

Exploring Factors That Impact the Well-Being of Young Muslims Living in Australia

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The majority of Muslims living in Australia are young and form an important part of the country's cultural diversity. Young Muslims are an under-researched population. Therefore, the present study aimed to explore perceptions of well-being among young Muslims and the factors they believe promote or hinder their well-being. A qualitative methodology using in-depth interviews was used. Seventeen young Muslims ($M = 23$ years, $SD = 4.2$ years) participated in the study. The data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicated that participants perceived well-being to be a multidimensional construct. Good relationships with family, friends, the community, the larger society, religion, and spirituality enhanced their well-being. Further, personal resources and coping strategies were also considered important for their well-being. Participants reported Islamophobia in society as a salient factor impeding their well-being. Additionally, interpersonal conflicts with family members, friends, and the community also negatively impacted their well-being. Participants offered helpful suggestions for other young Muslims. The study has implications for stakeholders such as educators and mental and allied health workers, who are involved in helping young Muslims in Australia. Limitations and future directions are discussed.

Keywords

Australia • Muslims • well-being • young • Islamophobia

Well-being is a subjective human experience that is considered vital for the successful functioning of individuals, groups, and communities (Tay & Diener, 2011). There is growing evidence that it is a complex multidimensional construct that encompasses physical, social, emotional, and cognitive elements (Diener et al., 2018; Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman, 2011). Most research

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on well-being has focused on Western populations (Heukamp & Arino, 2011). However, the demographic makeup of Western countries has changed, as people from diverse cultures have settled in the West. Little is known about the well-being of these cultural groups. Australia, a Western country known for its multicultural society, includes Muslims as one of its diverse cultural groups. Since 9/11, Muslims, especially young Muslims, have been portrayed negatively in the media (Kabir, 2019). Nonetheless, there is limited empirical knowledge on the well-being of Muslims settled in Australia, especially of those who are young. Further, it is unclear what well-being means to them and what factors they perceive as promoting or hindering their well-being.

Well-Being

Researchers from disciplines such as psychology, social sciences, and religious studies have formulated, defined, and investigated the concept of well-being (Dierendonck, 2005; Samman, 2007). It is regarded as a subjective process in which people evaluate their happiness and life satisfaction (Tay & Diener, 2011). Recent literature supports the intricate multidimensional aspect of this concept (Fleurbay & Blanchet, 2013). Recently, well-being is reflected by the presence of physical and mental health, an absence of disease or injury, behavioral activities to achieve self-actualization and self-fulfilment, positive social relations, constructive cognitions about self and others, safety, security, a good standard of living, and personal resources such as resilience and spirituality (Cresswell-Smith, 2019; Vally & Ahmed, 2020). While the multifaceted nature of well-being has been studied in the West, it has not been explored with non-Western cultures.

Scholars have defined culture in numerous ways. According to Martin and Nakayama (2001), intercultural communication scholars, it is “the learned patterns of perception, values, and behaviours, shared by a group of people, that is also dynamic and heterogeneous” (p. 23). This definition implies that culture is learned, shared, and expressed through behavior, and that it influences everyday communication practices. According to Triandis (2001), Northern and Western Europe, North America, and Australia have individualist cultures, where people give priority to their personal goals over the goals of their in-groups. He notes that in comparison, people from collectivist cultures such as those of Asia, Africa, and South America give priority to the goals of their in-groups, and are especially concerned with maintaining relationships.

Since well-being is subjective, its determinants can vary from person to person and from culture to culture. Researchers have been working to map determinants of well-being common across the globe (Heukamp & Arino, 2011). Recent developments in the literature (Lomas, 2015) suggest that due to psycho-biosocial commonality, several factors, such as resources, standard of living, and social-demographic aspects such as income and financial stability, occupational status, educational background, age, gender, marital status, and physical health have been identified as universal determinants of well-being applicable to people worldwide (Diener et al., 2018; Røysamb et al., 2018). The dimensions of well-being have expanded to include expression of one's political views, participation in the governance of one's country, and living in a healthy environment (Pinar, 2019). Satisfaction of these needs has been associated with experiences of higher well-being (Gori-Maia, 2013). However, Lomas (2015) has pointed out that despite commonalities, cultural differences exist among individuals across the world. He postulates that, as people vary in culture and belief systems, some culture-specific factors could affect the well-being of people from different cultural groups.

The cultural perspective suggests that well-being is a result of interaction between people and their socio-cultural context (Berry & Hou, 2020; Knoop & Delle Fave, 2012). In collectivistic societies, people are members of a family and a community and emphasize social responsibility,

and thus, their attitudes and beliefs about others are important (Pekerti & Arli, 2017). Having a sense of community, social trust, and social and instrumental support is considered important for well-being (Berry & Hou, 2017). It is also important to note that most collectivistic cultures around the world consider religion and spirituality as factors that are strongly associated with well-being (Cohen et al., 2016).

