

Explanation of psychological disorder between the popular-cultural perspective and the psycho-pathological aspect

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the traditional perception of psychological disorder, including the concept and cultural interpretation that encompasses a set of old beliefs still explaining psychological disorder in Arab societies as related to cultural concepts like magic, envy, possession, and the evil eye. On the other hand, some attribute this disorder to its scientific psychological explanation according to each psychological school, whether it is the psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive-social, or humanistic approach. Each school has its proponents who view psychological disorder as a set of symptoms and behaviors defined according to a clinical framework, also interpreted as a lack of harmony between the person, the body, the environment, and their cognitive perceptions. This led us to conduct this study, which aims to uncover the concept of psychological disorder between psychological explanation and the popular cultural perspective.

Keywords : psychological disorder, psychological interpretation ,popular cultural perspective

Introduction:

Since ancient times, humans have sought to explain the events and phenomena surrounding them within the framework of the culture and environment in which they live. They have derived their cognitive perceptions, cultural representations, and treatment methods from various popular and cultural sources. Despite the current scientific progress, the spread of health awareness, and the development of various medical sciences, these beliefs have not been entirely eradicated. A large segment of Algerian society still relies on its diverse cultural heritage in its perceptions, concepts, and interpretations of psychological disorders and illnesses. In this sense, we can say that disorder and

treatment constitute both a cultural reality and a medical scientific reality.

In studying perceptions of psychological disorder, it is not limited to modern concepts only, but also includes traditional, popular cultural beliefs that influence how individuals think and understand human phenomena and processes. These perceptions include traditional ideas and beliefs related to understanding and interpreting psychological disorders, as well as identifying their primary causes. These perceptions stem from the individual and collective contributions made by ordinary people and form a set of ideas based on personal experiences about various concepts and beliefs related to psychological disorders. An individual's

cultural background plays a significant role in their understanding of psychological disorder, as their perceptions and responses

(Mokhtar Maksem 2002) highlighted in his study on popular beliefs regarding mental and neurological illnesses that the popular perception of epilepsy differs significantly from the traditional medical model. The popular belief is that invisible and intangible forces cause the illness by penetrating the human body and settling in one of its organs, such as the head, for example. Traditional healers focus on avoiding disturbing these forces and appeasing them, rather than attempting to treat them as modern medicine does. Ahmed Fitas also explained in his 2021 study on cultural beliefs guiding the treatment of adults with psychological disorders that these beliefs play a fundamental role in understanding the causes of the disorder and interpreting it, as well as in determining the appropriate therapeutic approach. The study also found that the family has a significant influence on the patient's decisions and therapeutic directions (Ahmed Fitas, 2021).

In this research paper, we will attempt to address some of the key topics that have captured the interest of specialists, whether in psychology, sociology, or medical sociology. These topics include health and disorder, and how this disorder is interpreted through the lens of popular cultural background and its perspective, as well as through the psychopathological perspective and its schools of thought. This leads us to pose the following question: How is psychological disorder interpreted between scientific psychological reality and popular cultural belief?

to these disorders are influenced by the values, beliefs, and traditions they grow up with.

Study Objectives:

- To attempt to identify the impact of popular cultural beliefs in interpreting psychological disorders, as well as to uncover the effect of psychopathological interpretation on these disorders.
- To understand the difference between the popular cultural interpretation of the disorder and the psychopathological interpretation.
- To try to identify and determine the pattern and methods of treatment in both directions.

Terminological Definitions for the Study:

Discussing terminology requires us to examine a set of definitions to clearly define the verbal and conceptual boundaries of the concepts involved. Therefore, we must address the following:

The Concept of Health: The definitions of health vary according to different schools, directions, and theories. The following definition combines the social, psychological, and physical state of the individual. In 1984, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as the sum of social, personal, and physical resources that enable an individual to achieve their ambitions and fulfill their needs (Berry and Aldoibi: 1989). The organization also indicated that health is a state of well-being that allows every individual to realize their own potential, cope with the stresses of daily life, work effectively and productively, and contribute

positively to their community (**WHO: 2001**).

Definition of Mental Health: There are several definitions of mental health, and it is difficult to agree on a comprehensive definition of this concept due to the different scientific schools to which the definition's authors belong. Therefore, we will present the definition that we rely on, which is the definition provided by the World Health Organization (WHO). The organization emphasized that mental health is an integral part of overall health. It defined mental health as "a state of complete physical, psychological, social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or disability. Mental health involves psychological, physical, and social functions, which are interconnected and do not operate independently of each other" (**WHO Report: 2005**).

