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WELL-BEING, WORKPLACE AND RELIGION: INSIGHTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how religious practices and spiritual facilities may affect employees' well-being in workplaces. Based on Ryff's (1989) well-being framework, a related aim is to study the implications of spirituality for Ryff's (1989) model. Using a qualitative data from 22 employees, findings show that worshipping Allah, contemplative practices, and patience are key factors of one's psychological well-being. The study also highlights specific spiritual provisions and contemplative practices as key factors for enhancing Ryff's six dimensions of employees' psychological well-being. The paper offers a novel and contextual extension of Ryff's framework by theorizing the notion of well-being in Islam.

Keywords: Islam, Psychological Well-Being, Religiosity, Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Because the conceptual foundation of psychological well-being (PWB) is commonly grounded in Western contexts and theorizations (e.g., Duckitt, 1992; Joshanloo & Niknam, 2019; Ryff, 1989; Viot & Benraiss-Noailles, 2019), prior studies (e.g., Hammer & Cragun, 2019; Hashemi *et al.*, 2020; Milliman *et al.*, 2017; Park *et al.*, 2018) have called for additional research to develop contextual understanding of PWB. Specifically, although there is an increasing attention to socio-cultural, organizational and other challenges facing employees (e.g., Dsouli *et al.*, 2012; Du, 2016; Koburtay *et al.*, 2018; Koburtay & Syed, 2020) and their psychological well-being (Abrams, 2010; Combs & Milosevic, 2016; Haring *et al.*, 1984; Sosik *et al.*, 2017), to our knowledge, barring a few notable exceptions (e.g., Joshanloo & Niknam, 2019), there is a dearth of scholarship on how Islam views and defines well-being and what are specific Islamic practices that matter for workers' well-being. This topic is important because religious traditions and spirituality remain relevant in several Muslim majority countries (MMCs) in the Middle East and are embedded in national laws and societal norms (Koburtay & Syed, 2021).

To address this gap, and because religion may "help people cope with stressful life events" (Krause, 2019: 2; Kolodinsky *et al.*, 2008), this paper seeks to study the notion of well-being in Islam and how this concept is practiced in organizations. In specific, this study seeks to study how Islam defines and views well-being, explore what Islamic practices and spiritual facilities may affect employees' well-being in workplaces, and also understand what is the implication of Islamic practices and spiritual facilities for Ryff's (1989) eudaimonic psychological well-being model. The justification for using an Islamic lens is because prior studies on PWB are commonly grounded in Western theories and contexts (e.g., Hershcovis &

Barling, 2010; Joshanloo & Niknam, 2019; Ryff, 1989), and because this study focuses on Jordan and other MMCs in the Middle East.

We define the focal constructs included in this paper as follows. First, we refer to 'Islamic guidelines' as the principles and directions included in both the Quran and the Sunnah/Hadith (traditions of Prophet Muhammad). Second, we define 'well-being' from an Islamic lens indicating good life for the one living it, as reflected in Islamic teachings (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2019). To theoretically underpin this paper, we use Ryff's (1989) eudaimonic psychological well-being framework which includes six dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, a feeling of purpose and meaning in life, autonomy, positive relationships with others and environmental mastery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Well-Being

This study uses Ryff's (1989) theory of PWB. In Ryff's (1989) model, 'well-being' can be approached based on two views: the hedonic and the eudaimonic approaches (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Despite the overlap between both views, Ryff (1989) generated her model based on the eudaimonic view. In this study, we adopt the eudaimonic view of well-being because this view is concerned with people psychological status as a distinct view of happiness or satisfaction (e.g., Extremera et al., 2011). Ryff's (1989) eudaimonic view includes six dimensions that are connected with the PWB of an individual (i.e., self-acceptance, personal growth, a feeling of purpose and meaning in life, autonomy, positive relationships with others and environmental mastery).

Self-acceptance is defined as a positive assessment of one's current life as well as prior experiences and occurrences. Personal growth demonstrates the degree to which an individual has a continuous development and growth. In relation to the purpose in life, it reflects how an individual believes that his/her life is meaningful and has a clear direction. Autonomy, however, is defined as the ability to assess oneself using personal criteria and demonstrates independence and self-determination. Positive relationships indicate the goodness and closeness of people's interpersonal relationships. Finally, environmental mastery refers to a person's ability to effectively manage their daily activities (Disabato *et al.*, 2016; Ryff, 1989). This research aims to figure out how and why Islamic practices and spiritual facilities are crucial for Ryff's (1989) six factors of eudaimonic psychological well-being (RQ3).

