) and withdrawal from routine activities and relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Resilience

In the face of such challenges, resilience emerges as a crucial psychological construct that determines adaptability. The American Psychological Association (2024) conceptualises resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional and behavioural flexibility and adaptation to external and internal demands. This definition is based on the earlier characterisation of resilience by Masten et al., (1990) as the process, ability or outcome of successfully adapting despite challenging or threatening circumstances.

Resilience can be understood from two perspectives: as a process and as an outcome. Newman (2002) conceptualises resilience as a positive adaptation process in circumstances where difficulties - personal, familial or environmental - are so extreme that one would expect a person's cognitive or functional abilities to be impaired. Alternatively, Mancini and Bonanno (2009) conceptualise resilience as an outcome, namely a stable pattern of low stress over time. These complementary views emphasise that resilience is both the path to psychological stability in the face of adversity and the achievement of that stability.

Research has identified three primary protective factors that contribute to resilience (Fullerton et al., 2021; Rivera et al., 2021; Song et al., 2021). Firstly, the way in which individuals see and deal with the world has a significant impact on their adaptive capacity. Second, the specific coping strategies used to deal with stressors determine the effectiveness of the response. Thirdly, the availability and quality of social resources provide crucial support in difficult times. These protective factors operate within complex psychosocial systems that are influenced by cultural, religious and community contexts.

The development of resilience is also influenced by three categories of factors: individual factors include temperament indicators (de Maat et al., 2022) such as activity level, ability to reflect on new situations, responsiveness to others and cognitive abilities. Family factors (Bose & Pal, 2020; Li et al., 2023) include a warm, cohesive family environment characterised by parental concern for children's well-being, or the presence of caring adults (e.g. supportive grandparents) who compensate for inattentive parents - even in the context of poverty or marital disputes. Support factors include external resources (Fullerton et al., 2021; Romano et al., 2021) such as surrogate mothers, supportive teachers, institutional structures such as social services, engaged school systems, or religious organisations that foster connections to a broader prosocial community.

Coping

The active component of resilience is coping, which is defined in the APA Dictionary of Psychology (American Psychological Association, 2024) as the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage the demands of a situation when it is perceived as stressful or beyond

one's resources, or to reduce the negative emotions and conflict caused by stress. Coping strategies are actions, a series of actions or thought processes used to manage a stressful or unpleasant situation or to change one's response to such a situation. These strategies come in various forms, including problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), planful problem solving, support seeking, cognitive restructuring and escape-avoidance (Hussin, 2014), and approach and avoidance coping (Hussin & Mohamed, 2021).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), transactional theory of stress and coping, individuals continuously evaluate environmental stimuli and generate emotions in response. When stimuli are perceived as threatening, challenging or harmful (i.e. stressors), the resulting distress activates coping strategies aimed at controlling emotions or coping directly with the stressor. This coping process leads to outcomes that change the relationship between the person and the environment, which is subsequently evaluated as favourable, unfavourable or unresolved. Favourable solutions trigger positive emotions, while unfavourable or unresolved outcomes lead to persistent distress, so that additional coping strategies need to be considered. In this framework, stress is understood as exposure to stimuli that are appraised as harmful, threatening or challenging and that exceed a person's coping capacity.

Understanding the complex relationships between crisis events, resilience processes and effective coping mechanisms forms the basis for developing interventions that enhance an individual's ability to cope with life's inevitable challenges. As communities around the world continue to face unprecedented global and personal crises, the scientific study of resilience offers valuable insights into human adaptation and psychological strength in the face of adversity.

Resilience & Coping in Islam: What Can We Learn?

Resilience is a fundamental aspect of human endurance that enables individuals and communities to overcome adversity and transform challenges into growth. In Islamic history, the concept of resilience is deeply rooted in faith, trust in Allah (*Tawakkul*) and the ability to adapt through spiritual and practical means. Two significant events in the life of Prophet Muhammad (saw), the Year of Sorrow (*Am al-Huzn*) and the migration to Medina (*Hijrah*), offer profound lessons in resilience and coping. These events illustrate not only personal and communal perseverance, but also the intricate balance between faith, strategic thinking and psychological well-being. By looking at these historical moments through both Islamic and psychological lenses, we gain valuable insight into how belief systems, social support and purposeful action can help individuals navigate life's most difficult trials.