Adolf Meyer, who was the first to use this term, also defined mental health as the development of personal and social behavior towards normalcy and the prevention of psychological disorders. Mental health means an individual's adaptation to the external world in a way that ensures a sense of satisfaction and enables them to effectively deal with various problems (**Al-Daheri: 2005**). It is also defined as the ability to oscillate between doubt and certainty (**Ahmed Okasha: 2008**).

However, at times, mental health is subjected to a set of disorders that affect it, disrupting the individual's ability to reconcile their internal state with the external environment, thereby causing psychological disturbance.

The Concept of Psychological Disorder:

In a report issued by the World Health Organization (**WHO in April 2018**), published on its official website www.who.int, the organization confirmed the existence of many psychological disorders characterized by a variety of symptoms, some of which are similar, while others differ. These disorders involve a range of unusual thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, as well as abnormal relationships with others.

Psychological disorder is also defined according to the 10th classification of mental and behavioral disorders (ICD-10) as "a set of symptoms or behaviors that can be identified through observation and clinical examination, often accompanied by physical dysfunctions" (**Pull, C.B.: 1992**).

It is also defined according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), as "a psychological disorder consisting of a set of behavioral, psychological, or physical symptoms that appear in an individual as a result of several factors. These changes can be easily observed as they indicate a dysfunction in one of the bodily functions" (**DSM-5: 2013**). It can also be defined as a behavioral and psychological pattern that emerges in an individual as a result of experiencing distress or disability. These disorders represent an abnormal development of mental skills, and they are believed to occur due to issues in brain neurons. This is attributed to the complex interaction between genetic factors and life experiences the individual goes through (**KendraCherry: 2018**).

The Popular Cultural Concept of Psychological Disorder:

The nature of psychological illnesses differs significantly from other health issues, particularly in Eastern and Arab societies. In these communities, psychological disorders are surrounded by many concepts and beliefs that often add an element of mystery. These illnesses are often attributed to punishment for wrongdoings or the influence of hidden forces such as magic, jinn, and envy. These perceptions are heavily influenced by the cultural and social background in these countries. Arab psychological studies indicate that these beliefs affect how individuals deal with psychological illnesses (**Kamal Hassan: 1997**). Before addressing the cultural concept and the concept of psychological disorder in this context, we must first define: What is popular culture?

The Concept of Popular Culture:

Popular culture is a common topic in social and human studies, and it refers to a set of practices, ideas, and customs that prevail among the general public in a particular society. This concept encompasses all aspects of daily life for individuals. Popular culture is often seen as the opposite of high culture or the culture of elites, which pertains to the arts, literature, and theories practiced and consumed by the educated elite. John Storey, in his book "Cultural Theory and Popular Culture," discussed how popular culture is shaped through social and political processes. He emphasizes the importance of the historical and cultural context in understanding how this culture develops and spreads. He also noted that it is not static but constantly

changing and influenced by economic and political factors.

The term "popular culture" is a compound of two words: "culture" and "popular." Edward Tylor, in his book "Primitive Culture" (1871), defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities or habits acquired by man as a member of society." Meanwhile, Edward Hall, in his book "The Hidden Dimension" (1966), defined it as "a pattern of learned and shared behaviors that form a framework through which human behavior can be interpreted and predicted." Raymond Williams, in his book "Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society" (1976), described culture as "a complete way of life for a particular society, including patterns of behavior, customs, beliefs, and symbols." These definitions illustrate that culture is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various aspects of individuals' and societies' lives, including everything from values and beliefs to daily practices and social interactions.

As for the concept of "popular," it is considered an adjective derived from the term "people," which gives it both substance and spirit in terms of linguistic expression, significance, and symbolism. "Popular" is a characteristic of everything that comes from the people in terms of speech, practice, behavior, and perceptions of life and things (**Nassar Christian: 1998**).

Key Popular Cultural Classifications of Psychological Disorders:

Ackerknecht pointed out that every culture has its own perspective and understanding of disorder, noting that illness and its treatment, despite being biological processes, are influenced by cultural realities. This means that the concept of illness is primarily a cultural concept that varies from one society to another and from one culture to another. This idea is supported by many scholars, including Foster (1978), who indicated that health and illness are cultural phenomena in addition to being biological. Therefore, to study medical practices in traditional societies, they must be examined within the cultural context of these societies (**Nabila Ibrahim: 1967**). Disorder is a relative concept that varies between cultures, with each culture having its own unique interpretations and beliefs. Based on this context, we present the most important popular cultural classifications of psychological disorders, which are as follows:

Jinn in Cultural Belief:

(**Badra Moatassim Maimouni 2015**) explained that mental and psychological illnesses evoke a mysterious fear in some people, and this fear is often rooted in traditional beliefs related to concepts such as jinn and magic. These beliefs, which some people still hold, date back to earlier historical periods and continue to influence some individuals despite scientific and rational progress in certain societies. This influence is evident in some cultures, where many psychological phenomena are attributed to the presence of jinn, which are considered a social and religious reality. The methods used by these hidden forces to possess a targeted person, according to

popular cultural belief, have a set of characteristics that we explain as follows:

1. **The Possessed:** This refers to a person whose body is controlled by jinn or invisible beings, leading to changes in their behavior and thinking. The person becomes as if they are inhabited by these beings, which results in a transformation of their original personality and replacement with another personality characterized by symptoms such as fainting, trembling, hallucinations, delirium, confusion, disjointed thoughts, incoherent speech, and strange claims of knowing the unseen. The affected person often does not exhibit violent behavior towards others. In psychology, this condition is known as "dissociative identity disorder" (**Mesoum Leila: 2014**).
2. **The Struck:** This refers to a person who is believed to have been physically struck by jinn. It is said that the individual has been hit or forcefully dragged or has fallen to the ground. This event happens at lightning speed and often occurs in watery or abandoned places, or dumps. The usual time for such incidents is between the afternoon and evening, a period when these creatures are thought to spread. The severity of the strike depends on the extent of harm done to the jinn and the location and timing of the incident. Symptoms that appear in the struck person include anxiety, bewilderment, shock, and a state of excitement without losing spatial or temporal orientation. This harm

may result in sudden paralysis of a body part, loss of hearing or sight, paralysis of the lips, or facial distortion. Possession of the body in the struck state is considered more severe than in the possessed state.

3. **The Epileptic:** This refers to a person who suffers from recurrent seizures due to possession by jinn, which leads to their collapse to the ground due to fainting. This condition is accompanied by convulsive movements and requires intervention from those around the individual, often using a key to aid them and restore them to their normal state (**Mesoum Leila: 2014**).
4. **The Bewitched:** This refers to a person who has been subjected to a set of superstitious rituals that involve beliefs in supernatural powers aimed at influencing individuals and communities. These rituals are performed using incantations, spells, and knots, often leading to negative effects on the person and sometimes positive effects. The symptoms of magic are similar to those of possession in popular beliefs, where sudden psychological and physical disorders, such as the condition of being "bound" (a form of paralysis), are linked to black magic used for harm and revenge (**Samia Hassan Al-Saati: 1983**).
5. **The Evil Eye in Popular Belief:** The evil eye is a cultural phenomenon associated with popular beliefs, where it is thought to cause psychological and physical illnesses and affect individuals and

communities on a broad scale. This concept involves the belief in the existence of supernatural powers capable of influencing daily life. It is derived from cultural discourse and traditional healing practices and is particularly linked to individuals with unusual physical traits, such as blindness or crossed eyes (**Sabouh Rashid: 2000**).

Treatment of Popular Cultural Classifications of Psychological Disorders:

1. Ruqyah (Spiritual Healing): The phenomenon of treatment through spiritual healing (Ruqyah) has become increasingly prominent in Algeria recently. This form of treatment involves reciting the Holy Quran over individuals who are believed to be afflicted by possession or magic. People who have memorized the Quran recite it over patients to eliminate psychological or spiritual influences that are thought to be caused by jinn interference. This method is part of religious and spiritual beliefs in some cultures and aims to provide healing and psychological comfort to those being treated.

2. Visiting the Talib (Spiritual Healers): Spiritual healers, known as "Talib" (students of metaphysical knowledge), have a unique approach to magic, exorcism, and breaking spells. They avoid using traditional magical methods such as human or animal secretions and unclean substances like poisons. Instead, they rely on purity and blessings, using techniques that focus on cleansing the exterior of the body, such as using herbs, minerals, blessed water, and incense. These healers specialize in blessing

and purifying individuals from harm without affecting their internal aspects. Their practices also involve passing down their blessed knowledge and expertise from generation to generation, making them specialized healers who seek spiritual healing and recovery.

3. Herbal Medicine: Herbal medicine is one of the oldest and most common forms of traditional medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) has noted that herbal medicine serves as the primary form of treatment for about one-third of the world's population. Its success is based on scientific experience and comprehensive knowledge of the properties and therapeutic benefits of plants. Medicinal herbs contain active substances that are used in pharmaceutical production, and they should be used according to specific guidelines and rules, with full attention to potential side effects and dosage control. It is recommended to handle medicinal herbs as carefully as conventional medications to obtain maximum benefit while ensuring user safety (**Amira Mansour Youssef Ali: 1999**).

After reviewing the basic cultural foundations of the classification of psychological disorders and their treatment methods, we now turn to the explanatory models of psychopathological approaches and how they are treated.

