

Antecedent Factors of Well-Being in the World's Muslim Population: A Systematic Literature Review within an Islamic Cultural and Religious Framework

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Abstract

Most studies on well-being have been conducted in Western countries dominated by secular and individualistic values, thus not fully representing the experiences of Muslims who have different cultural backgrounds and religious values. This study aims to systematically synthesize various studies on well-being in Muslim populations to formulate antecedent factors that influence Muslim well-being. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, a total of 59 peer-reviewed journal articles were selected from an initial pool of 923 records identified through three major databases (EBSCOhost, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley) and additional sources. The results of the synthesis indicate that seven main factors influence well-being in Muslim societies: (1) orientation to the afterlife, (2) harmony of cultural and religious values, (3) theological perspective, (4) ritual worship practices, (5) gratitude, (6) religiosity and spirituality, and (7) hope. These seven factors form a conceptual framework that is sensitive to the Islamic cultural and religious context. This study makes a novel contribution by offering a multidimensional model of well-being integrated with faith values. The theoretical and practical implications of this study include the need to create mental health interventions and well-being measurement tools that are appropriate to the context of Muslim communities.

Keywords: Antecedent factors, Islamic psychology, Muslim population



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INTRODUCTION

There are two main concepts in discussing well-being, namely psychological well-being (PWB) and subjective well-being (SWB) (Hanley et al., 2015). These two concepts have different philosophical bases. SWB is rooted in hedonic philosophy that focuses on increasing positive emotions, while PWB is rooted in eudaimonic philosophy that focuses on self-actualization and optimal individual functioning (Chen et al., 2013). Joshanloo (2019) states that PWB has a more significant long-term influence on individual well-being. PWB is considered more stable because it is based on character and skill development. SWB tends to fluctuate because emotional experiences influence it.

However, most studies on well-being are conducted in Western countries dominated by secular and individualistic values (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). This approach does not always reflect the realities of other societies, including Muslim communities. Ruggeri et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of a culturally and religiously inclusive systematic approach to measuring well-being to be more globally representative. Joshanloo (2014) found that the concepts of happiness in the West and East differ fundamentally. The integration of culture and religion influences happiness due to the differences in Eastern perspectives, which emphasize spirituality, social issues, and morals, as opposed to Western perspectives that emphasize individual freedom and fulfillment.

Unfortunately, modern psychological approaches tend to ignore the religious dimension, particularly Islam. However, Islam has a significant global influence (Raiya et al., 2007). Van Dierendonck (2004) has indeed integrated elements of spirituality into Ryff's PWB model, but few studies explicitly consider Islam as the primary foundation for understanding well-being. For Muslims, happiness is inseparable from religious values (Steger & Frazier, 2005). Huntington emphasized that using Western theories directly to understand Muslim mental health can lead to conceptual errors (Joshanloo, 2013). Therefore, the well-being approach needs to be contextualized with Islamic values.

As researchers, it is important to build an empirical and relevant Islamic psychology (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011). Scientific knowledge is not value-free because it is influenced by non-epistemic factors such as religion and morals (Lusk & Elliott, 2022). True happiness in Islam is understood as closeness to God and adherence to ethical principles. Therefore, modern psychology needs to be inclusive and multicultural, and able to accommodate the transcendental perspective of Muslims. Despite their Western origins, psychological findings can still be of great benefit if adapted through an interdisciplinary approach that combines religious and psychological values (Kusumo et al., 2024). Kaplick & Skinner (2017) offer the Islamic filter approach, which is a process of filtering Western psychological theories to ensure that these theories are in line with Islamic principles. Meanwhile, Mujib (2017) conveyed a pragmatic approach that places more emphasis on the practical aspects of psychological theory for Muslims. These two approaches are important for the application of psychological theory that does not conflict with Islamic values.

There is a lack of systematic reviews that clearly map the antecedents of well-being in Muslim populations. Previous research has focused on Western perspectives, thus lacking a comprehensive analysis that integrates cultural and religious values. Previous research has also examined the importance of integrating religious practices, cultural identities, and theological perspectives into the study of Muslim well-being (Abdel-Khalek, 2019; Eryilmaz & Kula,

2020; Yusuf, 2022). These findings demonstrate the need for a comprehensive, in-depth synthesis to construct a contextual framework for Muslim populations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach (Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). SLR is a research method that is carried out systematically to collect, identify, and critically analyze various studies that have been carried out previously, with the aim of updating understanding of a particular topic and finding research gaps that are still open (Sataloff et al., 2021). This process was conducted strictly according to protocols designed to minimize selection bias, publication bias, and data extraction errors (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The initial step in conducting the SLR was to formulate the research question (Tranfield et al., 2003) that served as the basis for this review: *"What are the constructs of antecedent factors for well-being in Muslims?"* This question was then used to develop a literature search strategy. The search was conducted using three primary databases: EBSCOhost, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley, with additional sources from several other sources. The keywords used were *"Well-being" AND "Muslim" AND "Islam."*

