

## FAITH AND FULFILMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HAPPINESS IN MUSLIM LIFE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the relationship between faith, fulfilment, and happiness within Muslim life, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of how Islamic teachings shape happiness. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants of diverse demographics, all identified as Sunni Muslims. Thematic analysis revealed that faith serves as a cornerstone for happiness and fulfilment, with participants consistently highlighting the role of gratitude, trust in God (Tawakkul), and adherence to religious practices in fostering inner peace and resilience. Family and community relationships emerged as significant contributors to fulfilment, reinforcing the importance of social and spiritual connections. Participants also emphasised that happiness transcends transient emotions and is instead rooted in alignment with Islamic values, life purpose, and spiritual contentment. While the findings align with existing literature on the positive psychological impact of faith, the study also identified challenges, particularly in balancing societal expectations with personal and religious conceptions of happiness. The study's limitations, including the small sample size, demographic homogeneity, and reliance on purposeful sampling, restrict the generalisability of the findings. Future research should focus on more diverse participant groups, incorporating varied Islamic orientations, cultural contexts, and longitudinal approaches.*

**Keywords:** Faith, Fulfilment, Happiness, Well-Being, Gratitude.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the study of happiness and fulfilment has gained significant attention within psychology. However, a considerable gap still needs to be filled in understanding how these concepts manifest across diverse cultural and religious contexts. While happiness is universally sought, cultural and religious values profoundly shape the pathways to achieving it (Aghababaei, 2016). In Muslim life, where faith profoundly influences daily experiences and personal meaning, the relationship between religion and fulfilment is particularly important but underexplored.

Religion plays a significant role in shaping psychological well-being, offering a sense of purpose and fostering hope, resilience, and positive life outcomes (Emmons, Barrett, & Schnitker, 2008). Additionally, the link between religiosity and well-being raises essential questions about how faith contributes to an individual's experience of fulfilment and happiness, particularly in a Muslim context, where faith serves as a central aspect of life and identity. Previous research suggests that religious individuals, including those in Muslim communities, report higher levels of happiness and psychological health than their non-religious counterparts (Ghorbani et al., 2010; Wnuk & Marcinkowski, 2014).

Happiness and fulfilment are central concerns in positive psychology, with researchers striving to understand what constitutes a meaningful and satisfying life (Seligman, 2002). Baumann and Ruch (2021) have noted that, until recently,

fulfilment was often treated synonymously with well-being, with little effort devoted to defining its unique characteristics. Although various models of the good life—such as life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985), flourishing (Keyes, 2005), and eudaimonic well-being (Waterman et al., 2010)—have emerged. However, despite extensive studies on well-being, a comprehensive exploration of fulfilment remains scarce, especially across different cultural and religious contexts.

While numerous studies have explored general notions of well-being, the relationship between faith, fulfilment, and happiness remains underexplored, particularly in Muslim life. This study aims to address this gap by examining how Muslim individuals define and experience happiness and fulfilment. Thereby providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between religion or faith and subjective well-being (SWB). The research will contribute to the ongoing discourse in positive psychology by introducing a critical cultural and religious perspective into the conversation about fulfilment. The growing body of research on the role of religion in psychological health suggests that faith, particularly in a higher power, can foster hope, promote life satisfaction, and lead to a more fulfilling life (Aghababaei, 2016).

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Faith and fulfilment are deeply interwoven aspects of human existence, and their relationship to happiness has been a focus of philosophical, theological, and psychological inquiry for a while now. However, In Islamic traditions, faith (or Iman) forms the bedrock of the purpose and meaning of life (Ubale & Abdullah, 2016). Additionally, faith offers believers a pathway

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to spiritual and emotional contentment (Miller-Perrin et al., 2015). Furthermore, the concept of happiness in Islam transcends momentary pleasure, leaning more towards inner peace and tranquillity, life satisfaction, and, ultimately, fulfilling one's purpose in this world and the hereafter (Wiliasih et al., 2024). This literature review explores existing research on the connection between faith, happiness, and fulfilment, particularly in Muslim life.

