

Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED): Prevention and Cure from an Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Intermittent explosive disorder (IED) is one of the most dangerous mental illnesses in society today. It is a mental disorder that causes people to have periods of intense anger and sudden outbursts without any reason. Nowadays, as many as 7% people have intermittent explosive disorder (IED) according to the research. It shows that this mental disorder can affect many people because the aggressive behavior is impulsive and not planned, making it difficult to control. So, this article will focus more on intermittent explosive disorder itself and the Islamic approach towards this type of mental disorder.

KEYWORDS: intermittent explosive disorder (IED), mental disorder, aggressive behavior, Islamic perspective, psychotherapy

I. INTRODUCTION

Intermittent explosive disorder (IED) is a disorder of aggression that can occur in children, teenagers, or adults. As early as the age of older children, like 9 or 10 years old, people can face this mental problem, and it appears more common in males (Cleveland Clinic, 2022; Coccaro et al., 2005). It is a mental health condition marked by frequent impulsive anger outbursts or aggression (APA, 2022). It involves repeated, sudden bouts of impulsive, aggressive, violent behavior or angry verbal outbursts. It can make someone aggressive and even violent. For example, someone might yell, get in fights, throw or break things, abuse others, and have road rage. People with intermittent explosive disorder (IED) are aware that their anger is not appropriate, but feel like they cannot control themselves when they are angry. These explosive outbursts, which occur intermittently, can make it difficult for a person to maintain friendships or romantic relationships and can create problems at work or school. For many, it leads to interactions with law enforcement, including getting arrested. Someone with intermittent explosive disorder who does not seek treatment can experience this condition for years or decades (Renewal Oasis, 2025). However, the severity of outbursts may lessen with age (Mayo Clinic, 2024). Nevertheless, it is not permanent, which is why it is essential to have treatment in the early stages to avoid harming people around us.

II. INTERMITTENT EXPLOSIVE DISORDER

Intermittent explosive disorder (IED) is one of several impulse control disorders (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). What are impulse control disorders? Impulse Control Disorders are a class of disorders categorised under Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (National University Health System, 2023). These disorders can significantly impair an individual's ability to regulate emotions and behaviors, leading to problems in various areas of life, including social interactions, work, and legal matters. These dangerous behaviors often cause harm to others and/or yourself (Jenkins et al., 2015; Rynar & Coccaro, 2018). For example, a tragic incident involving a 17-year-old student suspected of killing his mother and brother, and seriously injuring his younger brother in Melaka (Astro Awani, 2025), one of the reasons was pent-up anger from being told to study by his mother to get excellent results in the examination. It shows that anyone can have this disorder if they are not mentally stable. Intermittent explosive disorder can also lead to issues with the law. Besides, people with intermittent explosive disorder usually have another mental health condition, such as autism, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, externalizing disorder, intellectual disabilities, antisocial personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder (Cleveland Clinic, 2022; Coccaro et al., 2005). That is why intermittent explosive disorder is one of the most dangerous mental disorders in our society today.

How do we know that people have intermittent explosive disorder? While it is normal to become irritated at times, it is abnormal if the anger becomes overwhelming and triggers impulsive, aggressive behavior that may harm those around us (Kulper

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et al., 2015). Experts, researchers, and psychologists do not yet know what causes this disorder; however, a few factors may increase the chances of having this disorder, including genetics. Although there is no “intermittent explosive disorder gene,” this disorder tends to run in families, so people could have inherited a gene that makes them more likely to have this disorder. Studies suggest that 44% and as much as 72% of IED diagnoses are tied to a family history (McMillen & Weishaupt, 2024). People with intermittent explosive disorder may carry an unusually high number of genetic variants that increase their risk of developing the disorder. Some of these genes may affect how a person responds to specific events, such as frustration or provocation.

Environmental factors also contribute to the development of this disorder, including the behaviors someone experienced as a child. We do not know what happens in other people's houses, but as human beings, we always want a good environment around us. Usually, if people grew up in a household where violent outbursts and physical and verbal abuse were common, they are more likely to behave similarly (McMillen & Weishaupt, 2024). For example, experiencing verbal and physical abuse in childhood, being bullied, witnessing abuse during childhood, or going through other disturbing, shocking, traumatic, or painful events in childhood also seems to play a role in having intermittent explosive disorder. That is why there is a Malay proverb that says, “Let the bamboo bend from its shoots”, “bapa borek anak rintik” (children inherit the traits, behavior, or appearance of their parents, where the child is not much different from his father). If we want our child to have good behavior, we should ensure their surroundings are positive and supportive.

