

## Exploring the Islamic Perspective on Physical Well: Allah's Desire for Human Health<sup>\*</sup>

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### Abstract

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a condition of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. This concept of health is deemed similar to the concept of health in Islam, in which Islam defines the state of health as the state of synergy between psychological, physical, spiritual, and social factors. In regard to physical health, Islam promotes physical activity and healthy eating, as shown by the Prophet Muhammad. Scientifically, the behavior shown by the Prophet Muhammad does benefit the physical health of human beings. In addition to physical health, mental health is also an important issue in achieving the complete state of well-being. Islam addresses the promotion of one's mental health through the implementation of Islamic faith and worship, tawbah, and the state of forgiveness. The following paper would like to further elaborate on the state of complete health in Islam and its relation to modern medicine.

**Keywords:** Health, Islam, Modern medicine, Physical well-being, Mental health

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## Introduction

Based on the World Health Organization (1948), health is a condition of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not only the absence of diseases or infirmity.<sup>1</sup> Well-being is defined as the synergy of feeling well and functioning well. For details, it is the combination of positive emotions (happiness and contentment), having control of life, having a purpose in life, and having experience of positive relationships. In addition, well-being is a factor that allows the person to grow and develop.<sup>2</sup> These definitions are based on modern medicine. Studies that report health and well-being based on Islam's perspective are limited.

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, with a growth rate of 0.5% per year.<sup>3</sup> Based on data published by Dvyik, et al. (2023), the worldwide population of Muslims will increase by 45.7% in 2060, leading to the total global population.<sup>4</sup>

*The Qur'an* is a Muslim scripture that contains a number of suras. Each sura explains multiple aspects of life and the afterlife, including health, medicine, healthcare, and attitudes toward those who are sick. In addition, the topics of health and healthcare are also found in *Hadith*. Based on *Hadith*, Prophet Muhammad elaborates on the importance of seeking treatment for illness, just like him, who sought treatment for himself.<sup>5</sup>

Besides seeking treatment for physical health, the other aspects that should be explored from Islam's perspective are mental health and behavior (including eating behavior)<sup>6</sup>. Religion was considered an essential characteristic of cultural psychiatry that influences diagnosis and therapeutic approach formulation.<sup>7</sup> From Islam's perspective, according to the *Qur'an*, food is the factor for thought, reasoning, gratitude, healing, reverence, and human dignity.<sup>8</sup> It is also

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, *Constitution of World Health Organization* [Internet] (World Health Organization, 2024), accessed January 10, 2024,

<sup>2</sup> K. Ruggeri et al., "Well-Being Is More than Happiness and Life Satisfaction: A Multidimensional Analysis of 21 Countries," *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes* 18, no. 1 (December 19, 2020): 192.

<sup>3</sup> F. Shirzad et al., "Islam and Mental Health: Translation, Book Review, and Commentary by Religious Scholars and Mental Health Professionals," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 24, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 160–71.

<sup>4</sup> E. Dyvik, "Estimated Percent Change in Worldwide Population Size from 2022 to 2060, by Religion" [Internet] (Statista 2024, 2023), accessed January 10, 2024,

<sup>5</sup> H. G. Koenig and S. Al Shohaib, "Beliefs about Health, Healing and Healthcare," in *Health and Well-Being in Islamic Societies*, ed. H. G. Koenig and S. Al Shohaib (Jeddah: Springer, 2014), 43–54.

<sup>6</sup> A. Tarighat-Esfanjani and N. Namazi, "Nutritional Concepts and Frequency of Foodstuffs Mentioned in the Holy Quran," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 3 (June 5, 2016): 812–19.

<sup>7</sup> N. Aggarwal, L. Hinton, and L. Kirmayer, *DSM-5 Handbook on the Cultural Formulation Interview* (American Psychiatric Pub, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Tarighat-Esfanjani and Namazi, "Nutritional Concepts and Frequency of Foodstuffs Mentioned in the Holy Quran," :818

related to health problems; therefore, eating behavior needs to be explored from Islam's perspective.<sup>1</sup>

With this paradigm (the increase in the Muslim population and the fact that Islam as a religion also recommends health), the knowledge about Islam's perspective on health and well-being should be explored. In this review, some explanations elaborate on the principle of health (physical and psychological) and well-being in Islam's perspective with the Tawhid concept.