### **2.1 Faith and Fulfilment**

Faith, particularly in Muslim communities, is a critical factor in the experience of fulfilment and well-being. Numerous studies have shown that religiosity positively correlates with psychological outcomes such as happiness, life satisfaction, and self-esteem (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2014). However, Ghani and Ahmad (2023) argue that the key to a happy and fulfilling life lies in adhering to the path of faith, self-purification, and character development. They highlight the importance of this approach as fundamental to achieving success in life. In Islamic contexts, however, the concept of Tawakkul (trusting in God's plan) is central to the experience of happiness. Believers who trust God's wisdom are often more resilient in facing life's challenges (Ghani & Ahmad, 2023). Moreover, research has shown that Muslims who actively engage in religious practices and trust in the divine will tend to report higher levels of happiness and lower levels of psychological distress (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2014).

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## **2.2 Faith and Fulfilment as a Source of Happiness in Islamic Contexts**

Faith has long been recognised as a crucial factor in enhancing subjective well-being (SWB), including happiness and life satisfaction (Shahama et al., 2022). With its comprehensive system of beliefs and practices, Islam greatly emphasises spiritual and worldly well-being (Ghani & Ahmad, 2023). For Muslims, faith is not merely a personal belief system but a way of life that influences emotions, behaviours, and social interactions, fostering a profound sense of happiness and contentment. This aligns with broader research, which shows that religion and spirituality often promote personal well-being by encouraging positive emotions, moral virtues, and strong social connections (Kim-Prieto & Diener, 2009).

A crucial part of an Islamic life is the fulfilment of religious duties such as daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, giving charity (Zakat), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). These practices strengthen an individual's connection with God and foster community and social bonds, both critical elements of happiness. Social connections, especially within religious communities, have been shown to play a significant role in subjective well-being (Jung, 2014). In Islam, belonging to the Ummah—the global Muslim community—creates a shared identity and support system, further enhancing happiness and life satisfaction.

Research exploring the relationship between religion and SWB across different faiths, including Islam, suggests that religious people report higher happiness and life satisfaction levels than non-religious individuals (Inglehart et al., 2008). This finding is

consistent across various spiritual traditions, although the intensity and nature of happiness may differ depending on specific beliefs and practices (Kim-Prieto & Diener, 2009).

The literature on faith and fulfilment, particularly within Muslim life, reveals that faith is an influential contributor to happiness and well-being. Islamic teachings emphasise inner peace, tranquillity, gratitude, and a sense of purpose essential to a fulfilled life. Muslims find immediate happiness and long-term fulfilment through religious practices anchored in their belief in God's plan.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the relationship between faith, happiness, and fulfilment in Muslim life. Five participants, all self-identifying as practising Muslims, were selected through a purposeful sampling. Participants varied in age, gender, and background, ensuring diverse experiences.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. These interviews allowed participants to reflect on how their faith influences their sense of purpose, happiness, and fulfilment. Sample questions included "How does your faith influence your sense of happiness?" and "Would you like to share your understanding and experience of fulfilment?"

The interviews were conducted in Microsoft Teams meetings, recorded with participant consent, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. This method identified recurring

patterns and themes across the data, providing insights into the role of faith in psychological well-being.

All ethical considerations were followed, including informed consent and anonymising participants' responses to ensure confidentiality. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research committee before commencing the study.

#### **4. RESULTS**

The thematic analysis of responses from five participants provides an in-depth exploration of the interplay between faith, happiness, and fulfilment in the lives of practising Muslims. These findings highlight seven key themes that provide insight into participants' experiences and reflections, thereby highlighting the central role of faith in shaping their psychological well-being.

##### **4.1 Demographic insight**

The participants in this study represented a diverse range of demographic backgrounds. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 49 years, with 40% aged 21–29, 20% aged 18–20, 20% aged 30–39, and 20% aged 40–49. Gender representation included 60% males and 40% females. Educational attainment varied, with 40% holding graduate degrees, 20% a bachelor's degree, and 40% having completed high school or its equivalent. Regarding marital status, 40% of the participants were married, while 60% were never married. Employment status indicated that 40% were employed, and 60% were not employed. Ethnically, 40% of participants identified as Asian, while 60% identified as Black. All participants reported

adherence to Sunni Islam, reflecting a uniformity in religious orientation within the sample.

