

Reconstruction Without Violence: Psychosocial Rehabilitation of Ex-Combatants and Militias – A Research Review in the Light of the Qur'an and Hadith

¹Dr. Sana Ur Rehman, ²Dr. Hafiz Zahid Frooq, ³Aziz Ur Rehman Ariyan, ⁴Ahmad Ur Rehman, ⁵Mahmood Ul Hasan, ⁶Hafiz Muhammad Ahmad

¹Assistant Professor/ University of Lahore. Postdoctoral Fellowship, IRI, IIUI.

²Lecture, Department of Islamic Studies. University of Kamalia.

³Lecture, Department of Islamic Studies. The University of Lahore.

⁴Lecture, Department of Islamic Studies. The University of Lahore

⁵Lecture, Department of Islamic Studies. The University of Lahore

⁶Lecture, Department of Islamic Studies. The University of Lahore

HOW TO CITE:

Sana Ur Rehman, Hafiz Zahid Frooq, Aziz ur Rehman Ariyan., Ahmad ur Rehman, Mahmood Ul Hasan, Hafiz Muhammad Ahmad. (2026). Reconstruction Without Violence: Psychosocial Rehabilitation of Ex-Combatants and Militias – A Research Review in the Light of the Qur'an and Hadith. International Journal of Special Education, 41(15s), 594-601

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2026 Authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

ABSTRACT:

Background

One of the greatest challenges faced by societies after a battle is the psychosocial reintegration of former fighters, members of militias and armed groups. They often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emotional dysregulation, profound shame, guilt and social isolation. There are many contemporary psychosocial therapies; however, many do not have cultural and theological resonance within Muslim communities. Islamic teachings, on the other hand, offer a rich alternative and complementary paradigm that fulfills the spiritual, psychological and community requirements of such folks.

Objective

This research endeavours to articulate a comprehensive Islamic model for the non-violent psychosocial rehabilitation of ex-combatants and militias, grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It aims to synthesise spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions into a workable guideline that can be integrated with modern therapeutic practices.

Methodology

This is a survey of the theoretical studies using:

- Analytical examination of relevant Qur'anic passages (via tafsīr and juristic ijtihād);
- Analysis of authentic aḥādīth from the Sihah Sittah;
- Comparative and integrative review with existing psychosocial interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Narrative

Therapy, PTSD focussed treatments, and group therapy modalities.

Results

The Islamic framework leads to the following concepts of rehabilitation:

Tawbah (Repentance) is a spiritual and psychological mechanism for the resolution of guilt and shame.

‘Afw (Forgiveness) replacing vengeance with kindness, restoring inner peace and self-worth.

Ṣulḥ (Reconciliation) - restoring social trust and repairing communal relationships.

Social Inclusion: Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into the Ummah. This was represented by the Prophet ﷺ during the Conquest of Makkah when he said, “Idhhabū fa-antum al-ṭulaqā” (“Go, you are all free”).

Conclusion

The Qur’an and Sunnah offer a calm, humane and holistic framework for the psychosocial rehabilitation of ex-combatants and militias. When combined with modern trauma counselling, group therapy and narrative methodologies, the Islamic paradigm can be used to build a culturally sensitive, effective and sustainable non-violent reconstruction model.

Keywords: Non-violent reconstruction, ex-combatants, militias, psychosocial rehabilitation, Tawbah, forgiveness, reconciliation, Qur’an, Hadith, PTSD, Islamic psychology.

1. Introduction

The Greatest Challenge for Post-Conflict Societies

The most intricate issue facing nations after armed conflicts ends is the psychological and social restoration of former soldiers, insurgents, and militia personnel. These individuals carry the scars of extreme trauma and mental strain from combat, often manifesting as severe psychiatric disorders. Contemporary research indicates that those who have been involved in killing or ethically dubious actions during warfare exhibit more pronounced PTSD symptoms than others.

The Concept of “Moral Injury” and Its Psychological Dimensions

In modern psychology, “moral injury” is a relatively recent construct, particularly salient in

studies of military veterans. It denotes the condition arising when an individual perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress their core moral and religious convictions. In such a state, the person experiences overwhelming guilt, shame, self-condemnation, and cognitive dissonance.