### **Health: A Blessing from Allah**

In ancient Greece, India, and Chinese medicine, the perception of health was a concept of equilibrium of the person and the environment, the synergy between soul and body, and the natural history of the disease. Health was defined as the "harmonious functioning of the organs" by Pindar (in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC). Plato also mentioned the definition of health in his publication "Dialogues"; he pointed out that the harmonization between individual and community can achieve the ideal human society. He also mentioned that "a healthy mind is a healthy body". Hippocrates also stated the idea of positive health that depends on the primary human constitution (genetic), exercise, and eating behavior (diet). Proper diet and exercise are the essential components of health that affect the mind and body, resulting in different types of diseases in each season (such as respiratory tract disease during winter).<sup>2</sup>

The definition of health has been developing until now. Based on the modern concept of health, health is not only defined as the absence of a disease; it also affects the capability of the person to realize and fulfil their needs. In this era, health is approached by a holistic concept, which consists of wholeness (the ability to function in physical, mental, spiritual, and social aspects). World Health Organization (WHO) proposed the definition of health in 1948, which defined it as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".<sup>3</sup>

In Islam, the definition of health is similar to modern medicine, which is the state of synergy between physical, psychological, spiritual, and social factors. However, in Islam, health is Allah's greatest blessing and gift. In that perception, taking care of health is a holy duty, which makes Muslims choose spiritual well-being over physical wellness. The belief in Islam also influences the idea of healing. In counter, when the illness comes, Muslims face the illness with patience and prayers because they assume that illness or diseases are the method to washing

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<sup>1</sup> J. Pooneh et al., "The Role of Islamic Lifestyle and Healthy Nutrition in Accordance with the Recommendations of Islam and the Holly Quran by Focusing on the Risk of Cancer Incident," *Journal of Community Medicine and Health Solutions* 1, no. 1 (November 17, 2020): 018–22.

<sup>2</sup> A. L. Svalastog et al., "Concepts and Definitions of Health and Health-Related Values in the Knowledge Landscapes of the Digital Society," *Croatian Medical Journal* 58, no. 6 (December 2017): 431–35.

<sup>3</sup> Svalastog et al., "Concepts and Definitions of Health and Health-Related Values in the Knowledge Landscapes of the Digital Society" 434

their sins.<sup>1</sup> In the Tawhid concept, Prophet Muhammad said that the religious people are missing their God (Allah); therefore, in dying conditions, they are pleased because they will meet God (Allah) in the near time. However, God (Allah) is missing the religious people more, and Allah loves the prayers who pray with their hearts (*Qalbu*). A Hadith explained, “Who is trying to come near an inch to Me, then I will come near them closer”.

From Islam’s perspective, health or even illness (disease) is considered a blessing and the method for washing the sins. However, even if it is identified as the method for cleaning the sins, Islam is also recommended to find the treatment to heal the disease. In addition, based on the *Qur’an*, saving other people’s lives is counted as saving all humanity in the world.<sup>2</sup>

### Physical Health and Well-being in Modern Medicine Perspective and Islamic Perspective

Health and well-being involve multiple aspects, which are physical, mental, and social. Therefore, health and well-being were elaborated not only by physical states and illness but also the psychosocial states, and the capability to endure the psychological status.<sup>3</sup> Physical well-being is the capability of the person to perform social roles and physical activities that are not limited by the physical condition (pain or other biologic health indicators).<sup>4</sup>

In the Islamic perspective, a healthy life is an obligation. The prayer should not be weak physically, spiritually, and mentally. A Hadith told us that “a strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer.” However, some Muslims have different opinions about the importance of physical health. Even a missed perception among the Muslim population about the physical well-being that is characterized by the increase in abdominal size has occurred.<sup>5</sup>

Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to improve and maintain their physical health through physical activity. Running is one of the physical activities that Prophet Muhammad conducts with His wife (Ayesha) and His children to stay healthy and active. The other sport that Prophet Muhammad does is horse riding (from *Hafna* to *Thaniyyat al-Wada’* and from *Thanniyat al-Wada’* to *Masjid bani Zuraiq*). The other sports and physical activities that are conducted are shooting, wrestling, and swimming.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B. Attum et al., "Cultural Competence in the Care of Muslim Patients and Their Families" [Internet], StatPearls, 2023, accessed January 10, 2024,

<sup>2</sup> S. M. Saleem and S. S. Jan, "Islam, Ethics and Modern Medicine: From Theory to Medical Practice: A Narrative Review," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* (July 20, 2022): 465–90.