#### **4.2 Understanding Happiness**

Participants described happiness as a multifaceted and deeply personal concept. For some, happiness was rooted in achieving significant life goals, such as excelling in a professional endeavour, fulfilling religious obligations like Hajj, or witnessing the positive impact of their actions on others. Others emphasised the importance of everyday joys, such as spending time with family, appreciating natural beauty, or feeling contentment in small blessings. The responses revealed that happiness is both a transient emotional state and a profound satisfaction derived from aligning one's life with Islamic values. For instance, one participant remarked that happiness often arises when there is a balance between faith-based and worldly responsibilities, reflecting the holistic approach many participants take towards well-being.

#### **4.3 The Influence of Faith on Happiness**

Faith emerged as a cornerstone of participants' experiences of happiness. It provided a framework for understanding life's challenges and maintaining an optimistic outlook, even during difficulties. Religious practices such as daily prayers, Qur'anic reflection, and seeking closeness to Allah through supplications were identified as key sources of emotional and spiritual stability. Participants also highlighted the significance of trust in Allah's plan, which fostered acceptance and inner peace in moments of uncertainty or adversity. Community engagement through shared religious activities further reinforced



participants' sense of happiness, with one individual specifically noting the uplifting effect of congregational prayers and Islamic study groups.

#### **4.4 Relationships and Community**

The role of relationships, particularly within families and close-knit communities, was consistently underscored as a critical factor in shaping participants' happiness. Family bonds were described as a source of emotional support and security, with moments such as shared meals, meaningful discussions, and celebrating life's achievements playing a central role in fostering joy. Friendships were also valued, primarily when centred around shared values and mutual encouragement in faith. Participants spoke of the importance of being part of a like-minded community, which provided opportunities for spiritual growth, reinforced their Islamic identity, and created a sense of belonging.

#### **4.5 Fulfilment and Happiness**

The relationship between happiness and fulfilment was described as interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Participants viewed fulfilment as a holistic state achieved by aligning personal goals with faith-based principles. For instance, completing religious obligations, contributing positively to the community, and pursuing meaningful career or educational milestones were all identified as sources of fulfilment. Happiness, in turn, was seen as a catalyst for fulfilment, providing the emotional energy and clarity needed to pursue these goals. Participants described fulfilment as an enduring sense of purpose and contentment that integrated spiritual,

personal, and communal dimensions. Additionally, a participant suggested that happiness plays a key role in fulfilment. They explained that when you are content with what you have, you remain happy regardless of whether that thing increases or decreases, whereas fulfilment might involve a different experience.

#### **4.6 Gratitude and Contentment**

Gratitude was universally acknowledged as a cornerstone of happiness. Participants frequently reflected on the importance of recognising Allah's blessings and practising thankfulness through actions such as dua, keeping gratitude journals, or engaging in acts of charity. This conscious practice of gratitude strengthened their connection to their faith and cultivated a more profound sense of contentment and ease in daily life. One participant noted that by focusing on what they had rather than what they lacked, they experienced a profound sense of inner peace and satisfaction, reinforcing the value of gratitude as both an emotional and spiritual practice.

#### **4.7 Coping with Challenges**

Participants identified various strategies for maintaining happiness and well-being during challenging times, with faith being a recurrent theme. Practices such as prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, and self-reflection were mentioned as critical tools for navigating difficulties. One participant explained that focusing on Allah's wisdom and maintaining hope in His plan provided reassurance in moments of stress or uncertainty. Gratitude and patience were also highlighted as essential attitudes for resilience, with participants consciously focusing

on long-term spiritual goals rather than immediate setbacks. Additionally, practical strategies such as journaling, seeking time in nature, and limiting exposure to external pressures were used to complement their faith-based approaches to coping.

#### **4.8 Societal and Cultural Factors**

Participants expressed awareness of the tension between societal expectations of happiness and their faith-based values. In some cases, societal definitions of success, such as pursuing material wealth or social status, were at odds with their personal beliefs about happiness. Participants described strategies for managing these pressures, such as quietly adhering to Islamic principles without seeking validation from others and avoiding environments that conflicted with their values. For participants living in non-Muslim-majority societies, maintaining cultural and religious identity required additional effort but was seen as integral to achieving long-term happiness and fulfilment.

