

EXPLORE NON-PHARMACOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS, INCLUDING QURANIC THERAPY, MUSIC THERAPY, AND RELAXATION TECHNIQUES, FOR MANAGING ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND STRESS

Sana Parveen¹, Javairia², Zatoon Bibi³, Salma Bibi⁴

¹Clinical psychologist (Advanced International Hospital, Islamabad) Pakistan

²Alumni, University of Wah, Pakistan

³M.Phil. Scholar, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁴Clinical psychologist, Wah Cantt, Pakistan

¹psana7758@gmail.com, ²javairiazaima@gmail.com, ³zatoon2001@gmail.com,

⁴salmaaliyar8620@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Sana Parveen

Abstract

This qualitative research explores the lived experiences of individuals using non-pharmacological interventions specifically Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation techniques to cope with anxiety, depression, and stress. Mental health issues are increasingly prevalent due to rapid social change, lifestyle pressures, and uncertainty in the modern world. Many individuals, especially in culturally religious settings, prefer methods that align with their beliefs and values rather than relying only on medication. This study aims to understand how these interventions affect emotions, thought patterns, and daily life. 18 participants (aged 19–62) shared their personal journeys through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis revealed seven main themes: (1) Spiritual and religious coping through Quranic therapy, (2) Emotional regulation and self-expression through music, (3) Body–mind connection and physiological calmness through relaxation, (4) Accessibility and cultural acceptance, (5) Personalization and integration, (6) Psychological and social benefits, and (7) Challenges and limitations. Participants reported feeling calmer, more spiritually connected, and emotionally balanced after consistent practice. Some also noted improvement in sleep, concentration, and relationships. The study concludes that non-pharmacological interventions can serve as culturally sensitive, cost-effective, and empowering ways to manage anxiety and depression when used alongside or as alternatives to medical treatment.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and chronic stress have emerged as serious global challenges that impact individuals' emotional stability, work performance, and overall quality of life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in every eight people worldwide experiences a mental

disorder, with depression being one of the leading causes of disability. The increasing prevalence of these issues highlights the urgent need for accessible, effective, and culturally sensitive interventions.

Traditional pharmacological treatments such as antidepressants and anxiolytics are effective for

many individuals, but they are often associated with side effects, dependency risks, or limited access due to financial constraints and social stigma. Furthermore, in many cultural contexts including Islamic societies individuals prefer treatment approaches that harmonize with their spiritual beliefs and values. This has led to a growing interest in non-pharmacological, holistic strategies that nurture not just the mind, but also the body and spirit.

Non-pharmacological interventions refer to therapeutic techniques that do not rely on medication but instead focus on behavioral, psychological, and spiritual practices to promote mental wellbeing. Among these, **Quranic therapy**, **music therapy**, and **relaxation techniques** stand out as particularly meaningful approaches due to their accessibility, cultural fit, and evidence-based benefits.

Quranic therapy involves the recitation, listening, and reflection on verses from the Holy Quran. This practice provides a deep sense of comfort, purpose, and spiritual connection, reducing emotional turmoil by strengthening faith and trust in divine wisdom. For many Muslims, Quranic therapy is not only a form of worship but also a method of emotional healing, as the rhythmic recitation and divine words evoke peace and mindfulness.

Music therapy uses sound, melody, and rhythm to regulate mood, reduce tension, and promote self-expression. Research shows that listening to soothing music can lower heart rate, reduce cortisol levels, and activate positive emotional responses in the brain. Participants often describe music as a “companion” that helps them express feelings they cannot articulate with words. It creates an emotional release, reduces isolation, and enhances self-awareness.

Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation are widely recognized for their calming effects on the nervous system. They lower physiological arousal, promote mental clarity, and enhance the ability to cope with stress. These techniques empower individuals to regain control over their body’s response to anxiety and maintain emotional balance.

Together, these three interventions spiritual, emotional, and physical represent a holistic framework for mental health management. They enable individuals to connect with their inner selves, build resilience, and cultivate peace in both the heart and mind. As modern life continues to exert pressure on mental wellbeing, integrating these culturally and spiritually grounded interventions into mental health care becomes increasingly essential.

