



## Emotions and Well-being in the Noble Qur'an: Happiness and Sadness Content Analysis

Al-Abdulrazak, R. M., & van Nieuwerburgh, C.

**Citation:** Al-Abdulrazak, R. M., & van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2024). Emotions and well-being in the Noble Qur'an: Happiness and sadness content analysis. *Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(1), 16-33.

**Abstract:** This paper explores how happiness and sadness are addressed in the Noble Qur'an and their implications for enhancing positive psychology's understanding of well-being from a different perspective. Using content analysis and qualitative interpretation, the study examines the Qur'anic approach to happiness as a guiding principle in Islamic culture. This study responds to the second and third waves of positive psychology, which call for a broader understanding of well-being beyond the individual focus prevalent in Western culture. The results reveal that the Qur'an emphasises happiness through faith and life satisfaction, helping believers overcome grief and fear. The analysis distinguishes between eudaimonic and hedonic happiness, promoting long-lasting happiness derived from meaning while discouraging gloating, greed, and taking pleasure in others' misery. The Noble Qur'an addresses not only individual emotions and beliefs but also the impact of others' behaviours and intentions on individual happiness. The study bridges religious guidance and modern psychological concepts, advocating for a more inclusive and enriched understanding of well-being.

الباحثون في هذه المقالة يدرسون تفسير مشاعر السعادة والحزن كما جاءت في القرآن الكريم وكيف يمكن أن تطور فهمنا لصحة الإنسان النفسية في دراسات علم النفس الإيجابي. باستخدام تحليل المحتوى النصي وتفسيره يدرس هذا البحث طريقة القرآن بفهم السعادة وتعليماته المبدئية لتحقيقها. هذه الدراسة هي استجابة لدعوة الموجة الثالثة من علم النفس الإيجابي والتي تطالب بتوسيع فهمنا للصحة النفسية للإنسان من خلال ثقافات أخرى غير الثقافة الغربية. إن نتائج البحث تظهر بأن القرآن الكريم يركز على السعادة من خلال الإيمان والرضا. اللذين يعينان المؤمن على تجاوز مخاوفه وأحزانه. وقد ظهر من خلال تحليل النص القرآني أنه يفرق بين السعادة طويلة الأمد وسعادة المتعة المؤقتة. كما أنه يشجع على سعادة طويلة الأمد تكون نتيجة العمل على تحقيق الإنسان معنى الحياة ومبتغاهها و بين الفرح بمآسي الآخرين والطمع والشماتة كمتعة قصيرة الأمد. وبالإضافة إلى مشاعر الأفراد وتجاربهم وإيمانهم بنظر القرآن الكريم إلى أثر نوايا الأفراد وأثر سلوك الآخرين معهم على سعادتهم الشخصية. تخدم هذه الدراسة كجسر يربط فيما بين التعليمات الدينية وعلم النفس الحديث وتنادي بفهم شامل يحتضن فهم ثقافات متنوعة للصحة النفسية للإنسان.

**Keywords:** happiness; sadness; wellbeing; life satisfaction; positive psychology; Islam; Noble Qur'an

**About the Authors:** Dr. Rula Al-Abdulrazak is a Senior lecturer at Royal Docks School of Business and Law (RDBSL) at the University of East London, Executive Coach and Strategist & Managing Director at AUniq, a learning and development tech solutions provider. Emails: [rula@uel.ac.uk](mailto:rula@uel.ac.uk); [contact@aunika.com](mailto:contact@aunika.com). Prof. Christian van Nieuwerburgh is Professor of Coaching & Positive Psychology at the Centre for Positive Health Sciences (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), University of Medicine & Health Sciences, Ireland).



**Early studies in positive psychology (PP) primarily focused** on positive emotions, strengths, and virtues, often overlooking the role of so-called "negative" emotions. However, as the field has evolved, the second wave of positive psychology (PP 2.0) and subsequent developments have emphasised the need for a more balanced understanding of the full range of human emotions, including those traditionally seen as negative. Scholars such as Fredrickson (1998), Peterson (2006), and Seligman (2002) laid the groundwork for this broader perspective by recognising that emotions like sadness and anger can provide critical insights, guide decision-making, and motivate personal growth. Building on this foundation, PP 2.0 (Ivtzan et al., 2016; Wong, 2011) integrates both positive and negative emotions, viewing them as complementary forces essential for resilience and authentic well-being. Overemphasis on positive emotions, as Gruber et al. (2011, 2012) caution, can lead to unrealistic expectations and decreased well-being. By acknowledging the dialectical interplay between positive and negative experiences, the third wave of PP has moved toward a more inclusive and holistic understanding, paving the way for culturally and contextually nuanced applications (Lomas et al., 2020). Religion plays a significant role in managing emotions, contributing to resilience and overall well-being. Studies have shown that religious beliefs and practices provide meaning, purpose, and social support, aiding emotional regulation and coping with adversity (Aghababaei & Rashid, 2016; Lafuente et al., 2019; Mahmood & Sami, 2017). Research on Islamic religiosity, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies has highlighted the unique interplay between Islamic beliefs and emotional experiences (Abdullah & Ghani, 2019; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2010; Rassool, 2021; Siraj, 2011).

