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## Analyzing Well-Being Models: Their Evolution, Limitations, and Future Pathways

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## Abstract

This article critically examines the evolution, limitations, and future trajectories of well-being models from antiquity to contemporary discourse. Employing interdisciplinary synthesis and comparative analysis, the study traces well-being conceptualizations from Aristotelian eudaimonia and hedonic traditions through Enlightenment utilitarianism to modern frameworks including Ryff's Psychological Well-Being, Seligman's PERMA model, Self-Determination Theory, and ecological models. A central argument advanced is that dominant Western paradigms exhibit systematic biases—individualism, cultural reductionism, measurement fetishism, and commercial appropriation—that undermine their universal applicability. The article provides an original, mandatory deep analysis of the Islamic well-being paradigm grounded in Falāḥ, sakīnah, tazkiyah al-nafs, and Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, incorporating Qur'anic textual evidence and classical scholarship from Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Khaldūn, Shāh Walīullāh, and Ibn Taymiyyah. Methodological critiques address Western-centrism, digital-age mental health challenges, inequality, and ethical concerns surrounding happiness commodification. Future pathways propose holistic, cross-cultural, spiritually integrated models and policy frameworks for sustainable well-being. The article concludes with original theoretical contributions synthesizing Eastern and Western epistemologies, offering a multidimensional, context-sensitive paradigm for twenty-first-century global challenges.

**Keywords:** Well-being models; eudaimonia; Falāḥ; positive psychology; cross-cultural mental health; Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah; spiritual well-being

## 1. Introduction

Well-being, broadly defined as the state of flourishing, satisfaction, and meaningful functioning across multiple life domains, has emerged as a central preoccupation of contemporary social science, clinical practice, and public policy. The term encompasses subjective hedonic experiences, objective life quality indices, psychological functioning, social integration, and spiritual fulfillment—a multidimensionality that has produced proliferating yet often incommensurable theoretical models. The importance of this topic transcends academic discourse: global mental health crises, rising rates of depression and anxiety, loneliness epidemics, and climate-induced psychological distress demand robust, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive frameworks for understanding and enhancing human flourishing. Historically, well-being inquiry traces to Greek philosophy (Aristotle's eudaimonia versus Aristippus' hedonism), Stoic virtue ethics, religious traditions including Buddhism and Islam, and Enlightenment thinkers such as Bentham and Mill. However, the modern empirical study of well-being—particularly since the emergence of positive psychology in the late 1990s—has generated unprecedented research volume yet also significant conceptual fragmentation. A critical research gap persists: existing well-being models remain predominantly Western, individualistic, and psychologistic, with insufficient integration of spiritual, communal, and non-Western epistemologies. Furthermore, methodological critiques regarding cultural bias, measurement reductionism, and ethical implications of happiness commodification remain underexplored. This article addresses the following research questions: (1) How have well-being models evolved historically, and what intellectual traditions inform contemporary frameworks? (2) What are the empirical, conceptual, and cultural limitations of dominant Western well-being paradigms? (3) What does the Islamic intellectual tradition contribute to a comprehensive well-being model? (4) What interdisciplinary and cross-cultural pathways can advance well-being theory and practice for global contexts?

According to Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*:

*«εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἐνέργειά τις κατ' ἀρετὴν τελείαν»<sup>1</sup>*

*(Eudaimonia is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue)*

This foundational Aristotelian statement establishes eudaimonia not as a momentary pleasurable state but as an ongoing activity—an *energeia*—that actualizes the distinctively human capacity for rational virtue. The term *teleian* (perfect or complete) indicates that genuine well-being requires not isolated virtuous acts but a fully realized character over a complete lifetime. Unlike hedonic conceptions that locate well-being in subjective feeling states, Aristotle's formulation positions well-being as objective flourishing measured against the standard of human nature's *telos* or purpose. This teleological framing has profound implications: well-being becomes a matter of becoming what one essentially is, not merely feeling what one desires. Contemporary eudaimonic models, particularly Ryff's psychological well-being framework, explicitly claim Aristotelian heritage, yet critics argue that modern operationalizations—measuring autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth—impose distinctly modern, individualistic values not present in Aristotle's more socially embedded virtue ethics. The translation challenge also matters: eudaimonia is poorly rendered as "happiness" with its hedonic connotations; "human flourishing" more accurately captures the sense of thriving across life domains rather than momentary emotional states.

Jeremy Bentham, the founder of classical utilitarianism, asserts in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*:

*«Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do»<sup>2</sup>*

Bentham's declaration represents a radical empirical turn in well-being philosophy. By identifying pain and pleasure as the sole "sovereign masters," he rejects both Aristotelian virtue ethics (which subordinates pleasure to rational virtue) and religious frameworks (which subordinate earthly pleasure to divine command). The dual claim is descriptive (what humans actually pursue) and normative (what humans ought to pursue)—a conflation that later utilitarians like Henry Sidgwick recognized as problematic. Bentham's felicific calculus attempted to quantify well-being across dimensions of intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, and extent. This quantification ambition prefigures contemporary subjective well-being (SWB) measurement, yet significant differences emerge: Bentham emphasized expert calculation of net pleasure, whereas modern SWB relies on self-report, privileging subjective experience over external judgment. The phrase "governance under two sovereign masters" reveals Bentham's mechanistic psychology—humans as passive responders to pleasure-pain stimuli—which contrasts sharply with eudaimonic and religious models positing active self-determination toward higher-order values. Contemporary critiques note that Bentham's model cannot distinguish qualitatively superior pleasures (e.g., intellectual satisfaction, spiritual peace) from qualitatively inferior ones (e.g., drug intoxication, sadistic enjoyment), a limitation John Stuart Mill attempted to remedy by introducing higher and lower pleasure distinctions.

Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, offers a profoundly ambivalent assessment:

*«What do men demand of life and wish to achieve in it? The answer to this question can hardly be in doubt: they strive after happiness; they want to become happy and remain so. This endeavour has two sides, a positive and a negative aim. It aims, on the one hand, at the absence of pain and unpleasure, and, on the other, at the experience of strong feelings of pleasure»<sup>3</sup>*

Freud's formulation captures the hedonic assumptions underlying much of modern psychology, yet his clinical experience generated deep skepticism about happiness's attainability. The phrase "strive after happiness" acknowledges its status as a universal human motivation, but Freud elsewhere argues that civilization's very structure—its demands for impulse repression, work discipline, and social conformity—systematically frustrates this striving. The dual-aim structure (avoiding pain, seeking pleasure) parallels Bentham's hedonism but adds psychoanalytic depth: unconscious conflicts, defense

mechanisms, and the death drive complicate any simple pleasure-pain calculus. Freud's therapeutic goal was not happiness but the transformation of "hysterical misery into common unhappiness"—a modest aspiration that contrasts sharply with positive psychology's flourishing agenda. The passive construction "they want to become happy" suggests happiness as something that happens to individuals rather than something actively cultivated—a perspective challenged by cognitive-behavioral and Buddhist-informed interventions demonstrating that well-being skills can be trained. Contemporary well-being researchers have largely abandoned Freud's pessimism, yet his warnings about the structural obstacles to happiness—inequality, repression, civilization's discontent—remain relevant critiques of individualistic positive psychology that locates happiness solely within personal attitudes and behaviors.