The search yielded 923 articles, which were then exported to Mendeley reference management software. After detecting and eliminating duplication, 916 unique articles were obtained, which were then filtered based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for this study included English-language scientific journal articles that included the keywords *"well-being," "Muslim,"* or *"Islam"* in the title, abstract, or keywords, focused on Muslim populations worldwide, and were indexed by Scimago Journal Rank (SJR), with a minimum journal ranking of Q3 (Falagas et al., 2008). SJR is considered capable of providing a comprehensive estimate of a journal's scientific value because it is based on the Scopus database and the PageRank algorithm (Khurshid, 2014). Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included non-journal articles such as conference proceedings, books, theses, dissertations, non-English language articles, and research that was not thematically or contextually relevant.

The next step was a quality assessment, resulting in 62 full-text articles for further review. Three articles were eliminated at this stage due to their context being irrelevant to the study's focus, such as research addressing historical conflict (Werner et al., 2013), Islamophobia (Sirgy et al., 2019), or acculturation without a direct link to the construct of well-being (Dey & Sitharthan, 2017). Thus, the final number of articles analyzed in this study was 59.

The analysis was conducted using an inductive content analysis approach to identify key themes emerging from the reviewed articles. This technique was chosen because research on well-being in Muslim populations remains relatively understudied and fragmented. Data analysis began with open coding of relevant quotes. These codes were then grouped into specific categories. Finally, the researchers synthesized the codes into themes that construct antecedent factors of well-being. The validity of the coding and theme creation was verified through data and time triangulation. The authors used Microsoft Excel to compile a summary table of the articles, including information on the author, year of publication, journal, research location, sample, methods, findings, and limitations. All stages of the SLR are depicted in a PRISMA flowchart that outlines the process of article identification, screening, selection, and inclusion (Figure 1). However, this method also has several limitations. First, the database used was based solely on English-language journal articles, which do not include other relevant

sources from other languages. Second, inductive content analysis relies on the researcher's interpretation, which can be subjectivist despite attempts to increase validity through triangulation. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this review.

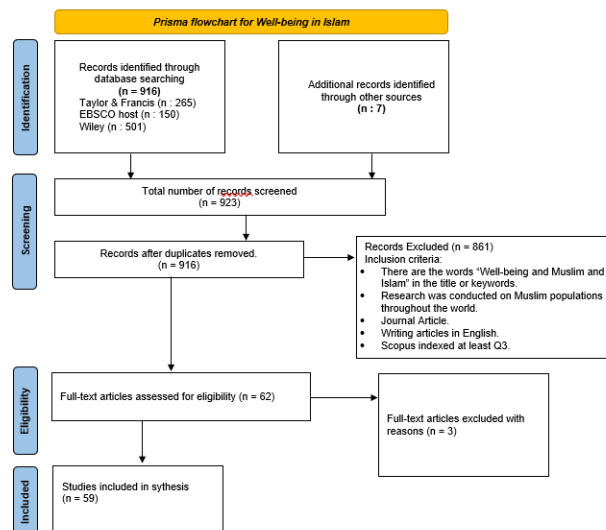


Figure 1. Summary of the SLR process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most research on well-being in Muslim populations has been conducted in Iran, followed by the United States, Pakistan and Türkiye, Israel, and Indonesia (Table 1). The predominance of research in Iran indicates that research on Muslim well-being remains uneven globally. Much research still focuses on the Middle East and the Americas, so existing theories of well-being do not fully represent the diverse experiences of Muslim populations in other regions. This situation poses challenges in generalizing to the entire global Muslim population, which has a very diverse social, cultural, and political background.

Table 1. Muslim Well-being Research Site

No.	Country	Number
1.	Iran	11
2.	United States	5
3.	Pakistan	4
4.	Türkiye	4
5.	Israel	3
6.	Indonesia	3

The development of well-being research in Muslim populations has experienced significant growth over the past ten years. This study synthesized 45 studies between 2014 and 2023, compared with 14 between 2006 and 2013 (Figure 2). This increase indicates that the theme of well-being in Muslim populations is beginning to receive more serious attention among researchers. This is understandable, given that Muslims constitute a large global community with a distinctive value system that differs from Western epistemic frameworks. Thus, the study of well-being in the Muslim context is not only practically relevant, but also theoretically important to enrich and balance the understanding of cross-cultural psychology.

