

Construction of an Islamically-Integrated Psychological Well-Being Model

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Psychological well-being is defined as an individual's overall functioning that includes fulfillment in various aspects of life, such as having positive relationships with others, personal mastery, autonomy, purpose and meaning in life, and personal growth. Despite the abundance of literature on psychological well-being, contemporary research has focused almost entirely on Western conceptualizations while often neglecting the cultural and religious factors that play a crucial role in defining it. The overall objective of this study is to conceptualize psychological well-being from an Islamic perspective, conducting a qualitative content analysis on two classical Islamic works, Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's 9th century work entitled *Sustenance of Body and Soul* and Imam al-Birgivi's 16th century work on *The Path of Muhammad*. The results of the analysis of these sources lead to the construction of a model consisting of three main themes and eleven subthemes. The results of the study are considered in relation to the existing literature, with a focus on the study's contributions, limitations, and implications for future practice and research.

Keywords

Psychological well-being • Islam, and mental health

Introduction

Psychological well-being (PWB), or what constitutes a good life, is defined as an individual's overall functioning that includes fulfillment in various aspects of life (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Historically, psychological well-being has been widely discussed by scholars from various fields, leading to the continuous growth of the literature. More importantly, early Muslim scholars from various disciplines, such as philosophers, Sufis, scientists, and physicians, have dedicated a considerable amount of attention to answering the question of what constitutes a good life (Balkhi, 2013; Birgivi, 2005; Ghazali, 1965; Kindi, 2012; Miskawayh, 1968).

Despite the abundance of literature on psychological well-being across civilizations and diverse scholarly traditions, contemporary research has focused almost entirely on Eurocentric conceptualizations of psychological well-being while mostly neglecting the cultural and religious factors that play a crucial role in defining it (Joshano, 2017; Koç & Kafa, 2019; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2017) (see Table 1 for a summarized version of the contemporary Eurocentric

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Table 1. Contemporary Eurocentric Conceptualizations of Psychological Well-Being

Jahoda (1958)	Ryff (1989)	Keyes (2002)	Diener (2009)	Seligman (2011)	Huppert & So (2013)	Henriques (2014)	Kushlev et al., (2017)
Attitudes toward the self	Positive relationships with others	Social integration	Meaning and purpose	Positive emotions	Competence	Satisfaction with life	Values and roles
Personal growth	Autonomy	Social acceptance	Supportive and rewarding relationships	Engagement	Emotional Stability	Happiness	Goals
Integration	Environmental mastery	Social contribution	Engagement	Relationships	Engagement	Biological functioning	Character strengths
Autonomy	Personal growth	Social actualization	Contributing to the well-being of others	Meaning	Meaning	Psychological functioning	Dealing with negativity
Perception of reality	Purpose of life	Social coherence	Competency	Accomplishment	Optimism	Access to environmental resources	Close relationships
Environmental mastery	Self-acceptance	Self-acceptance	Optimism	Positive emotion	Positive emotion	Access to social resources	Social interactions
		Being respected				Values and Ideology	Savoring
							Mindfulness
							Prosocial behavior

conceptualizations of psychological well-being). On the other hand, conceptualizing psychological well-being in isolation from its cultural and religious components leads to an inaccurate representation of this construct (Christopher, 1999; Joshanloo & Niknam, 2019). As Carol Ryff, the originator of one of the most widely accepted theories of psychological well-being, put it, “. . . cultural contexts shape the ideal formulations of human well-being as well as the practices by which it is to be promoted” (Ryff et al., 2014). The implications of this inaccurate representation may be seen in the results of studies comparing psychological well-being across different cultures or religions, which consistently show that the well-being of people in the West is significantly higher than that of other societies (Kuyumcu & Güven 2012; Joshanloo et al., 2021).

Given that Islam plays a central role in the well-being of Muslims, it is argued that contemporary scholarship should pay more attention to the rich legacy of scholarship written by Muslims in the field of psychological well-being. Greater attention is required to avoid a lack of understanding or a distorted understanding of what constitutes a good life from the Islamic perspective. It is important to consider this body of (Islamic) literature, which, although centrally concerned with the definition of psychological well-being, has not been adequately explored in contemporary research (Badri, 1979). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the shortcomings of previous Eurocentric conceptualizations of psychological well-being and develop a model based on uniquely Islamic constructs, which draws upon the rich heritage of Islamic literature. Without a representative understanding of psychological well-being informed by the Islamic tradition, mental health researchers and professionals lack a holistic view of what constitutes a good life.

