Family Beyond Boundaries: A Case Insight Into Islamic Extended Family Dynamics

Muhamad Rafiqi Hehsan[1, 2], Nathratul Ayeshah Zulkifli[1], Zulkifli Dahalan[3]

[1]Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Persiaran Ilmu, Putra Nilai, 78100 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, [2]Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Medical Campus, Jalan Sultan Mahmud, 20400 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu Darul Iman, Malaysia, [3]Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Pulau Pinang Kampus Permatang Pauh, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Corresponding Author Email: ayeshahzul@usim.edu.my

Abstract
Across numerous civilisations and geographic regions, extended family systems thrive, offering unique insights into social structures. In this case report, we explore the Islamic 'A'ilah, or extended family, as a comparative model. Islamic teachings place family at the heart of society, extending the concept beyond nuclear families to encompass extensive kinship networks. The Quran and Hadiths advocate the importance of maintaining familial bonds and treating relatives with compassion and respect, embodying a holistic approach to familial relationships. Despite regional adaptations influenced by pre-Islamic customs, the core principles remain consistent. In Malaysia, a growing number of Muslim families engage in this extended family model, with many seeking psychological support to navigate the complexities of familial dynamics. This study focuses on a case involving a woman navigating conflicts between her past and current relationships. We assessed her symptoms amidst ongoing family-dynamic conflicts, identifying manifestations of depression and anxiety. We evaluated her symptoms using the PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9) and GAD-7 (General Anxiety Disorder-7). The findings highlight significant challenges faced by individuals within extended families, highlighting the complexities of various roles and responsibilities. This paper explores the primary challenges posed by dynamic family structures in Islam and proposes strategies to mitigate the psychological impacts on family members, thereby enhancing their social functioning within both familial and societal contexts, especially in the Islamic community.
Keywords: Family, Psychological, Depression, Anxiety, Community

Introduction

Understanding the role and culture of the extended family from Islamic perspectives provides insights into the complexities of familial relationships, support structures, and the integration of religious teachings into daily life. In Islamic culture, the extended family holds a pivotal role in shaping not only the social fabric but also individual identities and support systems. Unlike the nuclear family structure prevalent in many parts of the world, the extended family in Islamic societies encompasses a wide network of relatives, incorporating grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws into a closely knit network. This expansive kinship network provides a foundation of emotional security, financial assistance, and social cohesion, forming an essential pillar of support for individuals within the family (Ahmed & Amer, 2014). This traditional family dynamic also offers both strengths and challenges, particularly in navigating the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

The extended family in Islam serves as a microcosm of social unity, ensuring members feel a deep sense of belonging and protection (Ali, 2005). It is more than a familial arrangement; it acts as a cohesive social system, reinforcing interdependence and cooperation among its members. This interconnectedness is vital, as it reinforces mutual support and offers stability, particularly during times of crisis. From a religious standpoint, Islam places significant emphasis on familial responsibilities. The Quran, along with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, consistently underscores the importance of maintaining strong kinship bonds. These teachings advocate for compassion, respect, and mutual support among family members, viewing such relationships as both a social and spiritual obligation. The extended family, thus, becomes a reflection of these principles, embodying the values of care, respect, and compassion.

Culturally, Islamic societies celebrate family connections through rituals and traditions that reinforce these ties. Whether through communal meals during religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr or gatherings for life events like weddings and funerals, these occasions foster the continued intergenerational support that is central to the extended family structure (Al-Shamahi, 2019). These traditions are not merely ceremonial; they reinforce shared values, maintain cohesion, and ensure that family members remain connected across generations. The emphasis on family ties is deeply ingrained in Islamic teachings, with both the Quran and Hadith advocating compassion, respect, and mutual support among relatives. However, modern psychological frameworks increasingly recognise that while extended families offer support, they also present potential stressors that can affect mental health.