This research aims to explore how individuals use Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation practices to manage anxiety, depression, and stress. It seeks to uncover the lived experiences behind these practices how they are used, what benefits they bring, and what challenges individuals face. By analyzing personal narratives, this study contributes to the growing understanding of how faith-based and culturally relevant therapeutic approaches can complement conventional mental health care systems.

Conceptual Framework

1. Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)

CBT suggests that negative thoughts and beliefs contribute to emotional distress. Quranic therapy aligns with CBT principles by helping individuals reframe thoughts through spiritual reflection and positive self-talk grounded in faith. Listening or reciting verses from the Quran helps individuals replace fear and hopelessness with faith and gratitude.

2. Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) Theory

PNI explores how psychological factors affect the immune system and physical health. Relaxation and music therapy both influence the body’s stress response by lowering cortisol levels, stabilizing heart rate, and improving immune function. Participants’ accounts of feeling physically lighter and calmer reflect this mind-body link.

3. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow, psychological growth requires fulfilling needs from safety to self-actualization. Quranic and music therapy address higher needs spirituality, belonging, and self-

expression while relaxation techniques meet safety and physiological needs by calming the body.

4. Biopsychosocial Model

This model suggests that health is influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Non-pharmacological methods work across all levels reducing biological stress, improving psychological resilience, and strengthening social/spiritual connections.

The framework integrates these theories to show how spiritual (Quranic), emotional (music), and physical (relaxation) interventions complement each other. Together, they promote holistic wellbeing by addressing the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and physiological dimensions of mental health.

Methodology

A qualitative phenomenological design was used to capture the depth of participants' feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Eighteen adults (10 women and 8 men) aged between 19 and 62 were selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their experience with at least one of the interventions. Some had used them for several months, while others had been practicing for years. Diversity in age, gender, occupation, and education was ensured to capture a range of perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted both in person and via online video calls. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Open-ended questions encouraged storytelling and reflection, such as:

- How did you start using this practice?
- What changes have you noticed in your emotional or physical state?
- How often do you use it, and in what situations?
- What challenges or barriers have you faced?
- How does your family or community view your use of this practice?

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework. Initially, 120 open codes were identified and grouped into broader categories. Researcher triangulation ensured credibility and accuracy of the themes.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any time. The research adhered to ethical standards for qualitative studies.

Results

The findings from this study reveal that non-pharmacological interventions collectively provide a comprehensive approach to managing anxiety, depression, and stress. Participants reported that Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation techniques worked synergistically to enhance emotional, spiritual, and physiological wellbeing. Spiritual practices fostered inner peace and resilience, music offered emotional release and mood regulation, and relaxation techniques promoted mind-body balance. Accessibility, cultural acceptance, and personalization facilitated consistent engagement, while psychological and social benefits included improved relationships, self-awareness, and social connectedness. Despite occasional challenges such as lack of guidance and irregular practice, these interventions collectively empowered participants to actively manage their mental health and cultivate a sense of control and fulfillment. This integrative effect demonstrates that these non-pharmacological strategies can complement traditional mental health care by addressing multiple dimensions of wellbeing simultaneously.

Table 1:

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Spiritual Healing through Quranic Therapy	Connection with Allah, Inner peace, Faith-based coping	Recitation as comfort, Reflection, Divine trust, Hope, Gratitude, Reduced anxiety
Emotional Expression through Music Therapy	Emotional release, enhancement, Memory and identity	Mood and Soothing music, Emotional regulation, Positive memories, Catharsis, Self-expression
Mind Body Calmness through Relaxation Techniques	Physical relaxation, control, Sleep improvement	Breathing Deep breathing, Meditation, Guided imagery, Improved focus, Reduced physiological tension
Accessibility and Acceptance	Cultural Affordability, Community support	Cultural fit, Easy to practice, No cost, Social approval, Familiarity with practices
Personalization and Integration	Daily routine, Combining therapies, Self-directed healing	Quran, music, breathing, Tailored use, Flexibility in timing, Consistency
Psychological and Benefits	Social Improved Emotional awareness	relationships; Calmness, Empathy, Self-control, Better Self-communication, Confidence
Challenges and Limitations	Motivation issues, perceptions, Religious concerns	Family Irregular practice, Social disapproval, Confusion about music, Lack of guidance

Table 1 shows the major themes, subthemes and codes.