The Year of Sorrow (Am al-Huzn)

The Year of Sorrow is characterised by two devastating losses that occurred in quick succession. The first was the death of Khadijah binti Khuwaylid, the beloved wife of Prophet Muhammad (saw.), who had been married for 25 years and was the first convert to Islam. Their marriage was not just a personal bond, but a deep partnership that supported Prophet Muhammad (saw) during the initial challenges of his prophetic mission. Khadijah gave him emotional support, financial security and an unwavering faith in his message when few others did. The second loss was that of Abu Talib, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad (saw), who had raised him after the death of his grandfather. Although Abu Talib never officially embraced Islam, he remained the steadfast protector of Prophet Muhammad (saw) against the hostility of the Meccan tribal leaders. His position within the Quraysh tribe had provided Prophet Muhammad (saw) with a crucial shield against physical persecution. His death left the Prophet vulnerable to increasing resistance from the Meccan tribal leaders, who had previously been restrained by Abu Talib's influence.

These losses came at a particularly precarious time in the mission of Prophet Muhammad (saw). The small Muslim community faced continued rejection in Mecca, and the protection that the tribal connections had previously provided dwindled. The deaths of

Khadijah and Abu Talib were not only a personal tragedy, but also a strategic setback that threatened the survival of the nascent Islamic movement. Without the protection of Abu Talib, hostility towards Prophet Muhammad (saw) intensified. Historical accounts describe incidents of physical abuse and harassment that would have been unthinkable before. At the same time, the absence of Khadijah's emotional support and advice left a deep void in the daily life and spiritual path of Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Despite these overwhelming challenges, historical records show that Prophet Muhammad (saw) demonstrated remarkable resilience. Crucial to this response was his unwavering faith in divine guidance. When the external support systems collapsed, his spiritual connection became his most important anchor. Islamic tradition reports that during this time, Prophet Muhammad (saw) increased his devotion to prayer and remembrance of Allah and found solace in spiritual practises. This response illustrates a fundamental principle of the psychology of resilience: the importance of finding meaning in the face of suffering. Prophet Muhammad (saw) interpreted his trials not as arbitrary misfortunes, but as meaningful tests in the context of his prophetic mission. This view enabled him to maintain a sense of purpose even in the midst of deep suffering.

Perhaps most remarkably, Prophet Muhammad (saw) persevered in his prophetic mission despite these setbacks. Instead of withdrawing from public life or abandoning his message, he continued to proclaim the principles of Islam, according to historical accounts. In fact, shortly after the Year of Sorrow, Prophet Muhammad (saw) undertook his journey to Ta'if to find a new audience for his message when the resistance in Mecca had reached its peak. Although the journey to Ta'if initially ended in rejection and further difficulties, it showed Prophet Muhammad's (saw) determination to persevere. This perseverance eventually led to the crucial connections with the visitors from Yathrib (later Medina) who would eventually provide a new home for the Islamic community.

Although the focus is on the personal resilience of Prophet Muhammad (saw), it is important to note the role of community support during this time. The small group of believers that surrounded him provided crucial emotional and practical support. Companions like Abu Bakr stepped forward and provided more protection and solidarity. This illustrates another principle of resilience: the importance of social support systems in overcoming personal tragedy. The Year of Sorrow thus demonstrates not only individual resilience, but also the power of the community to support the individual in times of extreme difficulty. The mutual support between Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his followers created a foundation that ultimately enabled the Islamic movement to survive and thrive.

The Year of Sorrow has remained a powerful narrative in the Islamic tradition, providing believers with a model for responding to personal tragedy. Beyond its religious significance, however, this historical episode also offers universal insights into human resilience and the psychology of coping with grief. First, instead of succumbing to grief, the prophet reinterpreted personal loss within a broader cosmological framework. This process of meaning-making transforms individual suffering into a collective narrative with a spiritual purpose, so that the cognitive focus remains on the mission despite the emotional upheaval. This aligns with the findings of Milner et al. (2020) on the significant role of meaning-making in enhancing mental health and well-being in people facing a stressful situation. Second, prayer (*salat*) and remembrance of God (*dhikr*) were found to be highly developed techniques for emotion regulation (Parks-Stamm et al., 2020). These practises fulfilled several psychological functions: They distracted potentially traumatic thoughts, provided emotional balance, and strengthened the connection to a transcendent perspective. Third, the response demonstrated an active process of rebuilding social support networks (Carmen et al., 2022), transforming personal loss into communal resilience by utilising spiritual community as a compensatory social mechanism.

The Migration to Medina (Hijrah)

The migration from Mecca to Medina (*Hijrah*) is a profound psychological and spiritual case study that combines Islamic theological principles with contemporary insights into resilience and coping mechanisms. From a psychological perspective, this historical event is an example of an extraordinary demonstration of collective trauma coping and adaptive coping strategies. The Muslim community under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) faced extreme social persecution and existential threat through a complex interplay of spiritual faith and strategic psychological adaptation. This migration goes beyond mere geographical relocation and becomes a powerful narrative of human resilience in the face of systemic oppression and existential uncertainty.

