

Imposter Syndrome: An Islamic Perspective

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What is Imposter Syndrome?

Definition: the feeling of self-doubt in high-achieving individuals

Pathophysiology:

- Shaytan's whispers
- perfectionism
- high-pressure environments
- early childhood dynamics (such as intense pressure to achieve)
- being an outsider or in a minority group in one's field, Islamophobia, racism, etc

Signs/Symptoms:

- Avoid high-demand tasks or challenges
- Experience psychological distress
- Experience burnout
- Undermine own success or dismiss positive feedback
- Experience constant fear about not living up to others' expectations
- Set unrealistic expectations
- Fear of speaking up
- Fear of making mistakes

Self-Doubt: A Universal Experience

We have all been there: Feeling “not enough”, not smart enough, not prepared enough, not deserving enough.

Islam does not dismiss these feelings; it gives us a framework to understand and overcome them.

Even the greatest human being, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), experienced moments of deep self-doubt... and Allah responded with compassion, reassurance, and guidance.

The Pause in Revelation

After the first revelation, the Prophet (PBUH) experienced a pause in revelation for days/months. No revelation. No guidance. No explanation. There was great wisdom behind this.

He feared:

“Has Allah abandoned me?”

“Is He displeased with me?”

A Qurashi woman mocked him: ***“Your Shaytan has abandoned you.”***

This is the *most painful* form of imposter syndrome, feeling unworthy despite being chosen by Allah Himself.

Surah Ad-Duha

(Chapter 93)

- Allah is always with you
- Your worth is not defined by your feelings
- Allah, through this, helped the Prophet PBUH to build his psychological resilience

وَالضُّحَىٰ

By the forenoon.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ

By the night when it darkens.

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ

Your Lord has neither forsaken you
nor hates you.

وَلَلْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ

And indeed the Hereafter is better for
you than the present.

وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ

And verily, your Lord will give you so
that you shall be well-pleased.

أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ

Did He not find you an orphan and give
you a refuge?

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ

And He found you unaware and
guided you?

وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ

And He found you poor and made you
rich?

فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ

Therefore, treat not the orphan with
oppression.

وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ

And repulse not the one who asks.

وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ

And proclaim the grace of your Lord.

Imposter Syndrome: Treatment

Building Psychological Resilience



1. Spiritual Resilience: Worship “on the spot”

Whenever you have feelings of imposter syndrome, in the moment when you have those thoughts, run towards Allah!

1. Isti'3atha
2. Recite the 3 'Quls' to silence Shaytan's whispers
 - Surah Al-Ikhlās, Surah Al-Falaq, and Surah An-Nas
3. Make Duaa to Allah to repel those thoughts/feelings
4. Pray 2 rak'a
5. Renew your intention for the task you're undertaking
6. Make thikr

1. Spiritual Resilience: Worship Anchors

Anchoring yourself to Allah through worship that guards your heart and mind from imposter syndrome

- Protect your salah
- Maintain a daily wird of Qur'an and dhikr
 - Morning and Evening Athkar for protection
- Make duaa specifically for confidence, clarity, and resilience
- Renewing your intention: everything you do becomes a form of ibadah and reinvigorates your sense of purpose
- Recite the 3 'Quls'
 - Surah Al-Ikhlās, Surah Al-Falaq, and Surah An-Nas

Spiritual resilience is not abstract; it is the daily practice of worship that strengthens your heart against self-doubt and Shaytan's mind games.

2. Personal Resilience: Ihsan

Practicing ***Ihsan*** is at the core of cultivating personal resilience

Ihsan = "Worship Allah as if you see Him."

Doing your best, practicing excellence in everything you do, with sincerity, for the sake of Allah.

When you practice Ihsan, you are aligning with the purpose Allah has put you on this Earth for, and this fuels your psychological resilience.

You do your best (Ihsan), and Allah takes care of the rest (Tawakkul)!

2. Personal Resilience: Ihsan

Adopt a growth mindset with Ihsan!