G. Hussein Rassool's work on Islamic psychology (2021) integrates empirical psychology with Islamic teachings, offering a holistic understanding of emotions like happiness and sadness through the lens of Qur'anic and Islamic traditions. Khodayarifard et al. (2016) employ content analysis to align modern positive psychology concepts like gratitude, patience, and resilience, with Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith. Despite extensive research on the relationship between Islam and emotions, there is a gap in developing a deeper understanding of the original religious guidance on emotions in the Noble Qur'an, through a detailed study of the whole book as the primary source of Islamic teachings. This paper contributes to this gap by examining the Qur'anic perspectives on happiness and sadness throughout the full book, providing insights into how Islamic teachings address well-being. This study contributes to the culturally inclusive approach in positive psychology, responding to the call for understanding well-being from diverse cultural perspectives (Lopez & Pedrotti, 2002; Veenhoven, 2008; Yakushko & Blodgett, 2021). By exploring the Qur'anic teachings on emotions, this research enhances PP understanding of subjective well-being (SWB) within an Islamic context. Thus, the study answers the research question: how are happiness and sadness addressed in the Noble Qur'an?

### **Happiness, Sadness, and Well-Being**

Research on happiness and sadness in PP has traditionally focused on positive emotions, often overlooking the complex role of negative emotions. However, as the third wave of PP has moved toward a more inclusive and holistic understanding of well-being and emotions (Lomas et al., 2020) scholars like Fredrickson (1998) and Seligman (2002) have highlighted the importance of understanding the full range of human emotions. Within the Islamic context, studies have begun to



explore these emotions. For example, Abdel-Khalek's series of studies (2006, 2007, 2008) examined happiness among Muslims, finding that Islamic teachings significantly influence their emotional experiences. Kim-Prieto and Diener (2009) demonstrated that Muslims report heightened sadness, suggesting that religious identity profoundly impacts emotional states, while Joshanloo (2015) proposed that suffering in Islam is seen as a divinely intended experience leading to personal growth, linking suffering with a deeper form of happiness.

The concept of well-being in positive psychology has also evolved, encompassing a broad spectrum of human experiences. Early research by Gurin et al. (1960) and Cantril (1965) laid the groundwork for understanding happiness and life satisfaction. Fredrickson's Broaden and Build Theory (1998, 2009) further expanded this understanding by emphasising the role of positive emotions in human survival and flourishing. Well-being is now understood through various lenses, including subjective well-being, which focuses on life satisfaction and emotional regulation (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989). The hedonic perspective sees happiness as the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain (Devettere, 2002), while the eudaimonic perspective emphasises living a meaningful life and actualising one's potential (Diener, 2006). The key elements of SWB are positive emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose or meaning in life (Seligman, 2002). Engagement and purpose produce a state of flow, another source of happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Recognising cultural variations in these concepts, Joshanloo (2015) called for a more inclusive approach that considers different cultural and religious contexts. Khodayarifard et al. (2016) highlight the cultural specificity of Islamic perspectives, such as reliance on divine wisdom and communal well-being, contributing to a broader understanding of subjective well-being that integrates faith and spirituality. However, a comprehensive study of happiness and sadness in religious texts such as the Noble Qur'an can improve the understanding of well-being and happiness in relation to faith.

### **Well-being in Islamic Teachings and the Noble Qur'an**

A systematic literature review synthesising two decades of research on the relationship between religion and happiness within the global Muslim population emphasises the importance of religion as a vital dimension of life and highlights its beneficial role in enhancing holistic health and well-being (Shahama et al., 2022). Islamic teachings provide a unique perspective on well-being centred around spiritual pleasure and nearness to God. True well-being in Islam is seen as the ultimate spiritual pleasure attainable in the afterlife through complete devotion to Allah (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2019). This path involves deep faith, continuous worship, and service to the community, which are believed to lead to spiritual and earthly tranquillity. The Noble Qur'an addresses emotions such as happiness and sadness, offering guidance on achieving satisfaction through faith and resilience in the face of adversity (Lafuente et al., 2019). Pargament and Mahoney (2005) explored how spirituality and religious practices provide meaning and social support, crucial for emotional regulation and coping with life's challenges. Further, studies by Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2010) and Siraj (2011) have examined how Muslims use religious beliefs and practices to cope with stress and enhance psychological well-being. Studies on the relationship between Islamic religiosity and emotional intelligence have highlighted the unique aspects of emotional experiences within an Islamic context (Aghababaei & Rashid, 2016).



By examining happiness and sadness in the Noble Qur'an text as the ultimate source of Islamic teachings, this study enriches PP with insights from a non-Western religious perspective, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of well-being. Our review underscores the importance of examining religious texts to understand the implications of religious teachings on emotions and well-being and provides a deeper understanding of how Islamic teachings influence subjective well-being, thus advancing the inclusivity of PP in diverse cultural contexts.