By proposing a theoretical framework for understanding psychological well-being from an Islamic perspective, this study aims to fill an important research gap. The objective of this study is to conduct a qualitative content analysis of two prominent treatises dealing with psychological well-being from an Islamic perspective, namely, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d.322/934)'s *Sustenance of Body and Soul* and Imam al-Birgivi (d. 929/1523)'s *The Path of Muhammad*, and develop a model of psychological well-being based on the qualitative content analysis of these works.

The reason pre-modern works were chosen to describe psychological well-being is that the concept of psychological well-being transcends modern literature since it is heavily informed by early philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions. Many Muslim scholars from various disciplines recognize the tremendous value Islam brings to the lives of people by laying the foundation for how to live a good life. The two works that the researcher chose were written by famous polymaths in their time, and provide an understanding of a good life from an Islamic perspective while also allowing for an interdisciplinary approach when conceptualizing a multi-dimensional concept, such as well-being. Bringing together the Sufi teachings (Birgivi, 2005) and applied philosophical traditions (Balkhi, 2013), the integration of both works provides a representative and organized conceptualization of psychological well-being from an Islamic perspective.

Elements of Psychological Well-Being and Their Relation to Religion

There is a growing body of literature in the field of psychology that demonstrates how various aspects of religion play a central role in people's psychological well-being (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011; Amer et al., 2008; Ismail & Desmukh, 2012; Moreira-Almeida, 2006; Sateemae et al., 2015). Here, the essential elements of a “good life” as presented by contemporary psychological well-being theories are examined and their relationship to religion and religiosity are discussed.

Concepts of Meaning and Purpose

In Islam, a “good life” extends beyond temporal satisfaction to include a broader sense of well-being (Joshanloo, 2017, p. 117). The Qur'an emphasizes that a human's ultimate purpose is to worship

Allah (Qur'an 51:56) and that a good life, both in this world and the Hereafter, comes from living according to His guidance (Qur'an 16:97). Moreover, the Holy Qur'an points out that the human psyche can only find satisfaction through the remembrance of Allah (Qur'an 13:28) and rejoice through showing gratitude to His bounties and blessings (Qur'an 10:58). Accordingly, believers find meaning and purpose by aligning their lives with the divine purpose of pleasing Allah (Keshavarzi et al., 2021, p. 20).

Research supports the significant role of religion in providing meaning and purpose. Muslim students, for example, perceive life as meaningful when they have a close relationship with God, serve God's purpose, and live in accordance with moral virtues (Mohammad et al., 2011). Studies consistently show a positive correlation between religious involvement, purpose in life, and psychological well-being (Bamonti et al., 2016; Moreira-Almeida, 2006; Stroope, Draper, and Whitehead, 2013; Wang et al., 2016).

A fundamental distinction between contemporary conceptualizations of psychological well-being and the Islamic perspective lies in Islam's comprehensive definition of well-being. It encompasses not only temporal satisfaction, such as happiness, life satisfaction, close relationships, and positive emotions, but also extends to psychological and physical health, meaning, and purpose. Crucially, it includes eternal well-being, aligning the meaning of one's life with their ultimate purpose in God (Joshnloo, 2017, p. 120).

For instance, drawing meaning from scripture to navigate worldly challenges is intimately connected to a Muslim's faith and cannot be merely personalized in vague notions of "meaning" (Büyükcınar, 1988, pp. 276–281). In Islam, trials and tribulations are seen as opportunities for getting closer to Allah and the expiation of sins (Ibn al-Jawzi, 2018, p. 728). The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that God Almighty expiates some of his sins for that" (Bukhari 5641). Numerous Qur'anic verses also address God Almighty's purpose in adversity, which is essentially to benefit the subject in the Afterlife (Hamdan, 2008). In the Qur'an, it is emphasized that Allah tests the believers by giving them the opportunity to grow closer to Himself and be successful through their good deeds and acts of worship (2:155–57, 32:24, 47:31, 94:5–8).

