



Editorial: The Year of “What Matters Now.”

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Every year, I write an editorial; but, this year, it seems harder to do. Perhaps it is because the ‘year of change’ ended up for many months once more being the ‘year of same’. I’ve learned to set low expectations and like you, I’m pretty much over the pandemic. Been there. Done that. Can we please move on? And that we are. Thanks to stellar government responses in many countries across the Gulf region, we’re back in full force. A renewed energy is in the air, employers are hiring, in-person trade shows have resumed, malls are full, university classrooms are humming, tourists are back and the unmistakable fever of Dubai’s EXPO 2020 is buzzing with every island, desert, nation, and territory of the globe represented. But, let’s not be fooled either. Many countries in the region have fared poorly indeed, some with existing challenges of war, civil strife, economic inflation, food insecurity, and more challenges on the horizon. These have only worsened during the pandemic and much will need to be done to repair and rebuild these nations. (Read more in my Perspectives paper; this issue). The opportunities as well as challenges facing us are great and you are needed. But rather than bore you with my annual wish for research and practise in the region, I’ve asked our leaders in the field for theirs instead. Ask yourself how you might contribute to a better year for everyone through ideas of your own and together, let’s make 2022 the year of what really matters.

If we focused on one challenge this year as positive psychology practitioners and/or researchers, what would it be?

Dr. Saddiga Jaber Al Ghalib, Professor, and Director of the Positive Psychology & Wellbeing Research Lab, Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (See [here](#) or [Instagram](#)). She is also the Editor of “*Prophet Muhammad’s Characteristics & Mannerisms and Positive Psychology*” (forthcoming), a book exploring the Prophet’s (PBUH) character strengths and associated toolkit for readers to cultivate a more meaningful life.

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“Positive Psychology should conduct more research examining the impact of interventions (PPIs) among youth in our region for continued effectiveness and relevance. Through such research we can discern what techniques work best for us given our culture, values, and attitudes. This will pave the way for the creation and implementation of national policies that can help people lead more fulfilling lives.”



Mohammed Al-Haj Baddar, Positive Psychology Practitioner and Senior Education Coordinator at RTI International. Amman, Jordan.

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"I'm contributing to research in the area of Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) in Arab countries and I've committed to working towards the improvement of early grades as well as teacher and student wellbeing here in Jordan. I invite researchers and practitioners to focus on teaching wellbeing alongside decreasing student's learning loss for better coping with the COVID-19 pandemic for 2022."

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"I'd like to see research on autonomy of choice and self expression in our region, as it is essential to reframe the notion of individual empowerment not as an affront to culture, but as an imperative to social and individual wellbeing. This reframing can help individuals break the chain of false or dictated beliefs around what has become "normalized" behaviour. For example, accepting family abuse, either physically or emotionally, and not allowing individuals to speak up as it is considered a form of disregard for family, needs revising. Autonomy of choice and self-expression is related to all life choices including marriage and career. Wellbeing entails having a voice as well as a choice."



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"According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2021), 82.4 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflicts, human rights violations, and violence, 42% are children. Exposure to trauma costs societies and individuals, making it a global issue. COVID-19 has further caused 6.9 million deaths (Institute for Health Metrics & Evaluation, 2021). Growing evidence shows that social, economic, environmental, and political determinants shape wellbeing and positive psychology must attend to these via global initiatives that collect, evaluate, and analyze social determinants, appraise their impact and implement interventions."



Sherif Arafa is an Egyptian award-winning editorial cartoonist and self-development author. He holds an MBA in Human Resources, an MS Degree in Applied Positive Psychology, and a Bachelor of Oral & Dental Surgery. Abu Dhabi, UAE.

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“The past two years created a permanent change in our work environment. We are used to “Microsoft Teams” meetings or distance learning classes. We so intensively used social media to communicate, to the extent that Facebook declared their plan to transform into virtual reality. As such developments are inevitable, an interesting area to explore is how to use these in ways that enhance wellbeing and mental health, as well as create connectedness over loneliness and isolation.”