Martin Seligman, founding father of positive psychology, declares in *Flourish*:

*«Well-being cannot exist just in your own head. Well-being is a combination of feeling good as well as actually having meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment»<sup>4</sup>*

Seligman's statement represents a significant evolution from his earlier emphasis on "authentic happiness," which privileged positive emotion as the central outcome. The explicit rejection of well-being as merely "in your own head" challenges both subjective well-being's cognitive-affective operationalization and the broader cultural tendency toward psychological individualism. By including meaning, relationships, and accomplishment alongside positive emotion, Seligman moves toward eudaimonic integration, though he explicitly rejects Aristotle's virtue-centered framework as empirically intractable. The PERMA model—Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment—emerges from this declaration, yet critics note persistent problems. First, the five components are measured primarily through self-report, so well-being paradoxically remains "in your own head" despite Seligman's disclaimer. Second, the model lacks clear hierarchical structure: is positive emotion foundational or equal to meaning? Can accomplishment substitute for meaning? Third, cross-cultural research reveals that relationship centrality varies: collectivist cultures may prioritize relational harmony above individual accomplishment, yet PERMA treats both as independent contributors without cultural weighting. Fourth, spiritual well-being—a dimension central to Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions—is entirely absent, despite empirical evidence that spiritual practice predicts health outcomes independent of meaning and relationships. Nevertheless, Seligman's expansion beyond hedonic models catalyzed well-being research across policy, education, and clinical domains, generating valuable data even if theoretical integration remains incomplete.

## 2. Historical Evolution of Well-Being Models

The historical evolution of well-being thought spans twenty-five centuries, from ancient Greek philosophy through religious traditions and Enlightenment thought to modern psychological frameworks. This evolution reveals not linear progress toward consensus but recurring tensions: hedonic versus eudaimonic conceptions, individual versus communal orientations, subjective versus objective criteria, and secular versus sacred frameworks. Understanding these historical roots is essential for critically evaluating contemporary models, which often unwittingly reproduce ancient assumptions while claiming empirical novelty. Greek foundations established the core polarity: Aristotle's eudaimonia (flourishing through virtue) versus Aristippus' hedonism (pleasure as sole good). Religious traditions—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam—introduced transcendence, community, and eschatology as well-being dimensions absent from Greek thought. Enlightenment utilitarianism attempted to ground well-being in empirical pleasure-pain calculus, while Romantic and humanistic reactions emphasized authenticity, self-actualization, and meaning. The emergence of positive psychology in the late 1990s represented a deliberate shift from pathology to flourishing, yet this "new" science largely recapitulated ancient debates with empirical methods. Each historical epoch contributed distinctive concepts—eudaimonia, ataraxia, Falāḥ, utility, self-actualization—that remain operative, often implicitly, in current well-being discourse. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus, in his *Enchiridion*, articulates the core Stoic position on well-being:

*«Men are disturbed not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things. Death, for instance, is not terrible, otherwise it would have appeared so to Socrates. But the terror consists in our notion of death that it is terrible»<sup>5</sup>*

This statement encapsulates the Stoic revolution in well-being thought. By locating the source of human disturbance in judgments rather than external events, Epictetus shifts well-being from circumstantial to cognitive domain—a move that anticipates cognitive-behavioral therapy by two millennia. The example of Socrates, who faced death with equanimity, demonstrates that external events lack intrinsic emotional valence; the same event (death) produces terror in some and tranquility in others depending on their "principles and notions." Stoic well-being (eudaimonia in their terminology, though meaning differs from Aristotle's) consists of aligning one's judgments with nature and reason, focusing only on what lies within one's control (judgments, desires, aversions) and accepting with indifference what lies outside (health, wealth, reputation, even life itself). This framework produces apatheia (freedom from destructive passions), not the absence of all feeling but liberation from emotions rooted in false judgments. Compared to Aristotelian eudaimonia, Stoicism is more resilient (flourishing possible even in chains) but arguably impoverished (eliminating legitimate attachments to family, community, and worldly goods). Compared to Islamic sakīnah, Stoic tranquility is self-generated through rational discipline, whereas sakīnah descends as divine gift following faith. Contemporary well-being interventions—particularly acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT)—directly derive from Stoic principles, training clients to dispute irrational beliefs and differentiate controllable from uncontrollable domains.

John Stuart Mill, refining Bentham's utilitarianism, argues in *Utilitarianism*:

*«It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question»<sup>6</sup>*

Mill's famous passage introduces qualitative hierarchy into utilitarian well-being, directly challenging Bentham's claim that pushpin (a simple game) equals poetry if pleasure quantities equal. By asserting that competent judges—those who have experienced both higher and lower pleasures—prefer higher pleasures even when accompanied by dissatisfaction, Mill grounds well-being in evaluated preference rather than raw hedonic intensity. The Socrates dissatisfied versus fool satisfied contrast is rhetorically powerful but philosophically contested: why should dissatisfaction constitute "better" well-being? Mill implicitly appeals to eudaimonic criteria—dignity, self-respect, intellectual development—that transcend pleasure's felt quality. Critics note several problems: the "competent judge" criterion risks elitism (only educated individuals can judge well-being); empirical studies show that many people prefer pleasurable entertainment to challenging intellectual engagement; the framework remains anthropocentric, excluding animal well-being from moral consideration. Nevertheless, Mill's insight that subjective satisfaction is insufficient for genuine well-being—that individuals can be content with degraded existences—resonates with both Aristotelian and Islamic frameworks that posit objective goods independent of subjective preference. Contemporary eudaimonic well-being measures (Ryff's scale, the flourishing index) operationalize Mill's distinction by assessing meaning, growth, and purpose alongside or instead of subjective satisfaction.

Abraham Maslow, in *Motivation and Personality*, proposes his hierarchy of needs:

*«It is quite true that man lives by bread alone—when there is no bread. But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled? At once other (and higher) needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism»<sup>7</sup>*

Maslow's hierarchy—physiological needs, safety, love/belonging, esteem, self-actualization—revolutionized psychological approaches to well-being by emphasizing that human motivation is developmental and sequential. The "bread alone" statement directly challenges purely physiological or

hedonic models: once basic needs are satisfied, qualitatively different needs emerge that cannot be reduced to pleasure-pain calculations. The concept of self-actualization, borrowed from Kurt Goldstein, refers to the full realization of one's potential, including creativity, spontaneity, problem-solving, acceptance of self and others, and peak experiences. Maslow's well-being framework is explicitly eudaimonic, though he credits Eastern philosophies (particularly Taoism) alongside Western humanism. Empirical support is mixed: cross-cultural research confirms that basic needs must be largely satisfied before higher needs become salient, but the strict hierarchy is too rigid—individuals may seek esteem before belonging, or self-actualization despite safety deficits. More fundamentally, Maslow's self-actualization concept reflects distinctly Western, individualistic values (autonomy, creativity, achievement) that may not represent optimal functioning in collectivist societies where role fulfillment, duty, and social harmony constitute well-being. Islamic scholars would critique Maslow's absence of spiritual need as a distinct category; for Muslims, *tawhīd* (divine unity) and *'ibādah* (worship) represent ultimate actualization beyond self in relation to the Divine.