Theme 1

Spiritual Healing through Quranic Therapy

Participants described Quranic therapy as their primary source of peace and hope. Many shared that the act of recitation or listening to verses soothed their emotional distress and replaced fear with faith.

“When I feel anxious, I recite Surah Al-Rehman. It instantly calms my heart. I feel like Allah is listening to me,” (Participant 5, Female, 29).

“I used to overthink everything, but when I listen to Quran before sleeping, I feel a shield around me. My sleep has improved,” (Participant 3, Male, 24).

“Sometimes I just put on Surah Yaseen in the morning, and it gives me energy and direction for the whole day,” (Participant 12, Female, 35).

Participants reflected that Quranic therapy gave them meaning in suffering, helping them accept difficulties as part of divine wisdom.

“Before, I used to feel lost. Now, I remind myself that everything is part of Allah’s plan,” (Participant 9, Male, 36).

“The verses remind me of patience. I used to feel like giving up, but now I find strength in prayer,” (Participant 7, Female, 41).

This theme reflects how faith acts as a form of cognitive reappraisal similar to CBT. Spiritual reflection helped replace negative, fear-based thoughts with positive, faith-driven interpretations.

Theme 2:

Emotional Expression through Music Therapy

Music therapy allowed participants to express emotions that were otherwise suppressed. Many described music as a safe emotional outlet, especially for those uncomfortable sharing feelings verbally.

“I play soft instrumental music when I feel low. It’s like my soul breathes again,” (Participant 2, Female, 22).

“When I listen to old songs, it brings back happy memories and I feel lighter,” (Participant 11, Male, 40).

“Music gives me a way to express sadness. I cry while listening and feel relieved afterward,” (Participant 10, Female, 26).

Some participants highlighted that even religious music, like nasheeds or Quranic recitations with rhythm, helped elevate their mood.

“I don’t listen to songs much, but Quranic recitation in a soft tone feels like music to my heart,” (Participant 4, Male, 33).

Music therapy supported emotional regulation and mindfulness. Participants described it as helping them “stay in the moment” and “clear their thoughts,” which corresponds with theories of emotional catharsis and neuropsychological relaxation.

Theme 3:

Mind-Body Calmness through Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation practices such as breathing exercises, guided imagery, and mindfulness meditation helped participants gain control over their physical symptoms of anxiety and stress.

“When I feel panic coming, I close my eyes, breathe deeply, and repeat ‘I am safe’. It helps me avoid anxiety attacks,” (Participant 8, Female, 27).

“At first I didn’t believe deep breathing could help, but after a week, I felt more in control of my emotions,” (Participant 6, Male, 31).

“Sometimes I sit in silence, light a candle, and just focus on my breathing. It feels like my body and soul are reconnecting,” (Participant 13, Female, 43).

Participants also noticed improvement in sleep patterns and focus.

“I used to have insomnia, but after doing breathing exercises before bed, I sleep peacefully now,” (Participant 13, Male, 32).

“I’m more focused during work; even my headaches have reduced,” (Participant 1, Female, 45).

Theme 4:

Accessibility and Cultural Acceptance

Participants emphasized that non-pharmacological interventions were appealing because they were accessible, inexpensive, and culturally relevant. These approaches required minimal resources and could be practiced in the comfort of one’s home.

“Listening to Quran or doing relaxation doesn’t cost anything. It fits my lifestyle,” (Participant 1, Female, 45).

“You don’t have to be rich to take care of your mental health. Quran and breathing are free, and they work,” (Participant 14, Male, 38).

Many noted that these practices are deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions, which made them socially acceptable and supported by families.

“In my house, everyone listens to Quran recitation in the morning. It creates such a peaceful start to our day,” (Participant 9, Female, 28).