1. Neurotic Psychological Disorders: Neurosis is a type of psychological disorder characterized by excessive fear and anxiety, which negatively impacts personality and nervous balance. Individuals suffering from neurosis experience physical and psychological symptoms such as obsessive-

compulsive thoughts without reaching hallucinations, delusions, or a loss of connection with reality. Their behavior is typically socially acceptable, despite the unconscious conflicts affecting them. Neurosis can significantly affect the quality of daily life, hindering the ability to adapt to life situations and potentially leading to suicidal thoughts or violent behavior in some cases (**Raad Iskandar and Arkan Bethune: 2022**).

2. Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD): Also known by the acronym BPD in English or TPB in French, borderline personality disorder is characterized by intense emotional instability, impulsivity, and a clear lack of self-image and personal identity stability. Those affected by this disorder struggle to maintain stable and tension-free relationships due to their mood swings and constant self-criticism. Individuals with this disorder exhibit extreme behavior, leading to instability in all aspects of life, including important life decisions, personal and professional relationships. Additionally, they may experience doubt, hesitation, and confusion in decision-making, which increases their social and emotional isolation. These individuals need intensive psychological support to enhance emotional and psychological stability and improve the quality of their personal and professional lives (**Delbrouck: 2015**).

3. Psychotic Psychological Disorders: Psychotic disorders cause serious and abnormal patterns of thinking and perception. Individuals affected by these disorders may lose contact with reality and experience hallucinations and delusions. Hallucinations involve perceiving unreal

things through the senses, including touch, sight, and hearing. Delusions occur when a person believes in things that are not real, such as thinking someone is stalking them or receiving visual messages through the radio. These disorders vary in duration; some persist for life, while others last for a short period due to drug-induced hallucinations or substance abuse. Psychosis is often the main symptom, but some disorders are classified based on their ability to trigger psychotic episodes in an individual. Other disorders, such as severe depression and bipolar disorder, can also cause short-term psychotic episodes.

From the above, we can say that neurotic, borderline, and psychotic psychological disorders each have a specific explanation based on the individual's pathological structure. Therefore, they usually require a specialized psychological approach in therapy, including these methodologies.

Mental Medicine: This is a medical specialty that deals with mental disorders of psychological or organic origin, such as depression and psychosis, within institutions and specialized centers for mental medicine. Treatment typically involves administering a range of medications to the patient, such as antipsychotics for treating schizophrenia, which help calm the patient and eliminate hallucinations and delusions. Additionally, there are mood stabilizers, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety medications (**Nahla Shuja: 2009**).

Psychotherapy: Psychotherapy begins with diagnosing the disorder, classifying it, and understanding its causes in order to select the appropriate therapeutic approach.

There are various approaches, including psychoanalytic therapy, behavioral therapy, cognitive therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Other methods include systemic therapy, humanistic therapy focused on the client, and family therapy, where the therapist becomes part of the family system to treat it, creating a new system that influences the family members.

Conclusion:

Mental health has become indispensable for maintaining quality of life and personal well-being. Mental health is related to emotional stability, psychological balance, and the ability to cope with a range of challenges and pressures in a society increasingly reliant on speed. Mental health is influenced by various factors such as genetics, environment, personal, and individual factors, which can directly or indirectly affect a person's mental state. It is essential to understand these factors and how they impact mental health to promote a healthy and balanced life. Additionally, culture and upbringing play a significant role in shaping and understanding health, as the concept of health may differ from one culture to another, one environment to another, and one society to another.

This makes promoting psychological awareness crucial for ensuring mental and emotional stability. Sometimes, mental health is challenged by a disorder that negatively affects the individual's psychological harmony. Some people attribute this disorder to religious, cultural, and popular beliefs, while others interpret it in a logical and scientific way, relying on scientific methods and rational analyses. Based on what has been discussed, it can be

said that the dual interpretation of psychological disorders is largely influenced by the individual's culture, popular beliefs, and the scientific and common knowledge they hold regarding the disorder, which is tied to a wide range of interconnected factors.

Recommendations and Suggestions:

- Encouraging psychological studies that focus on traditional treatment practices in our country is a fundamental step towards understanding deeply rooted cultural phenomena.
- Enhancing the effectiveness of treatments provided and making them more aligned with the cultural values of the community.
- Supporting psychological studies that address traditional treatment practices in our country is a necessary step to understand deeply ingrained cultural phenomena.
- Highlighting these studies due to their impact on cultural traditions and practices related to mental health and treatment.
- Working towards integrating modern knowledge and methods to improve the effectiveness of treatments and ensure they are more in line with the cultural values of the community.

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