The psychological construct of *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) emerges as a crucial coping mechanism that has fundamentally shaped the community's response to adversity (Adil, Gondal, & Niazi, 2022) (Adil et al., 2022). In Islam, *tawakkul* is not understood as passive resignation, but as an active, dynamic form of spiritual and psychological empowerment. Against this background, migrants have developed a sophisticated psychological strategy that combines deep spiritual conviction with proactive problem solving. Contemporary psychological research on resilience (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Masten, 2021) parallels this approach and illustrates how integrated belief systems can provide profound psychological resources in the face of extreme stress. The ability of migrants to transform a potential victim role into a narrative of purposeful migration illustrates a remarkable psychological mechanism by which traumatic experiences are reinterpreted as opportunities for growth and transformation.

The strategic planning aspect of the *Hijrah* offers important insights into Islamic approaches to psychological preparation and collective decision-making. The Prophet Muhammad's (saw) meticulous approach to migration reveals sophisticated psychological principles of risk management, collective security and strategic adaptation. This process involved complex psychological negotiations: managing individual and collective fears, maintaining group cohesion under extreme stress, and creating a narrative of hope and possibility. The careful selection of migration routes, timing and participants demonstrates a keen understanding of psychological group dynamics, security and collective resilience. Such strategic planning reflects a holistic Islamic approach to challenges that combines spiritual principles with pragmatic, psychologically grounded strategies.

From a broader psychological and Islamic perspective, the *Hijrah* represents a transformative case study in collective psychological resilience and spiritual coping. The migration transcends its historical context and offers deep insights into how integrated belief systems can provide psychological resources during extreme adversity. In Islam, this event is understood as a demonstration of divine guidance through human action, strategic thinking and collective resilience. The narrative challenges simplistic dichotomies between spiritual belief and practical action and instead presents a nuanced model of psychological adaptation that emphasises inner strength, collective solidarity and purposeful navigation through difficult life transitions. Ultimately, the *Hijrah* is a powerful testament to the human capacity for psychological transformation, spiritual resilience and strategic adaptation in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

The narratives of the Year of Sorrow and the *Hijrah* offer profound insights into resilience and demonstrate the interaction between faith, perseverance and strategic adaptation. From the life of Prophet Muhammad (saw), we learn that hardship and loss do not signify defeat, but rather serve as tests of faith and opportunities for growth. His response to adversity - through prayer, reliance on Allah, social support and proactive decision-making - epitomises a holistic model of coping that is still relevant today. These stories also emphasise the importance of community resilience. In the face of overwhelming challenges, Prophet Muhammad (saw) did not isolate himself but leaned on his companions, fostering a sense of solidarity that enabled the early Muslim community to survive and thrive. His ability to balance faith and action, patience and perseverance, and spirituality and strategic planning is a timeless lesson for overcoming personal and collective challenges. Ultimately,

resilience in Islam is not only about enduring suffering, but also about transforming trials into stepping stones for spiritual and personal development. By integrating faith, social support and adaptive coping mechanisms, individuals and communities can cultivate inner strength and emerge from adversity with renewed purpose and unwavering trust in Allah's wisdom. The example of Prophet Muhammad (saw) continues to inspire believers to face life's difficulties with courage, patience and hope.

Practical Coping Strategies to Build Resilience for Muslims

Planful problem solving is a fundamental aspect of human decision making and is consistent with the *tawhidic* paradigm, which emphasises the oneness of Allah and the integration of faith in all aspects of life. In Islam, problem solving is not merely a cognitive or strategic process, but a holistic approach that encompasses the search for knowledge, self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and reliance on divine guidance (istikharah). The Quran and Sunnah emphasise the importance of rational thought, mutual consultation (shura) and spiritual resilience in overcoming life's challenges. In addition, support-seeking from knowledgeable and righteous individuals, cognitive restructuring to align thoughts with faith-based perspectives, and escape avoidance in the form of patience and trust in Allah are essential components of the tawhidic approach. Through the combination of faith and intellectual endeavour, believers are guided to approach difficulties with wisdom, patience and trust in Allah's divine plan. This tawhidic approach ensures that problem solving is not only effective in achieving worldly solutions, but also contributes to spiritual growth and moral integrity, and reinforces the belief that every challenge is an opportunity to draw closer to Allah.

Planful problem solving

Planful problem solving is a proactive and systematic approach to overcoming challenges by identifying stressors, analysing solutions and implementing strategic actions (Hussin, 2014). In the Islamic framework, this concept is in line with the pursuit of knowledge, self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and reliance on divine guidance (*istikharah*). Islam encourages believers to make well-considered decisions, relying on Allah's wisdom, so that both the practical and spiritual dimensions of problem solving are taken into account.