“My parents are not very open to therapy, but when I told them I was doing Quranic recitation for calmness, they were proud,” (Participant 12, Male, 30).

Participants also expressed that these approaches helped remove the stigma often associated with mental health treatment.

“People look down on you when you say you go to a psychologist. But if you say you recite Quran or meditate, everyone supports it,” (Participant 11, Female, 33).

This theme highlights the socio-cultural compatibility of non-pharmacological interventions, making them viable alternatives to medication or formal therapy in conservative societies.

Theme 5:

Personalization and Integration

Participants described how they combined various therapies to create personalized coping strategies. Rather than following a fixed pattern, individuals adapted these methods to their emotional and spiritual needs.

"I recite Quran after Fajr, play soft music during work, and do deep breathing at night," (Participant 16, Male, 30).

"Sometimes I do all three in one day. Quran heals my spirit, music relaxes my emotions, and breathing helps my body," (Participant 2, Female, 21).

"I made my own playlist of nasheeds and instrumental music that reminds me of peace. I use it when I feel down," (Participant 4, Female, 26).

Several participants mentioned that flexibility was key to sustaining the habit.

"I don't follow a strict schedule. Some days I just focus on breathing, other days I listen to Quranic verses. It depends on what I need," (Participant 5, Female, 29).

This personalization reflects the concept of self-directed healing, where individuals actively design their own recovery process by combining methods that resonate with their lifestyle and belief system. It also mirrors the holistic model of care, addressing emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects simultaneously.

Theme 6:

Psychological and Social Benefits

Participants reported significant improvements in emotional regulation, patience, empathy, and communication. They felt calmer and more resilient when facing stress.

"After I started Quranic recitation, I became more patient with my family," (Participant 7, Female, 38).

"I used to react aggressively when stressed, but now I take deep breaths and handle situations better," (Participant 10, Male, 29).

"I feel emotionally lighter and more balanced. I don't take things personally anymore," (Participant 12, Female, 33).

Socially, participants noted that these interventions helped them build stronger relationships and connect with others more meaningfully.

"I've learned to listen more and talk less. My communication has improved a lot," (Participant 9, Male, 27).

"When I practice relaxation, I become more mindful of others' emotions too," (Participant 3, Female, 22).

Some participants described experiencing spiritual upliftment and social belonging as part of their emotional healing.

"The Quran gives me peace, but it also connects me to my community. When we recite together, I feel like we all heal as one," (Participant 14, Female, 40).

This theme connects with the bio psychosocial model, illustrating how emotional and social wellbeing are interconnected. Improved inner calm led to more positive social interactions and better emotional intelligence.

Theme 7:

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the benefits, participants faced several barriers and limitations. The most common were inconsistent practice, family disapproval of certain methods (especially music), and uncertainty about religious boundaries.

"I want to practice regularly, but sometimes my work schedule doesn't allow it," (Participant 15, Female, 37).

"My family doesn't approve of music therapy, so I use instrumental sounds only," (Participant 10, Female, 26).

"At first, I didn't know which relaxation method to follow, so I kept switching between apps," (Participant 6, Male, 31).

Participants also expressed a lack of professional guidance or structured programs to help sustain these practices.

"If someone could guide me or make a plan, I would follow it more regularly," (Participant 11, Female, 33).

Some mentioned doubts about combining religious and modern techniques.

"I was confused if meditation is allowed in Islam, but my counselor said intention matters, so now I do it peacefully," (Participant 5, Female, 29).

Finally, a few participants noted that the absence of immediate results sometimes made them lose motivation.

"When I don't feel instant relief, I stop for a few days. It's hard to stay consistent," (Participant 9, Male, 24).

These challenges emphasize the need for structured awareness programs, faith-based counseling, and community workshops to encourage regular and informed practice.

The findings of this qualitative research reveal that non-pharmacological interventions specifically Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation techniques play a vital role in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress while promoting overall mental and emotional wellbeing. Through thematic analysis of participants' lived experiences, seven major themes emerged, each reflecting unique aspects of healing and coping.