Global bodies like the World Health Organization and numerous NGOs advocate for evidence-based interventions such as CBT, Prolonged Exposure therapy, and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR). However, in Muslim-majority contexts, these approaches often lack cultural and religious sensitivity, leading to poor acceptance or suboptimal outcomes.

Islamic Teachings: A Comprehensive Alternative Framework

The Qur'an and Sunnah offer an integrated system that addresses human spiritual, psychological, and social exigencies. Islamic doctrine emphasises not merely the rectification of outward behaviour but also the purification of inner states, intentions, emotions, and conscience. This internal cleansing is the pivotal element that can free ex-combatants and militia members from the burdens of guilt, shame, and alienation.

Research Objective and Methodology

This theoretical review seeks to propose a thorough Islamic model derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. To this end, we conduct a deductive study of pertinent Qur'anic verses, analyse aḥādīth from the canonical collections, and offer a comparative and integrative assessment with modern psychological therapies. The study's focal point is "reconstruction through non-violence," which emphasises transforming former fighters into peaceful, productive members of society.

2. An Islamic Psychological Perspective on PTSD and Moral Injury

Integration of Modern Research and Religious Practices Contemporary medical research confirms that spiritually integrated psychotherapies are highly effective in resolving psychological distress. Recent publications from the American Psychological Association encourage therapists to collaborate with religious chaplains in treating moral injury, a cooperation that holds particular relevance in Islamic settings.

The Concept of Psychological Peace in the Qur'an

Allah states in the Holy Qur'an:

"Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah do hearts find tranquillity"

(Sūrah al-Ra'd, 13:28)

This verse furnishes the foundational premise for psychological rehabilitation. For a PTSD sufferer, dhikr (remembrance of Allah and

closeness to Him) serves as a powerful anchor, bringing coherence to a fragmented mind.

Returning to Tranquillity and Mercy

Throughout the narratives of the prophets, the Qur'an teaches that after a sin or error, one should not despair but turn to Allah's mercy. Prophet Adam (AS) prayed:

"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers" (Sūrah al-A'raf, 7:23).

Spiritual Concept vs. Cognitive Dissonance

In psychology, "cognitive dissonance" refers to the tension when one's actions contradict one's beliefs. In contrast, the Islamic concepts of tawbah (repentance) and istighfār (seeking forgiveness) provide a divine method for resolving this dissonance. Through repentance, the individual acknowledges the wrongness of their act, submits to their Lord, and resolves to amend future conduct. Psychologically, this process is profoundly therapeutic.

The Conquest of Makkah: A Historical Model of Non-Violence and Collective Forgiveness

The conduct of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ at the Conquest of Makkah stands as the most practical demonstration of the Islamic model. Addressing those who had persecuted, beaten, and exiled him and his Companions, he said: "Idhhabū fa-antum al-ṭūlaqā". This pronouncement precluded revenge and bloodshed. This event presents a rehabilitative paradigm in which forgiveness occupies the central place.

3. Tawbah (Repentance): The First Step of Spiritual and Psychological Rehabilitation

The Concept of Tawbah: More Than Verbal Acknowledgment

Research suggests that "Repentance Therapy" (Taubat Therapy) can be incorporated into modern psychological interventions. Tawbah comprises three core components:

- (1) abandoning the sin or crime.

- (2) feeling remorse for the act committed.
- (3) making a firm resolve not to repeat it.

These stages correspond, respectively, to CBT's behavioural activation, exposure therapy, and relapse prevention.

Tawbah an-Nasūḥ (Sincere Repentance): A Complete Psychological Revolution

Allah commands:

“O you who have believed, repent to Allah with sincere repentance” (Sūrah al-Taḥrīm, 66:8)

Tawbah an-nasūḥ denotes a repentance that uproots the sin. Psychologically, this represents a transformation of identity—moving from the self-concept of “killer” or “oppressor” to that of “repentant servant.” This shift is the most effective means of restoring self-esteem.