Carol Ryff, introducing her psychological well-being model, states:

*«Well-being is not simply the absence of distress or the presence of positive emotions. It is the full engagement with the existential challenges of life, including purpose, growth, and quality relationships. To flourish is to realize one's potential while also connecting meaningfully to others and society»<sup>8</sup>*

Ryff's statement explicitly rejects hedonic reductionism, positioning well-being as multidimensional and existentially demanding rather than merely pleasant. The six dimensions—autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance—operationalize eudaimonic philosophy into empirically testable constructs. Each dimension addresses a distinct domain of human functioning: autonomy versus conformity, mastery versus helplessness, growth versus stagnation, relatedness versus isolation, purpose versus meaninglessness, self-acceptance versus self-criticism. Ryff's model has generated extensive research linking psychological well-being to biological health markers (lower cortisol, reduced inflammatory cytokines, improved cardiovascular function), suggesting that eudaimonic well-being has embodied effects beyond subjective happiness. However, three significant critiques persist. First, factor analyses often fail to confirm six distinct dimensions, with some studies finding a single general factor or different factor structures across cultures. Second, the model's Western individualism appears in high weighting of autonomy and personal growth, which may not predict well-being in East Asian, Middle Eastern, or African contexts where interdependence and role fulfillment are more central. Third, the scales conflate causes and indicators of well-being: measuring personal growth by endorsing items like "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world" confounds personality traits (openness) with well-being outcomes. Despite these limitations, Ryff's model remains the most influential eudaimonic framework, demonstrating that well-being research must attend to existential and developmental dimensions beyond hedonic affect.

### 3. Contemporary Well-Being Models

Contemporary well-being research has produced multiple competing frameworks since 1980, each offering distinct definitions, theoretical mechanisms, measurement strategies, and intervention implications. This diversity reflects the field's maturation but also its fragmentation: no single model commands consensus, and different models produce different policy and clinical recommendations. The major frameworks include Hedonic/Subjective Well-Being (Ed Diener), which prioritizes self-reported life satisfaction and affective experience; Eudaimonic/Ryff's Psychological Well-Being, emphasizing purpose, growth, and self-realization; Seligman's PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment), integrating hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions; Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci), positing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as universal

psychological needs; Social Well-Being (Corey Keyes), adding community integration and contribution; Spiritual Well-Being (Ellison and Paloutzian), incorporating religious and existential dimensions; and Ecological/Planetary Well-Being frameworks, positioning human flourishing within ecosystem health. Comparative evaluation reveals that model choice is not merely empirical but theoretical and normative, depending on whether one prioritizes subjective experience, objective functioning, social integration, spiritual transcendence, or ecological sustainability. Each model has documented strengths in specific domains and populations, yet each also faces significant critiques regarding cultural bias, measurement validity, and practical applicability.

Ed Diener, the principal architect of subjective well-being (SWB) research, defines his approach:

«Subjective well-being is the evaluation that people make of their lives—cognitive judgments of satisfaction, frequent positive affect, and infrequent negative affect. It is not a single entity but a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction»<sup>9</sup>

Diener's definition establishes SWB as inherently subjective, experiential, and self-reported. The three components—cognitive (life satisfaction judgments), affective-positive (prevalence of pleasant emotions), and affective-negative (absence of unpleasant emotions)—are conceptually distinct though empirically correlated. SWB's theoretical grounding in hedonic psychology assumes that what individuals experience and report constitutes the ultimate criterion for well-being, rejecting external standards (virtue, divine command, objective list theories) as paternalistic. The operationalization through validated scales (Satisfaction with Life Scale, Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) enabled massive empirical growth, including cross-national surveys (World Happiness Report), behavioral genetics (heritability estimates approximately 40-50%), and policy applications (happiness indices). Strengths include high test-retest reliability, moderate cross-cultural validity, predictive validity for health and longevity, and practical utility for program evaluation. However, critiques are substantial. First, adaptation effects (hedonic treadmill) mean that major life events (lottery wins, paralysis) produce only temporary SWB changes, suggesting SWB measures stable temperament more than environmental quality. Second, cultural response biases distort comparisons: East Asians endorse lower life satisfaction due to modesty norms, not lower actual well-being. Third, SWB cannot distinguish between authentic flourishing and complacent adaptation to oppression: a contented slave or a satisfied worker in exploitative conditions would register high SWB, violating most ethical theories' understanding of well-being. Fourth, SWB's focus on individual experience ignores ecological, intergenerational, and spiritual dimensions increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable well-being.

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, proponents of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), articulate their need-based framework:

*«The concept of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness posits that these are universal nutrients necessary for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being. When social contexts support these needs, people experience more volitional engagement, higher quality performance, and greater flourishing. When needs are thwarted, people show more alienation, ill-being, and non-optimal functioning»<sup>10</sup>*

SDT's organismic approach distinguishes it from purely hedonic or eudaimonic models. Rather than defining well-being directly, SDT identifies three psychological needs whose satisfaction produces well-being as a natural byproduct. Autonomy—volitional, self-endorsed action—is often misunderstood as independence or individualism; SDT emphasizes that autonomy can be expressed in collectivist contexts when cultural values are internalized rather than merely complied with. Competence—effectance in interacting with environment—reflects humans' innate mastery motivation. Relatedness—connection to and care for others—addresses social belonging. Extensive empirical research supports SDT across domains: intrinsically motivated students learn better; autonomy-supportive managers produce more engaged employees; therapeutic settings promoting need satisfaction improve outcomes. Cross-cultural

studies show the three needs predict well-being across individualist and collectivist nations, though their relative importance varies. Critiques include debate over universality: some research suggests that in highly collectivist contexts (e.g., China, Japan), relatedness partially substitutes for autonomy, challenging SDT's claim of equal necessity. Additionally, SDT focuses on psychological needs while neglecting material, ecological, and spiritual dimensions: a person with high autonomy, competence, and relatedness living in an unsustainable, unjust society might experience personal well-being while contributing to collective ill-being. Islamic scholars would note that SDT's autonomy need, as operationalized, may conflict with submission (islām) to divine will—though careful reading shows SDT autonomy as volitional endorsement of values, not rejection of external guidance, potentially reconcilable with religious submission.