Nonetheless, contemporary conceptualizations of meaning often favor a secular viewpoint that excludes religion as a contributor to psychological well-being (Joshnloo, 2013). This perspective implies that individuals can create personal meanings independently of religious values or traditions (Schweiker, 2009). However, researchers argue that meaning-making is intricately linked to religious beliefs and values (Park, 2005). Furthermore, secularizing religion or extracting secular notions of "meaning" or transcendence, as demonstrated by Diener (2009), Seligman (2011), Huppert & So (2013), and Kushlev et al. (2017), tends to overlook the significance and centrality of the role of God and one's relationship with Him in defining psychological well-being (Nosrati et al., 2020; Reber, 2006; Bonab & Koohsar, 2011).

Concept of Positive Emotions

The role religion plays in the happiness of people has newfound interest among scientists and clinical practitioners in recent years due to its immense contribution to psychological well-being (Al-Karam, 2018; Keshavarzi et al., 2021; Koenig, 2018). However, even though contemporary research has shown that happiness is an essential component of well-being, the pursuit of happiness is conceived differently in the Islamic tradition than in the contemporary Eurocentric view. Al-Kindi (c. 801–873 C.E.), the first philosopher in the Islamic world, wrote an epistle on treating emotional dysregulation, and healing from sadness and grief

(Adamson & Pormann, 2012). Similarly, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1997) wrote about the role of patience and gratitude at times of trial and adversity, providing strategies to build patience and coming closer to God. Al-Jawziyya (2020) in his famous book, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, also devoted a section to grief, describing the stages and types, its adaptive and maladaptive forms, and adaptive emotional experiences' role in gaining proximity to God and the expiation of sins. Imam al-Birgivi (2005) also wrote in *The Path of Muhammad* about the role of contentment, surrendering to the decree of God, and demonstrating gratitude. In his book, he also provided cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies for growing out of adversity, and maintaining psychological well-being. Likewise, Imam al-Ghazali (1965), in *Revival of the Religions Sciences, Book of Fear and Hope*, wrote a thorough essay concerning the therapeutic application of hope to overcome fear and despair.

According to this extensive literature in the Islamic tradition, belief in God and His revelation is a fundamental source for experiencing positive emotions and living a good life (Nasr, 2014). Furthermore, the pursuit of happiness in Islamic tradition is primarily concerned with achieving eternal happiness rather than the more temporary forms of happiness conceptualized in modern theories (Joshanloo, 2017). In accordance with this view, Muslim scholars postulate that true happiness that transcends worldly existence can only be achieved through closeness to the Creator, by getting to know Him, and worshipping Him (Chittick, 1989). It is stated in the Qur'an that people can only feel peaceful, calm, and satisfied with the remembrance of Allah: ". . . the ones who believe and their hearts are peaceful with the remembrance of Allah. Listen, the hearts find peace only in the remembrance of Allah" (Qur'an 13:28). The Qur'an also states that straying away from Allah leads to having a depressed life: ". . . whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment" (Qur'an 20:124).

Several empirical studies have also established relationships between different aspects of religiousness and psychological well-being. For example, among Muslims, gratitude towards Allah has been shown to have a positive relationship with psychological well-being and resilience, and a negative relationship with mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Aghababaei, Błachnio, & Aminikhoo, 2018; Aqababaii, Farahani, & Tabik, 2012; Hasan et al., 2021). Research also indicates the effectiveness of patience in reducing mental health problems (Uyun & Witruk, 2017), and increasing satisfaction with life and general health among Muslims (Aghababaei & Tabik, 2015). Furthermore, Islamic-based emotional interventions have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing psychological well-being (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016) and treating mental health disorders (Babamohammadi et al., 2015; Masjedi-Arani et al., 2020).

Concept of the Self

Certainly, the concept of self is central to most theories of psychological well-being, including the notions of self-actualization (Jahoda, 1958; Ryff, 1989), attitudes of an individual toward his own self (Jahoda, 1958), self-acceptance (Diener et al., 2009; Ryff, 1989), autonomy (Ryff, 1989), and self-esteem (Huppert & So, 2013). Contemporary research on psychological well-being provides evidence for self-actualization, self-acceptance, autonomy, and self-esteem in maintaining and enhancing the optimal human functioning (Ryff et al. 2014). However, there are cross-cultural and religious differences regarding the emphasis given to the self as opposed to others when conceptualizing psychological well-being.