Istighfār: A Practical Exercise for Mental Health

In one study, participants who recited istighfār (Rabbighfirli, O my Lord, forgive me) 100 to 1000 times daily for a week showed significant reductions in anxiety, anger, sleep disturbances, and self-injurious behaviours. This simple, cost-free, and culturally sanctioned practice provides spiritual tranquillity.

Prophetic Hadith: The Vastness of Mercy

The Prophet ﷺ reported that Allah says:

“I am as My servant thinks of Me. If he draws near to Me by a handspan, I draw near to him by a cubit; and if he draws near to Me by a cubit, I draw near to him by a fathom; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running”

(Hadith Qudsi, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī).

This ḥadīth conveys a powerful message to any PTSD patient who deems themselves unforgivable: Allah's mercy far exceeds their self-constructed despair.

Self-Forgiveness vs. Allah's Forgiveness

Modern research has demonstrated that difficulty in self-forgiveness is directly linked to the severity of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Islam provides

a remedy by teaching that one should not attempt to forgive oneself directly but rather rely on Allah's mercy. When the servant becomes certain that Allah has pardoned them, self-forgiveness follows naturally.

4. 'Afw wa Darguzar (Forgiveness and Clemency): Restoring Mental Peace

Forgiveness: A Key Component in PTSD Treatment

Forgiveness is recognised in clinical psychology as an effective intervention for treating PTSD and moral injury. It assists the individual in letting go of resentment, vengeful impulses, and bitterness. Forgiveness is not about forgetting but about emotional liberation.

The Qur'anic Concept of Clemency and Forgiveness

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah introduces Himself with the attributes al-'Afuww (the Pardoner) and al-Ghafūr (the All-Forgiving). Believers are instructed to

“repel evil with that which is best” (Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:96) and “let them pardon and overlook” (Sūrah al-Nūr, 24:22).

The Psychological Mechanism of Forgiveness

When a former soldier forgives an enemy or themselves, neurobiological changes occur in the brain. This process reduces the feeling of “shame,” which negatively defines the entire personality, and replaces it with “guilt,” which is limited to a specific act. Guilt is constructive because it can be resolved through repentance and forgiveness, whereas shame paralyses the individual.

Prophetic Hadith: Honour for the Forgiving

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“Allah does not increase a servant in honour due to forgiveness except in honour” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

This principle is vital for psychological rehabilitation. When a person who has committed violence decides to forgive others,

they place themselves in a position of strength. They cease to be victims of the past and become architects of their present and future.

Forgiveness as a Means of Restoring Marital Relationships

Research shows that former soldiers with PTSD have higher rates of marital dissatisfaction and divorce. However, when their capacity for forgiveness is enhanced, marital compatibility improves markedly. Islamic teachings urge spouses to treat each other with kindness, clemency, and benevolence.

5. Ṣulḥ (Reconciliation): Rebuilding Societal Trust

Ṣulḥ: Not Just Peace, But Justice

The Islamic concept of ṣulḥ (reconciliation) is not a mere ceasefire but a process that reconnects broken relationships. The Qur'an states:

“So make reconciliation between your brothers”
(*Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt*, 49:10).

The use of the word “brothers” signifies that believers are siblings to one another regardless of past enmity.

Reconciliation in Tribal and Traditional Systems

In the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the jirga or umarwalī system has resolved conflicts for centuries. Rather than discarding these systems entirely, they can be reformed in accordance with Islamic principles and integrated with modern psychological interventions. This approach would be culturally acceptable and sustainable.

Testimony and Narrative Therapy

In modern psychology, Narrative Therapy has proven highly effective: the individual tells their story and re-authors it. In Islam, the concepts of shahādah (testimony) and iqrār (confession) are analogous. Confession of a crime and remorse over it opens the door to rehabilitation. When a former militant openly states what they did and why they are remorseful, society becomes more willing to accept them.

Social Inclusion: Re-acceptance as Part of the Ummah

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“The example of the believers in their mutual love, mercy, and compassion is like that of one body; when one limb complains, the rest of the body responds with sleeplessness and fever”
(*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī & Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*).