With increasing globalization and human movement, members of collectivistic cultures are living in individualistic societies as migrants. Therefore, the extent to which migrants feel welcomed, accepted, and a sense of belonging is essential for their well-being (Kassaye et al., 2016). Further, newly arrived migrants also require information, as well as technical and material support from the host society (Kim, 2017). If a host society is not receptive to migrants, and contact between the minority and majority population is minimal, it negatively impacts the migrants' integration and sense of belonging (Khawaja & Khawaja, 2016). Despite the critical role played by the host society in the well-being of migrants, Australians have shown less support to those who are visibly different and follow the Muslim faith (Kabir, 2008).

Muslims in Australia

Muslims from all over the world have resettled in Australia. The 2021 census reveals that 3.2 percent (813,392 individuals) of the total population in Australia identifies as Muslim (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021a). Islam emphasizes religious and spiritual beliefs and practices as salient determinants of well-being (Tiliouine & Belgoumidi, 2009; Yu et al., 2017). In the 17th century, Muslims arrived in Australia as fishermen from Indonesia. In the 19th century, Afghans, Pakistanis, and Indians arrived to work as cameleers, and in the transportation and mining sectors (Islamic Museum of Australia, 2019). In the 20th century, Muslim migration continued in waves from other countries such as Yugoslavia, Bosnia, and more recently from the Middle East (e.g., Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey), Africa (e.g., Somalia), and South Asian countries (e.g., Bangladesh, Malaysia) (International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, 2018).

Muslims in Australia, due to their heritage, tend to follow characteristics of collectivistic cultures. Family and community ties and memberships are valued (van Beurden & de Haan, 2020). As a result of their interdependent lives, Muslims receive social, emotional, and practical support from their friends and families (Pe-Pua et al., 2010). Their religion not only guides them to live virtuous lives, but it is also a means of bringing them closer together. Some Muslims connect through religious activities held at the mosque and commonly attend community cultural and social events. Faith and civic participation have been shown to promote resilience and well-being (Mitha & Adatia, 2016).

Due to Muslims interacting with multiple communities, they tend to report hierarchical identities by perceiving themselves first as Muslims, second as members of their cultural heritage, and third as Australians (Abu-Rayya et al., 2016). Further, we see multiple generations of Muslims living in Australia who can align themselves with more than one group. In 2021, the Australian census indicated that 318,422 Muslims in Australia were Australian born (ABS, 2021b). Researchers (Abbas et al., 2018) suggest that generation and the age at which people arrive in a new country appear to play a role in their resettlement and well-being. According to them, the first generation may find it difficult to adapt to a new country, as they may be holding on to their original cultural heritage and values. In contrast, they noted that second generation, or those who arrive very young, can easily adopt the practices of the larger society and identify more with the adopted country. It is interesting to note that the impact of discrimination on well-being is lower for the first generation and more severe for the second generation (Giuliani et al., 2018). The second generation seems to interpret discrimination as a hurdle in their adaptation.

Overall, 46% of the total Muslim population in Australia is young—that is, under 25 years of age (ABS, 2021b). Young Muslims have been framed negatively by the media (Ewart et al., 2017), which has led to the formation of stereotypes about them in Australia and countries around the world. In Australia, the media's portrayal of young Muslims as terrorists or bomb planters has promoted prejudices and social exclusion, thus making their resettlement harder (MacDonald, 2017). Despite being from many walks of life, the employment status of Muslims in Australia is worrisome. According to a report (Das, 2018), nearly 50% of working-age Muslims are unemployed. Further, according to the Scanlon Foundation's latest *Mapping Social Cohesion Report*, a significant segment of Australians surveyed (32%) reported harboring negative views towards Muslim Australians (Markus, 2021).

The past socio-political climate in Australia may have allowed Islamophobia to take hold (Uenal et al., 2021), and this has given rise to social distance between the Muslim and the non-Muslim Australian population at large. Australian Muslims may feel they are not able to fully participate in Australian society due to the stereotyping of Islam and Muslims. Such stereotyping may impact the sense of belonging and citizenship of Muslims in Australia (Dunn et al., 2007; Mansouri, 2005). In addition, public opinion, stereotypes, marginalization, and political climate may manifest in cases of discrimination and prejudice, which can make it difficult for Muslims to adjust to life in Australia (Khawaja & Khawaja, 2016). Research also indicates that some employers may hold strong biases against Muslims, which makes it difficult for some Muslims in the workplace (Hebbani, 2014; Lovat et al., 2015). In summary, although there has been extensive research on the problems faced by young Muslims, their well-being has not been explored.