Every challenge is an opportunity to grow closer to Allah.

Mistakes are not proof of inadequacy; they are invitations to Ihsan.

- Don't be afraid to make mistakes; aim to always learn from them. This will help you achieve Ihsan!

Focus on your ultimate goal: overcoming all of the obstacles you face for the sake of Allah. Your purpose is to please Allah and grow closer to Him through everything you do, with Ihsan!

As a Muslim, you have a divine promise that Allah will never let your effort go to waste!

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ
أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا



As for those who believe and do good, We certainly never deny the reward of those who are best in deeds.

3. Social Resilience: Righteous Support



The Prophet (PBUH) built a community that protected each other emotionally and physically through hardship



Build your own community! Surround yourself with Friends/Family/Colleagues who support your growth



Pay it Forward:

Mentor others

Share your experiences

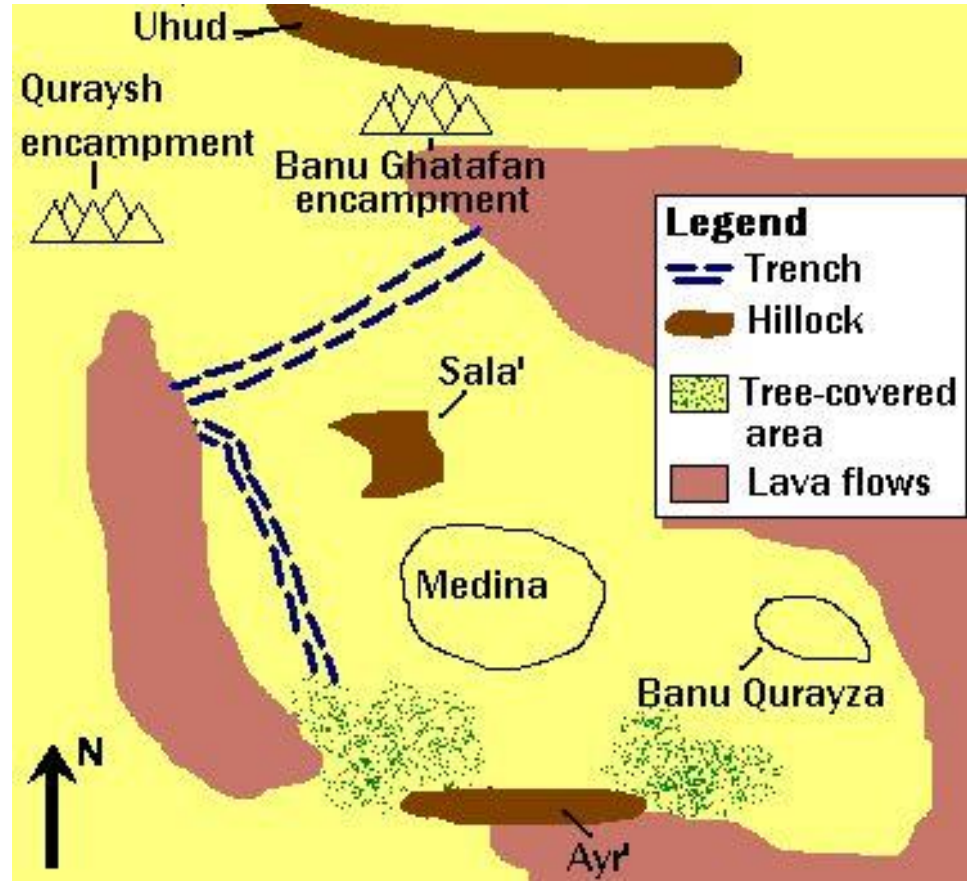
Support your classmates and brethren in Islam



Helping others strengthens your own psychological resilience.