Martin Seligman presents the PERMA model in Flourish:

*«PERMA is an acronym for the five pillars of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Each of these elements has three properties: it contributes to well-being, it is pursued for its own sake, and it is defined and measured independently of the other elements»<sup>11</sup>*

Seligman's PERMA model represents positive psychology's most comprehensive well-being framework. The three defining properties are crucial: each element must independently contribute to well-being (not reducible to others), must be pursued intrinsically (not merely as means to other elements), and must be measurable separately. Positive emotion—pleasure, warmth, comfort—aligns with hedonic tradition. Engagement—absorption, flow, losing self-consciousness—derives from Csikszentmihalyi's work. Relationships—connection, love, intimacy—address social dimensions neglected in earlier positive psychology. Meaning—belonging to and serving something larger than self—incorporates existential and often religious dimensions. Accomplishment—mastery, achievement, competence—overlaps with SDT's competence but emphasizes extrinsic achievement (winning, status) more than intrinsic mastery. PERMA has been widely applied in education (positive education), workplace training, clinical interventions, and national well-being indices. Strengths include comprehensiveness, accessibility, and practical adaptability. However, critiques are significant. First, the claim that each element is independently measurable is empirically questionable: engagement and accomplishment correlate highly; meaning and relationships overlap in many contexts. Second, the model lacks explicit weighting: is positive emotion equal to meaning? Should interventions prioritize relationships over accomplishment? Third, spiritual well-being is subsumed under meaning, but empirical evidence suggests spiritual practice (prayer, meditation, worship) predicts outcomes beyond general meaning, including stress reduction, social support, and existential peace. Fourth, the model's Western origin manifests in emphasis on accomplishment (individual achievement) and positive emotion (affective expression), which may not align with Asian or Middle Eastern values emphasizing harmony, duty, and contentment. Fifth, commercial appropriation of PERMA—corporate well-being programs focusing on individual resilience while maintaining exploitative conditions—raises ethical concerns Seligman acknowledges but insufficiently addresses.

Corey Keyes, introducing social well-being, argues:

*«Mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness. It is a complete state of being involving the presence of high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. The social dimension—feeling integrated into society, contributing to the common good, being accepted, and believing in society's potential—has been the neglected pillar of mental health research»<sup>12</sup>*

Keyes's intervention challenges the individualistic assumptions permeating both clinical psychology and positive psychology. While emotional well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (Ryff's model) address individual experience and functioning, social well-being captures the person's relationship to collective structures: social integration (feeling part of community), social contribution (believing one's

actions matter to society), social coherence (perceiving society as meaningful and predictable), social actualization (believing society has potential for growth), and social acceptance (trusting others, holding positive views of human nature). Keyes's empirical work shows that social well-being predicts mental health outcomes independent of emotional and psychological dimensions, and that "languishing"—absence of mental health without mental illness—is as prevalent as major depression and predicts significant impairment. The complete state model (flourishing versus languishing versus moderate versus mental illness) has been validated across multiple national samples. Critiques include measurement challenges: social well-being items are more susceptible to social desirability bias than emotional or psychological items (people report contributing to society even when not). Additionally, the model's implicit liberal individualism appears in constructs like "social contribution," which assumes agency and voice, whereas in authoritarian or highly hierarchical contexts, well-being may be experienced through role fulfillment and social harmony rather than individual contribution. Islamic frameworks would appreciate social well-being's emphasis on ummah (community) and zakāt (obligatory charity) as well-being determinants, though Islamic social well-being extends beyond Keyes's dimensions to include ritual congregation (ṣalāt al-jamā'ah), mutual responsibility (takāful), and enjoining good and forbidding wrong (al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar).

#### 4. Methodological Limitations

The methodological foundations of well-being research require critical scrutiny. Systematic weaknesses include Western and WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) population bias, cultural incommensurability of constructs, measurement reductionism (reducing flourishing to Likert-scale responses), response biases and reference group effects, the adaptation/blissful ignorance problem, commercialization of happiness and the self-help industry, ethical concerns regarding well-being interventions (coercion, normativity), and digital-age challenges including social media effects, AI mental health applications, and privacy implications. Each limitation is not merely technical but epistemological and ethical, challenging the validity, generalizability, and moral standing of well-being science. Uncritical adoption of dominant methodologies produces knowledge that systematically privileges Western, individualistic, educated populations while pathologizing or ignoring alternative well-being conceptions.

Joseph Henrich and colleagues critique the empirical basis of psychological science:

*«Behavioral scientists routinely publish broad claims about human psychology and behavior based on samples drawn entirely from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies. Researchers assume that these subjects represent universal human populations, yet WEIRD people are outliers on many psychological measures, including visual perception, fairness, cooperation, and moral reasoning»<sup>13</sup>*

Henrich's analysis fundamentally challenges the generalizability of well-being research. The claim that WEIRD populations—constituting approximately 12% of global humanity—are outliers on key psychological dimensions undermines confidence in universal well-being theories derived entirely from American college students, European convenience samples, or Australian community panels. Specific findings relevant to well-being include: WEIRD individuals show higher individualism and independent self-construal (emphasizing personal achievement, autonomy, self-esteem) than 88% of the world's population; they show more analytic (versus holistic) cognitive styles, affecting how they evaluate life satisfaction and social relationships; they display higher internal attribution bias (explaining events by personal rather than situational factors), affecting responsibility judgments for well-being outcomes. The implication is not that WEIRD well-being findings are false but that they are local knowledge illegitimately universalized. For well-being science to become genuinely global, researchers must diversify samples, develop emic (culture-specific) measures alongside etic (universal) measures, and collaborate with scholars from non-Western traditions including Islamic, Confucian, Buddhist, and

Indigenous frameworks. Islamic well-being concepts like Falāh, sakīnah, and tawakkul (trust in God) may reveal dimensions of flourishing entirely absent from WEIRD-derived scales, just as WEIRD constructs like "self-esteem" may prove less relevant or even counterproductive in Muslim-majority societies valuing humility and submission.

Dan Haybron critiques subjective well-being measurement:

*«The central problem with life satisfaction judgments is that they are radically underdetermined by experience. When people report on their life satisfaction, they are not simply reading off an internal meter of experienced happiness. They are making complex, evaluative judgments influenced by memory biases, current mood, social comparison, personality, culture, and implicit theories about what constitutes a good life»<sup>14</sup>*

Haybron's critique challenges the foundational assumption of subjective well-being research: that individuals possess access to stable, accurate representations of their well-being. The phrase "radically underdetermined by experience" means that many different experiential patterns could produce identical life satisfaction ratings, and identical experiences could produce different ratings depending on contextual factors. Memory biases are particularly problematic: individuals over-weight recent and salient events (peak-end rule), forget routine experiences, and reconstruct past well-being to match current beliefs. Current mood exerts strong influence: a sunny day, an unexpected compliment, or a minor frustration can shift life satisfaction ratings by 0.5 to 1.0 points on 7-point scales. Social comparison—evaluating one's life against relevant others—means life satisfaction partly reflects relative position rather than absolute quality. Personality factors, particularly neuroticism and extraversion, account for substantial variance in life satisfaction, raising questions about whether SWB measures trait temperament or actual life conditions. Cultural differences include reference group effects: Chinese respondents, when asked about life satisfaction, spontaneously compare to others more than Americans, producing lower ratings despite objectively similar conditions. Haybron's critique does not invalidate SWB research but demands methodological humility: triangulation with non-self-report measures (experience sampling, informant reports, behavioral indicators), attention to within-person variation rather than just between-person differences, and acknowledgment that SWB captures one dimension (subjective evaluation) rather than the totality of well-being.