Mohammad Asfour is a Global Green Strategist from Amman, Jordan. He is a 2016 graduate from ieBusiness School in Madrid, Spain with a Master’s degree in Positive Leadership & Strategy.

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"I've been focusing on applying positive psychology principles to organizational development. This starts the strategy development phase with a strength-based approach and ensures that channels of dialogue offer an opportunity for all those involved to express their opinions freely. By doing so, we sow the seeds of a positive culture within organizations. Yet, little can be sustained unless the leadership adopts those same principles; more research into how such strategies can be used regionally would be ideal."

Dr. Joanne Hands, PhD., President of the Middle East Psychological Association (MEPA), Kuwait City, Kuwait.

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“While the pandemic is largely over in the region, it has taught us the importance of protecting mental health and promoting wellbeing. Psychologists can support clients in that role and motivate them to adopt healthy lifestyles. The pandemic has opened the door for this topic, especially in the region, where mental health and wellbeing had been neglected. Governments see its importance. We must take advantage of that spotlight and show our worth by contributing to research in the region as well as appropriate treatment, prevention and promotion strategies.”



Dr. Louise Lambert, Editor of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology, Researcher, Director of Happiness Policy & Programming www.HappinessMatters.org.

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“We need to talk a whole lot less and do a whole lot more towards climate action! We also need to work much harder to strengthen partnerships with our regional neighbors (as opposed to prestigious international ones). By determining what makes people take regional climate action more seriously (versus mere intentions and good will), we can urgently develop interventions to make those conditions most likely to stem the effects of climate change, particularly in the MENA region, where its impact will be biggest of all. We also need to look to our regional neighbors and offer tangible, relevant support, as well as material assistance and/or professional development to those in need, as well as those with which we can begin to cement ties and bring more peace to the region.”



Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Khalek, Department of Psychology, College of Arts, Alexandria University, Egypt.

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“There remains a need to develop assessment tools that are short, potent and in Arabic to understand the MENA region’s state of wellbeing more fully. Further, while much is known about physical health and wellbeing in other parts of the world, we need local research examining the two to accurately understand and see how psychological states play on both good and poor states of health, as well as disease.”

Dr. Muhanad Al-Mughthim, Family Medicine Physician (Ministry of Health, KSA), Advisor at WellDar, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

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“To truly enhance wellbeing, culture needs to be factored into the equation. It is an inseparable part of life in the region and cannot be isolated from what people do, how they live and who they are. I’d also like to see more work on how we can understand the notion of “Work Life Balance” in our new post COVID context where work is increasingly being blurred with our personal lives. Finally, exploring the role of wearable technology as an enabler of wellbeing can be an interesting path as the future approaches.”



Dr. Meg Warren, Associate Professor of Management, College of Business & Economics, Western Washington University, USA. Board Member of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology.
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“Our research during the pandemic has shown that people, particularly those who have low income, are losing the very motivation to care for their well-being. Thus, restoring hope and the ability to care for one’s well-being are targets for future intervention. Also, given the sorts of major crises that a variety of groups, cultures, nations and our globe are facing, we need to start doing more ‘problem-centered research’. This means, examining which problems cause the greatest hit to well-being and how positive psychology interventions can combat the effects of such problems and create well-being in these contexts.”



Prof. Dr. Tayfun Doğan, Founder of the Positive Psychology Research & Application Center, Biruni University, Istanbul, Turkey (site of the 4th Eurasian Congress on Positive Psychology, in 2022).
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“I’m concerned about quality of life (QOL) and meaning in life these days. Both need to rise in the region and both have become major issues for people. What it means and how to make it happen given our current realities need to be prioritized going forward.”