Extreme Case Study: The Battle of the Trench

- 10 000 disbelievers vs 1 500 Muslims
 - Minority in the peninsula
 - Outnumbered
 - But they are with the Truth and the Prophet
 - How did they not succumb to imposter syndrome?
- Salman Al-Farisi: 5 km x 4m x 4m trench in rocky desert in 15 days
- 1 month siege
- All of Medina performs Qiyam Al-layal
- Betrayal of the Jews of Banu Qurayzah from the South
- Prophet prays all night x 7 days
- Agreement between Banu Qurayzah and Quraysh falls apart
- Sandstorm (Surat Al-Ahzab)



Extreme Case Study: The Battle of the Trench

Spiritual Resilience

- Qiyam al-Layl by all in Medina
- Duaa by the Prophet from Isha until Fajr during the last 7 days
- Knowing that Allah was with them even when the odds were against them

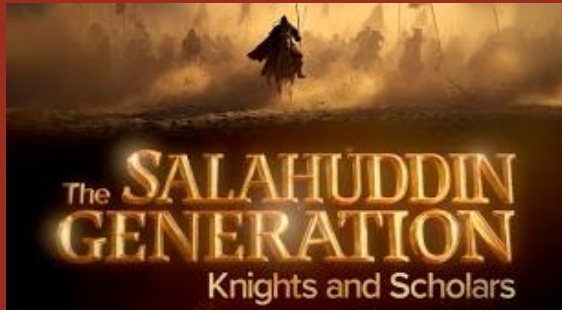
Personal Resilience

- Digging a 5 km trench in a rocky desert in 15 days with Ihsan, testing it
- The Prophet (PBUH) doing the hardest physical labour himself

Social Resilience

- Groups of 10 digging together so no one felt alone
- Singing poetry to lift morale
- The Prophet (PBUH) encouraging them with dua

Extreme Case Study: The Crusade vs Salahuddin



Spiritual Resilience

- Qiyam al-Layl by Salahuddin's entire army
- Salahuddin, the scholars who travelled with him and the entire army would pray in congregation and make dua
- Yaqeen that Allah was with them even when the odds were against them

Personal Resilience

- Excellent military preparation and strategy
- Ihsan in his character: compassionate despite facing a brutal enemy (staying true to Prophetic character)

Social Resilience

- Salahuddin surrounded himself with scholars, strategists and experts, capitalizing on the concept of Shuraa as the Prophet PBUH did
- Built cohesion within his army regardless of rank by inspiring them through his steadfastness and compassion, uniting them towards one goal: liberating Jerusalem and defending Islam and the Muslims

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أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا ﴿٣٠﴾

As for those who believe and do good, We certainly never deny the reward of those who are best in deeds.

Surat Al Kahf

What is your test?

This dunya is full of tests, that is the nature of Dunya.

One of those is imposter syndrome. Just like the Prophet PBUH and his companions overcame the most impossible of tests, through this, he taught us how to overcome ours.

Build your Psychological Resilience



With these three pillars,
you can overcome imposter
syndrome and rise to your
full potential, *for the sake
of Allah*

Remember: Allah is Always with You!

Story of Prophet Musa and Harun going to the Pharaoh

﴿٤٥﴾ قَالَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا نَخَافُ أَنْ يَفْرُطَ عَلَيْنَا أَوْ أَنْ يَطْغَىٰ

They both pleaded, "Our Lord! We fear that he may be quick to harm us or act tyrannically."

﴿٤٦﴾ قَالَ لَا تَخَافَا إِنِّي مَعَكُمَا أَسْمِعُ وَأَرَىٰ

Allah reassured them, "Have no fear! I am with you, hearing and seeing."

Allah is Always with You!

Just as Allah reassured Prophet Musa and Harun when facing Pharaoh, He reassures you:

You are not alone.

You are not inadequate.

You are not an imposter.

Your journey in medicine is part of your worship.

Your struggles are seen.

Your effort is recorded.

Your growth is rewarded.

Imposter Syndrome: An Islamic Perspective

BREAKOUT ROOMS: THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN USE THE
FRAMEWORK FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE TO OVERCOME ANY
OBSTACLES, ESPECIALLY IMPOSTER SYNDROME