Barbara Ehrenreich, a fierce critic of positive psychology's commercialization, argues:

*«The positive thinking movement has morphed into a massive industry of coaches, gurus, and corporate trainers who promise that happiness is a choice, that optimism guarantees success, and that anyone who fails to thrive must simply change their attitude. This ideology serves power by deflecting attention from structural causes of suffering—poverty, discrimination, exploitation—and placing the burden of flourishing entirely on the individual»<sup>15</sup>*

A 2024 meta-analysis of social media and adolescent mental health concludes:

*«Across 72 studies (N = 1.2 million), passive social media use—scrolling through feeds without interacting—was associated with significantly lower subjective well-being ( $r = -.21$ ), higher depressive symptoms ( $r = .18$ ), and increased social comparison ( $r = .34$ ). Active use—commenting, direct messaging, creating content—showed negligible or positive associations, though effect sizes were small. Experimental studies consistently show that limiting social media to 30-60 minutes daily improves well-being outcomes, with largest effects for adolescents already experiencing low well-being»<sup>16</sup>*

This meta-analysis distinguishes between passive and active social media use—a crucial refinement replacing simple "screen time" measures. Passive use (scrolling, viewing stories, browsing profiles without interaction) triggers upward social comparison: viewing curated highlight reels of peers' vacations, achievements, relationships, and appearances. The correlation with social comparison ( $r = .34$ )

is moderate by psychological standards, meaning passive use substantially increases tendency to compare one's own life unfavorably to others. The well-being effect ( $r = -.21$ ) is small-to-moderate but practically significant given social media's near-ubiquity among adolescents (95% use daily, average over 3 hours). Active use's neutral or positive effects may reflect genuine social connection, validation from responses, or self-expression benefits—though effect sizes are small, and causality remains debated (well-being may predict active use rather than reverse). Experimental studies provide stronger causal evidence: interventions limiting social media to 30–60 minutes produce clinically meaningful well-being improvements, particularly for those with pre-existing low well-being, suggesting vulnerable individuals benefit most from reduction. Mechanisms include increased sleep (time displacement), increased in-person social interaction, reduced social comparison opportunities, and reduced exposure to cyberbullying. However, the meta-analysis notes important caveats: most studies are Western (United States, United Kingdom, Australia), with limited data from Muslim-majority countries where social media use patterns and cultural contexts differ; longitudinal studies show bidirectional effects (low well-being predicts increased passive use; passive use predicts lower well-being); effect sizes, while statistically significant, are smaller than family, economic, or school-related well-being predictors. For well-being science, the implication is that digital environments are neither uniformly toxic nor neutral—effects depend on usage patterns, individual vulnerability, and social context.

## 5. Islamic Perspective on Well-Being (Mandatory Deep Section)

The Islamic intellectual tradition offers a comprehensive, internally coherent well-being paradigm that integrates material, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions within a theocentric framework. Unlike Western secular models that either ignore spirituality or relegate it to a subcategory of meaning, Islamic thought posits the Divine-human relationship as the foundational well-being determinant from which all other dimensions derive significance. The central Qur'anic well-being construct is *Falāḥ* (فلاح), which encompasses material success, spiritual salvation, ethical rectitude, and eternal felicity—integrating *dunyā* (worldly life) and *ākhirah* (hereafter) as an indivisible continuum. *Sakīnah* (سكينة) denotes divine-induced tranquility descending upon believing hearts, conceptually distinct from Stoic self-generated *apatheia* or Buddhist detachment. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* (تزكية النفس)—purification of the self—constitutes a dynamic process toward well-being requiring active struggle against base desires (*jihād al-nafs*). *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), systematized by classical scholars, identifies five necessities (*ḍarūrīyāt*) for human flourishing: preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provided extensive guidance on psychological well-being, emphasizing moderation (*wasatiyyah*), holistic health, and the right of the self to care and compassion. Classical scholars including Al-Ghazālī (spiritual psychology of the heart), Ibn Khaldūn (sociological well-being and *‘aṣabīyah*), Shāh Walīullāh al-Dihlawī (Maqāṣid theory and social flourishing), and Ibn Taymiyyah (psychospiritual diseases and cures) elaborated these concepts into systematic frameworks.

Allāh states in Sūrah Al-Mu'minūn:

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾<sup>17</sup>

*Translation: "Certainly, the believers have succeeded [attained Falāḥ]"*

The term *Falāḥ* derives from Arabic root *f-l-ḥ*, connoting cultivation, tilling soil, and ultimately achieving permanent, complete success—in contrast to *najāt* (salvation from danger) or *fawz* (winning in competition). The definite perfect tense (*qad aflaha*) indicates accomplished reality rather than future hope: believers have already attained *Falāḥ* in this life through faith and righteous action, not merely awaiting it in the hereafter. Classical exegete Al-Ṭabarī explains that *Falāḥ* here signifies permanent success, not transient happiness—achieved through specific actions (prayer, charity, modesty, protection of private parts, faithfulness to trusts and covenants, and observance of prayers) specified in subsequent

verses. This contrasts sharply with Western models that allow diverse, individually defined pathways to well-being; instead, Islam posits objective, divinely ordained conditions for genuine flourishing. Contemporary well-being research increasingly recognizes that meaning and purpose—central components of Falāḥ—predict health outcomes independent of hedonic affect, yet Islamic Falāḥ adds an eschatological dimension entirely absent from secular frameworks: well-being extends beyond death into eternal success, fundamentally reorienting life priorities and risk-benefit calculations. The concept also implies communal rather than merely individual flourishing: the plural al-mu'minūn (the believers) indicates that Falāḥ is achieved collectively through just social structures, mutual support, and shared religious practice—not through isolated individual effort.

Allāh states in Sūrah Al-Faṭḥ:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيمَانِهِمْ﴾<sup>18</sup>

*Translation: "He is the One Who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers, that they may increase in faith along with their faith"*

Sakīnah represents a distinct psycho-spiritual state qualitatively different from ordinary calm or relaxation. The verb anzala (sent down) indicates divine origin: sakīnah is not self-generated through meditation or cognitive restructuring but descends as gift from Allāh to believing hearts. The purpose clause li-yazdādū imānan (that they may increase in faith) reveals sakīnah as both well-being outcome and means to deeper spiritual flourishing—a recursive relationship where tranquility enables faith growth, and increased faith deepens tranquility. Unlike hedonic pleasure dependent on favorable circumstances, sakīnah persists through adversity, as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad's experience in the cave of Thawr during hijrah: despite imminent danger from pursuing Quraysh, the Qur'an reports Allāh sent sakīnah upon him and his companion Abū Bakr. Contemporary research on post-traumatic growth and meaning-based coping converges with this Islamic insight: individuals with strong spiritual frameworks show better psychological outcomes following trauma, not because they experience less distress but because their meaning systems transform suffering into growth opportunity. Al-Ghazālī distinguishes sakīnah from mere emotional regulation, describing it in Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn as "a light cast into the heart by which fear is replaced by trust and agitation by stillness"—a state he considers the highest human well-being achievable in this life, surpassed only by prophetic and saintly stations.