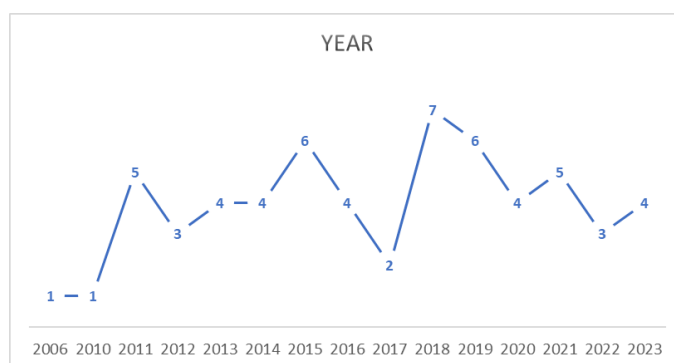


Figure 2. Development of Well-being research in Muslim populations

Based on 59 synthesized articles, seven factors influence well-being in the Muslim population. The first factor that needs to be considered in formulating well-being for Muslims is maintaining a focus on life in this world and the afterlife (Louw, 2013). Studies show that Muslim individuals strive to achieve balance through religious practices that reflect acceptance of destiny, adherence to religious teachings, and respect for local moral values. In the Shia view, such as Muthahhari, hedonism is rejected, and he emphasizes that true happiness comes from worship, self-development, and social contribution (Joshanloo, 2013). The concept of Islamic Well-being (IWB) explains the importance of faith, the performance of religious obligations, and the avoidance of sin as the foundation of well-being. The main orientation is towards the eternal afterlife compared to temporary worldly pleasures (Eryilmaz & Kula, 2020).

Thus, the world-afterlife orientation serves not only as a spiritual guideline but also as a distinguishing factor for Muslim well-being from more materialistic Western models. The world-afterlife orientation factor emphasizes that Muslim happiness cannot be separated from transcendental and religious dimensions, so any attempt to understand Muslim well-being must incorporate aspects of faith and the afterlife as central to its analysis.

The second factor that needs to be considered in formulating well-being in the Muslim population is the harmony between cultural and religious values. Cross-cultural studies show that congruence between individual values and social norms, both in the context of collectivist societies such as Iran and Muslim minorities in Western countries, contributes significantly to psychological well-being (Joshanloo, 2010). For example, women's participation in the economy in Bugis and Mandar is considered to be in line with religious interpretation and produces a sense of meaning and happiness (Yusuf, 2022). Similarly, the culture of *izzat* in Pakistan (Gunasinghe et al., 2019) or religious identity among Swedish Muslim youth becomes a significant source of well-being when accepted as part of one's identity (Berglund, 2013). However, inconsistencies between cultural values and beliefs, such as sexual identity conflicts in Türkiye, actually have a negative impact on well-being (Koc & Vignoles, 2016). These studies emphasize the importance of considering cultural and religious contexts in measuring and interpreting Muslim well-being in a more contextual and diversity-sensitive manner. Therefore, cultural and religious harmony is a key factor that shows that Muslim welfare is greatly influenced by harmony between beliefs and social acceptance in their environment.

The third factor that can influence well-being in Muslims is theology (Koburtay et al., 2022). Different Sunni and Shia theologies influence happiness, with Shia theology tending to be more collectivistic than Sunni (Joshanloo, 2013). Another study showed that Sunni

spirituality in Pakistan contributes to general well-being (Khan et al., 2015). At the same time, among Turkish Muslims, the relationship between religiosity and happiness is influenced by gender factors and the conditions of the country of residence (Esat et al., 2021). Research also found that students in theological schools have lower levels of stress and anxiety than students in public schools (Kaur & Mello, 2016). Therefore, future studies need to explore the influence of theological diversity and Islamic traditions on the construction of well-being in more depth and context. Therefore, theological differences not only reflect variations in belief but also shape how Muslims understand and experience well-being in social and personal contexts.

The fourth factor influencing well-being in Muslims is the practice of ritual worship, such as prayer, dhikr, and other spiritual activities. Various studies have shown that worship has a positive impact on physical and mental well-being, both in patients with schizophrenia (Irawati et al., 2023), Muslim refugees (Wu et al., 2021), and dhikr congregations (Hamsyah & Subandi, 2017). Daily spiritual experiences and optimism have been shown to mediate the relationship between frequency of worship and subjective well-being (Albatnuni & Koszycki, 2020). However, in the context of cultural pressure or discrimination, high levels of religious practice can actually decrease well-being if not accompanied by healthy religious coping (Bender et al., 2022; Stuart & Ward, 2018). Thus, the practice of worship not only functions as a religious activity but also as a psychological mechanism that can increase or decrease well-being depending on the surrounding social context.