Silvia King, MAPPSP, MBPSP, Founder of Positivity International. Silvia is a Positive Psychology Coach, facilitator and trainer based in the UAE and UK. She is currently doing a PhD to develop a model for an Indigenous Coaching Psychology in the Middle East.
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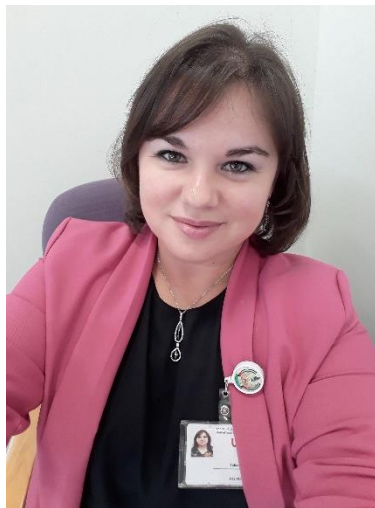


“So much work is being done in the region, but it is hard to find it. We must work harder to conduct research in the region, but more importantly, publish and disseminate those results so that we can all learn from them!! Second, I’d like to see more work testing positive psychology concepts to find out what works, what needs adapting and how practitioners need to adapt these in the region. Most of all, we need work exploring the nexus between Islamic psychology and positive psychology so that positive psychology is relevant to the region, but also for the field to be inclusive and representative of those it serves.”



Dr. Manal Khasib Al Fazari, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Manal-Al-Fazari> Email: manal@squ.edu.om

“It is critical to examine marital happiness and factors that affect it in Arab countries given the rising number of divorce cases among couples, especially young ones. But, equally, understanding more about the happiness of university students would also help us identify the difficulties they face, but help them understand their needs and satisfactions better as well. The information gathered in both of these populations can help us provide support and services more adequately.”



Dr. Tatiana Karabchuk, Ph.D. in Economic Sociology and Demography, Associate Professor, Department of Government and Society, CHSS, UAE University, Al Ain, UAE.

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“The pandemic brought not only temporary disruptions in the daily life of millions but also, global changes in the management of organizations and work processes. Companies discovered the opportunities and cost efficiency of having staff working from home while many employees were challenged by arranging the workspace at home and combining family duties with work obligations. The research on the effects on happiness and wellbeing of different groups across the globe is contradictory. Work-life balance and its contribution to happiness and mental health under the working-from-home regime should be studied more in 2022.”

Dr. Kirin Hilliar, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Heriot-Watt University Dubai, Psychologist at OpenMinds Psychiatry, Counselling and Neuroscience Centre, Dubai. Committee member with the International Psychology Conference Dubai (IPCD), <https://www.psych-me.com/>
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“I’d like to see more on the integration of positive psychology principles and techniques into education practices – at the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The COVID pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of educators and educational institutions to not just prepare students with technical skills and knowledge (maths, physics, history and all that), but also with the self-awareness, interpersonal skills and coping techniques that all of us need to weather difficult situations. I also think it’s a great time to be a student in psychology. More attention to the field in general means more people on the ground building wellbeing. Psychology has never been more popular; it’s time to use that momentum to our advantage.”



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“In 2022, I think the field of positive psychology should focus on exploring factors such as meaning and compassion, which have contributed to the development of resilience and post-traumatic growth that some people experienced (and may still yet) during, as well as after the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, given the popularity of social media and its psychological effects, I believe the field should focus on the relationship between social media and well-being. Future work should investigate how the use of social media enhances people's well-being and how positive psychology can support flourishing through social media.”



Dr. Marei Salama-Younes, Ph.D. (Psychology), Ph.D. (Sports & Physical Activities Sciences). Professor of Exercise & Sport Psychology, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt; Associate Member of Paris Nanterre University/Rennes 2 University. Council of Advisors with the International Positive Psychology Association; Member of the Editorial Board, Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology.