The presented case study focusses on a case involving a man who overcomes difficulties in his relationships from the past and current. After the tragic loss of his wife, he entered a blended family dynamic by marrying a widower, who had four children. Over time, his role within this complex family system contributed to significant emotional and psychological distress, manifesting as symptoms of depression and anxiety. His symptoms were assessed using the PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9) and GAD-7 (General Anxiety Disorder-7) tools. It demonstrates how these family dynamics shape not only individual relationships but also societal interactions. Understanding the role of the extended family from an Islamic perspective offers valuable insights into the complexities of familial relationships and the integration of religious teachings into daily life. This exploration lays the groundwork for a deeper appreciation of the diverse, multifaceted nature of family dynamics in Islamic

societies, highlighting the importance of these extended networks in both personal and community well-being.

Case Report

This case presents the complex psychological journey of Z, a 31-year-old man grappling with significant depressive and anxiety symptoms as he navigates the challenges of extended family dynamics following a life-altering event. Z's emotional journey began after the tragic loss of his wife in a motor vehicle accident, leaving him as a single parent to their son. In time, he found solace and companionship with A, a widow with four daughters. The two decided to blend their families, hoping to create a nurturing environment for all their children. However, the transition proved challenging, revealing underlying emotional and familial tensions that deeply affected Z's mental health. Importantly, Z's situation offers insight into the psychological toll of grief, family restructuring, and the demands of stepparenting, compounded by societal expectations and personal guilt. Z faced the intricate emotional and logistical challenges of managing a large, blended family. He had no history of mental illness, substance use, or any other health concerns.

Z's experience is marked by a range of emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms, which are categorized as follows:

1. **Grief and Loss**: Z continues to mourn his late wife, particularly during family gatherings or holidays that evoke memories of her. Milestones such as holidays and family events evoke strong feelings of sadness and nostalgia, triggering emotional waves that remind him of his late wife. The combination of ongoing grief and the complexities of his new family dynamic amplifies his sense of loss.
2. **Anxiety and overwhelm**: The responsibilities of managing a large, blended family, balancing the needs of his biological son and four stepdaughters, have left Z feeling overwhelmed. He struggles to harmonize the discipline and emotional needs of all the children, contributing to his anxiety.
3. **Guilt and Self-Doubt**: Z experiences deep feelings of guilt and self-doubt, questioning his ability to fulfill his role as both a father and a stepfather. He feels guilty for perceived inadequacies in providing emotional stability for all the children, and he worries about societal and familial judgment regarding his remarriage and its implications on family dynamics.
4. **Social Isolation**: Despite being surrounded by family, Z frequently feels emotionally isolated. His introverted nature prevents him from seeking support, fearing judgment and misunderstanding from extended family members or friends.
5. **Physical Symptoms**: Z's emotional strain has manifested in physical symptoms, such as persistent headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and chronic fatigue, all of which he attributes to the stress of managing his new family dynamics.

These emotional and physical manifestations significantly impact Z's daily life across several dimensions, where he struggles in multiples area of functionality in his life:

1. **Parenting Challenges**: Z struggles to balance the emotional and developmental needs of his biological son and stepdaughters. This creates tension and uncertainty, particularly in navigating the gender dynamics and varying emotional requirements of the children.
2. **Marital Strain**: Differences in parenting styles and expectations cause friction between Z and A. Both bring their unique previous experiences into their current roles, leading

to misunderstandings and strain in their relationship. This discord leads to tension in their relationship, as they attempt to navigate the complexities of their blended family roles.

3. **Extended Family Dynamics**: Z faces challenges managing relationships with his late wife's family, while simultaneously trying to define boundaries and expectations with A's extended family. This dual responsibility creates confusion and stress, often leaves him emotionally drained and uncertain about how to maintain healthy connections with both sides.

4. **Work and Personal Fulfillment**: Z's emotional burden of his family situation has also affected his professional life. This reducing his focus at work and his enjoyment of previously fulfilling activities, leading to a sense of dissatisfaction and disconnection from his personal goals.