The fifth factor influencing well-being in Muslim populations is gratitude. Various studies have shown that gratitude, both religious and dispositional, positively contributes to happiness and mental health (Aghababaei et al., 2018). Islamic-based gratitude training has been shown to be more effective in improving well-being than secular approaches, as it aligns with participants' spiritual values and beliefs (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016). Dispositional gratitude has a greater impact than religious gratitude on mental health (Aghababaei & Tabik, 2013). Gratitude ultimately serves as a psychological and spiritual force that deepens the meaning of life and strengthens an individual's resilience to stress.

The sixth factor influencing well-being in Muslim populations is religiosity and spirituality. Various studies have shown that both have a significant positive relationship with various aspects of psychological well-being, such as happiness, life satisfaction, mental and physical health, and self-esteem (Abdel-Khalek, 2019). Spirituality often shows a more substantial impact than religiosity (Joshnloo, 2011), especially in the context of Muslim communities and the diaspora in the West (Hodge et al., 2016). Religiosity also plays a protective role against depression, particularly in Muslim children, adolescents, and the elderly (Abdel-Khalek & Eid, 2011; Abolfathi Momtaz et al., 2012). Furthermore, faith-based social support and religious practices have been shown to mediate the influence of religiosity on well-being (Musa, 2015). Religiosity and spirituality can be important foundations that not only strengthen Muslim well-being but also build identity and a sense of social connectedness in Muslim life.

The seventh factor influencing well-being in the Muslim population is hope. Agency hope, which is an individual's belief in their ability to achieve goals, has been shown to be an important mediator between religiosity and SWB, where religiosity increases agency hope, which then positively impacts life satisfaction, positive emotions, and decreases negative emotions (Nell & Rothmann, 2018). Furthermore, in divorced Muslim women in Israel, hope and well-being are influenced by personal factors such as education and economic

independence, as well as communal factors such as a sense of community, which provides psychological protection (Abu-Ras & Itzhaki-Braun, 2023). Hope thus acts as a psychological resource that enables Muslims to face life's challenges with more optimism and resilience.

These seven factors demonstrate that Muslim well-being cannot be understood in isolation, but rather through the complex dynamics of spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions. An orientation toward the afterlife provides transcendental direction, the harmony of cultural and religious values maintains social legitimacy, theology forms a framework for thought, worship practices serve as a means of spiritual internalization, gratitude strengthens the meaning of life, religiosity and spirituality serve as foundations of identity, and hope serves as psychological energy for facing life's challenges. These factors demonstrate the multidimensionality of Muslim well-being, in which aspects of faith and community play equally important roles as individual psychological aspects. Discussions of Muslim well-being must consider the interconnectedness of these factors to be more contextual and relevant.

The novelty of this research is its ability to construct a broader, contextual, and culturally sensitive conceptual framework. This framework can understand Muslim well-being and fill a gap that has been under-recognized in mainstream psychology. Unlike most previous studies that use Western-oriented, individualistic models of well-being, this study integrates seven key factors: afterlife orientation, cultural-religious value alignment, theological perspective, ritual practice, gratitude, religiosity and spirituality, and hope, which typically shape well-being in Muslim communities. By incorporating theological diversity (Sunni and Shia), sociocultural variations across regions, and religious practices in clinical, social, and diasporic contexts, this study broadens the epistemological landscape of positive psychology. It offers a multidimensional, faith-based model of well-being.

The implications of this synthesis are both theoretical and practical. In its conceptual findings, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding well-being within a framework that integrates cultural and religious values without being trapped by Western perspectives. Practically, mental health services for Muslim communities need to be designed with unique spiritual, religious, and cultural dimensions in mind. Therefore, well-being scales need to be modified to suit the Muslim context. Furthermore, the development of religion-based well-being programs and the training of professionals to implement religiously and culturally sensitive therapies should be encouraged.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a systematic synthesis of 59 articles discussing well-being in Muslim populations, identifying seven key factors influencing psychological well-being: afterlife orientation, alignment of cultural and religious values, theological perspective, ritual practices, gratitude, religiosity and spirituality, and hope. These results demonstrate that the construct of well-being in Muslim societies is inextricably linked to distinctive religious and cultural dimensions, differing from the dominant Western approach to positive psychology.

This research provides a novel contribution in the form of a comprehensive conceptual framework that is sensitive to the Islamic cultural context and emphasizes the importance of a more inclusive and contextual approach to understanding and measuring well-being. Theoretical and practical implications of this study include the need for adaptation of psychological interventions, the development of well-being measurement instruments, and

professional training that is sensitive to the values of the faith and cultural diversity of Muslims.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was responsible for the conceptualization, project administration, literature search and selection, data curation, quality assessment, validation, and writing, review, and editing of the manuscript. The author also approved the final version for publication.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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