<sup>3</sup> S. Sonnentag, L. Tay, and H. Nesher Shoshan, "A Review on Health and Well-Being at Work: More than Stressors and Strains," *Personnel Psychology* 76, no. 2 (June 31, 2023): 473–510.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. Michalos, *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Netherlands: Springer, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> M. Z. Malik, "Importance of Physical Fitness in the Light of Seerat e Tayyibah," *Jihat al-Islam* 1, no. 2 (2011): 7–20.

<sup>6</sup> Malik, "Importance of Physical Fitness in the Light of Seerat e Tayyibah," "19

In this era, physical inactivity has been an issue for the risk of developing chronic health diseases. A study was conducted by Aljanyousi GF et al. (2019) to understand the sociocultural factors that influenced physical activity among Muslim students in Qatar. This study found that their family health values influenced the physical activity among the subjects (it is affected by Qatar culture and Islamic culture). In the interview, the subjects mentioned that their families believed that healthy activity and behavior are Islam's order (Islam tells them to do physical activity to keep a good body shape or good health). Islam's activities, such as praying, fasting, attending the mosque, and others, stimulate physical health.<sup>1</sup>

Besides physical activity, healthy eating is another way to increase physical well-being. From the Islamic perspective, Muslims are recommended to eat healthily with the hope that it can be the source of their pure heart and clear mind. Prophet Muhammad is the Islamic model for healthy eating behavior. The "Prophetic Food" foods are honey, goat's milk, barley, dates, and others. Several studies show the benefits of healthy food with physical activity to increase physical well-being. In addition, these two ways of improving physical well-being also act as essential factors to increase mental well-being.

### **Mental Health and Well-being in Islamic Perspective**

Mental health disease is a psychological problem that causes the inability of a person to deal with their problems. It is influenced by the internal state of mind and its environment. It causes low productivity and, at worst, causing death. Religion is one factor that affects a person's decision and state of mind. In Islam, health is not only physical health but also mental health. The faith of Islam stands for the Muslims to achieve happiness and peace of life to solve their problem without feeling hopeless. It will stimulate the Muslims to believe that their life is meaningful and then avoid anxiety, depression, and distress during the problematic condition.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast with physical well-being, mental well-being is more subjective and philosophical. Even in Islam, states of mind are also a product of desirable mental status and are influenced by the objective life situation. Based on Islam's perspective, the ideal subjective state of mind should be in peace and interpreted as the unity between humans (prayer) and their God (Allah), or a concept called Tawhid. However, in the process of making peace with mental status and following the instruction of Islam's order, there is a wicked force that strongly urges Muslims to bail out from this state, which is called an evil-commanding activity. This component of personality is a negative aspect that is very close to blaming, self-accusing, and feeling embarrassed. This condition is also known as the evil-commanding self.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. F. Aljanyousi et al., "Addressing Context to Understand Physical Activity among Muslim University Students: The Role of Gender, Family, and Culture," *BMC Public Health* 19, no. 1 (December 5, 2019): 1452.

<sup>2</sup> Fatimah Andriyani et al., "Influence of Islam on Mental Health," in *Muhammadiyah International Public Health and Medicine Conference* (Jakarta: Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, 2022), 325–32.