Recognizing the need for help, Z sought professional support and guidance from a psychiatrist and psychologist specializing in grief, family dynamics, and mental health. A comprehensive, multi-faceted approach was employed to address his mental health challenges:

1. **Individual Therapy**: Through regular therapy sessions, Z works on processing his grief, managing his anxiety, and developing healthier coping strategies for navigating the complexities of his complex family life.

2. **Family Counseling**: Z and A engage in joint family counseling sessions aimed at improving communication, establishing shared parenting goals, and strengthening their marital relationship. These sessions serve as a critical platform for addressing their different parenting styles and fostering unity within the family.

3. **Support Groups**: Z has joined support groups for widowers and blended families, allowing him to connect with others who have experienced similar challenges. This sense of community provides him with comfort and helps to reduce feelings of isolation.

4. **Self-Care and Religious Practices**: Z's therapist has encouraged him to prioritise self-care activities, including mindfulness, regular exercise, and hobbies that promote relaxation and emotional well-being. Additionally, engaging in religious practices has offered him both spiritual and emotional solace, strengthening his ability to cope with the stresses of daily life. Gradually, Z also began to open up to trusted family members, fostering empathy and understanding within his extended family network.

Over time, with the continued support of therapy, open communication with his new spouse, and a commitment to self-care, Z begins to navigate her extended family dynamics with greater resilience and emotional clarity. He is gradually learning to embrace his dual role as a parent and stepfather while honoring the memory of his past while finding peace in his present circumstances. This case highlights the profound psychological impact that life transitions, grief, and the complexities of blended family dynamics can have on mental health. It underscores the importance of seeking professional support and fostering a compassionate understanding within extended family networks.

Z's clinical examination and routine laboratory results were unremarkable, with all parameters within normal limits. His vital signs were unremarkable with blood pressure (115/75 mmHg), heart rate (85 beats/min), and respiratory rate (22 breaths/min), and no abnormalities were detected during his physical examination. All organic investigations ruled

out physiological causes for his symptoms, confirming that his distress was primarily psychological, likely stress-related in origin (Table 1).

Table 1
Blood Parameter Result

Heart rate	85 bpm	Hemoglobin	15.5mg/dL
Oxygen saturation	99% under room air	Total White Cell (TWC)	5.0×10^9/ L
GCS	full, orientated, obeyed command	ESR	6.5 mmol/hr
Respiratory rate	not tachypneic RR 20	CRP	0.57 mg/dL
Capillary refill time (CRT)	less than 2 sec	Lumbar puncture	Not done
Temperature	36.7 Celcius	Chest X Ray	No abnormality noted
Blood pressure	115/75mmHg	Brain CT Scan	Not done
Random blood sugar	6.0mmol/L	Liver function test	Within normal range
Renal profile	Within normal range	Fasting lipid profile	Within normal range

Z was discharged home following a thorough evaluation, given his low-risk status and insightful understanding of his mental health condition. His calm demeanor, coupled with his wife's commitment to support him, set the stage for a structured outpatient follow-up. To aid his recovery, Z was prescribed oral anti-anxiety medication and instructed in relaxation techniques to help manage his stress.

Growing up as the middle son among three siblings, Z faced a unique set of challenges. His upbringing was marked by his father's frequent absence, compelling Z to assume significant responsibilities, particularly in caring for his younger brother, who was born with Down Syndrome. Meanwhile, his elder siblings attended boarding school, leaving Z to shoulder the burden of household duties alongside his mother, who exhibited anxiety and dependency in the absence of their father. Z frequently recalled his father's critical parenting style, which fostered a sense of inadequacy and reinforced the notion that vulnerability was a weakness. This environment fostered a sense of obligation within him, as he perceived his mother's anxiety and reliance on him to maintain household stability.