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“Leisure-time activities are an essential part of life and their importance towards the development of psychological, cognitive and physical assets across the lifespan is recognized in all societies. These activities include cultural events, arts, music, social and sport activities, with thousands of studies in positive psychology exploring such recreational, educational and competitive contexts. Positive Psychology should conduct more regional research examining the impact of sport and physical activity interventions (PPIs) and their impacts on psychological, cognitive and social development for a range of participants (i.e., special needs, children, youth, elderly). The field of “Positive Sport Psychology” should be recognised as a new IPPA division.”



Nadia Almheiri (MAPP, 2021, UPenn), Managing Director of Almuatheroon Professional & Management Development, Dubai, UAE.

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“I think a regional positive psychology needs to focus more on helping individuals learn and apply emotion regulation strategies and techniques to help deal with the challenging situations one regularly encounters to help maintain their overall well-being.”



Kareem Sheta is a corporate trainer with the Leadership Factory, host of *Food for Thought* and a certified positive psychology master coach. He lives in Egypt.

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“After graduating from engineering school and realizing that it wasn't for me, I shifted careers multiple times to explore my areas of interest and find the optimal job. When I started training clients, I was surprised to find that many of them wanted to shift goals as well, but felt that it was risky or too late. I was also shocked to discover that many Middle Eastern societies view shifting careers as unconventional. However, positive psychology studies have shown that pursuing our inner goals increases our level of self-satisfaction. So, this year, utilizing our personal and professional strengths, let's motivate our community to explore their intrinsic goals and adventurous spirits.”



Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi, PhD (Psychology), Professor of Psychology, Director of the Honors College Southwest at Houston Community College, Adjunct Faculty at University of Houston (Downtown), City University of New York, School of Professional Studies; Member of the Editorial Board, Journal of International Women's Studies; Editor, “*Toward a Positive Psychology of Islam and Muslims: Spirituality, Struggle, and Social Justice*” (Springer Cross Cultural Advances in Positive Psychology, Vol. 15).

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“In 2022, positive psychology in the region must center well-being through spirituality, struggle, and social justice. The Middle East is comprised of diverse spiritual and cultural traditions that are integral to human growth and development. Utilizing a holistic approach to health and wellness requires researchers and practitioners to navigate the personal and collective challenges that are relevant to the people they study and serve. In the coming year, I hope positive psychology in the region can learn to be more critical of “superstar” researchers, more cognizant of human biases and motivations, and more open to creating spaces for difficult conversations that can perhaps build pathways to Justice, Intersectionality, Healing, Acceptance, and the Disruption of age-old Dogmas (JIHAD).”



Mae Al Mozaini, Founder + CEO, The Arab Institute for Women's Empowerment - Nusf. Khobar, Saudi Arabia. For more information, visit The Arab Institution for Women's Empowerment, <https://www.1.nusf.org/>

“As we advance Saudi Arabia's national development agenda and Vision 2030 objective of increasing women's participation in the workforce to 30%, researchers can help by identifying the right mix of policy changes that serve to promote women's empowerment and cultivate sustainable economic development. They can also identify in practise, how such policies can best be implemented in workplaces and society as a whole, so that women's full potential can be realized. Hence, workplace, social and economic wellbeing will be important indicators of how well this capacity is built and exercised over time. Continued big actions towards these aims in Saudi Arabia and the GCC region overall are expected.”

Here's to 2022!

Did our best and brightest inspire you? We sure hope so! Feel free to connect with our friends and if you know of others doing positive psychology research in the region, let them know about us or reach out and we'll be in touch with them. You may be interested to know that the community has joined forces with the Middle East Psychological Association (MEPA) as its very first Division. You may also want to catch up with their country chapters across the MENA region and take part in the growing field of psychology as a whole. Watch this space for more throughout the year: <https://www.mepa.me/division-1-positive-psychology/>

Whether 2022 brings more lockdowns, working from home, COVID variants and boredom, let's do what we can to bring levity and joy, warmth and love, silliness and fun, as well as serious energy towards solving some of the globe's biggest issues. Because we all love a challenge, don't we!?

Sincerely,