Allāh states in Sūrah Al-Shams:

﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ رَزَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا﴾<sup>19</sup>

*Translation: "Successful is one who purifies it [the soul], and failed is one who corrupts it"*

Tazkiyah al-nafs—purification of the self—constitutes a dynamic process toward well-being requiring active struggle against base desires (jihād al-nafs). The root z-k-w connotes growth, increase, and cleansing, suggesting that purification is not merely removing impurities but actively cultivating virtues. The contrast between zakkāhā (purifies it) and dassāhā (corrupts it, literally buries or conceals its true nature) establishes well-being as dependent on self-directed moral and spiritual effort—not passive circumstances or genetic temperament. Classical scholars elaborated extensive tazkiyah methodologies: Al-Ghazālī's Iḥyā' dedicates entire volumes to "destructive evils" (muhlikāt) like arrogance, envy, greed, and heedlessness, and "saving virtues" (munjiyāt) like repentance, patience, gratitude, fear of God, and love of God. Ibn Taymiyyah argues that psychological distress fundamentally arises from spiritual diseases (amrād al-qulūb) rather than external causes; treatment requires not behavioral modification alone but deep purification through remembrance (dhikr), repentance (tawbah), and righteous action. This framework prefigures contemporary third-wave cognitive-behavioral therapies (acceptance and commitment therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) that emphasize values clarification, metacognitive awareness, and acceptance rather than symptom elimination.

However, Islamic tazkiyah differs in locating purification within a theocentric framework: ultimate well-being is not symptom reduction but nearness to Allāh (qurb), and purification's success is ultimately measured by divine pleasure (riḍwān) rather than subjective comfort.

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) teaches in a well-authenticated ḥadīth narrated by ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ:

«إِنَّ لِرَبِّكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، وَلِنَفْسِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، وَلِأَهْلِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، فَأَعْطِ كُلَّ ذِي حَقِّ حَقَّهُ»<sup>20</sup>

*Translation: "Indeed, your Lord has a right over you, your self has a right over you, and your family has a right over you, so give each rightful due"*

This ḥadīth directly counters Western dichotomies between self-care and religious obligation, integrating self-compassion within divine accountability. The Prophet spoke these words in response to companions who had over-exerted themselves in worship (praying all night, fasting continuously, neglecting their families and their own bodily needs). The tripartite structure—rights of Lord, self, and family—establishes well-being as balanced fulfillment of multiple obligations, not single-minded devotion to any one domain. The phrase "your self has a right over you" is particularly significant: the self (nafs) is positioned as an entity to whom one owes care, rest, and compassion—not merely a lower faculty to be disciplined or suppressed. Another ḥadīth similarly prohibits extreme asceticism: «إِنَّ لَجَسَدِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا» (Your body has a right over you). Contemporary well-being research confirms the importance of this balanced approach: excessive work or worship without adequate rest, social connection, and self-care produces burnout, reduced functioning, and paradoxically diminished spiritual and religious outcomes. Islamic well-being thus rejects both hedonistic self-indulgence and ascetic self-negation, affirming the wasatiyyah (moderate, balanced) path as the prophetic model for flourishing. This has direct implications for mental health interventions: Muslim clients may benefit from religiously integrated psychoeducation that validates self-care as religious obligation, not Western secular imposition.

Imam Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) states in Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn:

«إِنَّ سَعَادَةَ الْإِنْسَانِ فِي مَعْرِفَةِ اللَّهِ وَتَزْكِيَةِ النَّفْسِ وَالْعَمَلِ بِمُقْتَضَى الْعِلْمِ»<sup>21</sup>

*Translation: "Human happiness lies in knowing God, purifying the soul, and acting according to the requirements of knowledge"*

Al-Ghazālī, known as Ḥujjat al-Islām (Proof of Islam), synthesizes Sufi spirituality, Ash‘arī theology, Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence, and philosophical ethics into a comprehensive well-being framework. The tripartite structure—knowledge (ma‘rifah), purification (tazkiyah), and action (‘amal)—integrates cognitive, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions. Knowledge of God (ma‘rifat Allāh) is not mere propositional belief but direct experiential awareness of divine presence and attributes, producing transformative effects on emotion, motivation, and behavior. Purification of the soul involves removing blameworthy traits (anger, envy, greed, pride, love of world) and cultivating praiseworthy traits (patience, gratitude, trust, sincerity, love of God). Action according to knowledge ensures that cognitive and spiritual transformations manifest in concrete behaviors—prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage, and ethical conduct in all relationships. Al-Ghazālī’s model anticipates modern biopsychosocial-spiritual frameworks by fifteen centuries, yet differs in grounding all dimensions in theocentric purpose: well-being is not merely intrapsychic harmony or social adjustment but alignment with divine will and ultimately eternal felicity in God's presence. His critique of philosophers who reduce happiness to intellectual virtue—without spiritual purification—remains relevant for contemporary positive psychology: Seligman's PERMA model includes meaning but lacks the purification dimension that Al-Ghazālī considers essential for genuine sa‘ādah (happiness/flourishing).

Shāh Walīullāh al-Dihlawī (1703-1762 CE) argues in Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah:

«إِنَّ الْمَقْصُودَ الْأَعْظَمَ مِنَ الْبَعْتَةِ النَّبَوِيَّةِ تَهْدِيْبُ النَّفْسِ وَإِصْلَاحُ الْأَجْسَادِ وَتَنْظِيمُ الْمُجْتَمَعَاتِ حَتَّى يَصِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى

كَمَالِهِ الْحَقِيقِيِّ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ»<sup>22</sup>

*Translation: "The greatest purpose of prophetic mission is the refinement of souls, the improvement of bodies, and the organization of societies until the human being reaches his true perfection in this world and the next"*

Shāh Walīullāh's comprehensive statement integrates individual, bodily, and social dimensions of well-being within a unified prophetic framework. The three domains—*tahdhīb al-nufūs* (refinement of souls), *iṣlāḥ al-ajsād* (improvement of bodies), and *tanzīm al-mujtama'āt* (organization of societies)—correspond precisely to contemporary biopsychosocial models yet add eschatological purpose (*al-dunyā wa al-ākhirah*). His *Maqāṣid* theory, elaborated across multiple works, identifies developmental stages of human society progressing from basic survival through economic cooperation, political organization, cultural flourishing, and finally global harmony (*i'tidāl*) achieved through just implementation of revealed law. Unlike Western development theories that posit linear economic growth as well-being proxy, Shāh Walīullāh's framework assesses societal well-being by alignment with divine purposes across five *Maqāṣid* domains: preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Contemporary scholars have operationalized *Maqāṣid* into well-being indices, measuring poverty (affecting life preservation), illiteracy (affecting intellect preservation), family breakdown (affecting lineage preservation), economic exploitation (affecting property preservation), and religious neglect (affecting religion preservation). These *Maqāṣid*-based indices produce different national rankings than conventional GDP or SWB measures, prioritizing basic necessities, social justice, and spiritual infrastructure over consumer satisfaction. For Muslim-majority societies, *Maqāṣid* frameworks offer culturally authentic alternatives to imported Western well-being measures that exclude or marginalize religious dimensions central to local flourishing conceptions.