Throughout his adolescence, Z internalized the belief that he must shoulder these responsibilities, a mindset that persisted into adulthood. His wife often noted his tendency to suppress his emotions, rarely discussing his struggles, which created a dilemma that he equated with strength. Concurrently, his wife acknowledged the pressures she placed on him to embody an exemplary role model for their children, at the same time a good reliable

husband further exacerbating his internal conflicts. This interplay of expectations led to frequent arguments or conflict between the couple, ultimately prompting Z to seek help from a clinical psychologist, which later resulted in a referral to a psychiatrist for expert management.

Through a comprehensive approach combining psychotherapy, familial support, and a reduction in exposure to stressors, Z has begun to rediscover his rational sense of safety and emotional equilibrium. Over the past few months, he has developed healthier coping mechanisms, leading to a notable improvement in his psychological symptoms.

Discussion
This case study explores the transformative journey of Z, a middle son from a challenging family background, as he navigates the complexities of mental health and familial responsibilities. This highlights the profound influence of familial roles and dynamics on mental health, particularly within the framework of extended blended families. It invites further exploration of these themes from an Islamic perspective, advocating for a holistic, multi-modal psychological approach to support individuals like Z in their recovery journey. This significant influence of extended blended family dynamics warrants further exploration through an Islamic lens, emphasizing a holistic psychological multi-modal approach.

The Concept of Family in Islam: A Contemporary Exploration of Extended Family Dynamics
1. The Quranic and Prophetic Foundations on Extended Family
In Islam tradition, the family unit is the cornerstone of society, rooted deeply in principles of social justice, kinship (silat ar-rahim), and mutual support. Unlike the modern emphasis on nuclear families, the Islamic model of extended family comprising not only parents and children but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other relatives has been an enduring pillar of Islamic culture. The Quran and Hadith emphasize the preservation and nurturing of familial bonds, reflecting the centrality of the family in Islamic teachings. The Quran explicitly instructs believers on maintaining familial bonds and responsibilities toward relatives, as illustrated in Surah An-Nisa (4:36):

وَٱعْبُدُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا۟ بِهِۦ شَيْـًٔا ۖ وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَٰنًا وَبِذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينِ وَٱلْجَارِ ذِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْجَارِ ٱلْجُنُبِ وَٱلصَّاحِبِ بِٱلْجَنۢبِ وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَٰنُكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا

Allah commands: "Worship Allah ˹alone˺ and associate none with Him. And be kind to parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, near and distant neighbors, close friends, ˹needy˺ travellers, and those ˹bonds people˺ in your possession. Surely Allah does not like whoever is arrogant and boastful".

This verse emphasizes the importance of extended family ties and support beyond the nuclear family, reinforcing the spiritual and social duty of maintaining kinship.. The Quran emphasizes the importance of maintaining strong family ties, and it is filled with injunctions encouraging believers to honor and care for their relatives. Islam promotes caring for kin, emphasizing the importance of maintaining kinship ties, which is a duty on every Muslim. This concept of kinship (silat ar-rahim) is a key component of Islamic family law and moral philosophy, underscoring the moral imperative for Muslims to uphold and strengthen family connections.

The Prophet's life serves as a model for fostering extended family relationships, highlighting the importance of providing emotional and financial support, especially to elderly relatives. The Hadith literature emphasizes the extended family's role, with numerous sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) illustrating how he upheld kinship ties.

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ . رضى الله عنه . عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ فَلْيُكْرِمْ ضَيْفَهُ، وَمَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ فَلْيَصِلْ رَحِمَهُ، وَمَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ ".

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should serve his guest generously; and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should unite the bond of kinship (i.e., keep a good relationship with his kith and kin); and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should talk about what is good or keep quiet". (Sahih Al-Bukhari: 6138)

قَالَ إِنَّ جُبَيْرَ بْنَ مُطْعِمٍ أَخْبَرَهُ أَنَّهُ، سَمِعَ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم يَقُولُ " لاَ يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ قَاطِعٌ ".

