

## **ELEMENTS OF OF HAPPINESS AND LASTING WELL-BEING IN HAJJ**

Salahuddien Ayob<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Intan Hashimah Mohd Hashim<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Zulkarnain Ahmad Hatta<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Noraida Abdul Ghani<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Shukran Abd Rahman<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Zarina Mat Saad<sup>4</sup>, Dr. Jasni Sulong<sup>5</sup>, Dr. Nor Diana Mohd Mahudin<sup>3</sup>, Zhooriyati Sehu Mohamad<sup>1</sup>, Mohd Arif Shuib<sup>3</sup>, and Nurulhuda Ramli<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, <sup>3</sup>Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, <sup>4</sup>College Of Arts And Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, <sup>5</sup>School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

[salahuddien@gmail.com](mailto:salahuddien@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT** - Most people generally aim to obtain happiness and everlasting well-being in their life. One of the aim of positive psychology is to understand this nature of happiness. Seligman (2011) believed that long lasting wellbeing comprised of five essential elements: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Positive Psychology, which has focus on the conditions and process that contribute towards the flourishing and optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions, must base its research around the five elements. Hajj is a once in a lifetime pilgrimage obliged to all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable. It is a communal act of worship, committed individually and yet, by being in ihram and completion of sets of rituals, emphasizes equality and unity among all Muslims. Previous psychological research on Hajj is scant. However, it was reported that despite significant health and safety risk associated with hajj, pilgrims have reported positive experiences and psychological changes after Hajj (Wolfe, 1997; Clingingsmith, Khwaja & Kremer, 2009). This paper proposes how Hajj as a potential positive institutions may have the five elements in that it require the pilgrims to have some level of positive emotions, a sense of engagement, with opportunities to develop positive relationships, meanings and sense of accomplishment within the rituals. Plan for further research on these variables is discussed.

**Keywords:** hajj; positive institution; positive psychology; happiness; well-being.

## INTRODUCTION

It is believed that most people generally aim to obtain happiness and everlasting well-being in their life. In relation to this, it is noted that one main aim of Positive Psychology is to understand this nature of happiness. Seligman (2011) believed that long lasting well-being comprised of five essential elements: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). Seligman surely believes that Positive Psychology, which has focus on the conditions and process that contribute towards the flourishing and optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions, must base its research around the five elements.

Hajj is a once in a lifetime pilgrimage obliged to all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable. It is a communal act of worship, committed individually and yet, by being in ihram and completion of sets of rituals, emphasizes equality and unity among all Muslims. However, it was reported that despite significant health and safety risk associated with hajj, pilgrims have reported positive experiences and significant self-reported, perceived psychological changes after performing the pilgrimage (Clingsmith, Khwaja & Kremer, 2009; Wolfe, 1997; X & Haley, 1965). Previous psychological research on positive aspects of Hajj is indeed scant. Incidentally, religion was not the main focus for research among psychologist until later end of 20th century (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003) and Malaysia with its significant Muslim population has no research focus on the area of Psychology of Religion (Haque & Masuan, 2002). This has led to the call for more research on the experiences of Malaysian muslim, specifically on their hajj experience and related area of happiness and well-being (Ayob, Ahmad Hatta, Naing, 2012).

This proposed research aim to explore how Hajj as a potential positive institutions may have the five essential elements of well-being. In this regard, Hajj require its pilgrims to have certain level of positive emotions, a sense of engagement, with opportunities to develop positive relationships, meanings and sense of accomplishment within the once-in-a-lifetime rituals.

This proposed study is important because it can contribute to a more comprehensive approach to studying psychology and religion. By focusing on Hajj religious experience, this study offers an investigation related to Islam and gives a more complete view of different religions beyond the oft-reported western Judaeo-Christian population.

In addition, this study offers a more positive approach to studying Islam. Findings from this proposed research will detract western negative perception on Islam and its global gathering of Hajj. As proposed here, the study will be able to contribute new understanding of Islam and Hajj from the perspectives of Positive Psychology and Psychology of Religion.

A systematic study of Hajj as a major Islamic religious institution is needed. Hajj has the characteristic of a positive institution that may promotes happiness and SWB. This study is important because it will highlight factors that can contribute towards human general happiness as well as greater understanding on the contributing factors that promotes SWB. This proposed study can help us understand the influence of Hajj on Hujjajs state of emotion and how it may contributes towards their lasting happiness and well-being, Scientific research on Hajj is scant, but the pilgrimage posses the characteristics for elements of well-being, and yet not adequately described by the scientific community. Overall, Hajj is a positive institution that warrants this psychological investigation.

Specific objectives of this proposed research are as follows:

- To explore the level of happiness and SWB of those who have performed the Hajj
- To examine the potentially positive aspects of Hajj on happiness and SWB
- To investigate Hajj as a potentially positive institution by examining Hajj's experience in relation to PERMA
- To explore the factors that can potentially moderate PERMA in relation to SWB

## **PROPOSED METHODOLOGY**

It is proposed that data collection for this study to be conducted over two phases. In the first phase, data are gathered via pen-and-paper set of questionnaire while the second phase will be via semi-structured face-to-face interview.

Well-established psychological measures will be translated and adapted for use in the first phase of the research. This may include Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985), Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire (Fordyce, 1988), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), and Quality of Life Questionnaire (Greenberg & Greenley, 1997).

In the 2nd phase, in-depth, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to investigate potential factors that have prevented hujjaj from experiencing PERMA during Hajj. Interviews with those who experiencing low level of PERMA will help us to understand why they were experiencing the negative situations. These interviews can highlight the potential factors that may include health and financial difficulties or existing major stressor. The approach is more phenomenological in nature in which the identification of the factors depend on the participants and will be set in advanced

## **RESEARCH BENEFITS & EXPECTED OUTCOME**

It is the aim of everyone who perform the hajj that his/her pilgrimage is accepted by Allah, for He will decide those who will obtain Hajj Mabrur. On the other hand, it is possible for us to facilitate towards that level by understanding the factors involved. There are numerous discussions as well as publications by Islamic religious scholars on this topic. However, to the knowledge of the author and via reviews of the literature, psychology has none to offer. It is hoped that the outcome of this research will provide some psychological perspectives on internal-self, mental requirement for this state of Hajj Mabrur.

Hajj and umrah service operators (e.g. Malaysia's Tabung Haji, umrah tour agencies) may benefit from this research as it will provide psychological feedbacks on the experiences of the hujjaj. Be it positives or negatives, there are avenues for improvements and lessons to be learned on the pilgrimage to the holy cities. Knowledges on the "guest of Allah" psychological state of experienced positive emotions, level of engagement, perceived positive relationships, awareness of the meaning, and sense of accomplishment, will provide much needed information on this greatest annual human gathering of the world.

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The corresponding author (email: [salahuddien@gmail.com](mailto:salahuddien@gmail.com)) is a PhD student at School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. The first author is also a Graduate Research Assistant for research project on Social Psychology of Crowd Behavior During Evacuation, one of the research projects under USM Hajj Research Cluster. Subsequent authors are members of the research project.

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