Seeking knowledge and guidance

Islam attaches great importance to the acquisition of knowledge in order to cope with the complexity of life. The Quran and hadiths repeatedly encourage believers to seek wisdom, consult knowledgeable people and make informed decisions. In addition, the practise of shura (mutual consultation) further strengthens planful problem solving in Islam. The Quran states: "And those who have obeyed their Lord and performed the prayer and whose affair is settled by consultation among themselves, and of what We have given them they spend." (Quran 42: 38). This verse emphasises the value of collective wisdom and shows that strategic decisions benefit from multiple perspectives. Whether dealing with personal dilemmas or societal challenges, Islam encourages people to seek advice from scholars, experts and trustworthy individuals before taking action.

Tazkiyah al-Nafs: The purification of the soul

An essential aspect of effective problem solving is self-knowledge, which in Islam is cultivated through tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul). This process is fundamental to achieving happiness in this world and in the hereafter. According to Al-Ghazali , the nafs is naturally inclined to disobedience and is susceptible to the whisperings of the devil, which leads to spiritual corruption. As disobedience increases, a blackness spreads in the soul and eventually closes the doors to Allah's benevolence (Sa'ari, 2002).

Self-reflection (*muhasabah*) is an important tool of *tazkiyah al-nafs* that enables individuals to evaluate their strengths, weaknesses and biases when making decisions. The Quran states, "Whoever purifies them will prosper, and whoever suppresses them will be ruined" (Quran 91: 9-10). Through *muhasabah*, you examine your personal thoughts, behaviours and emotions and identify negative traits such as arrogance or ruthlessness. This self-examination promotes ethical decisions, sincerity and righteousness. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* also involves repentance (*tawbah*) and seeking Allah's forgiveness, freeing the mind from emotional burdens and negative influences. Together, *tazkiyah al-nafs* and *muhasabah* cultivate resilience, patience and a deep trust in Allah's wisdom that enables the individual to face life's challenges with clarity and a purified heart.

Istikhara: The search for divine guidance

One of the unique aspects of problem solving in Islam is the reliance on divine guidance through Istikhara (prayer for guidance). When Muslims are faced with difficult decisions, they are encouraged to perform *Salat al-Istikhara* and seek Allah's guidance. Prophet Muhammad (saw) taught this prayer to his companions and emphasised that Allah, as the ultimate source of wisdom, provides the best guidance. The *Istikhara* not only helps in decision making but also reduces anxiety by strengthening trust in Allah's decision. It enables the individual to recognise human limitations and at the same time strengthens the belief that Allah's wisdom surpasses human understanding. This practise provides a sense of inner peace, prevents hasty or emotionally driven decisions and ensures that actions are in accordance with divine will.

Modern psychological research supports the idea that structured problem solving in conjunction with spiritual practises improves cognitive functioning and emotional regulation. Studies suggest that prayer, meditation and self-reflection improve problem-solving ability by reducing stress and promoting clarity (Koenig et al., 2001). The integration of rational decision making and spiritual confidence in Islam provides a holistic framework that enables individuals to deal with challenges effectively. Furthermore, Islamic teachings emphasise perseverance (*sabr*) in the face of adversity. The Quran says: "O believers! Seek comfort in patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with those who are patient" (Quran 2: 153). This emphasises the importance of resilience and perseverance in solving problems and reminds believers that every challenge is an opportunity for growth and divine reward.

Planful problem solving in Islam is a multidimensional process that combines intellectual endeavour, self-purification and reliance on divine guidance. Through the pursuit of knowledge, tazkiyah al-nafs and istikhara, the individual can navigate challenges with wisdom, patience and faith. This Islamic perspective not only strengthens decision-making skills, but also promotes spiritual well-being and ensures that problem-solving is done with ethical integrity and trust in Allah's greater plan. Ultimately, Islam offers a comprehensive and balanced approach to overcoming adversity that promotes both personal growth and community resilience.

Support seeking

Support seeking is a basic coping strategy that consists of turning to others for emotional, psychological or practical help during difficult times (Hussin, 2014). It plays a crucial role in alleviating stress, strengthening resilience and promoting overall well-being. In Islam, seeking support is not just an individual act, but a deeply rooted communal and spiritual practise. The principles of *ikhtiar* (effort) and *Tawakkal* (trust in Allah), as well as the emphasis on community (*ummah*) and brotherhood, provide a holistic framework for seeking support. Islam encourages believers to turn to Allah through prayer and supplication while seeking advice and solidarity from other Muslims. This integrated approach strengthens faith, emotional resilience and social cohesion.