For instance, early and contemporary Western psychologists conceptualized the ability to resist social pressure and make evaluations according to internalized norms and personal standards as essential components of psychological well-being (Jahoda, 1958; Ryff, 1989).

This conceptualization represents the ideal notion of self as independent, as opposed to an Islamic notion of self that emphasizes each individual as a part of social unity (Hayatullah, 2014). It is stated in the Holy Qur'an: "the believers are none but brothers unto one another" (Qur'an, 49:10). Islam lays a strong emphasis on community welfare, social responsibility, and contributing to the well-being of others (Birgivi, 2005). On many occasions, Qur'an stresses the importance of showing dedication to the community through collaboration, facilitation of collective social justice (Qur'an 2:83, 2:215, 16:90), and commitment to parents through righteousness, respect, and kindness (Qur'an 17:23–24, 31:14, 46:15). It is stated in the Holy Qur'an: "Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbour farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful" (Qur'an 4:36).

There is a large body of research demonstrating the role of a collectively aligned Muslim identity in the well-being of Muslims. Research has shown that collectivistic coping strategies help Muslims promote psychological well-being and prevent mental illness. For example, Guerin, Elmi, and Guerin (2006) examined the relationship between mental health and coping strategies among Somali migrant women in an ethnographic study. Researchers found that participation in community activities helped Somali women better adapt to their new environment, increased their psychological well-being, and prevented the onset of psychological disorders. A recent study that collected data from 245 Muslim caregivers for palliative care patients during the mourning period showed that religious and cultural practices, such as arranging a funeral feast, visiting the graves, and reading the Qur'an together, helped bereaved individuals cope with the absence of their loved one (Ümmühan, Gül, & Behice, 2022).

It is clear from the literature review that all elements of well-being, as presented by contemporary Eurocentric theories, are closely related to religion and indices of religiosity. However, these contemporary models of psychological well-being do not explicitly include the religious domain of psychological well-being or, in the case of the value-based approaches to well-being, they attempt to do so by integrating Eurocentric culture and values. In this way, existing approaches fail to capture the deeper understanding of well-being that is influenced by religious and cultural values in Islam. Therefore, an examination of the Islamic understanding of well-being is necessary to identify and conceptualize a psychological well-being model that is religiously appropriate.

Methodology

Research Design and Rationale

The researcher conducted a qualitative content analysis (Shava et al., 2021) on the concept of psychological well-being in Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's *Sustenance of Body and Soul* and Imam al-Birgivi's *The Path of Muhammad*.

Ethical Considerations and IRB Review

This study underwent review by Ibn Haldun University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. The IRB determined that the study received full approval based on its low risk and minimal invasiveness, affirming that the research design and protocols align with established ethical standards. All data collected were securely stored and analyzed in accordance with ethical standards.

Results

Results from the qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative content analysis conducted on Abu Zayd al-Balkhi's *Sustenance of Body and Soul*, and Imam al-Birgivi's *The Path of Muhammad* resulted in a three-step process entailing "knowledge" (theme 1), "intention" (theme 2), and "action" (theme 3) for psychological well-being that one can achieve either by oneself or with the help of an external aid (i.e., a therapist or spiritual guide). This three-step process is described in detail in the following pages.

Theme 1: Knowledge

According to the descriptions provided by Balkhi and Birgivi, this theme can be divided into four overarching sub-themes: *knowledge of self-awareness, knowledge of vices, knowledge of virtues, knowledge of the nature of worldly existence, human beings, and common psychological disturbances, and knowledge of Islamic creed and ethics.*

Knowledge of Self-Awareness

Both in the works of Birgivi and Balkhi, a shared theme becomes evident: the essential foundation for attaining psychological well-being is self-awareness. Self-awareness is the key to effectively managing internal events (i.e., psychological states) and external events (i.e., environmental triggers) (Balkhi, p. 33; Birgivi, p. 182).