Narrated Jubair bin Mut`im: That he heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, The person who severs the bond of kinship will not enter paradise. (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 5984)

This foundational concept of kinship, or "silat ar-rahim", as highlighted by both the Quran and the Prophet's teachings, underpins the obligation of Muslims to uphold family connections, especially those within the extended family network. The Prophet's own life serves as a model for nurturing relationships within the extended family, stressing the importance of caring for elderly relatives and supporting those in need.

2. Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and Family Relations

Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) provides a detailed framework for the rights and responsibilities within extended families, ensuring that family members are supported not just emotionally, but also financially and materially. These principles are central to Islamic inheritance laws, which aim to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth within the family.

يُوصِيكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِىٓ أَوْلَٰدِكُمْ ۖ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ ٱلْأُنثَيَيْنِ ۚ فَإِن كُنَّ نِسَآءً فَوْقَ ٱثْنَتَيْنِ فَلَهُنَّ ثُلُثَا مَا تَرَكَ ۖ وَإِن كَانَتْ وَٰحِدَةً فَلَهَا ٱلنِّصْفُ ۚ وَلِأَبَوَيْهِ لِكُلِّ وَٰحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا ٱلسُّدُسُ مِمَّا تَرَكَ إِن كَانَ لَهُۥ وَلَدٌ ۚ فَإِن لَّمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ وَلَدٌ وَوَرِثَهُۥٓ أَبَوَاهُ فَلِأُمِّهِ ٱلثُّلُثُ ۚ فَإِن كَانَ لَهُۥٓ إِخْوَةٌ فَلِأُمِّهِ ٱلسُّدُسُ ۚ مِنۢ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّةٍ يُوصِى بِهَآ أَوْ دَيْنٍ ۗ ءَابَآؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَآؤُكُمْ لَا تَدْرُونَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ لَكُمْ نَفْعًا ۚ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

Allah commands you regarding your children: "The share of the male will be twice that of the female. If you leave only two or more females, their share is two-thirds of the estate. But if there is only one female, her share will be one-half. Each parent is entitled to one-sixth if you leave offspring. But if you are childless and your parents are the only heirs, then your mother will receive one-third. But if you leave siblings, then your mother will receive one-sixth after the fulfillment of bequests and debts. Be fair to your parents and children, as you do not fully know who is more beneficial to you. This is an obligation from Allah. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise". (Surah An-Nisa, 4:11-12)

This verse highlights the structured approach to inheritance in Islam, ensuring that wealth is fairly distributed across generations and among extended relatives. These laws are designed not only to preserve familial wealth but to foster social cohesion by reducing economic disparities within families. The system emphasizes the responsibility of the family to care for

one another, particularly those who may be vulnerable, such as widows, orphans, and the elderly. Therefore, Islamic jurisprudence outlines specific responsibilities and rights within extended families, emphasizing the roles of various relatives in ensuring mutual support, including financial obligations, inheritance laws, and caregiving responsibilities. The extended family is seen not only as a support system for individuals but also as a mechanism for broader social cohesion. Islamic law recognises that relatives have rights over one another, and failure to fulfill these obligations can be considered sinful.

3. Inter-generational Support

Respect and care for the elderly are not only embedded in Islamic teachings but are also viewed as a critical means of preserving family integrity across generations. In Islamic culture, the extended family operates on the principles of inter-generational solidarity, with younger members responsible for the care of their elders. The extended family system in Islamic culture is built on the principles of mutual assistance and respect. It plays a crucial role in socializing individuals, providing care for the elderly, and fostering a sense of belonging and identity within Muslim societies. In Islamic tradition, the elderly are revered, and caring for aging parents and grandparents is considered a religious duty. The Islamic family dynamic, as embodied in the concept of 'A'ilah, fosters strong intergenerational ties, creating a supportive environment that promotes both spiritual and social wellbeing.