The Notion of Well-Being in Islam

For Muslim people, the view of well-being is in light of the principle of Allah's absolute sovereignty (Joshanloo, 2017) and it challenges the view of well-being as a purely biological state. For example, Emmons (2000) suggests that spirituality enables people to solve problems and attain goals in their everyday lives. He proposed the concept "Spiritual Intelligence", implying the ability of people to manage their lives and discover meaning and significance.

As evident in the literature, many Muslim scholars dedicated themselves to enriching their awareness in spiritual questions of well-being and flourishing (Abdul-Rahman, 2017). A common note shared by them is that worshipping Allah is a humans' ultimate function and the fulfillment of which leads to and supports one's well-being. The Quran clearly states this in the following verse: "*And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind*" (Quran, Taha, 20:124).

In addition to the positive effects of worshipping Allah for individual's well-being, specific practices that assist people manage their lives while retaining happiness and well-being

are also included and highlighted in the Quran. One approach is to encourage people to think about and contemplate Allah's 'ayaat' (signs) on this planet and in the universe. For instance, the Quran says (41:53): *“We will soon show them our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth”*. These meditations enhance the spiritual intelligence of individuals by abstracting pleasant thoughts and meanings and promoting positive states such as gratitude, optimism, perseverance, and inspiration (Abdul-Rahman, 2017).

The concept of a 'tree of contemplative practices', according to Munsoor and Sa'ari (2017), may be utilized in an Islamic context to reflect essential practices derived from the Quran and the Prophet's words and deeds. The authors also point out that there are some required and optional practices for mind, body, and soul cultivation. Among these practices are: creative process (focuses on the beauty of God's creation through nature-inspired geometry and floral forms); generative (create a platform for common thoughts and feelings to be expressed through acts of devotion and prayers); ritualistic-cyclic practices (the five pillars of Islam); stillness (calm the body and mind by repentance, supplication, concentration, pondering, thinking about death, and silent ritual prayer); activist (service to others and pro-justice demonstrations); movement practices (presence of mind in prayers and daily living); and relational (relationship between a spiritual instructor or a sheikh and a seeker and this takes the forms of spiritual guidance, mentorship, and dialogue).

Another approach in Islamic teachings to well-being is patience 'sabr' when enduring difficulties, adversity or frustration. Previous research reveals that being patient in the face of adversity is connected to a lower risk of mental disease. For instance, Schnitker and Emmons (2007) studied the psychological and religious roots of patience and found that patience is strongly related to spiritual transcendence and religious behaviors. Furthermore, Schnitker (2012) found a positive relationship between patience and well-being. Schnitker (2012: 263) also states that “patience has long been upheld as a character strength and desirable personality trait that promotes human flourishing and well-being”.

From an Islamic perspective, different verses underscore the significance of patience. The Quran says (11:115): *“And be patient, for indeed, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good”*. The Quran also says (2:155): *“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient”*. According to El-Aswad (2014), in Islam, patience leads to peace and peaceful interpersonal relationships, thus promoting well-being, because in Islamic teachings, this concept is metaphorically described and utilized as a “key to a happy ending or relief”.

In relation to our first research question, namely, “how Islam defines and views well-being”, and in light of the abovementioned discussion (Quranic verses and previous studies), we conclude that “only through submission to the Will of God and by obedience to His law can one achieve true peace and enjoy lasting purity” (Husain, 1998: 282). In order to operationalize the concept of well-being in Islam, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 1: In Islam, worshipping Allah, contemplation and patience are important factors of individual's well-being.

METHOD

Recruitment and Ethics

Purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants, because of the sensitivity of this study. This ensured that the participants are well-informed and experienced

in the subject matter. Purposively recruiting participants was based on their religious affiliation (i.e., Islam) and their understanding of the study's main constructs (e.g., pillars of Islam, Islamic practices, and well-being in Islam).