Balkhi emphasizes the importance of self-awareness in stating: "If a person comes to know the nature of his soul and the degree to which it can tolerate stress in dealing with problems, then he can decide, based on this knowledge, what kinds of problems he is ready to face and what problems he should avoid." He also states: "If one feels strong enough to face significant challenges that might trouble others, they should confront them bravely. However, if they realize these challenges exceed their capacity, they should avoid them, even if it means sacrificing certain pleasures." Opting for soulful tranquility over confronting intolerable ordeals is wiser, as the latter can lead to anxiety, distress, and physical or emotional disorders. Choosing to avoid what one cannot endure "leads to a peaceful life, a healthy soul and real worldly happiness" (Balkhi, p. 33).

Birgivi underscores the importance of self-awareness by saying that it is essential for identifying and managing the internal and external factors that contribute to negative emotions, ultimately leading to a more peaceful and controlled emotional state. In one passage, he suggests that to achieve freedom from the harmful effects of anger, individuals need to reflect on the causes and effects of negativity in their lives. Birgivi states, "Self-awareness plays a crucial role in recognizing personal triggers for anger, such as arrogance, selfishness, and excessive ambition, and addressing them." Furthermore, he mentions that external factors can trigger anger to varying degrees. Here, self-awareness involves "understanding how these factors affect emotions and behavior, including knowing when to avoid situations or people that provoke anger." An example supporting this concept is found in his statement: "Angry people, unless they have patience and strength of will, compassion and ability to forgive should escape from places where tyrannical people are present" (p. 182).

Knowledge of Vices

According to Birgivi, another important way of improving one's well-being is by acquiring knowledge about vices (p. 111). Birgivi describes a vice as "an immoral personal characteristic that negatively affects one's well-being in this world and his position in the Hereafter"

(p. 169–174; 247). Among the vices examined in this analysis, aggression, maleficent ambition, envy, arrogance, avarice, careless haste, hopelessness, hypocrisy, and other social offenses emerge as important.

This qualitative content analysis article concentrates on one illustrative vice to exemplify the broader spectrum of vices discussed by Birgivi. The selection of this specific vice, namely *aggression*, is based on its relevance to what was previously discussed in the self-awareness section. Birgivi describes aggression as an “instinctual response associated with physiological arousal, propelling one to act to repel a threat or in response to injustice and is experienced as a strong feeling of distress” (p. 178). Furthermore, aggression not only harms the furious person more than their adversary but also spreads like a contagious ailment, rendering them unaware of the consequences of their actions. Birgivi goes on by identifying the opposites of aggression as knowledge of these virtues, which “enable one to be patient, considerate, and calm instead of flying into passion when encountering an unpleasant and aggressive situation” (p.179).

Knowledge of Virtues

An important constitutive step in improving psychological well-being is by acquiring knowledge about virtues (Birgivi, p.75). Birgivi describes virtue as “a quality that is acquired by following moral and ethical standards” (p. 75; 108). He underscores the importance of virtues by asserting that they “help in overcoming vices, and that acquiring this quality necessitates one to make a great deal of effort to fight against and overcome their vices” (p. 75; 82; 110; 278). Among the virtues examined in this analysis, God reliance, submission, piety, humility, contentment, forgiveness, gratitude, positive evaluation of others, generosity, patience, and love of knowledge emerge as important.

This qualitative content analysis article highlights the virtue *forbearance*, as an illustrative example to illuminate the broader spectrum of virtues described by Birgivi, for its relevance to the preceding discussions on self-awareness and as a contrast to the vice of aggression.

According to Birgivi, forbearance encompasses several aspects, but in the context of aggression, it primarily involves “considering the good intentions of others and having a favorable opinion about them (p. 183) while eliminating any doubts about the goodness in them” (p. 189). He highlights the importance of positive evaluation of others by saying: “The worst handicap to acquiring forbearance is harboring doubts about the goodness in other people, especially the other faithful, and imagining bad things about them. This suspicion of one’s associates leads to the terribly sinful state of doubting the goodness in God” (p.189). In Islam, this concept aligns closely with the principle of *husn al-zan*, as exemplified in the Quran: “O you who believe, avoid suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin. Do not look for each other’s faults and slander each other. Would you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother?” (49:12). Birgivi’s insights thus contribute to a broader understanding of this Islamic concept, fostering motivation for the cultivation of a virtue, and the elimination of a vice.