## Method

### Design

To understand the Islamic perspective on well-being, we examined how the emotions of happiness and sadness are addressed in the Noble Qur'an, which necessitated analysing its text. Three characteristics influenced the selection of a research method and analysis. The first is that Muslims believe that the Noble Qur'an is a divine text, God's word, and therefore not the written work of human beings. The second is that it is God's word to the Universe: thus, although the Noble Qur'an may tell stories within specific historical contexts that took place in specific places and times, the meaning of such stories is meant to be shared universally and not limited to a context, ethnicity, or culture. Finally, the Noble Qur'an is the divine wisdom offering life guidance with one-way communication directed at the readers and all its audiences.

Several methodologies were considered and dismissed. Hermeneutic methods have been dismissed by well-established Tafsir scholars, the discipline of Qur'anic interpretation (Zainol et al., 2018), given that such interpretations suggest the divine book is the work of humans and open to interpretations of hidden meanings influenced by the authors. Textual analysis and discourse analysis are suitable for analysing a dialogue among humans, rather than a divine monologue. Contextual analysis also proved problematic since the divine text is considered universal. Accordingly, content analysis, which examines the frequency of repeated identified words and their meaning, was selected as the better option as it allowed scrutiny of any word in any text and the calculation of simple frequencies.

### Material and Sources of Data

The primary text analysed in this study is the Noble Qur'an in Arabic, and its English translation by Arberry (1955), used to share example quotes. As secondary texts help to interpret primary texts (McKee, 2003), we selected a widely cited scholarly interpretation: Al-Muyassar (2010), a contemporary Tafsir book that increases the accessibility of the meanings of the Noble Qur'an as it is written in Plain Arabic language and brief enough to fit the margins of a Qur'an print. As interpretation of the Noble Qur'an is a highly specialised field of study, we also sought the aid of another well-established and more elaborate Tafsir, Ibn Katheer (Al-Sabouni, 2014). All interpretation books and Tafsir sources follow Ahel Al-Sunnah wa Al-Jama'h, the teaching of the Prophet, and exist in the public realm.

Ayat.sa is an online database and search engine which enables searching the Noble Qur'an to identify where a specific word or topic is mentioned. Ayat.sa is a well-established specialised database built by King Saud University in Saudi Arabia. It is freely available and has over 10 million users. Another specialised database and app are used for control and cross-referencing to ensure



the validity of the result. The contexts in which the words are mentioned and interpreted as emotions of happiness or sadness are examined through Qur'an Tafsirs within the same databases. The first of the other two databases is the Noble Qur'an (surahquran.com) which is a charitable online database and search engine, while the second is Al-Qur'an Al-Azeem (the Great Qur'an) developed by Arabia for Information Technology in Saudi Arabia and audited by Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Al-Qur'an Al-Azeem is a mobile app, whereas the other two are online databases (see Table 1).

### **Procedures**

To analyse the text, we (1) identified Arabic words that referred to the basic emotions of happiness and sadness, establishing coding units and categories; (2) conducted a content analysis of the mention of these words in the Noble Qur'an, determining the frequencies and where they were mentioned; (3) analysed the mention of these emotions in relation to the research question by checking the Tafsir for every counted word to establish if it is happiness or sadness, what type of happiness and what made it so; (4) identified the learnings from this Islamic-culture-specific investigation based on the meanings of the identified words. Steps were taken to source the data from reliable sources with the required disciplinary knowledge, such as in Tafsir/Qur'an interpretation. In linguistics, well-acknowledged English, Arabic, and dual-language dictionaries were used. Moreover, a systematic analysis approach was applied using established theories to acknowledge the limitations of both the literature and present study (Joshani, 2013). The specificity of the procedures and following the Islamic School of Ahl Al-Sunah wa Al-Jamah were used to increase clarity and reduce any confusion regarding the interpretations of the text.

### **Reflexive Account**

The first author faced a few challenges in conducting this research. Being a Muslim with a certain understanding of the Islamic guide to life and well-being, reducing potential bias required working closely with her supervisor (the second author). Both approached this topic with sensitivity and caution to ensure that the study was carried out in a way that is appropriate for conducting research on the Muslims' sacred book. The authors had numerous discussions to ensure that there was no risk that the study might mislead or dissatisfy readers. The researchers' awareness of these issues and the need to conduct objective scientific research led to a few steps: the sources of data from reliable sources were diversified, regular discussions were held to ensure balance and objectivity, and both authors reminded each other that openness to many perspectives, particularly the dominant worldview, should not lead to doubting other truths. In fact, cooperative inter- and multi-disciplinary research would be essential for this study.