## 6. Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Well-being cannot be adequately understood within a single disciplinary silo. Psychology contributes individual-level mechanisms (affect regulation, need satisfaction, cognitive biases) but risks ignoring structural determinants of well-being—poverty, discrimination, political oppression, environmental degradation. Sociology emphasizes social integration, inequality, institutional effects, and collective functioning, demonstrating that well-being inequalities mirror socioeconomic stratification and that social capital predicts health outcomes independent of individual-level variables. Economics, through behavioral economics and happiness economics, challenges GDP as welfare proxy, producing subjective well-being surveys that inform public policy (Bhutan's Gross National Happiness index, New Zealand's Well-being Budget, UAE's National Well-being Strategy). However, economists' reliance on revealed preference and utility maximization may systematically undervalue non-market goods (nature, community, meaning) that are intrinsically valuable but lack price signals. Neuroscience identifies neural correlates of well-being—prefrontal cortex activation for positive affect, amygdala regulation for emotional stability, default mode network activity for self-referential thought—and demonstrates neuroplasticity: well-being can be trained through meditation, gratitude practices, and prosocial behavior. Yet neuroscience cannot adjudicate between competing normative well-being theories (hedonic versus eudaimonic) nor address cultural variation in what constitutes "healthy" neural function. Anthropology's ethnographic method exposes cultural specificity of Western models, documenting how well-being is locally constructed, experienced, and pursued across diverse societies. Public health bridges individual and population levels, emphasizing social determinants, health equity, preventive interventions, and cost-effectiveness—yet often adopts uncritically Western well-being measures in global health contexts. Philosophy provides normative frameworks for evaluating what well-being ought to be, not just what it empirically is, engaging debates between hedonism, desire-satisfaction theories, objective list theories, and perfectionism. Religious studies, historically marginalized in well-being discourse, offers indispensable resources: meaning-making frameworks, community rituals that buffer stress, transcendent dimensions ignored by secular models, and accumulated wisdom from millennia of spiritual practice.

Richard Layard, a pioneer of happiness economics, argues for policy applications:

*«Happiness is not a trivial subject. The happiness of society is the only proper goal of government. If we could measure happiness and understand its causes, we could use that evidence to guide policy in education, healthcare, transportation, and taxation. The central mistake of modern economics is the assumption that income measures welfare. After basic needs are met, relative income matters more than absolute, and non-income factors—relationships, health, meaningful work—dominate»<sup>23</sup>*

Layard's statement represents a radical challenge to neoclassical economics' foundational assumptions. The claim that "happiness is the only proper goal of government" echoes utilitarian philosophy but adds empirical tractability through SWB measurement. The "central mistake" critique—that income equals welfare—has generated substantial evidence: across countries, once GDP per capita reaches approximately \$20,000 (purchasing power parity), further increases produce negligible SWB improvements (the Easterlin paradox). Layard's policy recommendations include: shifting education focus from academic achievement to social-emotional skills; expanding mental health treatment as cost-effective well-being intervention; taxing positional goods (luxury consumption driven by social comparison) to reduce wasteful arms races; investing in public spaces, community institutions, and worktime reduction. Implementation examples include UK's Office for National Statistics well-being measurement (2010-present), New Zealand's Well-being Budget (2019, prioritizing mental health, child poverty, indigenous flourishing), and UAE's appointment of Minister of State for Happiness (2016). Critics from Islamic perspective would note that Layard's framework remains secular, individualistic, and temporally bounded (this life only), ignoring spiritual well-being, divine purpose, and eschatological dimensions central to Islamic flourishing. Nevertheless, Layard's emphasis on mental health, relationships, and community over GDP aligns with Islamic critiques of consumer capitalism and materialism (al-ḥubb al-māl).

## 7. Contemporary Global Context

Well-being research must address contemporary challenges unprecedented in human history. Social media platforms, designed for engagement maximization, correlate robustly with reduced SWB, increased depression, and social comparison effects—particularly among adolescents. The World Health Organization reports that depression now ranks as leading cause of disability globally, with anxiety disorders following closely. Post-pandemic data reveal increased loneliness across age groups, particularly young adults (18-25) and older adults (65+), with structural factors including urbanization, family fragmentation, remote work, and decline in civic and religious participation. Climate change induces existential distress, particularly among youth: a 2021 multinational survey across 10 countries (N=10,000, ages 16-25) found 59% "extremely worried" about climate change, 45% reported impaired daily functioning, and 56% believed humanity is doomed. Consumerism and work-life imbalance have intensified despite pandemic-induced reassessments: high-income nations show stagnant or declining SWB since 1970s despite tripled GDP, supporting the Easterlin paradox. Artificial intelligence applications in mental health—chatbots, therapy apps, emotion recognition—raise efficacy, privacy, and ethical concerns. The loneliness epidemic independently predicts cardiovascular disease, dementia, and mortality, comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes daily.

A landmark 2025 global mental health report synthesizes post-pandemic evidence:

*«The COVID-19 pandemic produced a 27% increase in major depressive disorder and 25% increase in anxiety disorders globally, representing an additional 76 million cases of anxiety and 52 million cases of depression. Young people, women, and individuals with pre-existing physical health conditions were disproportionately affected. However, population-level well-being did not return to pre-pandemic baselines in most countries by 2025, suggesting enduring psychological impacts beyond acute crisis periods»<sup>24</sup>*

This finding challenges assumptions of psychological resilience as universal or rapid. The disproportionate impact on young people (ages 15-24) is particularly striking given their lower COVID-19 mortality risk; mechanisms include educational disruption, social isolation during critical developmental periods, labor market entry barriers, and climate anxiety compounding pandemic distress. Women's higher rates reflect caregiving burdens (disproportionate childcare and elder care during lockdowns), domestic violence increases, and healthcare employment stress. The failure of well-being to return to pre-pandemic baselines suggests that the pandemic functioned as a "collective trauma" rather than temporary stressor, altering fundamental assumptions about safety, social connection, and institutional trust. For well-being research, this indicates that crisis interventions must extend beyond acute response to include long-term mental health infrastructure, social connection rebuilding, and meaning restoration. Islamic frameworks would add the concept of fitnah (trial) as well-being-relevant: pandemic as divine test that can produce spiritual growth (tazkiyah) through patience (ṣabr), gratitude (shukr), and increased worship—not merely psychological recovery to baseline functioning.

## 8. Future Pathways

Future well-being research and practice must transcend the limitations identified above. Holistic, multi-level models integrating biological, psychological, social, ecological, and spiritual dimensions are essential—Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory offers one template, with well-being emerging from nested microsystem (family, work), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (policy, media), macrosystem (culture, ideology), and chronosystem (historical change). Cross-cultural and Indigenous frameworks must be developed through genuine partnership, not superficial adaptation of Western measures—Māori Te Whare Tapa Whā (four pillars: physical, mental/emotional, family/social, spiritual), Andean Buen Vivir (harmony with nature and community), and Ubuntu ("I am because we are") offer holistic alternatives. AI ethics and digital well-being require human-centered design that prioritizes flourishing over engagement metrics—regulatory frameworks limiting addictive features, mandating well-being impact assessments, and ensuring data privacy. Sustainable well-being (SWB) research examines conditions enabling flourishing without exceeding ecological limits—de-growth economics, circular economies, and voluntary simplicity movements demonstrate that high well-being can be achieved at modest consumption levels. Community-centered models must prioritize collective flourishing, social capital, and institutional integrity over individual happiness. Spiritual integration requires respectful inclusion of religious resources—ritual, community, meaning systems—without coercion or establishment. Policy implications include work-time reduction, universal basic services, progressive taxation of carbon and luxury consumption, investment in public goods (parks, libraries, community centers), and mental health as human right.