Aims of the Study

Young Muslims in Australia constitute almost half of the total Muslim population in the country. Due to their age, identity, and religious affiliation, they can encounter a higher level of societal prejudices and biases (Ewart et al., 2017). Subsequently, they can experience challenges in the resettlement process, which can slow down their integration into the host society (MacDonald, 2017). Nevertheless, they show resilience through their cultural and religious values (van Beurden & de Haan, 2020). Considering the limited body of knowledge on this subgroup, the present study aimed to explore their perspective on well-being. It was crucial to identify the aspects of their lives that contributed to or hindered their well-being.

Method

Study Design

A qualitative methodology was employed to explore the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This methodology is recommended for under-researched topics and was suitable for the present study, as to the authors' knowledge, the well-being of young Muslims living in Australia has not been investigated. Individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to gather narratives, which enabled the participants to express their views and experiences openly in a safe and flexible setting (Dowling et al., 2016). As the study aimed to ascertain the subjective experiences of individuals, the interpretive paradigm was deemed most suitable with data gathered via qualitative methods (Trainor & Graue, 2014). Thematic analysis, which has emerged as a robust

toolkit for health and applied research, was used to analyze the participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A deductive approach was selected to explore what defined well-being to the young Muslims, and what factors were perceived as promoting or hindering it.

Participants

Seventeen participants, five men and twelve women, within the age range of 18–28 ($M = 23$; $SD = 4.2$ years), who identified themselves as following the Muslim faith, participated in the study. Most ($n = 14$) were from Brisbane (Queensland), while the remaining ($n = 3$) were from Adelaide (South Australia). Twelve were born in Australia, and five arrived as minors and had been in the country for 5 to 25 years. At the time of data collection, all participants were Australian citizens. Eleven of them were single, while others were married or in a relationship. Three of them were parents. Eight of them spoke English as their first language, while the other nine participants spoke either Urdu, Farsi, Dari, or Turkish. All participants were proficient in the English language. Four of them had completed a bachelor's degree, while the remainder had completed high school. Five participants were employed, while others were either employed part-time ($n = 4$), unemployed ($n = 3$), or were students ($n = 5$).

Measures

Demographic form: All participants completed a brief demographic form that gathered data on age, gender, education, employment, marital status, languages spoken, English proficiency, number of children, country of origin, number of years in Australia, citizenship, and religious affiliation.

Interview probes: Three probes were used to assess participants' views on the following: their perceptions of well-being (e.g., What does well-being mean to you?), factors that act as facilitators to well-being (e.g., What contributes to your well-being?), and barriers to well-being (e.g., What aspects of your life hinder your well-being?).

Procedure

Ethics and health and safety clearances were obtained from the respective university committees. The authors disseminated information about the study through their social and cultural contacts. In addition, flyers about the study were sent to non-governmental organizations and social and cultural groups. Those who received the email or flyer were asked to pass it on to their social contacts within Australia. Members of society, who were between the ages of 18–30 years, identified as first or second-generation culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Muslims, and spoke conversational English, were invited to participate. The age range specified reflected the majority of young Muslims in Australia.

Data Collection

The information sheet explained the anonymous, voluntary, and confidential nature of the study. Participants completed a written consent form. Semi-structured interviews with three primary probes (outlined above) were conducted in the English language. Follow-up probes, which emerged from the conversations between the participants and the interviewers, were used as required (Kvale, 2008). The interviews were conducted over six months, either face-to-face ($n = 12$) or via telephone ($n = 5$), depending on the preference of the participants. The first

author and two research assistants conducted the interviews. The two research assistants had psychology degrees and were trained and closely supervised by the first author. Data collection was terminated once saturation of themes was observed (Terry et al, 2017). All participants were debriefed at the end of the interview and given a \$20 voucher as a token of appreciation. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour each.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the two research assistants involved in the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data (Braun & Clark, 2021), which allows the researcher to make sense of shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clark, 2021). The deductive approach was applied in analyzing data about the meaning participants attached to the well-being and the factors they believed promoted or hindered their well-being (Terry et al., 2017). To enhance the rigour in the analysis, the two authors analyzed the data independently. First, they read the transcripts repeatedly to gain familiarity. Second, they immersed themselves in the data and generated codes by attaching labels to the participants' comments. Third, they examined the codes to identify patterns and clusters. The codes were subsequently collapsed together into bigger and more meaningful patterns. They identified clear ideas that represented the themes. These emerging themes were labelled. Fourth, they met to discuss the identified themes. There was a 90 percent match in the overarching themes identified by the two authors, which supported the reliability of the data analysis. At this stage, the emerging themes and the underlying codes were reviewed back and forth until the two authors agreed on the final themes, which captured the data in the most meaningful way. The last step was to identify quotes from the transcripts that best supported the final themes and voiced the views of participants, who varied based on their gender and other demographics. These quotes are presented in the findings section. The first author and the two research officers followed the Muslim faith. The second author, a South-Asian migrant, despite not following the Muslim faith, had conducted extensive research with this population and was familiar with Islam. Hence, the whole research team possessed the competence necessary to assess the experiences of the participants.