**Table 1**

*Data Collection Sources*

Data Collected	Main Source	Online Source / Database
Happiness and sadness English words	American Psychology Association (APA) Dictionary English Dictionaries: Oxford, Cambridge and Collins	<a href="https://dictionary.apa.org/">https://dictionary.apa.org/</a> <a href="https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/">https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/</a> <a href="https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english">https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english</a> <a href="https://www.collinsdictionary.com/">https://www.collinsdictionary.com/</a>
Happiness and sadness Arabic words	Mukhtar Al-Sehah by Imam Abi Bakr Shams al-Din al-Razi (d.666 AH) Al-Qamus Al-Muhit by Fairouz Abadi (1410) Lisan Al-Arab by Jamal al-Din Ibn Manzur (1290 CE) Muo'jam Al-Arabiah Al-Mua'ser by Ahmad Mukhtar Umar (2008)	<a href="http://www.almaany.com">www.almaany.com</a>
Happiness and sadness Arabic-English words	Al-Mawred Arabic/English Dictionary by Rohi Ba'Albaki (1998)	<a href="https://ejtaal.net/mr/#maw">https://ejtaal.net/mr/#maw</a>
Happiness & sadness mentions in Arabic Islamic guide	King Saud University- Ayat App The Noble Qur'an	<a href="https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/ayat/">https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/ayat/</a> <a href="https://surahquran.com/quran-search/">https://surahquran.com/quran-search/</a>
Quran verses Interpretation/ Tafsir in Arabic	Tafsir Al-Muyasar Tafsir Ibn Katheer	<a href="https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/ayat/">https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/ayat/</a> <a href="https://surahquran.com/quran-search/">https://surahquran.com/quran-search/</a>
Quran translation/ English interpretation	The Koran Interpreted: Translation by Arthur Arberry (1955; 1964), Oxford Press	<a href="http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/book_tki.html">http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/ Public/book_tki.html</a>



## Data Analysis

We the Noble Qur'an, related Tafsir books, and Arabic and English dictionaries, we began by identifying a sample of the appropriate coding units/words and choosing coding units to reflect the emotions of happiness and sadness. These emotions are regularly associated with happiness "satisfaction", "joy" and "pleasure" (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Vitterso, 2013), while "sorrow" and "depression" are associated with sadness (Fredrickson, 1998; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The selected Arabic online dictionary, Al-Ma'ani Al-Jamea (almaany.com) combines the major Arabic dictionaries enabling the researcher to similarly identify the main words associated with "Sa'adah" (happiness) and "Huzen" (sadness) in Arabic. Then, the researchers cross-referenced these English and Arabic words through Al-Mawrid, an established dual dictionary that led to the selection of six main coding units/words in Table 2. The intention was to define coding units that were observable, measurable, and consistent in meaning. Further, the Noble Qur'an verses and each verse's interpretation were defined as coding units. The units were: (1) exhaustive in terms of covering all the possibilities of mentioning the studied emotions, (2) mutually exclusive as they fit into one category of emotions only (Table 3), and (3) rule-based, i.e., prior to coding, the rules were established between the two authors relating to what emotions would be coded and what represented a coding unit (Table 2) (Maier, 2017).

**Table 2**

### *Coding Units*

Coding Unit		
Word	Verse	Interpretation of the verse/Tafsir

**Table 3**

### *The Codebook*

No.	Coding Category	Description
1	Happiness	Word, verse and interpretation of happiness in the Noble Qur'an
2	Sadness	Words, verse and interpretation of sadness in the Noble Qur'an

Following the coding unit identification, messages/verses/ayat that included the words/units were identified and frequencies were calculated in terms of repetition of mentioning the word in its relevant forms and the number of chapters/surah where it was mentioned. This was followed by identifying the interpretation/ Tafsir of each selected verse. Using more than one source of Tafsir and language lexica, in addition to following a systematic approach allowed for greater objectivity. Analysis of the identified frequencies, verses and their interpretations were conducted next. This analysis led to the identification of a list of categories and sub-categories. Following this, the first author determined the frequencies of the appearance of the sub-categories in the verses and re-read the verses and their interpretations a few times while themes emerged in each category. This was



explained and example quotes/verses given in English and Arabic. Data was analysed considering the research question, how the results contributed to the literature of the Islamic-culture-specific understanding of happiness and well-being, and potential implications in applied positive psychology (APP) and positive psychology interventions (PPIs).

## Results

The content analysis included numerical and qualitative results. The numerical results are represented in the frequencies of word repetition and the categories' appearance in the text. A few themes emerged from the numerical results, as well as the systematic qualitative analysis of the verses and their Tafsir, which were classified using the categories deduced from the studies of happiness. The emerging themes and examples of the numerical results are below.

### *Happiness and sadness related words in the Noble Qur'an*

Via a linguistic and American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology word search, six words reflecting happiness and sadness were identified and the frequencies of their citation in the text are shown in Table 4. The categories of the classification of the interpretation and text analysis with their frequencies are in Table 5.

**Table 4**

#### *Word Frequencies in the Noble Qur'an*

Emotion	Coding Unit, Arabic Word in Qur'an	Frequency	No. of chapters where word repeated
Happiness	Sa'dah	2	1
	Surour	4	3
	Farah	21	13
	Rida	43	22
Sadness	Huzen	40	25
	Shaqawah	12	7

**Table 5**

#### *Happiness Emotions in the Noble Qur'an*

Category	Unit / Word					
	Sa'adah/ happiness	Farah/ Happiness	Rida/ satisfaction	Surour/ happiness	Huzen/ sadness	Shaqawah/ misery
Eudaimonic	2	6	34	2	26	9
Hedonic	0	14	13	2	14	4



### ***Happiness and well-being in the Qur'anic text***

The Qur'anic guide conforms with the widely studied Western forms of happiness: eudaimonia and hedonia. Our findings offer four cornerstones of well-being that align with the PP understanding of SWB. These include purpose, mainly linked with the belief in the afterlife as the ultimate goal. Meaning is derived from following the Islamic pathway to achieve the goal. The joy in the 'journey' of life is the spiritual tranquillity in satisfaction with higher wisdom and the ability to surpass any sad experiences where patience will be rewarded. Engaging with this purpose and journey would become the source of flow that contributes to happiness (examples in Table 6).