<sup>3</sup> M. Joshanloo, "Islamic Conceptions of Well-Being," in *The Construction of an Islamically-Integrated Psychological Well-Being Model*, ed. Fatma Sena Aycan, master's thesis, Ibn Haldun University, School of

To achieve well-being, Muslims should fight the devilish self. The inaction of self-accusing self will encourage Muslims to have a stable state of mind. Muslims will have a peaceful and serene condition when this condition is achieved through absolute unity with God (Allah). The state is characterized by the internal assurance that results from the awareness of approval and support from Allah. From the Islamic perspective, well-being can be achieved through the knowledge and implementation of Islamic faith and worship, tawba, and forgiveness.

The Islamic faiths consist of (1) believing in God; (2) believing in Prophet Muhammad; (3) believing in the Qur'an; (4) believing in the day of Judgement; (5) believing in Angels; and (6) believing in the destiny or fate (qadr).<sup>19</sup> Implementing Islamic faith and worship is one of the factors that can influence the well-being of Muslims. The interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith among Muslims, personal beliefs, and behavioral adherence are essential roles in the relationship between mental health and the doctrines of Islam. These doctrines have the potential to prevent and mitigate psychiatric problems such as anxiety and depression.<sup>1</sup>

The other concept that can help to increase positive mental health among Muslims is the concept of Tawba. Tawba consists of four pillars: (1) regret; (2) the behavior of never repeating the wrong action; (3) compensation effort for the wrongdoings; (4) seeking forgiveness; it is a principle of Islam to assist the soul decompensation. This concept was taught in the Qur'an:

"Seek forgiveness of your Lord and repent to Him, [and] He will let you enjoy a good provision for a specified term and give every doer of favour his favour. However, if you turn away, then indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a great Day."

A study was conducted by Uyun Q, et al. (2019) (Table 1) about the importance of the Tawba concept in improving mental health; this therapy is known as soul purification (or *tazkiyah al-nafs*). This study involves 32 Muslim college students (18-23 years old) who had eight sessions of Tawba and istighfar therapy. After therapy, the subjects had increased social-emotional health, believing in themselves and others as positive mental health indicators.<sup>2</sup>

Another principle in Islam to achieve mental well-being is forgiving. Conflict is an unavoidable condition, even in Islam. Conflict can occur if there is a difference in interest or belief between two or more individuals or groups. The most important in this situation is how to deal with the conflict. The idea that humans are never free from making mistakes is accurate; however, humans should try to prevent mistakes because forgiving is not an accessible state.

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Graduate Studies, Department of Clinical Psychology, supervised by Asst. Prof. Dr. Hooman Keshavarzi, 2017, 109–31.

<sup>1</sup> Shirzad et al., "Islam and Mental Health: Translation, Book Review, and Commentary by Religious Scholars and Mental Health Professionals, 168

<sup>2</sup> Q. Uyun, I. N. Kurniawan, and N. Jaufalaily, "Repentance and Seeking Forgiveness: The Effects of Spiritual Therapy Based on Islamic Tenets to Improve Mental Health," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 22, no. 2 (February 7, 2019): 185–94.

Forgiveness, forgiving and forgive are mentioned in the Qur'an. Forgiveness is deciding and ignoring the sin; hence, forgive is leaving the blame, and forgiving is knowing the sins and forgetting it. If Muslims forgive and ignore their sins, God (Allah) will forgive them because God (Allah) is forgiving and merciful. In Islam's perspective, Prophet Muhammad is the model of forgiving and guides his followers to forgive.<sup>1</sup>

Forgiveness is potentially related to well-being, physical health and achieving success. People with forgiveness behaviour tend to have high positive emotions, high satisfaction with life, and low negative emotions. Psychologically, it can increase self-esteem and reduce the adverse effects of psychological tension.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Islamic perspectives based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and the example of Prophet Muhammad show the critical role of health and physical and mental well-being. As proved by scientific data, physical activity, eating behaviour, implementation of Islamic faith and worship, tawba, and forgiveness are the ways to achieve general well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Jannatian, M. Motia, and A. Parcham, "Lingüistic and Metalingüistic Elements of Forgiveness (AFW) in Resolving Family Conflicts in the Holy Quran," *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana* 26, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>2</sup> I. Warsah, "Forgiveness Viewed from Positive Psychology and Islam," *Islamic Guidance and Counselling Journal* 3, no. 2 (2020).

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