

MORE THAN JUST FEELING ALONE

Understanding LGBTQ+ Muslim Mental Health



UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Many Muslim cultures talk about mental illness and not mental well-being. Often, mental illness is seen as connected to jinn, evil eye or punishment for sin.

This approach sees the person with mental health challenges as a victim or failure. This is often not helpful.

Just like we all have physical health, we all have mental health; each requires unique nurturing and attention to help us manage difficulty when it arises.

Our mental health and well-being can be socially influenced in many ways. These can include our experiences with family, friends, and communities. Negative experiences in these environments can leave a lasting impact on how we see ourselves and the world.

CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

As LGBTQ Muslims:

- We often know we are different from a young age but do not have the language to articulate why or how.
- We worry about disappointing our parents and being disowned by our families.
- We hear Imams and family members reject LGBTQ identities and “lifestyles” in a way that makes us feel shame. This leads to fear, anxiety, and depression.
- When people like us don’t fit gender expectations, we often experience bullying that we receive almost no support to manage. This negatively impacts our self-esteem.
- We are often led to believe that we must choose between Allah and what we know to be true of ourselves. This threatens our sense of belonging and safety.
- We face pressures to change through prayer or are forced into heterosexual marriages. This can lead to feelings of rejection, loss, isolation, and violence.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

As Muslims, it is our responsibility to start honest conversations about mental health in our communities. This is an important way to resist the silence that results from shame. In addition, our communities must think about how to be accountable when we continue to create hostile environments for members of the LGBTQ Ummah.

Even though mental health is an individual experience, it is strongly influenced by our environment. Here's what we can do to create safer spaces:

- Explicitly welcome LGBTQ Muslims to our congregations
- Listen to members of the LGBTQ Ummah when they share their experiences
- Educate ourselves on how to support LGBTQ people
- Look into religious teachings that are inclusive and respectful of LGBTQ people

DEAR LGBTQ MUSLIMS,

Your wellbeing is important. And you are certainly not alone. Here are some considerations for your individual wellbeing:

- Sorting out what it means to be an LGBTQ Muslim is a journey with many destinations. Be kind to yourself on that journey.
- Your relationship with Islam can be complex and can change over time. It can be cultural, spiritual, ritual, political, religious, or non-existent. Each one of these, or a combination, is valid.
- Prioritize your own safety and share information with others based on your own comfort. It is unfair to be pressured to “come out” or “stay in the closet” if it’s not what you want.
- Where are you able to seek and find affirmation, validation, and support? Are these people & places equipped to serve you?
- What kinds of support might you need to feel better about who you are and create a sense of belonging--even if it’s temporary?
- Remember that you are brave. And your very existence is a testament to the beauty of Allah’s creation.

FURTHER READING

LGBTQ people and Mental Health
by Canadian Mental Health Association

A Muslim Mental Health Response to Homophobia
by MuslimMentalHealth.com

Resource Library
by Rainbow Health Ontario

Mental Health Resource for Guys into Guys
by GoodHead.ca

Fact Sheet: LGBTQ People, Drug Use & Harm Reduction
by Rainbow Health Ontario

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