Findings

The participants' responses identified three broad themes, which reflected their perspective on well-being and factors that promoted or hindered their well-being.

Meaning of Well-Being

The participants reported perceiving "well-being" as a concept with multiple aspects encompassing various areas of one's life. They noted that fulfillment in these areas was required to achieve an overall sense of well-being. It involved accepting one's strengths and limitations and enjoying good health. According to one participant, "it's about feeling ok, being happy, being comfortable in your own skin, but it's also about physically being healthy" (Participant 5, 18 years old, female). An absence of stress and disease was also highlighted as an important feature of well-being, along with work-life balance. Leading a safe and productive life was considered significant, as noted by Participant 12 (18 years old, female): "being successful, protected and safe." Thus, well-being was seen as a combination of many characteristics and features: "It's about your health and about how you interact with others and how you go about in your life and

your friends and interpersonal aspects” (Participant 16, 27 years old, female). Overall responses indicated that they perceived well-being as a broad concept with many dimensions, for instance: “I think well-being...refers to a holistic approach” (Participant 2, 21 years old, female).

Factors Promoting Well-Being

Participants' narratives revealed the following eight subthemes as being promoters of well-being.

Family

“Family” was by far the most important factor participants perceived as promoting their well-being. All 17 participants emphasized the reciprocal relationship with families as an important determinant of well-being, and this was viewed as the top priority, as their families were a strong part of their lives. The participants reported that the emotional, social, financial, and practical support that they received from their parents promoted their well-being. Family members enabled them to acquire values and traditions, which guided them in building relationships with others and solving problems in their lives. They saw family as a source of stability. Participants also saw themselves as contributing to the well-being of other family members, acknowledging that this relationship was one of reciprocity, as one participant expressed these ideas in the following way:

Let's put it this way, in my culture we live with the family, and that helps me a lot because I see my family, my loved ones, they're around me, they're close to me, so I'm not away from them, first of all. It enables me to look after them in the same way that they look after me. When I come home, they know... Mum cooks the food. That helps. Even the fact that I can sit down and talk to them. (Participant 17, 27 years old, male)

Friendships

According to participants, despite family members playing a salient role in their well-being, they could not be available at all times. Additionally, there was a range of issues they could not discuss with family members. Therefore, friends were regarded as another strong factor associated with their well-being. One participant (28-year-old male) described them as the “pillars of well-being.” They referred to friends from school or work, as well as those who were from their ethnic communities. Friends from the larger majority helped them fit in and become integrated into society.

Ethnic friends from their own cultural background helped them enjoy their shared culture and values. Participants enjoyed having someone they could trust and depend on for problem-solving and moral support. They engaged with friends to relax, socialize, and play sports, which enhanced their mental, social, and physical well-being. One participant reported:

Being able to talk about your situation and problems and the feedback they give you, especially when it is positive, it can really make me feel a lot better about a situation and can make me handle a situation better. (Participant 13, 21 years old, female)

Religion

Overall, 14 participants spent a substantial amount of time discussing the role of religion in one's well-being. Participants believed their faith provided them with guidelines, which they followed

to live a meaningful life. Participant 7 (19 years old, male) reported that religion provided “a purpose in life.” Most of the participants (n = 12) indicated that ethical principles proposed by their religion, and their reliance on God, protected them from engaging in immoral acts. They further elaborated that the religious values of respecting oneself and others, and treating others with kindness, helped them become better persons in society. According to Participant 10 (27 years old, male), the belief that one is accountable for one’s actions on the “day of judgement” acted as a moral compass. A restriction on the consumption of alcohol, drugs, and smoking promoted health, while turning to God and praying for assistance gave hope and had a positive impact on their holistic well-being. In summary, Islam was viewed by participants as having a positive effect on their mental and physical health.