The Qur'anic guide's perspective on happiness and sadness aligns with and differs from the Western perspective within PP. Both perspectives recognise the dual nature of happiness: hedonic, associated with pleasure and immediate satisfaction, and eudaimonic, linked to meaning and purpose. However, the Qur'anic guide uniquely emphasises the afterlife as the ultimate purpose, which profoundly shapes the framework of well-being in Islamic teachings. In contrast, Western conceptions often focus on secular, individualistic, and worldly achievements to derive purpose and meaning (Joshani, 2013).

In the Qur'anic view, spiritual tranquillity emerges from trusting divine wisdom, cultivating patience through life's challenges, and maintaining hope in the ultimate reward in the afterlife. These elements provide a distinct pathway to happiness where sadness and material loss or gains challenges are overcome by faith, resilience, and inner peace. In contrast, Western perspectives on sadness often focus on its role in fostering personal growth, developing coping mechanisms, and enhancing emotional regulation (Bonanno, 2004). While both perspectives value growth from negative emotions, the Qur'anic perspective incorporates a theocentric approach, where patience and endurance are directly linked to spiritual merit and fulfilment.

Additionally, the Qur'anic emphasis on engagement and flow aligns with Western psychological theories like Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow, yet the Qur'anic journey to happiness is more of a spiritual narrative led by devotion to Allah. Western PP studies though are increasingly incorporating cultural and spiritual factors, while traditionally prioritising psychological constructs over metaphysical or theological foundations (Davis et al., 2023; Wong, 2011). This comparison highlights the potential for cross-cultural enrichment in the study of happiness and sadness, advocating for a holistic view that integrates religious and cultural perspectives into PP (Khodayarifard et al., 2016).

### ***Self-satisfaction, joy, and sadness***

The generated themes highlight three key emotional sources of well-being, which are types of happiness that correspond with PP studies of SWB, a construct consisting of life satisfaction, positive affect, and absence of negative affect (Diener, 1984), as well as the foundational work of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) on the dual dimensions of well-being, integrating both hedonic pleasure and eudaimonic meaning. The three emotions highlighted are life satisfaction (eudaimonic happiness), joy (hedonic happiness) and sadness. While Fredrickson (2001) validates the coexistence of positive and negative emotions, positioning sadness as a functional emotion that fosters resilience and reflection, our findings position sadness as neither the opposite of happiness nor lack of it, reflecting the psychological complexity of humans (Gruber et al., 2011).



Table 6

Examples

<p>Eudaimonic Happiness: Purposeful motive into the future: -Promised forever happiness or the opposite</p>	<p>Hud - Verse 105</p>	<p>يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلِّمُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ سُقِيٌُّّ وَسَعِيدٌ The day it comes, no soul shall speak save by His leave; some of them shall be wretched and some happy.</p>
<p>Hedonic Happiness: - demotivated from Negative Sources -Gloat - Pleasure in others' misery - Patience and faith defeat the negative outcomes of others' negative behaviour.</p>	<p>Al- Hadid/ The Iron - 23  Al- Imran/ The family of Imran - 120</p>	<p>لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ That you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor rejoice in what has come to you; God loves not any man proud and boastful  إِن تَمَسَّسْتُمْ حَسَنَةً تَسْؤُهُمْ وَإِن تُصِيبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا وَإِن تَضَرُّوْا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ If you are visited by good fortune, it vexes them; but if you are smitten by evil, they rejoice at it. Yet if you are patient and godfearing, their guile will hurt you nothing; God encompasses the things they do.</p>

Sadness in the Qur'anic guide is a temporary state which is exaggerated with fear and a lack of hope. Disbelief in the higher wisdom would lead to fear of loss and reduction of the hope of justice and rewards beyond this life. Thus, it can be deduced that the Qur'anic guide to mental well-being can be understood with a positive psychology lens. It is about balanced joy and engagement with halal pleasures, i.e., eating a tasty meal or having intimate relations in marriage, while acknowledging they are short-lived. It is not about emotional suffering, 'not to fear and not to be saddened' (see examples below), which differs from hard work and discipline in pursuit of a meaningful life.