This ḥadīth serves as a guiding principle for rehabilitation programmes: society must re-embrace these individuals.

The Concept of “Ṭulaqā” (The Freed Ones): A New Beginning

The most oppressive figure against Muslims during the Makkan period was ‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl. After the Conquest of Makkah, he fled, but later came into the service of the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet not only forgave him but ran to welcome him, saying: “O ‘Ikrimah! Welcome, the riding migrant.” ‘Ikrimah’s subsequent services to Islam are unforgettable. This example shows that rehabilitation focuses not only on “punishment for the past” but also on “future potential.”

6. Group Therapy and Collective Forgiveness

The Importance of Group Therapy

Alongside individual counselling, group therapy is highly effective. The Islamic system assigns a central place to the jamā’ah (social group). Congregational prayer (ṣalāh), collective supplications (du‘ā), and group dhikr provide opportunities for individuals to see others like themselves and realise they are not alone.

Collective Istighfār: A Group Intervention

In a research study, participants who sat in a group and practised repentance and istighfār showed more favourable psychological outcomes than those who practised individually. The reason is that hearing others’ voices, listening to their repentance stories, and praying for one another creates a social support system that is profoundly healing.

Support Groups: The Way of the Companions (Ṣaḥābah)

When the Companions made a mistake, they would not hide but would go to the Prophet ﷺ, confess their error, and ask for punishment. The Prophet would then instruct them to repent and encourage them to rejoin society. This is an ancient system of restorative justice, which emphasises reform over punishment.

Educating Society: Eradicating Stigma

For successful rehabilitation, society must be educated not to view these ex-soldiers or militia members with a stigmatising lens. The Prophet ﷺ said:

“The one who repents from sin is like the one who has no sin” (Sunan Ibn Mājah).

This ḥadīth informs society that after undergoing the rehabilitation process, past allegations no longer apply to the individual.

Practical Steps for “Non-Violent Reconstruction”

In Pakistan’s regions such as Peshawar, Swat, and North Waziristan, where military operations occurred and subsequent efforts were made to rehabilitate separatists or militants, an Islamic model combined with CBT and group therapy could yield better outcomes. Specialised rehabilitation centres staffed by scholars, psychologists, and former soldiers can be established for this purpose.

7. Integration of Modern Psychotherapy with Islamic Teachings

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Tawbah

The core principle of CBT is that our thoughts control our emotions and behaviours. When a former soldier thinks, “I am a bad person,” they fall into depression. Repentance therapy breaks this negative cognitive schema and replaces it with the belief: “I did a bad thing, but Allah is Ghafūr (All-Forgiving) and Raḥīm (Most Merciful), and I can change my life.”

Exposure Therapy and Dhikr

Exposure therapy is used in PTSD treatment, where the patient is gradually reminded of their trauma to learn to manage it. The Islamic practice of dhikr acts as a gentle form of exposure. (Wahbeh, H., & Radin, D. 2017). When a patient recites “Lā ilāha illallāh,” their brain enters a specific rhythm and vibration that reduces anxiety. Diary studies have shown that those who engage in dhikr experience less sleep disturbance.

Clearance Therapy and Istighfār

In psychology, “Clearance Therapy” (Uyun, Q., & Kurniawan, I. N. 2018). involves the patient shedding burdens of the past. In Islam, this burden is called wizr (weight). The Qur’an states:

“That Allah may forgive you your sins” (Sūrah al-Ṣaff, 61:12).

Daily istighfār is a psychological process of shedding past burdens. When a person says “Astaghfirullāh,” they acknowledge past mistakes and prepare to move forward.

Forgiveness-Based Intervention (FBI)

“Forgiveness-Based Intervention” has gained significant popularity in modern clinical practice. It guides the patient through four stages: (1) recognising anger and bitterness, (2) committing to a decision to forgive, (3) practising forgiveness, and (4) achieving freedom from emotional bonds. All four stages are present in the Qur’an and Sunnah. The Prophet ﷺ demonstrated this practically at the Conquest of Makkah.