Overall, 22 respondents took part in this research, representing a wide range of industries such as tourism, education and banking. There were 14 men and 8 women in the sample. Most of the respondents (n = 18) were married, with a higher education (n = 15), and all of them were Muslims. Some data was anonymized to avoid revealing the respondents' identity, as per our ethical commitment. Based on in-depth and rich conversations, the number of respondents was considered sufficient as the data was saturated and more coding was no longer feasible, and the potential to generate new themes/information was exhausted (Fusch & Ness, 2015). As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, and due to the sensitivity of this research, the respondents participated by answering open-ended questions utilizing online or paper-based survey to maintain anonymity and privacy.

Data Analysis and Propositions

In this study, we used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis as this technique is recommended in various qualitative investigations (e.g., Edwards & Few-Demo 2016; Spates et al. 2019). Inter-rater reliability (IRR) checks were used to refine this process and verify credibility of data, hence allowing for more reasonable thematic conclusions. This was handled through reviewing all data for important statements and themes to help restrict the inherent subjectivity and maintain objectivity of the data analysis. Based on our data analysis, the findings (propositions) were concluded with respect to the research questions. Two key thematic conclusions/propositions were concluded as answers to RQ2 and RQ3 as indicated below.

Proposition 2(a): Designated spaces for prayer, prayer time provision and ablution facilities are central for workers' well-being at workplaces. In the participants answers, the most often used codes in the responses to the question "what kind of Islamic religious practices and spiritual facilities are needed by you and important for your well-being and happiness at work" are 'pray', 'praying', 'time to pray', 'mosque', and 'place to pray'. For instance, a retired forty-eight year old man (P10) answered the question through saying that "the ability to pray on time without interruptions" is crucial for my happiness and well-being.

Different participants supported this view, P4 (forty-year old man, employed in a shipping company), P5 (thirty-seven year old man, lecturer), P6 (fifty years old man, Professor), and P7 (fifty-year old man) repeated the same response through giving direct and brief answers based on the following: "pray", "a designated place to pray", mosque, and "praying" respectively. In a similar vein, many other participants echoed this sentiment, stating that prayer and prayer time are necessary and crucial for their well-being at work (e.g., P11, P13, P14, P15, P16). P18, a forty-seven year old general manager male echoed the same idea through mentioning "a proper place for 'Wudu' and a clean/quiet space for pray" are significant for well-being. A fifty-nine year old quality assurance and planning director (P22 Male) made a clear link between performing prayer and prayer rooms or spaces with well-being, positive energy and comfort at work:

"Sometimes during work, we need to perform the prayer on time, and according to Islamic teachings, it is preferable to pray in the mosque and with a group. And therefore it is preferable to have a mosque in the organization or close to it (or praying room) and to allow the employee to pray in it, and the employee can be given a quarter-hour break in which to perform the prayer, and there is no objection to deducting it from working hours so that it covers working hours without shortage. This will make the

employee feel comfortable, give him or her positive energy to complete the work actively, and increase the level of satisfaction”.

Intriguingly, a female CEO of one of the organizations (P19) recommended a number of Islam practices as essential determinants for well-being at work as follows:

“A policy that permits the display of religious objects in the office and in employees’ dress – e.g., wearing of the hijab, Quran on the desk; allowance of prayer/meditation time during working hours, events and meetings; providing a place for prayer; ablution (Wudu), dress, and facing [Macca direction] among others; time off and leave policy for religious celebrations, Eid-Adha, Eid Al-fitr, pilgrimage among others; Friday prayer in the mosque (...); welcoming religious diversity in employment and acceptance of religious expression and symbols; accommodations to prayer and fasting obligations; culture of respecting and allowing fasting during Ramadan; food and drink requirements (Halal food and drink) and respecting individual choice; religious and spiritual events, retreats like Iftar in Ramadan for the team; no discriminatory policies for religious beliefs; clear policies that clarify both permissible and nonpermissible activities and match work duties to employee’s religious beliefs; mental health counselling programs; religion-based wellness and employee assistance programs; allowance of charity and alms giving activities between employees to those in need”.