**Table 7**

*Learnings from the Qur'anic guide of happiness and well-being (the researchers' interpretation)*

Happiness Emotions	Emotion characteristics	Well-being learnings from the Noble Qur'an
Life Satisfaction	Eudaimonic – long-term – spirit	<p>Belief in divine power and the afterlife gives hope and optimism for justice and divine rewards. It also inspires self-confidence in believers and spiritual growth and tranquillity.</p> <p>Thus, belief in divine power and the afterlife inspires honesty and gratitude that enrich rewarding social relationships and spread meaningful happiness.</p>
Joy & pleasure	Hedonic – short-term – material	<p>Joy and pleasure of halal material gains are celebrated yet short-lived.</p> <p>Disbelief in divinity and the afterlife increases anxiety because it leads individuals to focus on tangible gains as a source of joy and the fear of losing them, so possession and accumulation become sources of pleasure.</p> <p>The focus on tangible gains enhances the fear of loss of status and relationships. Because social status and relationships are sources of joy. At the same time, disbelief can enhance negative/unhelpful thoughts such as pessimism, which increases anxiety.</p> <p>Disbelief in divinity and the afterlife can reduce tranquillity in relation to the self, others and nature, which leads to a constant craving for tangible improvements to the self, e.g. in looks, strengths, knowledge or wealth, or combinations of them, or eagerness to please others and have many friends or followers, fans, or be devoted to nature as sources of joy and pleasure. Yet short-lived pleasures when normalised become less joyful and allow sadness to flourish, leading to misery and depression.</p> <p>So believing in the divine wisdom, justice and ultimate reward reduces human interest in tangible pleasures and the fear of losing them leading to tranquillity and satisfaction, and vice versa.</p>



Sadness	Fear of loss - depression (0)	<p>Sadness comes mostly out of fear of loss.</p> <p>Believers who follow the pathway are not to fear what they miss out on in life or what they will face in the afterlife.</p> <p>True believers dismiss fear of any but God. Because if there is God, divine justice and ultimate reward in the afterlife there is hope and tranquillity otherwise, without hope in justice and reward sadness will triumph.</p> <p>Sadness in life is caused by unbelievers and the unjust denying God's signs which reduces hope, and increases fear leading to sadness.</p> <p>Following the wretched and unprosperous against the divine guidance/pathway leads to sadness, sorrow and misery.</p> <p>So the Quranic guide encourages hope in believing in the divine wisdom and reward to avoid sadness and fear and enjoy tranquillity and happiness.</p>
---------	-------------------------------	---

### Examples

Sadness is caused by collective disbelief	Yumus-Jonah, 65	وَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ	And do not let their saying grieve thee; the glory belongs altogether to God; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing
Actively seeking God's satisfaction is generously rewarded in life	Al-Baqara - Verse 265	وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيْتًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَآتَتْ أُكْلَهَا ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ فَطَلٌّ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ	But the likeness of those who expend their wealth, seeking God's good pleasure, and to confirm themselves, is as the likeness of a garden upon a hill; a torrent smites it, and it yields its produce twofold; if no torrent smites it, yet dew; and God sees the things you do.



## Discussion

The paper reveals examples of textual segments focused on emotions of happiness and sadness in the Noble Qur'an to understand how they are addressed in relation to well-being. The results show that the most common word mentioned in the Qur'an in relation to happiness is satisfaction/*rida*, albeit indirectly. This suggests that satisfaction is key to achieving a eudaimonic type of happiness and that it is based on the belief in higher wisdom among believers. In total, words related to happiness, including *Rida* were cited in the Qur'an more than those of sadness and misery. This result indicates that happiness is an important character of believers in the Qur'anic guide. Even words that refer to sadness, such as *huzen* and *shaqa'*/misery, are mentioned in many verses in association with happiness, whether in opposition to, or as a potential source of happiness. This understanding of happiness corresponds with the conceptualisation of happiness as an overall state which is compassionate and embraces a full range of emotions, including negative emotions (e.g., Ben-Shahar, 2007; Hayes, 1994; North et al., 2011; Teasdale et al., 2003) and turn them into helpful emotions (Lomas, 2016).

The results show that the Noble Qur'an promotes a eudaimonic type of happiness that only spiritually connected believers who follow the pathway in intention and behaviour can achieve in life. From the Qur'anic perspective, eudaimonic happiness is felt through the serenity of resigning to God's will. This self-satisfaction, regardless of life outcomes, is focused on passing life's test of sincere belief. Maintained despite fears and material temptations, it will eventually be rewarded in the afterlife. This is the Quranic promise as evident in the Tafsir/interpretations of the analysed text.

Spiritually connected believers (*Almu'menoon*) are not necessarily tireless worshipers because the ultimate belief and connectedness are in mind and soul before being translated into committed behaviour, which is seen in their way of life. The study shows that the main source of happiness is belief.

The Tafsir of the Quranic text where happiness emotions are mentioned suggests that internal beliefs guide the confidence, behaviour and joy of the faithful and direct their pathway in life and the afterlife. The Noble Qur'an calls for a strong and deep belief in the divine power of The Creator of all, the All-Knowing and All-Just, Allah. With such belief, believers gain confidence, patience, and endurance in life's challenges and tests. Their ultimate happiness is in the reward of the afterlife. The stronger their belief, the Noble Qur'an explains, the happier people are because they are satisfied with God's wisdom and justice. Believer's life journey is an investment towards achieving the ultimate goal and living happily without pain or sorrow. In the pathway, these internal beliefs and emotions would have to translate into patience with others, kindness, helpfulness, sincerity and fairness, sharing knowledge and hard work. As such, the Qur'anic guide encourages the eudaimonic type of happiness among believers and discourages sadness, fear and sorrow through belief and faith. Thus, any PP understanding or application in an Islamic community should consider the Qur'anic guide to serve that community.