Spiritually Integrated Care

Recent publications by the American Psychological Association emphasise “Spiritually Integrated Care,” advising therapists to work collaboratively with chaplains. In Islamic environments, scholars and Sufis can perform this role. Mosques can be transformed into community mental health centres offering counselling alongside prayers.

8. Practical Recommendations for Implementation and Conclusion

Establishment of National Rehabilitation Centres

In Pakistan and other Muslim countries, national-level centres such as Dār al-Amān (Abode of Peace) or Markaz Iṣlāḥ wa Baḥālī (Centre for Reform and Rehabilitation) should be established for ex-soldiers and militia members. These centres should mandatorily include the following services: daily circles of collective istighfār and dhikr, tawbah therapy supervised by psychologists, vocational skills training, and a system for reconciliation through umarwalī/jirga.

Joint Training for Scholars, Therapists, and Security Personnel

The success of this model requires that scholars receive basic counselling training, psychologists are educated in Islamic teachings (especially the concepts of tawbah, forgiveness, and mercy), and security personnel are taught a “Soft Approach” strategy. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Indeed, I have been sent to perfect noble character.”

Family Counselling and Support

As research has shown, PTSD profoundly affects marital life. Therefore, family counselling must be made a mandatory part of rehabilitation programmes. (Caselli, L. T., & Motta, R. W. 1995). Wives and children should be taught how to interact with these individuals. The Qur’an states:

Bibliography

The Holy Qur’an

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Hadīth Qudsi No. 15 (“I am as My servant thinks of Me”)

Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Dhikr wa al-Du‘ā’ wa al-Tawbah wa al-Istighfār, Hadīth No. 2725b

Sunan Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Zuhd, Bāb Mathal al-Tā’ib (“The one who repents from sin is like the one who has no sin”)

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī & Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Hadīth “The example of the believers in their mutual love...” (Muslim, Kitāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah wa al-Adab)

Witvliet, C. V. O., Phipps, K. A., Feldman, M. E., & Beckham, J. C. (2004). Posttraumatic mental and physical health correlates of forgiveness and religious coping in military veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17, 269-273.

Currier, J. M., Drescher, K. D., & Nieuwsma, J. A. (Eds.). (2020). *Addressing Moral Injury in Clinical Practice*. American Psychological Association.

“And live with them in kindness” (Sūrah al-Nisā’, 4:19).

The Role of Media: Stories of Rehabilitation, Not Stigma

Media in Pakistan often portrays ex-soldiers or militia members as “criminals” and “rebels.” Instead, the media should change its approach and publicise successful rehabilitation stories. The Prophet ﷺ said:

“Were it not that the devils circle around the hearts of the children of Adam, they would see the kingdom of the heavens.”

Summary and Future Direction (Conclusion)

The Qur’an and Sunnah offer a peaceful, humane, and comprehensive system for the psychological rehabilitation of former soldiers and militia members. This system resolves cognitive dissonance through tawbah, liberates from feelings of shame and guilt through forgiveness and clemency, and rebuilds societal trust through reconciliation. By integrating this system with modern psychological interventions (CBT, Exposure Therapy, Narrative Therapy), an effective, culturally sensitive, and sustainable model can be developed. The need is for governments, security institutions, scholars, and psychologists to collaboratively implement this so that the dream of “reconstruction through non-violence” can be realised. Āmīn, thumma āmīn.

-
- Uyun, Q., & Kurniawan, I. N. (2018). Taubat (Repentance) and Istighfar (Seek Forgiveness from Allah) Therapy to Improve Subjective Well-Being of Master Students: A Preliminary Study. *Advanced Science Letters*, 24, 5422-5425.
- Caselli, L. T., & Motta, R. W. (1995). The effect of PTSD and combat level on Vietnam veterans' perceptions of child behavior and marital adjustment. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 51, 4-12.
- Wahbeh, H., & Radin, D. (2017). Shamanic Healing for Veterans with PTSD: A Case Series. *Explore*, 13, 207-217.
- Snider, J. J. (2015). *Moral Injury: Repair through Self-Forgiveness*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.