The Quran explicitly commands kindness and care towards parents and grandparents, as seen in Surah Al-Isra (17:24):

وَٱخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ ٱلذُّلِّ مِنَ ٱلرَّحْمَةِ وَقُل رَّبِّ ٱرْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِى صَغِيرًا

The Quran states, "And be humble with them out of mercy, and pray, "My Lord! Be merciful to them as they raised me when I was young". (Surah Al-Isra 17:24).

This inter-generational support system ensures that elderly members of the family receive care, both emotionally and materially, creating a cohesive family structure. A recent systematic literature review showed strong evidence that inter-generational activities can help older individuals' health in significant manners (Zhong et al., 2020). For older individuals, interactions with young children demonstrated the greatest and most comprehensive spectrum of health benefits, encompassing physical and psychological health, cognitive function, social relationships, physical activity, and social activity (Zhong et al., 2020).

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِيَّاهُ وَبِٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ إِحْسَٰنًا ۚ إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِندَكَ ٱلْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَآ أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُل لَّهُمَآ أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُل لَّهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا

As stated in the Quran: "For your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And honor your parents. If one or both of them reach old age in your care, never say to them even 'ugh,' nor yell at them. Rather, address them respectfully". (Quran 17:23).

The cultural expectation to care for aging parents and grandparents not only reflects obedience to divine injunctions but also sustains the cohesion of the extended family unit (Andruske CL & O'Connor D., 2020). The study revealed that these inter-generational interactions are influenced by a complex interplay of individual characteristics, relational

dynamics, and sociocultural factors (Mitchell BA & Teichman S., 2024). Contemporary studies have shown that Muslim families, especially in predominantly Islamic countries, continue to prioritize this traditional form of care-giving, even in urbanized settings (Baeke et al., 2012; Halim et al., 2024).

The extended family is central to the values of mutual aid, respect for elders, and the preservation of Islamic values across generations. It concludes by considering the future of the extended family in Islamic communities and how Islamic teachings continue to adapt to changing family dynamics. This emphasis on inter-generational support creates a strong, cohesive family structure that ensures the well-being of elderly family members, both emotionally and materially (Zhong et al., 2020). This reflects the deep cultural and religious commitment to maintaining strong family ties across multiple generations.

Psychological View of Extended Family Dynamics
In the realm of psychology, the dynamics and complexities of family structures have garnered significant attention, with blended families emerging as a distinct area of study (Ali A, 2005). Blended families, often referred to as stepfamilies, represent a unique constellation where individuals from previous relationships come together to form a new family unit. In this case study, Z and A, both widowed and each with their own children, remarried, bringing with them the unique emotional and social challenges inherent in blended families. Psychologically, this transition can be fraught with challenges as family members are adapting to each other, renegotiating their roles, as well as navigating their complex emotional needs.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory (1978) provides valuable insight into the nature of these challenges. According to Bowen, families function as both emotional and relational systems, with each member influencing and being influenced by the others on multiple levels: individual, dyadic, systemic, and intergenerational. In this case, Z and A faced emotional fusion, where partners, due to fear of emotional rejection, failed to assert independent choices, leading to heightened anxiety. The inability to manage emotional responses in such circumstances causes chronic worry, manifesting as psychological strain. By psycho-educating both Z and A on emotional fusion and fostering differentiation techniques, they were able to maintain their individual identities while remaining emotionally connected to others. This has helped the family to adapt to changes in their environment and thereby experience less emotional stress (Brown, 1999; Bowen, 1978).

1. Psychological and Social Challenges in Blended Families
Another way to understand why blended families face challenges is through the Family Systems Theory, which proposes that family is a social system that has its own rules, roles, characteristics, communication patterns, and power structure (Crittenden & Dallos, 2009). The integration of different rules, communication styles, and power structures may lead to confusion. When two individuals/widows with different family systems come together, there might be confusion in adapting one another's family systems. Papernow (2015) highlights that blended families face the challenge of creating a new family culture while navigating existing cultures from prior family structures.