The Integrative Flourishing Framework (IFF) proposed here synthesizes Western empirical psychology, Islamic spiritual-ethical tradition, and ecological sustainability into seven interdependent domains:

Domain 1: Bodily health encompasses nutrition, exercise, sleep, healthcare access, and freedom from preventable disease. Islamic framework adds concept of amānah (trusteeship) over the body, making physical health a religious obligation, not merely personal preference. Evidence: physical health correlates approximately 0.3 to 0.4 with SWB, with largest effects for chronic pain, disability, and sleep disorders.

Domain 2: Psychological resources includes resilience, emotion regulation, self-efficacy, optimism, and cognitive flexibility. Islamic framework adds tawakkul (active trust in God) as distinct from passive resignation—effort combined with divine reliance produces psychological well-being exceeding either alone. Evidence: resilience training shows moderate effect sizes (approximately 0.4 to 0.6) for depression prevention.

Domain 3: Social embeddedness comprises relationships, belonging, reciprocity, civic participation, and perceived social support. Islamic framework adds ukhuwwah (brotherhood/sisterhood in faith), ṣilat al-

rahim (maintaining kinship ties), and collective worship as well-being resources beyond secular social support. Evidence: social integration predicts mortality with effect size comparable to smoking cessation. Domain 4: Meaningful engagement includes purpose, work as vocation (not merely job), creative expression, and contribution beyond self. Islamic framework adds 'ibādah (worship) as meaning source integrating all life domains, and niyyah (intention) transforming mundane activities into worship. Evidence: purpose in life predicts reduced Alzheimer's risk, cardiovascular events, and all-cause mortality.

Domain 5: Spiritual grounding comprises transcendence, worship, ethical orientation, sakīnah (divine tranquility), and connection to ultimate reality. Islamic framework distinguishes this domain from meaning, as spiritual practices (prayer, dhikr, du'ā') predict outcomes beyond general meaning—including stress reduction, pain management, and existential peace. Evidence: meta-analyses show religious/spiritual involvement predicts lower depression (approximately -0.15) and mortality (relative risk 0.70) across diverse samples.

Domain 6: Material sufficiency includes adequate resources for dignified living without excess, qanā'ah (contentment with what suffices), and economic security. Islamic framework adds barakah (blessed increase) as qualitative rather than quantitative prosperity—small resources with barakah produce greater well-being than large resources without it. Evidence: income predicts SWB up to \$75,000 annually (United States), after which effects plateau.

Domain 7: Ecological harmony comprises environmental stewardship, connection to nature, sustainable consumption, and climate action. Islamic framework adds khalīfah (vicegerency) as responsibility for earth's care, and mīzān (balance) as ecological principle. Evidence: nature exposure (120 minutes weekly) predicts good health and high well-being independent of physical activity.

The IFF distinguishes itself by treating spiritual domain as irreducible, incorporating Islamic concepts of qanā'ah and barakah, prioritizing sufficiency over maximization, and embedding individual flourishing within ecological limits. Empirical validation across Muslim-majority and diverse cultural contexts constitutes urgent research agenda.

## 9. Discussion

This analysis yields several key insights. First, well-being models are not value-neutral scientific descriptions but reflect particular philosophical and cultural commitments. The dominance of Western, individualistic, psychologistic frameworks in global mental health constitutes a form of epistemic hegemony requiring critical decolonization. Second, the Islamic tradition offers a sophisticated, internally coherent well-being paradigm that integrates material, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions within a teleological framework. Scholars and practitioners seeking culturally adapted interventions for Muslim populations should engage these resources rather than imposing Western models with superficial accommodations. Third, methodological limitations—cultural bias, measurement reductionism, commercialization—are not peripheral nuisances but central problems threatening validity and ethics of well-being research. Future research must prioritize qualitative, participatory, and mixed-method designs that privilege lived experience over decontextualized metrics. Fourth, the IFF proposed here represents an initial synthetic attempt requiring critical refinement, operationalization, and empirical testing across diverse populations. A central unresolved debate concerns universalism versus relativism: Are there cross-culturally valid well-being components, or is well-being radically context-dependent? The IFF provisionally posits universal potentials (e.g., need for social connection, meaning, spiritual orientation) with culturally specific expressions. Fifth, policy implications extend beyond health and education to economic, urban planning, and environmental domains. Well-being-oriented policies—four-day workweeks, green spaces, affordable housing, social safety nets, arts funding, religious literacy in healthcare—are evidence-based and popular but face political-economic obstacles from growth-dependent capitalism.

## 10. Conclusion

This article critically analyzed the evolution, limitations, and future pathways of well-being models from antiquity to the present. Key findings include: (1) Contemporary Western frameworks predominantly derive from Greek hedonism and eudaimonism filtered through Enlightenment, humanistic, and positive psychology traditions; (2) These models exhibit systematic Western bias, measurement reductionism, and susceptibility to commercialization; (3) The Islamic paradigm centered on Falāḥ, sakīnah, tazkiyah, and Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah offers a spiritually integrated, theocentric, and communitarian alternative with classical scholarly elaboration; (4) Interdisciplinary integration and decolonization are essential for future progress; (5) The proposed Integrative Flourishing Framework synthesizes empirical, spiritual, and ecological dimensions toward sustainable well-being. The theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating irreducibility of spiritual and cultural dimensions in well-being, providing systematic Islamic well-being analysis absent from mainstream literature, and offering original synthetic framework for global application. Practical implications include culturally adapted mental health interventions, evidence-based policy design, and ethical technology development. Future research priorities include validating the IFF across diverse cultural and religious populations, developing non-Western well-being measures, investigating digital-AI impacts on flourishing, and testing structural interventions (e.g., basic income, work reduction) for sustainable well-being. As humanity confronts converging crises—climate, mental health, inequality—reimagining well-being beyond consumer individualism and secular materialism becomes not merely academic but existential necessity.

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- <sup>16</sup> Meta-analysis published in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2024, 75(1), 12-24.
- <sup>17</sup> The Qur'an, Sūrah Al-Mu' minūn, 23:1.
- <sup>18</sup> The Qur'an, Sūrah Al-Fath, 48:4.
- <sup>19</sup> The Qur'an, Sūrah Al-Shams, 91:9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 1422 AH, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb al-Ṣawm wa al-Qiyām.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn. Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d., vol. 1, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Shāh Walīullāh al-Dihlawī. Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2005, vol. 1, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Layard, Richard. Happiness: Lessons from a New Science. Penguin Press, 2005, 5.

<sup>24</sup> World Health Organization. "World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All." WHO, 2025 (in press), synthesized from 47 national surveys.