Quranic therapy emerged as a powerful spiritual tool that fostered inner peace, hope, and trust in divine wisdom. Participants described the recitation and listening of Quranic verses as soothing and spiritually uplifting, helping them to reinterpret challenges as part of Allah's plan. This spiritual engagement provided comfort, reduced fear, and enhanced resilience.

Music therapy offered participants an emotional outlet for expression and self-regulation. Many described music as a form of emotional ventilation that allowed them to release sadness and stress. Both instrumental music and faith-based nasheeds helped in creating calmness, improving focus, and evoking positive memories that supported psychological healing.

Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, and guided meditation, helped participants achieve mind body balance. Regular practice reduced symptoms of anxiety, improved sleep quality, and increased focus and energy. Participants shared that even short sessions of deep breathing made them feel in control of their thoughts and emotions.

Themes related to **accessibility and cultural acceptance** highlighted that these methods were easy to practice, affordable, and compatible with

cultural and religious values. Participants appreciated that these techniques carried no stigma compared to medication or formal psychotherapy. Similarly, the **personalization and integration** theme showed that individuals created flexible routines by combining Quranic recitation, music, and relaxation according to their needs showing a trend toward self-directed, holistic healing.

The **psychological and social benefits** theme revealed enhanced emotional stability, patience, empathy, and improved family and social relationships. Participants felt more connected, spiritually grounded, and capable of managing life's challenges calmly. However, the **challenges and limitations** theme identified barriers such as irregular practice, lack of structured guidance, confusion about religious boundaries (especially regarding music), and difficulty maintaining motivation.

The findings of this qualitative research reveal that non-pharmacological interventions specifically Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation techniques play a vital role in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress while promoting overall mental and emotional wellbeing. Quranic therapy provided inner peace, spiritual connection, and hope, while music therapy offered emotional release and self-expression. Relaxation techniques improved mind body balance, sleep quality, and focus. Themes related to accessibility, personalization, psychological and social benefits and challenges highlighted the cultural relevance, adaptability, and practical barriers to sustained practice. Overall, participants reported improvements in emotional resilience, social connectedness, and spiritual fulfillment, demonstrating that these methods can complement conventional mental health treatments effectively.

Discussion

The present study provides comprehensive insight into how non-pharmacological interventions, namely Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation techniques, can effectively manage anxiety, depression, and stress. These interventions not only address the psychological

symptoms but also contribute to emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing, reflecting a holistic approach to mental health care. The discussion below elaborates on each theme, integrates findings with existing literature, and examines practical and theoretical implications.

Spiritual Healing through Quranic Therapy: The study highlights Quranic therapy as a powerful spiritual tool that significantly enhances coping mechanisms for participants. Recitation, listening, and reflection on Quranic verses offered a sense of inner peace, comfort, and hope. This supports Koenig's (2012) findings that spiritual practices can act as protective factors against mental distress by fostering meaning, purpose, and positive cognitive reframing. Participants consistently reported that their anxiety diminished when engaging in Quranic recitation, suggesting a strong link between faith-based practices and emotional regulation. The findings further emphasize that spiritual interventions can be integrated into mental health strategies, especially within Muslim populations, providing culturally congruent therapeutic options. By reshaping negative thought patterns through faith-based reflection, Quranic therapy operates in a manner similar to cognitive-behavioral interventions, validating the role of spiritual coping in psychological resilience.

Emotional Expression through Music Therapy: Music therapy emerged as a dynamic emotional regulation strategy. Participants noted that music facilitated expression, emotional release, and mood enhancement. This aligns with research indicating that music can modulate emotional states, reduce stress, and stimulate the brain's reward systems (Thoma et al., 2013). Music served multiple functions: as a tool for catharsis, an instrument for relaxation, and a conduit for positive memories. Faith-based music, such as nasheeds, not only enhanced emotional regulation but also reinforced spiritual connections, reflecting a dual benefit of cultural congruence and therapeutic effect. The study extends existing literature by demonstrating how participants actively select music based on personal needs,

highlighting the role of autonomy and preference in enhancing therapeutic outcomes.