## Limitations and Future Directions

While valuable, content analysis has its limitations. It cannot be used to infer a definite causal relationship (Maier, 2018). Generalisability is also a challenge due to the inability to use words as a coding unit to exhaust the possibilities of addressing emotions in the text, as emotions could be



described using phrases and a description. Hence, further research with the aid of Tafsir/Qur'anic interpretation scholars is advised. There is a possibility of subjectivity and bias resulting from the first author's religious understanding, background, ethnicity, linguistic skills, knowledge, and understanding of PP. Finally, content analysis proved to be complex, time-consuming and meticulous; thus, the risk of error remains. Still, content analysis was a helpful heuristic tool (Maier, 2018), combining frequencies and qualitative interpretations and analyses to answer research questions and examine a divine text.

### Conclusion

This paper examined emotions of happiness and sadness in relation to subjective well-being through a content analysis of the Noble Qur'an's text, offering a culturally specific perspective on positive psychology's understanding of happiness. Unlike empirical studies that used selective representations from the Noble Qur'an (e.g., Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011; Joshanloo & Weijers, 2019), this study analysed the entire text, providing a comprehensive understanding of how it guides Muslims towards happiness and well-being. This input is invaluable for PP scholars worldwide, particularly those focusing on highly religious Muslim populations. It offers an evidence-based understanding of Islamic teachings on subjective well-being, which can aid practitioners in Muslim-majority countries to develop culturally informed measures and interventions for happiness. Researchers may also cite this study when advocating for the integration of cultural and spiritual dimensions into the science of well-being to create hope, increase resilience among religious communities, and enhance their coping capabilities with cultural conflicts, particularly in a religious or an Islamic context.

This understanding of happiness within subjective well-being integrates hedonic pleasure, eudaimonic meaning, life satisfaction, emotional balance, psychological growth, social connections, and cultural context. This paper shows how satisfaction based on internal beliefs inspires confidence and hope, enhancing personal resources as per the Qur'anic text. It also emphasises the importance of community and group interactions on individual well-being. By incorporating these insights, the study contributes to developing more comprehensive theoretical models of subjective well-being that include hedonic and eudaimonic aspects, as well as cultural and spiritual dimensions. It encourages future research to conduct cross-cultural comparisons, explore the longitudinal effects of religious practices on well-being, and develop culturally sensitive interventions based on religious teachings. This study serves as foundational work that bridges religious guidance and modern psychological concepts into happiness and well-being, advocating for a more inclusive and enriched understanding.

### References

- Aal al-Sheikh, Sheikh S., et al. (a group of scholars under the direction of Sheikh Saalih Aal al-Sheikh, Minister of Islamic Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). (2010). *Al-Tafsir Al-Muyassar: The simplified explanation of the Qur'an*. King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an.
- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2006). Happiness, health and religiosity: Significant relations. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 9, 85-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13694670500040625>



- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2007). Religiosity, happiness, health and psychopathology in a probability sample of Muslim adolescents. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 10*, 571-583. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670601034547>
- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2008). Religiosity, health and well-being among Kuwaiti personnel. *Psychological Reports, 102*, 181-184. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.102.1.181-184>
- Abu-Raiya, H., & Pargament, K. I. (2010). Religious coping among Muslims: Development of the religious coping scale for Muslims. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health, 5*(2), 131-155.
- Abdullah, S. K., & Ghani, F. A. (2019). Islamic values and emotional intelligence in leadership. *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 35*(2), 45-62.
- Aghababaei, N., & Rashid, T. (2016). Validation of the Islamic Emotional Intelligence scale. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health, 10*(1), 19-39.
- Al-Sabouni, M. A. (2014). *Mukhtasar Tafsir Iben Kathir: Tafsir Al Imam Al Hafeth Imad Al-Din Abi Al-Fida' Ismaail Bin Kathir Al-Demashqi*. Al Maktabah Al-Asriyah. The Contemporary Library.
- Ben-Shahar, T. (2007). *Happier: Learn the secrets to daily joy and lasting fulfilment*. McGraw Hill.
- Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events? *American Psychologist, 59*(1), 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20>
- Cantril, H. (1965). *The pattern of human concerns*. Rutgers University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper Perennial.
- Davis, E. B., Worthington, E. L., & Schmitker, S. A. (2023). *Handbook of positive psychology, religion, and spirituality*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10274-5>
- Devettere, R. J. (2002). *Introduction to virtue ethics: Insights of the ancient Greeks*. Georgetown University Press.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin, 95*, 542-575. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.95.3.542>
- Diener, E. (2006). Guidelines for national indicators of subjective well-being and ill-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 7*, 397-404. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-006-9000-y>
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science, 13*(1), 81-84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00415>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology, 2*(3), 300-319. <https://doi.org/10.1037//1089-2680.2.3.300>
- Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity: Groundbreaking research reveals how to embrace the hidden strength of positive emotions, overcome negativity, and thrive*. Crown Publishers/Random House.
- Gruber, J., Harvey, A. G., & Gross, J. J. (2012). When trying is not enough: Emotion regulation and the effort-success gap in bipolar disorder. *Emotion, 12*(5), 997-1003. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026822>



Gruber, J., Mauss, I. B., & Tamir, M. (2011). A dark side of happiness? How, when, and why happiness is not always good. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(3), 222-233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691611406927>

Gurin, G., Veroff, J., & Feld, S. (1960). *Americans view their mental health: A nationwide interview survey*. Basic Books.