A few participants (n = 4) elaborated on the social interaction and support that occur as a part of the religion and associated practices. For example, going to the mosque on a Friday or during the month of Ramadan fostered interpersonal interactions. Interaction as a part of religious activities also allowed them to seek support from others and meet their social needs. Furthermore, this was also an opportunity for younger people to learn from more revered members of the community. One participant reported:

My religion teaches me to treat others with kindness, treat yourself with respect, and to know your values and to promote well-being. Well, it teaches me certain values that I’m supposed to abide by. I mean, there are people who are very accepting and very supportive as well. They’re very determined, and I guess that really does help me look up to them, and you know...try to be like them. (Participant 5, 18 years old, female)

Culture and Ethnic Community

Most participants (n = 14) felt that the multicultural nature of Australian society contributed to their well-being. Some of them, due to their parents or their own interracial marriages, had links to more than one cultural group. Diversity and inclusion were endorsed as playing an important role in their lives. They liked to display certain aspects of their home culture and tradition in the form of food, art, and taking part in festive activities. Cultural values and traditions appeared to help them cope with the day-to-day matters. Further, they found the collectivistic nature of their communities and family helpful, as there was always someone to support and guide them in times of crisis. One participant reported:

With community, I guess your community is there for you when you do need help. The events they do makes you be able to gather somewhere and mix with people who are the same religion or share the same views as you. It allows you to socialize, I guess. (Participant 4, 18 years old, female)

Participants highlighted the importance of helping others through volunteering. Some shared their experiences of engaging in fundraising and with non-profit organizations. This helped the communities generate funds for those who were experiencing financial strain or duress. It also enabled them to experience happiness and satisfaction. One participant stated:

I like to keep myself occupied with some non-profit organizations. If you do good things for other people who really need it, then I think ultimately, it comes back some way or another in your life. I think I am a strong believer of this. I feel that if

you do good and you're part of communities and organizations helping other people in whatever way, whatever charity, whatever fundraising, your family is a part of some organization. (Participant 16, 27 years old, female)

Society at Large Creating a Sense of Belonging

Most (n = 14) participants reported having good neighbors. Although their sense of camaraderie was minimal due to the fast pace of life, they saw their neighbors as friendly and respectful. They reported, "feeling safe and at home" (Participant 17, 28 years old, male). Some of these participants interacted with their neighbors, who offered practical support when required (e.g., looking after the house while away) and emotional support during difficult times. Another participant saw Australia as a fair country where justice and equity were emphasized, stating, "It just makes you feel safe knowing that your rights are protected, and that society will fight for you if you aren't treated rightly" (Participant 4, 18 years old, female). According to participants, these positive experiences enhanced their well-being.

Participants emphasized the importance of being respected and appreciated by the larger Australian society. They indicated that welcoming societal attitudes were vital for their well-being. Acceptance from the host society gave them a sense of security. They wanted to be accepted for who they were and not judged by the host society as people who did not contribute to society and depended on taxpayers' money. Participant 2 (21 years old, female) said: "Societal attitudes are a big factor (on my well-being). I like to be accepted for who I am and not judged." Inter-racial interaction and communication were regarded as salient for their well-being. These ideas are represented by the following comments: "And then say that you're in a good area where people are friendlier, more calm, collected, and open-minded, with that I guess it's more relaxing. You feel more safe" (Participant 14, 20 years old, female).

In addition to commenting on neighborhood and society at large, most participants also discussed their lives in Australia based on their views on the weather and the environment. They enjoyed the climate and the general environment and said that the open spaces and blue skies contributed to feelings of pleasantness and relaxation, which in turn helped their mental well-being.

Personal Resources

Participants regarded personal attributes, resources, and strengths as important contributors to their holistic well-being. For example, being happy, comfortable, and relaxed within themselves was considered central to their health and well-being. They also emphasized hope, optimism, and believing in their destiny as positive strategies that helped them maintain a positive outlook on life. Further, being independent, organized, goal-directed, and having a set routine in life were seen as behaviors that promoted their well-being. Having good character based on their faith and cultural values, such as filial piety and taking care of the vulnerable children and elderly, was also an important contributor to their well-being. Considering the general climate of negativity towards Muslims in Australia, having good coping mechanisms and showcasing resilience was considered necessary to handle these difficult situations. They dealt with racism and societal prejudices by laughing about it, even at times with the members of the larger society, and reframing the situation more positively. For example, one participant said:

I think I've been very fortunate that I haven't really had any serious negative experiences, but I have had some instances where people have told me to go back to where

I came from and things like that, and that affected me for a few days, but I bounced back afterwards and continued with my life. (Participant 2, 21 years old, female)

Further, they saw their engagement with the larger society as an important factor for their well-being. Some participants reported being proactive in society to strengthen multiculturalism. They had taken up voluntary roles to contribute to the welfare of society. They had taken over the responsibility of addressing the misconceptions in society about Islam. Some described the initiatives they took to introduce themselves as Muslims to change the public's negative attitude. Good communication skills, self-esteem, and a belief in oneself were regarded as key to being able to interact with the host society. Some of these ideas are reflected by the following comments:

I am working towards being a positive member of society, that I have something to contribute to society, and that I'm trying to help improve. (Participant 2, 21 years old, female)

I'm quite conscious about my acts and what I say and what I do because I don't want to put a bad image out there. So I try to actually project a very good image of Muslims. (Participant 17, 28 years old, male)

Basic Needs

Most participants lived at home with their families and were not under any pressure to earn the means to live independently. There were some references to the importance of learning and education. Employment was also considered indirectly linked to well-being as it helped generate funds. When asked about the importance of money in their lives, they saw its contribution to happiness but were content with an amount enough to get by, or as noted by Participant 1 (28 years old, female), "just enough for day-to-day needs."