Mind-Body Calmness through Relaxation Techniques: Participants reported that relaxation interventions, including deep breathing, mindfulness, and guided imagery, effectively regulated physiological arousal and alleviated symptoms of anxiety and stress. These findings are consistent with psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) research, which shows that relaxation techniques can reduce cortisol levels, stabilize heart rate, and improve sleep (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004). Regular practice of these techniques empowered participants to manage stress responses autonomously, fostering self-efficacy and resilience. Improved focus, sleep quality, and mood regulation reported by participants emphasize the physiological and cognitive benefits of mind-body interventions, reinforcing their relevance in comprehensive mental health care.

Accessibility and Cultural Acceptance: The study underscores the importance of socio-cultural context in mental health interventions. Participants highlighted that non-pharmacological approaches were accessible, affordable, and culturally aligned, which facilitated adherence and reduced stigma. For example, Quranic recitation is a socially accepted and encouraged practice, while relaxation techniques and music therapy, when culturally adapted, were well-received. This finding aligns with Hodge (2005), emphasizing the necessity of culturally sensitive interventions for effective mental health promotion. Accessibility and cultural congruence were reported as key motivators for sustained engagement, illustrating that interventions which respect cultural norms and spiritual values are more likely to be maintained over time.

Personalization and Integration: Flexibility and self-directed application of these therapies emerged as a critical factor in their effectiveness. Participants reported combining Quranic therapy, music, and relaxation practices to create routines tailored to their emotional and spiritual needs. This personalization reflects the holistic model of care, addressing cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions simultaneously. Integrative

practice allowed participants to balance daily responsibilities while sustaining therapeutic engagement, highlighting the importance of adaptable mental health strategies. The findings suggest that interventions should be designed to allow user autonomy, enabling individuals to adjust practices based on situational needs and personal preferences.

Psychological and Social Benefits: Beyond individual coping, these interventions had significant social and interpersonal benefits. Participants noted increased patience, empathy, improved family and social interactions, and greater self-awareness. This supports the biopsychosocial framework, demonstrating that improvements in emotional regulation extend to social domains, promoting overall wellbeing. Spiritual and emotional interventions reinforced social connectedness, creating opportunities for shared experiences, communal support, and enhanced relational skills. These psychosocial benefits underscore the broader societal impact of culturally congruent non-pharmacological interventions.

Challenges and Limitations: Despite the positive outcomes, participants reported challenges including inconsistent practice, lack of structured guidance, and uncertainty regarding the religious appropriateness of certain methods. These barriers highlight the need for structured programs, culturally sensitive counseling, and educational support to facilitate adherence. Participants also noted that the absence of immediate results sometimes reduced motivation, suggesting that sustained engagement may require guidance, reinforcement, and community support. Addressing these limitations is crucial to ensure the long-term.

Conclusion

Quranic therapy, music therapy, and relaxation practices represent powerful, culturally grounded tools for managing anxiety, depression, and stress. These interventions not only reduce psychological distress but also promote faith-based resilience and holistic wellbeing. Integrating such approaches

within community and clinical settings could greatly enhance mental health outcomes.

Limitations:

- Small sample size (n=18) limits generalizability.
- Participants were primarily from a single cultural and religious background.
- Self-reported experiences may introduce bias.
- Lack of long-term follow-up to assess sustained effects.
- Absence of control group for comparative analysis.

Suggestions or Recommendations:

- Conduct studies with larger and more diverse populations.
- Examine integration of interventions with conventional therapy.
- Investigate the role of community and family support in adherence.
- Mental health practitioners should incorporate culturally sensitive non-pharmacological interventions into therapy.
- Develop structured training programs and workshops for community members.
- Explore long-term impacts and sustainability of interventions.
- Include quantitative measures to complement qualitative insights.
- Provide guidance to ensure correct and consistent practice of interventions.
- Educate families to reduce stigma and enhance support for participants.
- Policymakers should support inclusion of culturally appropriate interventions in public mental health programs.

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