From the case study, we can justify or understand that Z could feel overwhelmed with assimilating her previous family's culture with the new family's culture and trying to redefine

roles and dynamics within the new blended family. Z and A's marital strain could also be explained by the Family Systems Theory, as they both have established different parenting styles and are trying to navigate a new system within the blended family. This constant adjustment from something familiar to something new could cause cognitive dissonance for both Z and A. Festinger's theory on cognitive dissonance highlights that a discrepancy in cognition could lead to psychological discomfort (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). However, there are positive sides to cognitive dissonance, as it would usually encourage individuals to change their beliefs in order to rebalance the discrepancy in their cognition.

Moreover, the Theory of Mind (Premack & Woodruff, 1978) could also be beneficial for Z and A as it helps individuals understand that everyone is their own individual entitled to their own assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, hopes, needs, intentions and more. Therefore, couple therapy where individuals can openly discuss and share their beliefs would prove beneficial to Z and A as boundaries in their family relationships and differences in parenting styles would be clarified thus promoting and maintaining stability and security within the couple (Furrow & Palmer, 2007).

2. *Impact on Children in Blended Family Dynamics*
Aside from parents, children are also affected by the switch in roles or the introduction of new family cultures within a blended family. Children in blended families face significant psychological challenges, including shifts in roles, loyalty binds, and the loss of familiar routines (Papernow, 2015; Muwafiqi et al., 2023). Such stressors can manifest as behavioural problems, academic difficulties, and social isolation (Turunen, 2014). Papernow (2015) highlights the emotional and behavioural challenges children face, while Turunen (2014) stresses that these transitions can create stressful environments, potentially leading to academic and behavioural difficulties. Research by Perales et al. (2017) found that children in stepfamilies experience higher rates of mental health issues compared to those in original families, underscoring the need for role clarity and adjustment to new cultural norms.

Moreover, positive family dynamics highly influences the emotional development of children, as the parents are able to be sensitive, responsive, and caring towards their children, allowing them to foster emotion-recognition and emotional regulation (Grevenstein et al., 2019). Interestingly, the children's physical health is also affected by the family dynamics whereby Gunn and Eberhardt (2019) found that children's sleep patterns are associated with family dynamics, particularly when there is mutual support and positive interactions among family members. This indicates that without proper adjustment to the new culture or proper role definition, children are exposed to detrimental consequences.

Children in dysfunctional families are particularly vulnerable, often experiencing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which can result in long-term emotional and cognitive challenges (Deighton et al., 2018). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains how a child's development is shaped by their immediate family environment, making unhealthy family dynamics a significant risk factor for developmental and psychological issues. Research links such dynamics with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and emotional suppression, particularly among young adults (Arora & Dutt, 2024; Shi et al., 2022). One way to overcome this issue is through therapy that focusses on establishing a middle ground where new shared values as a reconstituted family is discussed to foster a new family identity (Furrow & Palmer,

2007). Therefore, it would be beneficial for Z and A to consider family therapy to ensure their children's overall well-being is also in good condition.

3. The Role of Family Dynamics on Psychological Health: Positive and Negative Effects

Family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of relationship security and stress, at the same time, significantly influencing their psychological, behavioural, and physiological health (Jabbari et al., 2023). A healthy positive family environment, marked by supportive communication, understanding, and mutual respect, tends to promote emotional resilience, healthy coping mechanisms, and overall well-being (Thomas et al., 2017). Conversely, negative family dynamics such as frequent conflict, poor communication, or lack of support can lead to increased stress and have adverse effects on both mental and physical health (Jabbari et al., 2023).