Public Infrastructure

The participants appreciated the excellent infrastructure and public facilities in Australia (e.g., educational institutions, parks, pools, sports complexes, and beaches) and viewed them as important for their well-being. They felt that quality transport and roads in the Australian cities were beneficial. A couple of participants referred to the significance of having a comfortable place to live as a factor related to their well-being. One participant commented:

The work—having a comfortable work, (and secure) financial status helps with well-being as well. Having access to food for me, like ice cream and chocolate, very important to my well-being. I'm serious, they help me. Infrastructure is always having a house, having a roof on top of us, feeling security, feeling that we're never going to be on the streets or like poverty and stuff like that—that also really helps my well-being. (Participant 8, 28 years old, female)

Factors Hindering Well-Being

Participants' narratives revealed four factors hindering their well-being.

Islamophobia, Prejudices in Australian Society at Large and Media

Virtually all participants pointed out that societal prejudices and biases toward Muslims acted as a salient factor hindering their well-being. Larger society's mistrust and aversion, as well as rejection and exclusion, were regarded as severe problems. The impact of Islamophobia on participant well-being was palpable in this quote from an 18-year-old female (Participant 11): "It makes me unhappy when I go somewhere and I have the scarf on, people are looking at me. They're judging me; they say things to me. That makes me upset, and I don't really like that." Twelve participants reported being targets of Islamophobia, while others were not directly impacted but reported observing it. Those who were directly affected reported being abused, harassed, and discriminated against at work and even deprived of opportunities. Some of these sentiments were indicated by the following comment:

I guess sometimes I feel like it can impact me, like I don't have the same opportunities as if I wasn't a Muslim, like people will treat me differently if I wasn't a Muslim. I guess that can impact me mentally, like I can start having negative thoughts about myself and the way people treat me. I guess that could impact me negatively.
(Participant 7, 19 years old, male)

These participants, because of their experiences, lived in fear and discomfort, which impacted their well-being. In general, they all referred to how Islam was framed negatively through the media. According to one participant who wore a hijab and thus was visibly identifiable as a Muslim:

One thing that I think not destroys, but affects well-being is what we hear on the media. So, all these negative things about Muslims and about terrorism and all that stuff, it definitely does affect your well-being, because it makes you insecure when you're talking to other people. When you're working at work, you feel like people are judging you; they've got their eyes on you because they know I'm a Muslim.
(Participant 11, 18 years old, female)

Seeing their religion tarnished was a source of stress for all 17 participants. Some of them managed by avoiding the media or maintaining a distance between themselves and the larger society. Overall, they felt judged by the larger society for terror acts that were not their fault and they were not connected with, as noted by Participant 11 (18 years old, female): "Well, it's what's going with society, where if one person from our culture does something bad, we all get blamed for it and we get picked on and people say stuff." They found the burden of offering explanations to the host society draining. The participants reported that the majority tend to overgeneralize and perceive all Muslims as terrorists, when clearly this is the act of a very small fraction of Muslims. The fact that most Muslims contribute to society was generally ignored.

Negative Relationships with Family and Friends

While we saw that family and friendships could promote one's well-being, some participants reported they felt pressure to meet the high expectations of their family and friends. They encountered stress due to the inability to meet those expectations. Participant 14 (20 years old, female) indicated: "Just the expectations of your family and your friends, if you're not able to meet their expectations, they may put you down, and again that has a negative impact on your

happiness.” Further, participants reported that strained relationships with family and friends could dampen their well-being. They discussed interpersonal and intergenerational conflicts. An elder family member could differ from a young member on various aspects of life, and at times, compromise was impossible. Elders, in particular, were unable to understand the participants’ experiences, challenges, and viewpoints, which created stress and interpersonal distance. However, participants did not wish to lose a family member due to the conflicts. A couple of participants pointed out that their families had disconnected themselves due to differences of opinion, and they felt isolated and deprived of social, emotional, and practical support. Similarly, strained relationships with friends were also a source of distress, as they decreased their sources of social support and connection. These ideas were reflected in the following way:

Well, I guess with your friends, when you do have arguments, it’s really stressful. Like mentally it does put you down and makes you unhappy when you have to deal with that, or when your family doesn’t understand some stuff that you’re going through, and you can’t express to them because they won’t be understanding, I guess, in some areas of your life. (Participant 4, 18 years old, female)

Lack of Personal Resources

While having personal resources promoted well-being, a lack thereof could hinder one’s sense of well-being. Participants indicated that studies, work, and living in a multicultural society could take a toll on their well-being. The responsibilities of education and employment restricted them from engaging in activities that could otherwise add to their enjoyment and happiness. For example, Participant 5 (18 years old, female) reported:

Studying does give me some form of contentment. I’m reaching my goals and trying to be successful, but I guess it restricts me in ways where I have to work hard, stress and...I do get some pessimistic feelings, and that does affect my well-being because it is stress related.