Knowledge of Worldly Existence, Human Beings, and Common Psychological Disturbances

Based on Balkhi’s description, enhancing psychological well-being involves three other vital aspects: internalizing knowledge about the nature of *worldly existence*, *human beings*, and *common psychological disturbances*. In his book, *Sustenance of Body & Soul*, Balkhi encapsulates the concept of recognizing the inherently anxious, sad, worrisome, and calamitous nature of worldly existence. He emphasizes this by saying:

Another maneuver is for one to understand and realize that life in this world, by its very nature, is not the abode of perpetual joy and happiness, nor the abode of avoiding any loss of loved ones or sought after desires. One should look around to see if anyone has been spared such losses and bereavements. None will be found. If this is the way of things then one should deeply convince oneself that all the pleasures one obtains in life are but an additional gift that should be enjoyed with delight and that the losses one suffers and (those things) which one is unable to attain should not cause one much sorrow and bereavement. This should give one a fairly happy life of satisfaction and contentment (p. 52).

Here, he underscores the significance of this awareness, highlighting its potential to help individuals shift their focus away from personal desires and, in turn, reduce psychological suffering (Balkhi, p. 34). This cognitive outlook encourages one to contemplate the impermanent nature of the worldly existence and the enduring nature of the Hereafter. By recognizing the inherent challenges of their earthly existence, individuals can reevaluate their priorities, which, in effect, alleviates psychological distress.

Later, Balkhi goes on to highlight the importance of recognizing that experiencing distressing emotions is an inherent aspect of the human condition. He reinforces this point by stating, “By his very nature, man cannot maintain perpetual tranquility and peace, as he is inevitably exposed to anger, fear, distress, and similar emotions. Daily experiences are bound to provoke anger, anxiety, sadness, or gloom due to the intrinsic essential nature of the soul and its volatile essence and changeability.”

According to Balkhi, “this awareness empowers individuals to confront and embrace these emotions as they emerge, providing them with valuable tools to effectively navigate their emotional states. Additionally, when necessary, this insight guides individuals to seek the essential support they may require, including psychological or medical treatment and social support” (Balkhi, p. 34). Furthermore, as stated by Balkhi:

Embracing knowledge about psychological disturbances equips individuals with a powerful tool to monitor and manage their psychological condition, including recognizing the emergence of inevitable symptoms. This heightened awareness facilitates a more informed and resilient approach to combating and ultimately overcoming these disturbances. Such an endeavor necessitates contemplation on the intricacies of psychological disturbances, their causes, and their potential effects. Additionally, it requires a deliberate consideration of strategies and techniques to effectively combat and transcend each specific disturbance. Through this comprehensive understanding and proactive approach, individuals can take affirmative steps towards preserving and sustaining their psychological well-being (Balkhi, p. 37).

Knowledge of Islamic Creed & Ethics

Lastly, psychological well-being encompasses beliefs that imbue life with a sense of purpose and meaning (Birgivi, p. 36–37; 52). Birgivi highlights the role of recalling knowledge related to Islamic creed and ethics in enhancing well-being by saying that “such recollection fosters a sense of direction and intentionality in one’s life” (p. 4–5; 21–28).

Theme 2: Intention

Birgivi emphasizes the pivotal role of intention in the journey of self-improvement, asserting, “the superiority of knowledge depends solely on the sincerity of the intention to act upon it” (p. 158).

This intention, he argues, “acts as a bridge connecting knowledge with action, guiding individuals in determining what they should do and how they should do it” (p. 100). Therefore, the second step towards preserving and sustaining psychological well-being involves setting pure intentions and actively striving to eliminate vices from one’s life. However, according to both Balkhi and Birgivi, this endeavor is not without its challenges. “Cultivating virtues and resisting corresponding vices demands a dedicated effort, requiring individuals to continually self-evaluate and draw upon their knowledge to navigate the situations they encounter” (Birgivi, p. 110; Balkhi, p. 31; 63).

Accordingly, they underscore the importance of perpetual self-evaluation as a means to recognize one’s shortcomings. This ongoing process involves introspection into one’s intentions, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, enabling individuals to maintain a constant state of self-examination aimed at combatting and ultimately overcoming vices (Birgivi, p. 96; 110; 143; 154; Balkhi, p. 31; 63). By linking the sincerity of intention to self-evaluation, they provide a comprehensive framework for psychological well-being, where genuine intentions guide the path towards virtuous actions, and vigilant self-evaluation serves as a vital tool for inner development and the pursuit of psychological well-being.