### **5. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the interconnectedness of faith, fulfilment, and happiness within the Islamic context. In this study, participants consistently identified faith as the foundation of happiness and fulfilment, reflecting the emphasis in Islamic teachings on spiritual contentment, gratitude, and trust in God (Tawakkul). This resonates with previous literature that highlights faith as a critical determinant of life satisfaction and resilience (Ubale & Abdullah, 2016; Wiliasih et al., 2024). Happiness, as described by participants, went beyond transient emotions, instead being rooted in inner peace, gratitude, and fulfilling religious

obligations, aligning with Islamic notions of well-being (Miller-Perrin et al., 2015; Wiliasih et al., 2024).

Fulfilment, according to participants, stemmed from living a life aligned with Islamic values, which provided a sense of purpose and direction. Family and community relationships further amplified this sense of fulfilment, with participants emphasising the importance of belonging to a supportive religious community. These findings support research indicating that religious and social connections enhance subjective well-being and provide a sense of belonging (Jung, 2014; Kim-Prieto & Diener, 2009). Religious practices such as prayer, charity, and communal gatherings were identified as essential in fostering both individual happiness and collective fulfilment, highlighting the importance of faith as a comprehensive framework for well-being. These findings also align with Ghani and Ahmad (2023), who argue that the key to a happy and fulfilling life lies in following the path of faith, self-purification, and character development.

Despite these positive findings, participants acknowledged challenges in balancing societal expectations with their religious beliefs about happiness. This tension reflects broader cultural dynamics influencing well-being, where societal definitions of success and happiness may conflict with personal or religious values. Participants navigated these challenges by prioritising their faith, further demonstrating its role as a stabilising and guiding force.

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## **6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

This study underscores the profound interconnectedness of faith, fulfilment, and happiness in Muslim life. Faith emerges as the cornerstone of well-being, fostering gratitude, purpose, and resilience. Fulfilment is intricately linked to living in accordance with Islamic values; it arises from the alignment of individual actions with Islamic principles. However, happiness is deeply rooted in inner peace and meaningful relationships. It is understood as a complex interplay of emotional positivity, personal achievements, and a balance between worldly and spiritual responsibilities. While the findings align with existing research, they also highlight the need for further exploration into the nuances of faith-based happiness in diverse contexts. Addressing these gaps will provide richer insights into how faith can serve as a source of fulfilment and happiness in an increasingly complex world.

This study is not without limitations. The demographic composition of participants, predominantly young adults and Sunni Muslims restrict the generalisability of the findings to other age groups, Islamic orientations, or cultural contexts. Furthermore, the reliance on purposeful sampling may have introduced selection bias, limiting the diversity of perspectives. The small sample size also precludes broader statistical analyses, reducing the scope of generalisation.

Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample, encompassing varied Islamic orientations, geographic regions, and life stages. Studies exploring the experiences of older adults or those from minority Islamic sects could provide

additional depth to the understanding of faith, fulfilment, and happiness. Additionally, Longitudinal studies may also offer valuable insights into how these concepts evolve over time and across life transitions.

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**APPENDIX:**

Theme	Key Insights
Understanding Happiness	Happiness is multifaceted, encompassing life achievements, religious fulfilment, and simple joys. The key is to balance faith and worldly responsibilities.
Influence of Faith	Faith provides emotional stability and optimism. Practices like prayer, Qur'anic reflection, and trust in Allah's plan foster happiness and resilience.
Relationships and Community	Family and community relationships are vital for happiness. They offer emotional support, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for spiritual growth.
Fulfilment and Happiness	Happiness and fulfilment are interconnected. Fulfilment is achieved by aligning personal goals with faith, while happiness provides energy to pursue goals.
Gratitude and Contentment	Gratitude enhances happiness by allowing one to recognise Allah's blessings, practice thankfulness (e.g., dua, charity), and focus on what one has rather than what one lacks.
Coping with Challenges	Faith-based practices (prayer, Qur'anic recitation) and attitudes (gratitude, patience) are central to resilience, and they are complemented by practical strategies like journaling.
Societal and Cultural Factors	Participants navigate societal pressures by adhering to Islamic principles, maintaining cultural identity, and balancing material success with spiritual values.