Other experts, studies, and researchers note that the uncontrollable aggressive behavior characteristic of intermittent explosive disorder is related to the level of serotonin in the brain being lower than usual (Sherrell, 2023). What is serotonin? Serotonin is a natural chemical produced by the intestines and brain. It is also a neurotransmitter, and some consider it a hormone as well. It helps send messages between nerve cells and affects mood, emotions, and digestion (McIntosh, 2024). It is also known as the natural mood booster (Harvard Health, 2025). People also sometimes refer to it as the “happy” chemical because it contributes to overall well-being and happiness (Sherrell, 2023). How is it related to intermittent explosive disorder? As stated before, low levels of serotonin are linked to intermittent explosive disorder. Although the link remains unclear because serotonin cannot be measured in the brain, it still plays important roles there. Serotonin has many different roles. One of them is a natural chemical in your body that controls your mood. For example, when you feel happy, and all seems right with the world, you are feeling the effects of serotonin. Too little serotonin can trigger this disorder, and too much serotonin can be life-threatening (HealthDirect, 2025). It is essential to find the right balance by working out, consuming complex carbohydrates (for example, vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains), and using natural remedies, medication, and other healthy practices.

An intermittent explosive disorder can happen at any time, with little or no warning. They usually last less than 30 minutes (Michigan Medicine, 2024), but they may occur daily, weekly, or monthly. The person with IED sometimes their aggressive impulses can be triggered by something minor that does not match the event that sparked it. Usually, they feel rage, experience sudden, unprovoked anger that they cannot control, have racing, irritating thoughts, and experience other minor events that lead to sudden outbursts, physical assaults, or property damage (Zayed, 2025). They are aware that their outbursts of anger are inappropriate, but feel they cannot control their actions during episodes. Even when the person seems calm, and there are no noticeable triggers, they suddenly fly into a fit of rage. They go from 0 to 100 with no warning sign, often frightening those around them. There are too many examples around us, such as long, angry speeches, heated arguments, temper tantrums, and shouting (Michigan Medicine, 2024). As many studies have said, it must occur often to identify someone with a disorder because shouting, angry speeches, or heated arguments usually happen in society. It is a no-brainer to diagnose anyone with this disorder if it happens once in a lifetime.

III. INTERMITTENT EXPLOSIVE DISORDER: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Intermittent explosive disorder (IED) in Islam is viewed as a severe form of anger outbursts in life. Hence, people must understand that anger is a normal response to problems or threats. It is not a problem to become angry, but when it becomes out of control, it becomes harmful, affecting our relationships, our well-being, and the people around us (Yaqeen Institute, 2024). Abu Hurayrah (rA) narrated that “a man said to the Prophet ﷺ, ‘Advise me.’ He said, ‘Do not get angry.’ He repeated his question several times, and he said (each time) ‘Do not get angry.’” (al-Bukhari, no.6166). This hadith explains that every believer should avoid anger because it brings many harms to oneself and others (Mustafa, 2001).

In Islam, intermittent explosive disorder is categorized as a “disease of the heart”. (Subandi, 2024). This concept originates from a verse in the Holy Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 10, which means: “In their hearts is a disease, and Allah increases their disease; and for them is a painful punishment because they [habitually] lie.” The heart referred to the spiritual heart, known as *qolbu*, which requires spiritual and behavioral changes to cure it. Nu'man bin Bashir narrated that he heard the Prophet ﷺ say, “Know that in the body there is a lump of flesh, if it is good then the whole body is good, if it is bad then the whole body is bad, know that it is the heart.” (al-Bukhari, no.52, Muslim, no.1599).

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Anger is a natural and unavoidable part of human nature, but IED, anger that breaks out out of nowhere, or rage attacks are different. Some anger can be considered righteous anger. Anger that is permitted by Islamic law is called *al-Ghadab al-Mahmud* (praiseworthy anger). It is permissible to feel angry when there is sentiment that ridicules the religion of Islam by enemies from among the infidels, hypocrites, and others (Jabatan Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan, 2021). IED is a different matter. That is why it is called disorder. It is an illness or condition that disrupts normal physical or mental functions (APA, 2022). Some people can control their anger, but in terms of IED, people will rage even though the matter is small. That is why our Prophet is commanding us not to let our anger overcome us when it does arise. Allah said in the Quran, "They are who spend in the way of Allah both in plenty and hardship, who restrain their anger, and forgive others. Allah loves such good-doers". (Ali Imran: 134).

IV. INTERMITTENT EXPLOSIVE DISORDER: PREVENTION AND CURE FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

In Islam, there is no disease without a cure, whether it is a disease of the heart, mental illness, disorder, or physical disease, except death. From Abu Hurayrah (rA), that the Prophet ﷺ said, "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment." (al-Bukhari, no.5678). From Anas bin Malik RA, the Prophet ﷺ said, "Indeed, Allah created disease and also its cure. Hence, seek medication." (Musnad Ahmad, no.12596).

In Islam, addressing Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED) involves a combination of spiritual practices to control anger and psychological intervention for behavioral management (Mufti Menk, 2022). There are several actionable tips from the Prophetic tradition and professional therapy in order to overcome IED.

A. Managing IED through self-control

As mentioned before, intermittent explosive disorder is viewed as a disease of the heart. It is not easy in theory or practice to control it because IEDs have too many ways to be triggered. If we can control it, it is a very commendable attitude. Moreover, it is one of the characteristics of a person who is faithful and pious, as Allah mentions in Surah Ali-Imran, verse 134 (Zulkifli, 2022). It is all right to be angry, but a rage attack or outburst is forbidden. The Prophet ﷺ himself felt angry in several situations, including the incident of Usamah bin Zaid, who killed an enemy on the battlefield, even though he had already uttered the Shahadah. The Prophet ﷺ said to him, "Did you kill him when he had said La ilaha illa Allah? Usamah replied: He only said it out of fear of being killed. The Prophet ﷺ replied: Did you cut his heart open to see whether he truly believed or not?" (Muslim, no.96).