Additionally, for some participants, being part of a minority population was regarded as a “problem.” They felt alienated and as a “foreigner” or an “outsider” in Australia, which led to feelings of low self-esteem. They also highlighted that a lack of confidence, poor problem-solving, and poor communication skills were deficits that hindered their well-being.

Navigating the Nexus of Culture, Religion, and Community

Several participants found navigating between multiple cultures challenging. Meeting different sets of expectations, values, and traditions on the home front and another at the societal level was a tough task, and at times it was found difficult to manage this dichotomy. For some participants, religion also played a role in their stress, as they were restricted from certain behaviors and activities, which were common parts of the larger society. They found it difficult to manage these differences. For some participants, however, culture was more of a problem than religion, as Participant 5 (18 years old, female) explained: “I guess religion, as I told you before, is a way of life, but culture clashes with that. It’s more culture that restricts my well-being rather than religion.” Some participants pointed out that being part of different ethnic communities could be a problem, as rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of these multiple groups clashed. Maintaining a balance between different communities and cultures was found to be a source of

stress. It seemed that at times, the cultures of ethnic communities evolved over time and deviated from their original traditions. As the members of these cultural groups were migrants with the stress of adaptation and resettling in a new setting, they introduced changes, which could be viewed negatively and seen as tarnishing the reputation of the original culture. Thus, participants reported sadness due to not having the opportunity to experience their original culture. According to one participant: "My culture... I don't know much about my culture because I didn't grow up there" (Participant 4, 18 years old, female).

Discussion

The findings highlighted well-being as a multidimensional construct. Strong interpersonal relations with family, friends, community, and larger society appeared to promote well-being among young Muslims in Australia. Further, culture, religion, spirituality, and personal resources were regarded as important for well-being. There was limited emphasis on education, employment, income, and infrastructure. Islamophobia in society emerged as a major factor hindering the well-being. Additionally, interpersonal conflicts such as tensions with family members, friends, and the community, as well as poor coping strategies, impeded the well-being of some participants in this study.

Consistent with contemporary literature, which is predominantly based on Western populations, the young Muslims living in Australia also understood well-being as a complex multidimensional construct (Fleurbay & Blanchet, 2013). They recognized that it encompasses physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual domains (Diener et al., 2018; Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman, 2011). It is interesting to note that populations from individualistic and collectivistic backgrounds both interpreted well-being as a holistic concept. It appears that the dimensions of well-being are generic and apply to different populations globally. These findings empirically support the recent theoretical developments in the field (Cresswell-Smith, 2019).

Factors Promoting Well-Being

It is interesting to note that culture-specific factors appeared to play a significant role in the lives of the young Muslims. This outcome is consistent with ideas proposed by Lomas (2015). In line with research on collectivistic societies, good social relations and social support appeared to be critical to the well-being of participants (Triandis, 2001). The role of family was pivotal in promoting well-being. Family members provided emotional, social, financial, and practical support, as well as instilling values and traditions (Pekerti & Arli, 2017; Yeo, 2014). Positive relationships outside the family unit also played an important role in well-being. Young Muslims valued friendships for a range of reasons, including as a source of moral support, assistance with problem-solving, relaxation, and recreational activities. It seemed that forming friendships with those from their own cultural groups assisted in maintaining their own cultural background and heritage (Knoop & Delle Fave, 2012), while forming friendships with friends from the host society strengthened their integration within Australia (Kim, 2017). Social inclusivity and engagement with the larger society enhanced their sense of belonging, which reinforced their well-being (Kassaye et al., 2016).

Islam, as a religion, was another key factor identified as important for supporting well-being. Similar to past research, participants reported that their religious beliefs offered guidelines for living a meaningful life (Tiliouine & Belgoumidi, 2009; Yu et al., 2017). Religious activities promoted feelings of calmness and prevented them from engaging in dysfunctional behaviors

(Cohen et al., 2016). Social interactions and support offered through religious practices promoted the social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of well-being. Inclusivity at the community level supported well-being (Kassaye et al., 2016; Mitha & Adatia, 2016). Further, involvement in cultural activities associated with their home culture and traditions strengthened multiculturalism (van Beurden & de Haan, 2020). Environmental aspects of living in Australia were also recognized as contributing to well-being, with the climate and space reported to enhance mental well-being (Pinar, 2019).