Ikhtiar and tawakkul: balance between effort and trust in Allah

Islam advocates a balanced approach to problem solving that includes both personal endeavour (**ikhtiar**) and trust in Allah's divine wisdom (**tawakkul**). The Quran states: "Before and behind each of them are several [angels] who protect him according to the will of Allah. Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves. And if Allah has intended evil for a people, it cannot be averted. And there is no protector for them except Him" (Quran 13: 11). This verse emphasises the need for proactive engagement in overcoming difficulties in reliance on Allah's ultimate plan. The concept of **tawakkul** does not mean passively relying on divine intervention, but actively seeking solutions that are complemented by faith.

The role of prayer (salah) in seeking support

Regular prayer (*salah*) is an important mechanism for seeking divine support and emotional stability (Pajević et al., 2017). Muslims perform salah five times a day to strengthen their connection to Allah and gain spiritual strength for the difficulties of life. The Quran emphasises: "And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly devoted" (Quran 2:45). In addition to its spiritual significance, prayer also offers psychological benefits by providing a structured moment for reflection, reducing stress and increasing emotional resilience (Achour et al., 2016). The repetitive nature of salah instils discipline, consistency and a sense of inner peace (Yucel, 2010), allowing individuals to find comfort in their faith and trust in Allah's guidance.

Du'a (supplication) as a source of strength

Du'a, supplication, is a fundamental form of seeking support in Islam. It enables believers to communicate directly with Allah and express their worries, fears and hopes. Collective supplications, such as those said in congregational prayers or during difficult times, foster a sense of unity and shared faith among Muslims (Fatima, 2025). The act of praying for oneself and others strengthens the bonds of brotherhood and reminds individuals that they are not alone in their struggles.

Social and community support: the role of the Ummah

Islam places great emphasis on the concept of the *Ummah*, the collective Muslim community, which serves as an important source of support. The Quran states: "And co-operate in righteousness and piety, but do not co-operate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah, for Allah is severe in punishment" (Quran 5: 2). This verse emphasises the importance of mutual help and communal responsibility in promoting resilience and well-being. Mosques, study circles and Islamic gatherings offer individuals the opportunity to receive emotional and practical support from fellow believers.

Research in psychology shows that social support is a key factor in promoting mental health and resilience. Studies have found that people who participate in religious community activities experience lower stress levels and greater emotional well-being (Lüscher et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2011). Islam's emphasis on prayer, du'a, and community support is consistent with these findings and demonstrates that faith-based social networks play a critical role in emotional stability. Furthermore, Islam teaches that seeking support is not a sign of weakness, but a recognition of people's interdependence. The Quran reminds believers: "The believing men and the believing women are allies for each other. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, perform the prayer and give the *zakah*, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have mercy on them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (Quran 9: 71). This emphasises the idea that mutual support is a fundamental Islamic duty.

The search for support in Islam is a multidimensional approach that integrates faith, prayer, supplication and community solidarity. Through a balance of personal endeavour and trust in Allah (*Ikhtiar* and *Tawakkul*), regular prayer (*Salah*), *Du'a* and trust in the Muslim community (*Ummah*), the individual can face life's challenges with resilience and confidence. Islam provides a comprehensive framework for seeking support and ensures that individuals find strength not only through the divine connection, but also through the bonds of brotherhood and collective care. Ultimately, seeking support is an essential aspect of Islamic teachings that emphasises the idea that no one is destined to endure difficulties alone, but rather in the embrace of faith and community.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is a psychological technique that involves recognising and changing negative thought patterns in order to develop more positive and adaptive thinking (Hussin, 2014). This process is important for improving mental wellbeing, strengthening resilience and promoting a balanced perspective on life's challenges. In Islam, cognitive restructuring is in line with core spiritual beliefs such as faith in the unseen (*al-ghayb*), acceptance of divine will (*qadar*), gratitude (*shukr*) and patience (*sabr*). By integrating these principles, Muslims can cultivate a mindset that promotes emotional stability, optimism and a strong trust in Allah.

Belief in Qadar: Transforming negative experiences

A fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings is the belief in *Qadar* (divine decision), which helps Muslims to re-evaluate negative experiences and see them as part of Allah's greater plan. The Quran states, "There is no calamity that befalls the earth or you that is not recorded in the Book of Decisions before We bring it into being. Verily, that is easy for Allah" (Quran 57: 22). Realising that all events, good or bad, are predetermined by Allah promotes a sense of acceptance and reduces feelings of despair. This perspective helps Muslims to move from an attitude of helplessness to one of trust and confidence in divine wisdom.