How do we control ourselves so that rage does not overcome us? Firstly, know when to walk away from a situation that makes you uncomfortable (Yaqeen Institute, 2024). It is a crucial skill for protecting your mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. The Prophet ﷺ said, "If any of you becomes angry and he is standing, let him sit down so his anger will go away; if it does not, then let him lie down." (Sahih Ibn Hibban, no.5688). If standing makes you uncomfortable, sit down; if sitting down makes you uncomfortable, lie down; and if that cannot be done, withdraw from that situation. Physical distance can help you cool down and gain a clearer perspective on how to confront the situation. (Yaqeen Institute, 2024). Secondly, keep silent (Zulkifli, 2022). Silent in this context does not mean we are cowards or guilty; it allows our emotions to settle down before taking any action. Taking this pause helps prevent hasty remarks and their potential fallout. The Prophet ﷺ said, "If any of you becomes angry, let him keep silent." (Musnad Ahmad, no.2137).

B. Spiritual remedies

In Islam, controlling one's temper is a sign of strength and spiritual health. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ advised against uncontrollable aggressive outbursts and showed the method to overcome them. First, seek refuge with Allah from satan. The Prophet ﷺ said, "If a man gets angry and says, 'I seek refuge with Allah,' his anger will go away" (Suhaib, 2021). These narrations are also in line with the verse, "If you are tempted by Satan, then seek refuge with Allah. Surely He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing." (al-A'raf (7): 200). If we suddenly feel rage, we say many times, "I seek refuge with Allah from accursed satan". Second, take ablution (wudu). IEDs are recognized as complex matters. It is different from anger, but in Islam, anger, rage, or outbursts all come from satan. This is as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Anger comes from the devil, the devil was created of fire, and fire is extinguished only with water; so, when one of you becomes angry, he should perform ablution." (Abi Daud, no.4784). Do not underestimate the benefits of ablution. Last but not least, Prophet ﷺ taught us a *du'a* to relieve anger (Yaqeen Institute, 2024). Whenever you feel yourself on the verge of letting anger get the best of you, say the following supplication. Umm Salamah (rA) narrated: I said, "O Messenger of Allah, will you not teach me a supplication with which I can pray for myself?" The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Say: O Allah, the Lord of Muhammad ﷺ, forgive my sins, remove the anger from my heart and protect me from the trials of misguidance as you long as you allow us to live." (Musnad Ahmad, no. 26576).

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C. Professional therapy or Holistic approach

Islam is a universal religion. Islam places great importance on goodness and health. (JAKIM, 2015). In addition to the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, Islam strongly emphasizes seeking professional help (example given: an Islamic counsellor or CBT) for compulsive, aggressive outbursts. What is CBT? Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems (APA, 2022). IED is not a small matter. It can happen very often in daily life. In order to overcome the IEDs, seek treatment whether in an Islamic way or a professional way. Islam tells its followers to seek treatment when infected with an illness, including a mental disorder or a disease of the heart. (JAKIM, 2015). The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Treat yourselves, for Allah has not sent down any disease without creating a cure for it, except for one disease." They asked, "What is it?" He replied, "Old age (or death)" (Sunan Ibn Majah, no.3436). Therefore, our task is to identify the most effective medicine based on expert advice. This is as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "For every disease there is a remedy. When the remedy is applied to the disease, it is cured by the permission of Allah, the Exalted and Glorious." (Muslim, no.2204).

V. CONCLUSION

Intermittent explosive disorder (IED) management is not an easy task and requires a great deal of discipline and self-control because if it is not controlled and the feeling of rage is allowed to take control, it is feared that it will result in actions that are outside the limits of Islamic law. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Who do you consider to be a fighter among you?' We said, 'One whom men cannot wrestle down.' The Prophet said, 'It is not so. Rather, it controls himself when he is in rage or anger.'" Therefore, those who can control it are considered to have praiseworthy qualities in Islamic law and are promised great rewards. Abu Darda (rA) narrated, "I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, tell me about a deed that will admit me into Paradise. The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Do not be angry and you will enter Paradise.'" (Al-Tabarani, no.2353). Even so, it is crucial to remember here that the key point is "by Allah's permission". Not everything planned will be achieved as requested. Allah said in the al-Qur'an, "Every soul will taste death. And we test you with evil and with good as a trial; and to Us you will be returned." (Al-Anbiya (21):35). It is important for us to do our part, whether that is by keeping ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually healthy, keeping ourselves away from anything that can trigger our rage or anger, and making sure we are following the Islamic teachings. If it becomes unwell, then it is recommended to try to treat the illness in the best way, but ultimately, the fate of all of us lies in the hands of Allah.

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