Theme 3: Action

In the Islamic tradition, action holds a paramount significance, as it is the tangible manifestation of one’s intentions and beliefs. It is through action that individuals demonstrate their commitment to self-improvement, spiritual growth, and most importantly, their faith (Birgivi, p. 100). As Birgivi emphasizes: “Faith is surety, security, confirmation of teachings brought by the Messenger of God from God, believing them in your heart and expressing them with your tongue, your behavior, and your actions” (p. 55). “According to most dependable sources, knowledge, sincerity, fear and hope in God, honesty, good character and behavior, and good deeds are part of faith and an indication of the perfection of faith” (p. 56).

In this context, faith encompasses beliefs, behaviors, character, and virtues that contribute to psychological well-being by fostering feelings of security, authenticity, integrity, clarity, equilibrium, and resilience in confronting life’s trials and maintaining inner peace. Consequently, the third essential step toward attaining psychological well-being lies in the consistent and purposeful practice of virtuous deeds, aligning not only with one’s intentions but also enhancing personal growth and benefiting the broader community.

Conclusion

Despite the abundance of literature on psychological well-being, contemporary research has focused almost exclusively on Western conceptualizations that offer an understanding of well-being specifically attuned to Eurocentric culture and values and their philosophical and religious underpinnings (Joshanloo, 2017; Koç & Kafa, 2019; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2017). On the other hand, definitions of psychological well-being are inherently rooted in people’s cultural and religious contexts, and a Western theory that attempts to understand a “good life” leads to an inaccurate representation of the understanding of psychological well-being in Muslim populations (Badri, 1979; Joshanloo & Niknam, 2019; Keshavarzi et al., 2021).

Although researchers have strived to develop frameworks within Islamic psychology, and have successfully modified Western psychological models, scales, and interventions to be more religiously and culturally sensitive (Haque et al., 2016; Tanhan, 2019), there has been a noticeable lack of a psychological well-being model built upon uniquely Islamic constructs in the literature. This study attempted to close this research gap by proposing an Islamically-integrated psychological well-being model that builds on unique Islamic constructs. The current model

suggests that psychological well-being develops in a sequential order in three stages consisting of: knowledge, intention, and action. Therefore, the proposition that the current model makes goes beyond the early idea that psychological well-being is a simple and one-dimensional theory comprised of isolated constructs, independent from one another. According to the current model, having a complete understanding of psychological well-being necessitates appreciating the sequential order and the relatedness of all three stages. The transitional processes between these three stages indicate that one should first gain knowledge regarding the constituents of psychological well-being, and then turn this into action with full presence of mind and intentionality that entails being cognizant of these values whilst performing such actions.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The first implication is the improvement of further models built upon uniquely Islamic constructs to better understand psychological well-being. Researchers are also encouraged to facilitate the development of a valid and reliable scale that is appropriate to the current model since there is no empirically tested model of psychological well-being that is inherently Islamic. After the development of a valid and reliable scale, future researchers can also test the adaptability of this scale to see the extent to which it is applicable to Muslims across different countries. In addition, future researchers may also conduct cross-cultural studies to assess the level of psychological well-being of individuals from different cultures.

The second implication could be developing therapeutic interventions to integrate into mental health practice and creating experimental studies to measure their efficacy. For example, researchers may provide psychoeducation that corresponds to the knowledge construct of the current model, and then examine the scores for the other constructs to measure the extent to which knowledge predicts intentional actions, actions themselves, and the overall psychological well-being of individuals. Researchers and mental health practitioners can use the data drawn from experimental and correlational studies to better understand which constructs have essential contributions to psychological well-being, and how further interventions can be designed to increase psychological well-being. Researchers and mental health practitioners can utilize such interventions in psychoeducational programs, workshop projects, and different types of therapies (e.g., motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and culturally sensitive therapy) to help enhance the psychological well-being of individuals.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study was that only a limited number of books were subjected to qualitative content analysis in the development of the current model. In this sense, future researchers could benefit from a variety of different sources found in the Islamic scholarly tradition. Another limitation was that no instrumental tool was developed as a result of this study.

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