Positive reframing through gratitude (shukr)

Gratitude (*shukr*) is a powerful cognitive restructuring tool that enables individuals to shift their focus from the hardships to the blessings in their lives. Islam places great emphasis on gratitude as a means of achieving peace and contentment. The Quran states: "If you are grateful, I will surely give you more" (Quran 14:7). Gratitude means recognising the countless blessings of Allah and understanding that even trials contain hidden wisdom and opportunities for personal growth. By focussing on the positive aspects of life, one can replace negative thoughts with appreciation and hope.

Reflecting on the Quran and Hadith: Shaping positive thought patterns

The teachings of Islam encourage believers to see difficulties as trials from Allah to strengthen faith and character. The Quran states: " Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not." (Quran, 2: 216). This verse emphasises the divine wisdom behind life's challenges and reminds believers that difficulties can serve a greater purpose that is beyond immediate comprehension. By embracing this perspective, Muslims can reframe their thoughts and view trials as opportunities for growth rather than mere misfortune. Through regular recitation and contemplation of the Quran, individuals develop resilience, patience (*sabr*) and gratitude (shukr) and realise that every experience — whether perceived as positive or negative — is part of Allah's greater plan for their spiritual and personal development.

Developing patience (sabr) as a cognitive strength

Patience (*sabr*) is a key principle in Islam that helps in cognitive restructuring by enabling individuals to endure hardships with resilience and trust in Allah's wisdom. The Quran assures believers, "Verily, Allah is with those who are patient" (Quran 2: 153). When Muslims understand that difficulties are temporary and serve a greater purpose, they can turn stressful experiences into opportunities for growth and reward. This change of heart promotes emotional stability and a more positive outlook on life.

Modern psychological research supports the effectiveness of gratitude, acceptance and positive reframing in enhancing mental well-being. Studies suggest that gratitude practises are associated with improved psychological resilience and overall happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Similarly, integrating the Islamic principles of *qadar*, *shukr* and *sabr* provides a comprehensive approach to cognitive restructuring that not only strengthens psychological resilience but also deepens spiritual fulfilment.

Cognitive restructuring in Islam is closely interwoven with faith, gratitude, patience and trust in Allah's wisdom. By embracing faith in *Qadar*, practising gratitude, reflecting on the Quran and Hadith and cultivating patience, Muslims can transform negative thoughts into positive perspectives. This holistic approach to cognitive restructuring promotes both psychological well-being and spiritual growth, enabling individuals to navigate life's challenges with clarity, resilience and faith in Allah's greater plan.

Escape-avoidance

Escape-avoidance is a coping mechanism in which individuals try to avoid stressors, whether through distraction, withdrawal or temporary disengagement (Hussin, 2014). Although often seen as a less adaptive strategy, certain forms of escape avoidance can serve as constructive coping mechanisms when approached with intention and mindfulness. In Islam, spiritual retreats, remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*), and seeking refuge in divine guidance offer structured ways to temporarily withdraw from stress while fostering resilience and emotional stability. By integrating these practises, Muslims can transform stress avoidance into a spiritually enriching experience that promotes psychological well-being and strengthens faith.

Spiritual retreats (I'tikaf): A structured retreat

Islam encourages a temporary retreat from worldly distractions in order to focus on spiritual rejuvenation. One of the most profound practises of retreat in Islam is *i'tikaf*, a spiritual retreat that takes place during the last ten days of Ramadan. Participating in *i'tikaf* allows Muslims to detach from daily duties and immerse themselves in worship, contemplation and self-reflection. This form of structured retreat provides mental clarity, reduces anxiety and strengthens the connection to Allah. By temporarily escaping external stressors in a controlled environment, individuals can return to their daily lives with renewed vigour and purpose.

Dhikr (remembrance of Allah): A spiritual refuge

Regular *dhikr* is an effective mechanism for emotional regulation and stress relief. Remembering Allah by reciting His names, reading Quranic verses and supplication provides an immediate escape from worldly anxieties. The Quran states: "Verily, in the remembrance of Allah the hearts find rest" (Quran 13: 28). This emphasises how dhikr promotes inner peace and resilience. It helps individuals overcome difficulties by focussing their attention on divine support rather than overwhelming stressors.

Khalwa (seclusion and meditation): Reflection and renewal

The Islamic tradition recognises the value of seclusion (*khalwa*) for deep reflection and self-purification. While excessive social withdrawal can be harmful, periodic seclusion for meditation and introspection can be beneficial. Islamic mysticism (*Sufism*) particularly emphasises khalwa as a means of detaching oneself from worldly distractions and strengthening one's connection to Allah. This conscious form of solitude enables individuals to process emotions, gain clarity and find spiritual guidance, making escape a meaningful and productive experience.