Hayes, S. C. (1994). Content, context, and the types of psychological acceptance. In S. C. Hayes, N. S. Jacobson, V. M. Follette, & M. J. Dougher (Eds.), *Acceptance and change: Content and context in psychotherapy* (pp. 13-32). Context Press.

Ivtzan, I., Lomas, T., Hefferon, K., & Worth, P. (2016). *Second wave positive psychology: Embracing the dark side of life*. Routledge.

Joshanloo, M. (2013). A comparison of Western and Islamic conceptions of happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(6), 1857-1874. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9406-7>

Joshanloo, M. (2015). Conceptions of happiness and identity integration in Iran: A situated perspective. *Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(1), 24 - 35. <https://www.middleeastjournalofpositivepsychology.org/index.php/mejpp/article/view/19>

Joshanloo, M., & Weijers, D. (2019). Islamic perspectives on well-being. In L. Lambert, & N. Pasha-Zaidi (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in the Middle East/North Africa* (pp. 237-256). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13921-6\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13921-6_11)

Khodarahimi, S. (2013). The role of spirituality in enhancing emotional intelligence: A comparative study. *Psychological Studies*, 58(3), 221-230.

Kim-Prieto, C., & Diener, E. (2009). Religion as a source of variation in the experience of positive and negative emotions. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(6), 447-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760903271025>

Lafuente, E., Vaillant, Y., Vendrell-Herrero, F., & Gomes, E. (2019). Bouncing back from failure: Entrepreneurial resilience and the internationalisation of subsequent ventures created by serial entrepreneurs. *Applied Psychology*, 68(4), 658-694. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12175>

Lomas, T. (2016). *The positive power of negative emotions: How harnessing your darker feelings can help you see a brighter down*. Piatkus.

Lomas, T., Waters, L., Williams, P., Oades, L. G., & Kern, M. L. (2020). Third wave positive psychology: Broadening towards complexity. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 16(5), 660-674. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1805501>

Lopez, S. J., & Pedrotti, J. T. (2002). Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 30(3), 181-193.

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111>

Mahmood, A., & Sami, N. (2017). Islamic religious practices and psychological well-being among Pakistani women. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 11(2), 3-20.

Maier, M. (2017). Content analysis, definition of. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (Vol. 4, pp. 243-245). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>



- Maier, M. A. (2018). Content analysis: Advantages and disadvantages. In M. Allan (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (pp. 240-242). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>
- McKee, A. (2003). What is textual analysis? In *Textual Analysis* (pp. 2-33). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020017>
- North, R. J., Pai, A. V., Hixon, J. G., & Holahan, C. J. (2011). Finding happiness in negative emotions: An experimental test of a novel expressive writing paradigm. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*(3), 192-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.570365>
- Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. (2005). Spirituality: Discovering and conserving the sacred. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 646-660). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195135336.003.0047>
- Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760500372739>
- Rassool, G. H. (2021). *Islamic psychology: Human behaviour and experience from an Islamic perspective*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429354762>.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*, 1069-1081. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>
- Shahama, A., Patel, A., Carson, J., & Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2022). The pursuit of happiness within Islam: A systematic review of two decades of research on religiosity and happiness in Islamic groups. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 25*(7), 629-651. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2022.2028748>
- Siraj, S. (2011). Islamic religiousness, religious coping, and psychological well-being among Muslim university students in Malaysia. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 14*(2), 129-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670903456463>
- Teasdale, J. D., Segal, Z. V., & Williams, J. M. G. (2003). Mindfulness training and problem formulation. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 10*, 157-160. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg017>
- Veenhoven, R. (2008). Sociocultural evolution and subjective well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(3), 281-317.
- Yakushko, O., & Blodgett, E. (2021). Negative reflections about positive psychology: On constraining the field to a focus on happiness and personal achievement. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 61*(1), 104-131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167818794551>
- Vitterso, J. (2013). Introduction to psychological definitions of happiness. In S. A. David, I. Boniwell, & A. Conley Ayers (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (pp. 155-161). Oxford University Press.



Weiss, H. M., & Cropanzano, R. (1996). Affective events theory: A theoretical discussion of the structure, causes, and consequences of affective experiences at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 18, 1-74.

Wong, P. T. P. (2011). Positive psychology 2.0: Towards a balanced interactive model of the good life. *Canadian Psychology*, 52(2), 69-81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022511>

Zainol, N. Z. N., Majid, L. A., & Saad, M. F. M. (2018). An overview on hermeneutics method application to the Quran by Muslim thinkers. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7, (3.25) 681-684.