It is interesting to note that out of all the determinants identified as universal, only personal characteristics and resources were recognized as facilitators of well-being. Similar to previous research, self-acceptance, optimism, independence, being organized and goal-directed, as well as humor, resilience, and the ability to cope with stress were regarded as important facilitators of well-being (Cresswell-Smith, 2019; Vally & Ahmed, 2020). Participants used these strategies to address discrimination and negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam in Australia. However, contrary to past research (Diener et al., 2018; Røysamb et al., 2018), universal factors associated with materialistic gain were not regarded as important for one's well-being. While some participants recognized the importance of good living standards and infrastructure, employment, income, and financial stability were not considered crucial for one's well-being. This may be because most of the participants lived at home with their families and were not under the financial pressure of supporting themselves. It is also possible that being from collectivistic cultures, they valued social relations and responsibility over materialistic gains (Pe-Pua et al., 2010).

Factors Hindering Well-Being

The findings highlighted Islamophobia as a major obstacle to well-being. Consistent with past outcomes, these experiences included harassment, abuse, and discrimination, and resulted in fear and discomfort (Mirza, 2019). These prejudices were more pronounced for those who looked visibly different (e.g., Arab appearance or wore hijab) (Kabir, 2008). Negative portrayals of Muslims in the media created mistrust and suspicion among the host society and slowed down the young Muslims' integration into the society (Ewart et al., 2017; MacDonald, 2017). Subsequently, these social issues gave rise to stereotyping at the societal level and impacted the daily functioning of young Muslims when at educational institutions and places of employment, and even more so when they were identifiable as Muslims due to a head covering (Aziz, 2012; Dunn et al., 2007; Hebbani & Wills, 2012; Markus, 2021).

Considering that relationships were identified as the most important facilitator, interpersonal conflicts with family and friends emerged as a barrier. In line with past research, these conflicts were often a result of intergenerational clashes. These young Muslims encountered pressures to meet high parental expectations (Mansouri & Johns, 2017). A lack of conflict resolution led to social distance and estrangement among family members (Renzaho et al., 2017). Subsequently, such antagonisms prevented the parents and other elders from offering support to the younger people. Therefore, a loss of social, emotional, and practical support compromised the well-being of young Muslims.

Further, a lack of personal resources could also negatively impact well-being. Consistent with past findings, young Muslims, who felt alienated by the larger society, experienced low self-esteem. This demoralized state contributed to their lower level of happiness and life satisfaction (Khawaja & Khawaja, 2016). Low levels of confidence, poor problem-solving, and communication skills acted as barriers to well-being (Watson et al., 2021). Multiple demands, in the form of educational and occupational commitments, restricted participants from more enjoyable activities and caused stress. These findings are in line with past studies (Jones et al.,

2021; Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2019). Some participants found it stressful to navigate multiple cultures to meet different sets of expectations, values, and traditions between home and broader society, which was a new finding.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The current study identified culture-specific factors that impacted the well-being of young Muslims living in Australia. Findings supported the importance of relationships and recognized the importance of religion and spirituality for well-being. The study also supports the multidimensional nature of well-being.

In addition to contributing to current theoretical frameworks of well-being, insight gained from this study is of practical utility in developing policies and interventions to support the well-being of individuals in this population at various levels, from health interventions through to government policies. Stakeholders who may benefit from such information include educators and mental and allied health workers, who are involved in supporting young Muslims resettling in Australia.

Limitations and Future Direction

The study is not free from limitations. The sample was homogeneous and consisted of young Muslims living comfortably with families and did not represent young Muslims from different socioeconomic classes or generations. Further, it also did not include newly arrived migrants. Therefore, it was not possible to explore the impact of the socio-economic factors, duration of stay, or generational status on the participants' well-being. Future research should address these gaps by collecting a larger and more diverse sample. Additionally, it is of interest to understand the well-being of adolescents, adults, and elderly Muslims.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations, the study is the first of its kind to explore the well-being of young Muslims living in Australia. The participants perceived well-being as a holistic concept. Happiness and satisfaction in several areas were important. Personal resources and a positive approach to life were regarded as critical for one's mental health. Being from collectivistic cultures, family and friends were emphasized as a source of support. Religious, cultural, and family values and traditions guided participants in their lives. Acceptance by the larger society and a sense of belonging were important for well-being. Nevertheless, Islamophobia and discrimination were major factors hindering well-being. Interpersonal conflicts and poor coping skills lead to a reduced level of well-being. The findings are useful for stakeholders who work with young Muslims. Further, it is expected that the study would become the basis for future investigations.

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