Proposition 2(b): Contemplative practices are important for workers’ well-being. Proposition 2(b) was independently concluded to support our answer to RQ2 as a consequence of analyzing all responses received for the following question: “to what extent are the following contemplative practices (stillness, generative, creative process, relational, activist, ritualistic cyclic and movement practice) important and needed in your life” (Munsoor & Sa’ari, 2017). Participants responses to this question were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = “never” to 5 = “always”). Interestingly, based on an initial calculation of counting number of participants responded to this question as ‘always’, our findings suggest varying levels of relevance for various contemplative practices for individuals’ well-being. According to the participants, the most essential contemplative practice for their happiness and well-being is ritualistic cycle (i.e., encourage and practice the five pillars of Islam). At a second stage, the participants indicated that creative process (i.e., focuses on the beauty of God’s creation through geometry and floral forms inspired by nature), movement practices (i.e., presence of mind in prayers and daily living), and generative (i.e., evoking common thoughts and feelings through acts of devotion and prayers) are all significant and necessary for their well-being. At a third stage, stillness (i.e., quieting the mind and body through repentance, supplication, centering, reflection, thinking about death and silent ritual prayer) and activist (i.e., service to others and protests for justice), were deemed as relevant for well-being. Only one participant, however, stated that relational (relationship between a spiritual instructor or a sheikh and a seeker and this takes the forms of spiritual guidance, mentorship, and dialogue) is always necessary or required for their well-being.

Proposition 3: Worshipping Allah, contemplative practices and patience are important for Ryff’s six indicators of psychological well-being. As demonstrated above, to address our RQ3: “what is the implication of Islamic practices and spiritual facilities for Ryff’s eudaimonic psychological well-being model”, a question was incorporated for participants as follows: “according to your understanding of Islamic view of well-being (e.g., worship, patience, contemplation), to what extent are such Islamic practices and views of well-being important for Ryff’s (1989) six eudaimonic dimensions of well-being”.

In accordance with our data analysis, proposition 3 was concluded suggesting that Islamic perspective of well-being (incorporating worship, patience, contemplation) is related with enhancing Ryff's six dimensions of individual's well-being. In particular, most of participants said that Islamic practices and perspective of well-being are critical for their personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, feeling of purpose, environmental mastery and close relationships with others. For example, anchored in a 5-point scale ranging from "most important" to "least important", more than ninety-three percent of the responses indicated that Islamic practices and view of well-being are very essential for the six dimensions of well-being.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Insights from our survey yield key propositions. In light of proposition 1, the literature shows that Islam fosters three elements for one's well-being: (1) worshipping Allah (Joshnanloo, 2013; Joshnanloo & Weijers, 2019), (2) contemplation (Abdul-Rahman, 2017; Munsoor & Sa'ari, 2017) and (3) patience (Schnitker, 2012). In this study, we highlighted specific practices for these three factors. In relation to worshipping Allah, we found that prayer, fasting, reading Quran and giving charities are important for one's well-being. Moving to contemplation, we suggested the following practices as key factors for enhancing people's well-being: ritualistic-cyclic, creative process, generative, movement practices, stillness, activist, and relational. Finally, regarding patience, we found that being calm during difficulties, frustration or adversity is key factor for one's well-being in Islam.

Moving to propositions 2(a) and 2(b), this study shows that designated spaces for prayer, and provision of prayer time and ablution facilities (proposition 2a) are important for workers' well-being (see Koburtay & Alzoubi, 2021; Puchalska-Wasyl & Zarzycka, 2020). In addition, as pointed in proposition 2(b), we suggest specific contemplative practices as important elements for workers' well-being. Our findings also show that the Islamic view of well-being is linked with Ryff's six factors of psychological well-being (proposition 3). This result is viewed in light of Chowdhury's (2018: 156) study which shows that religiosity is important for well-being in terms of "self-identity, self-esteem and meaning and satisfaction in life". Thus to conclude, we offer a preliminary advocacy to the claim that workplaces in Jordan and other MMCs should present more spiritual care for employees as vital predictors for their well-being and happiness.

From a theoretical viewpoint, this paper has (1) presented a comprehensive, fresh and contextual understanding of the Islamic view of well-being, (2) highlighted specific implementations and practices of the Islamic view of PWB, and (3) highlighted the contextual extension of Ryff's framework by extending its model to Islamic notion and practices of well-being. From a policy view, this paper encourages employers to ensure that employees are aware of the positive ramifications of workplace spirituality through imparting the Islamic view and definition of well-being. We suggest including specific spiritual workshops in the HR agenda and evaluating how such workshops are related to employees' well-being to ensure optimal results. At the end, we encourage more studies to examine the theoretical model introduced in this paper using different research designs and study sites. We induce researchers to use this study towards examining the differences between the eudaimonia and hedonia conceptions of well-being.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR(S)