Seeking refuge in Allah: turning to divine protection

Instead of avoiding challenges altogether, Islam teaches believers to seek refuge in Allah through prayer and supplication. The Quran states: "And seek help through patience and prayer; verily it is a burden except for the humble." (Quran, 2: 45). This verse emphasises the importance of turning to Allah in times of need and stresses that true relief and strength come from steadfastness in prayer (*salah*) and patience (*sabr*). Rather than resorting to avoidance or destructive coping mechanisms, Islam encourages believers to transform their struggles into spiritual surrender. Through constant supplication (*du'a*) and reliance on divine wisdom, individuals can experience psychological relief, inner peace and clarity of mind. This spiritual approach fosters resilience and strengthens the belief that difficulties are only temporary and serve as tests that ultimately bring one closer to Allah.

Research shows that mindfulness and meditation practises similar to dhikr help to reduce stress and improve emotional stability (Shapiro et al., 2007). Islamic coping strategies such as *i'tikaf, dhikr*, and *khalwa* provide structured ways to disengage from stress while maintaining spiritual growth. These practises not only provide temporary relief, but also provide individuals with greater resilience and emotional regulation skills for long-term well-being.

Escape-avoidance, when practised consciously and purposefully, can be a valuable coping strategy in Islam. Rather than engaging in harmful avoidance behaviours, Muslims can seek structured spiritual retreats, engage in dhikr, practise khalwa and seek refuge in Allah. These practises transform a temporary retreat into an opportunity for self-reflection, renewal and strengthening of faith. By integrating these Islamic coping mechanisms, people can manage stress more effectively while strengthening their spiritual and emotional resilience.

In essence, planful problem solving within the Tawhidic paradigm harmonises intellectual effort, self-purification and trust in divine wisdom. Islam provides a comprehensive framework for overcoming challenges by combining knowledge, ethical behaviour and reliance on Allah's guidance. Through practises such as shura, *tazkiyah al-nafs, istikharah* and support-seeking from a righteous community, the individual cultivates clarity, resilience and a deepened trust in Allah's wisdom. Cognitive restructuring enables believers to see challenges as opportunities for growth, while escape avoidance, when based on patience and tawakkul (trust in Allah), enables perseverance in difficult situations. This holistic approach not only strengthens decision-making, but also promotes personal and communal well-being. Ultimately, problem solving through the tawhidic paradigm reaffirms the believer's trust in Allah's greater plan and ensures that every trial serves as a means to spiritual elevation and righteous action in this world and the hereafter.

CONCLUSION

At the centre of Islamic coping strategies is the principle of *tawhid* - the unshakeable belief in the Oneness of Allah. This fundamental concept unifies all coping mechanisms by reinforcing the understanding that every challenge, hardship and trial is part of Allah's divine plan. Whether through *salah* (prayer), *du'a* (supplication), seeking social support,

cognitive restructuring or even structured forms of escape avoidance such as *i'tikaf*, all coping strategies in Islam are ultimately designed to strengthening the relationship with Allah.

Belief in tawhid promotes resilience by strengthening trust in divine wisdom (*tawakkul*), encouraging patience (*sabr*) and promoting gratitude (*shukr*). All of this helps Muslims to overcome life's adversities with a sense of purpose and inner peace. Unlike secular coping strategies that rely solely on self-efficacy or external resources, Islamic coping mechanisms integrate spiritual, psychological and social dimensions, ensuring a holistic approach to well-being.

Ultimately, effective coping skills in Islam are not just about surviving difficulties, but transforming them into opportunities for spiritual growth and closeness to Allah. By anchoring their coping strategies in tawhid, Muslims can find strength, purpose and perseverance even in the most difficult circumstances, reinforcing the idea that true resilience comes from faith in Allah's wisdom and mercy.

REFERENCES

Achour, M., Bensaid, B., & Nor, M. R. B. M. (2016). An Islamic perspective on coping with life stressors. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *11*(3), 663–685. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-015-9389-8

Adil, A., Gondal, M. U., & Niazi, S. (2022). Tawakkul ,ediates between religious orientation and depression among Muslims. *Clinical and Counselling Psychology Review*, *3*(2). https://doi.org/10.32350/ccpr.32.02

American Psychological Association. (2024). *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. American Psychological Association. https://dictionary.apa.org/

Berkes, F., & Ross, H. (2013). Community resilience: Toward an integrated approach. *Society & Natural Resources*, *26*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2012.736605

Bose, S., & Pal, D. (2020). Impact of employee demography, family responsibility and perceived family support on workplace resilience. *Global Business Review*, *21*(5), 1249–1262. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150919857016

