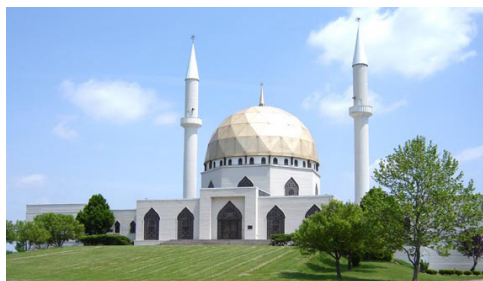


Mental Health in Islam

Ohio's Muslim population is 120,077 or about one percent of the total population, many of whom are new Americans.¹ Mental illness and suicide are not tied to race, economic status, gender, or religion, but Muslim Ohioans face these issues all the same. Therefore, we must ensure that our mental health system of care is accessible to this population, and raise awareness for Muslim mental health in Ohio.

A Closer Look

Ohio's Muslim population is diverse, vibrant, and widespread. A majority of individuals live in Ohio's major metropolitan areas of Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Toledo. Many families immigrated more than a century ago from areas such as Lebanon and Syria, seeking greater economic opportunities.² More recently, immigrants are coming from Somalia and other areas in conflict, seeking refuge. As immigrant Muslims, they must adapt to a new way of life in America that is often much different from their life in their country of origin. For some people, they find it more challenging to get acclimated to their new life in America, and that can take a toll on their mental health. Regardless of their immigration status, Islam is a religious minority and Muslims are highly vulnerable to religious discrimination, which is a risk factor for depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.³



Islamic Center of Greater Toledo

Muslim Youth

Many Muslim young people have reported feeling torn between their parents' cultures and mainstream American culture.⁴ Difficulties with social adjustment may manifest as risk behaviors. In addition, they may be challenged with issues of identity related to their religious or ethnic identity, which may include frustration due to lack of memories of their home country, attachment to their country of origin at the expense of connecting with peers, or detachment from ethnic culture in attempts to avoid emotional triggers.⁵ This strain can cause mental health challenges, that if remain unchecked, can lead to suicidal thoughts and actions.

Resources

- Naseeha Hotline: 1 (866) 627-3342
- The Family and Youth Institute: thefyi.org
- Institute for Muslim Mental Health: muslimmentalhealth.com
- American Muslim Health Professionals: amhp.us
- Islamic Social Services Association: issausa.org

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Barriers to Access

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, Muslim people faced increased discrimination and that has remained true for the past two decades. Islamophobia causes many Muslim Americans to fear for their safety and well-being. In fact, between 2016 and 2020, 60 percent of Muslim Americans reported some level of religious discrimination, surpassing all other religious groups.⁶ These prolonged experiences can cause mental health challenges and suicidal thoughts or actions.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “Nearly one-third of Muslim Americans perceived discrimination in health care settings; being excluded or ignored was the most frequently conveyed type of discrimination.”⁷

In addition to discrimination, Muslim Americans face multiple barriers to accessing quality behavioral health care, including:

- A lack of Muslim mental health professionals
- Language barriers
- Cultural barriers, including stigma and a lack of understanding and education about mental health
- Financial limitations and/or lack of insurance coverage for counseling and other services

There are also religious barriers that prevent Muslims from seeking support. There is a strong misconception that mental health challenges are associated with a lack of connection to God. Some may consider disclosure of mental illness to be “shameful.”⁸

A Path Forward

Stigma and access to care can lead to silence, and because of this, many Muslim Americans never find help. To address these challenges, it will take a community-wide effort and improvements to Ohio’s system of care. Imams (Muslim faith leaders) can play a crucial role in supporting the needs of their communities. However, Imams are less likely than other clergy to have formal counseling training.⁹ By increasing awareness and training among faith leaders, we can begin to change the narrative around mental health.

Increasing the number of Muslim mental health professionals can help meet demand. And, providing increased language interpretation services can allow for even more people to receive care. These are important first steps in ensuring that Ohio’s mental health system of care is accessible and supportive of all faiths, cultures, and identities.

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ABOUT OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

OSPF gives hope to those in crisis, strength to those in the struggle, and comfort to those in grief. OSPF is a non-profit organization that works tirelessly to help all of Ohio’s communities reduce the risk of suicide. Our work includes supporting those impacted by suicide, raising awareness of mental health issues, and coordinating community resources and evidence-based prevention strategies across the state.



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