Unhealthy family dynamics can lead to the development of ineffective coping mechanisms among family members (Jabbari et al., 2023). Coping mechanisms are crucial for maintaining mental well-being as they enable individuals to manage stress, resolve conflicts, and adapt to challenging situations effectively. These ineffective coping mechanisms can negatively affect an individual's mental health by increasing emotional distress, impairing problem-solving abilities, and reducing overall resilience. For example, individuals who learn to avoid conflict or suppress their emotions in a dysfunctional family setting may struggle with anxiety and depression, as they have not developed healthy ways to address and manage their emotional challenges. As such, Arora and Dutt (2024) noted a positive correlation between dysfunctional family dynamics and elevated depressive symptoms in young adults.

Moreover, Shi et al. (2022) also reported similar findings in which poor family dynamics was associated with depression among adolescents. Hence, these crucial findings highlight the broader mental health repercussions of family dysfunction. This idea is supported by the stress process theory (Pearlin, 1999) which suggests that the positive and negative aspects of a relationship, in this case the family dynamics, can have a significant impact on the well-being of individuals. This finding highlights the critical role that a positive family environment plays in fostering psychological resilience and emotional well-being.

The current case reinforces the relationship between supportive family dynamics and positive mental health outcomes. In this case, Z's mental health improved considerably after embracing healthy family practices, including open communication with her extended family, which provided emotional support during her struggles. The study found that when Z confided in his family about his struggles, the support and understanding from his extended family played a crucial role in enhancing his mental health. These findings underscore the profound impact that a healthy family dynamic can have on the psychological well-being of both individuals and couples.

Addressing Psychological Challenges in the Context of Islamic Family Dynamics

In the current era of globalization and social change, family structures are becoming increasingly diverse, with rising rates of divorce, separation, single parenthood, and blended families (Sweeney, 2010; McLanahan et al., 2013). These shifts have introduced new psychological challenges, including family conflicts and generational gaps in the interpretation of values and Islamic teachings (Sillars et al., 2003). In many cases, caregivers bear the brunt

of these stresses, particularly when caring for family members with mental health issues, further complicating their own emotional well-being (Von Kardorff et al., 2016; Dadson et al., 2018).

These dynamics, often complicated by generational gaps and differing interpretations of Islamic teachings, create conflicts that can hinder open communication and problem-solving within families (Umennuihe et al., 2023).

Addressing mental health issues within the family is often hindered by cultural stigmas, making it difficult to seek help or engage in open discussions about psychological struggles (Arnaez et al., 2020). The stigma surrounding mental health within many cultures further compounds these challenges, discouraging individuals from seeking help. Role conflicts within families, particularly in blended families, can exacerbate these issues, creating tension over parenting approaches and family roles particularly when differing cultural expectations go unacknowledged (Turnbull et al., 2023; Arweck, 2019).

In the context of Islam, there are key principles that can help resolve family conflicts and promote mental well-being. Open, respectful communication fostering honesty and mutual respect can alleviate familial tensions. The Islamic principle of musyawarah (consultation) encourages inclusive decision-making and conflict resolution (Syukur & Bagshaw, 2020). Additionally, integrating self-care practices, spiritual activities, and religious traditions can provide psychological and emotional benefits, promoting family harmony and well-being (Hekmati et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This case showed presentation of common psychological issues such depressive and anxiety symptoms which were predisposed by the dynamic patterns of family background. The extended family provides a comprehensive support network that spans emotional, financial, and spiritual domains. Islamic jurisprudence further codifies these relationships, ensuring that family members fulfill their obligations to one another, while inter-generational support solidifies the extended family's role as the backbone of Islamic society. As family dynamics evolve in modern times, these teachings continue to offer valuable guidance on preserving family unity and ensuring the well-being of all its members. The case demonstrates how integrating psychological theories and Islamic principles can help families navigate the complex emotional landscape of blended family life, promoting both mental health and familial harmony.

Declaration

Conflict of interest
The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Funding
The authors declared that this study had received no financial support.

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