Carmen, E., Fazey, I., Ross, H., Bedinger, M., Smith, F. M., Prager, K., McClymont, K., & Morrison, D. (2022). Building community resilience in a context of climate change: The role of social capital. *Ambio*, *51*(6), 1371–1387. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-021-01678-9

de Maat, D. A., Schuurmans, I. K., Jongerling, J., Metcalf, S. A., Lucassen, N., Franken, I. H. A., Prinzie, P., & Jansen, P. W. (2022). Early life stress and behavior problems in early childhood: Investigating the contributions of child temperament and executive functions to resilience. *Child Development*, *93*(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13663

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(2), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377

Fatima, M. (2025). Psychological healing through prophetic supplications: A case study of kitab al-da 'awat of jami al-tirmidhi. *Journal of Religion and Society*, *3*(1), 395–408.

Fullerton, D. J., Zhang, L. M., & Kleitman, S. (2021). An integrative process model of resilience in an academic context: Resilience resources, coping strategies, and positive adaptation. *PLOS ONE*, *16*(2), e0246000. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246000

Hussin, R. (2014). *Work-family conflict and well-being among employed women in Malaysia: The roles of coping and work-family facilitation* [Doctoral Dissertation]. University of Waikato.

Hussin, R., & Mohamed, R. (2021). Perceived stress and coping as predictors of hopelessness and psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications on social policies. *International Journal of Social Policy and Society* , *18*(S1), 101–119.

Koenig, H., McCullough, M., & Larson, D. (2001). *Handbook of religion and health*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195118667.001.0001

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.

Li, Y., Li, N., Wang, J., Shang, Q., Zhang, B., & Cao, M. (2023). Effects of social support, family resilience, and individual resilience on fear of cancer recurrence among persons with breast cancer: A cross-sectional study. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *45*(11), 993–1000. https://doi.org/10.1177/01939459231200772

Lüscher, J., Scholz, U., & Bierbauer, W. (2023). Social support, distress and well-being in individuals experiencing Long-COVID: A cross-sectional survey study. *BMJ Open*, *13*(3), e067166. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-067166

Mancini, A. D., & Bonanno, G. A. (2009). Predictors and parameters of resilience to loss: Toward an individual differences model. *Journal of Personality*, *77*(6), 1805–1832. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00601.x

Masten, A. S. (2021). Multisystem resilience: Pathways to an integrated framework. *Research in Human Development*, *18*(3), 153–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2021.1958604

Masten, A. S., Best, K. M., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, *2*(4), 425–444. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579400005812

Milner, K., Crawford, P., Edgley, A., Hare-Duke, L., & Slade, M. (2020). The experiences of spirituality among adults with mental health difficulties: A qualitative systematic review. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, *29*, e34. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796019000234

Newman, T. (2002). *Promoting Resilience: A review of effective strategies for child care services*. Centre for Evidence Based Social Services.

Pajević, I., Sinanović, O., & Hasanović, M. (2017). Association of Islamic prayer with psychological stability in Bosnian war veterans. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *56*(6), 2317–2329. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0431-z

Parks-Stamm, E. J., Pollack, J. S., & Hill, D. R. (2020). The impact of prayer direction on emotional and cognitive responses to personal problems. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *12*(4), 471–474. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000280

Rivera, M., Shapoval, V., & Medeiros, M. (2021). The relationship between career adaptability, hope, resilience, and life satisfaction for hospitality students in times of COVID-19. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, *29*, 100344. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2021.100344

Romano, L., Angelini, G., Consiglio, P., & Fiorilli, C. (2021). Academic resilience and engagement in high school students: The mediating role of perceived teacher emotional support. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, *11*(2), 334–344. https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe11020025

Sa'ari, C. Z. (2002). A purification of soul according to sufis: A study of al-ghazali's theory. *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam*, *3*(1), 95–112.

Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2007). Teaching self-care to caregivers: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on the mental health of therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, *1*(2), 105–115. https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105

Song, S., Yang, X., Yang, H., Zhou, P., Ma, H., Teng, C., Chen, H., Ou, H., Li, J., Mathews, C. A., Nutley, S., Liu, N., Zhang, X., & Zhang, N. (2021). Psychological resilience as a protective factor for depression and anxiety among the public during the outbreak of COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.618509

Taylor, R. J., Chatters, L. M., & Joe, S. (2011). Non-organizational religious participation, subjective religiosity, and spirituality among older African Americans and Black Caribbeans. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *50*(3), 623–645. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-009-9292-4

Yucel, S. (2010). *Prayer and healing in Islam*. Tughra Books.