INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909

Volume 4, Issue 3, 2026

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AS PREDICTORS OF HAPPINESS IN MUSLIMS: A CASE STUDY IN SOUTHERN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Muhammad Bilal[*1], Muhammad Usman[2], Dur-e-Sehar[3], Hafsa Abbas Wattu[4], Qurat ul Ain[5]

[*1,2]*Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Islamabad, Pakistan*
[3,4] *Department of Psychology, Islamia University Bahawalpur, Pakistan*

[*1]mu.bilal@iiu.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *
Muhammad Bilal
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22829049

Received	Accepted	Published
01 January 2026	17 March 2026	31 March 2026

ABSTRACT

The present study examined religious practices and subjective happiness among Muslim university students in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. The study used a quantitative survey design with a convenience sample of 200 Muslim university students from the Bahawalnagar campus of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Religious practices were assessed using a 15-item Religious Practices Scale adapted from the rituals subscale of the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory, and subjective happiness was assessed with the four-item Subjective Happiness Scale. The original study examined descriptive levels of religious practice and happiness, gender differences, associations with age, and the predictive contribution of religious practices to happiness. The sample showed a mean religious-practice score of 48.73; when divided by the 15 items, the mean item score was 3.25, which the thesis classified as moderate. Gender differences in religious-practice scores were not statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 0.43$, $p = .513$, and the gender difference in happiness was also not statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 3.03$, $p = .084$. Age was not significantly associated with happiness, $r = -.04$, $p = .552$, or religious practices, $r = .09$, $p = .189$. Regression analysis indicated that religious practices explained 1.3% of the variance in happiness, $R^2 = .013$, $F(1, 198) = 2.56$, $p = .111$. Thus, the data did not provide statistically significant evidence that religious practices predicted subjective happiness in this sample. The findings are discussed in relation to Islamic religiosity, subjective well-being, measurement, and the cultural context of Southern Punjab.

Keywords:

religious practices; religiosity; subjective happiness; Muslim students; Southern Punjab; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Religion is an important source of meaning, guidance, identity, and social organization for many people. In Muslim contexts, religious life includes both beliefs and observable practices through which individuals express commitment to Islamic teachings. The present study focuses specifically on religious practices rather than treating religiosity as a single undifferentiated construct. This distinction is important because behavioral expressions of religion may be related to psychological outcomes in ways that are not captured by broad measures of religious identity.

Within Islamic thought, religious practice includes obligatory and voluntary forms of worship and conduct. The source thesis conceptualized practices in relation to the Qur'an and Sunnah and emphasized practices such as prayer, fasting, zakat, pilgrimage, Qur'anic engagement, and conduct toward others. The Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI) was developed to represent Islamic religiosity through a framework that is sensitive to the Islamic worldview (Krauss, 2005; Krauss et al., 2005). The present study used selected ritual/practice items from this tradition as an indicator of religious practice.

Happiness has also been studied extensively within positive psychology. Subjective well-being includes cognitive and affective evaluations of one's life (Diener, 2000), while positive psychology emphasizes human strengths, flourishing, and positive experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) was developed as a brief measure of global subjective happiness and has demonstrated reliability and construct validity across samples (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The SHS captures an individual's global evaluation of being happy, including comparisons with peers and perceptions of generally happy or unhappy people.

Religious involvement may be related to happiness through several possible pathways. Religious practices can provide routines, meaning, social connection, moral guidance, and opportunities for reflection. At the same time, the relationship should not be assumed to be universally positive or causal. Subjective happiness is influenced by multiple personal, interpersonal, cultural, and contextual factors, and cross-sectional associations cannot establish causal direction. Diener (2000) emphasized the multidimensional and culturally embedded nature of subjective well-being.

The Southern Punjab context provides a useful setting for examining these questions because religious practice is embedded in everyday family and community life. The original thesis selected Bahawalnagar as its geographical setting and focused on Muslim adults, with university students forming the study sample. The study therefore addresses a specific population and should not be generalized beyond comparable contexts without further evidence.

The present article converts the thesis into a concise empirical research paper while preserving the reported sample, measures, statistical tests, and results. The primary research question was whether religious practices were associated with and predictive of subjective happiness among Muslim university students. Additional questions concerned gender differences and associations between age and the two principal variables.

Research Objectives

- To examine the level of religious practices among Muslim university students in Bahawalnagar.
- To examine the level of subjective happiness among Muslim university students in Bahawalnagar.
- To examine the relationship between age and subjective happiness.
- To examine the relationship between age and religious practices.
- To examine gender differences in religious practices and subjective happiness.
- To examine whether religious practices predict variation in subjective happiness.

Hypotheses

- Muslim university students will demonstrate a moderate level of religious practices.
- Muslim university students will demonstrate a high level of subjective happiness.
- Age will be significantly associated with subjective happiness.
- Age will be significantly associated with religious practices.
- Male and female students will differ significantly in religious practices and subjective happiness.
- Religious practices will significantly predict subjective happiness.

Method

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used. The design was intended to describe the level of religious practices and subjective happiness and to examine statistical relationships among religious practices, happiness, age, and gender.

Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of 200 Muslim university students from the Bahawalnagar campus of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The source thesis describes Muslim adults as the target population and identifies Bahawalnagar as the geographical boundary of the study. Convenience sampling was used because of practical constraints involving time and resources. The reported gender comparison included male and female students; the source material does not provide a complete demographic table with the exact number of participants in each gender group in the text available for this article.

Measures

Religious Practices Scale. Religious practices were assessed with a 15-item scale derived from the rituals subscale of the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI). The source thesis states that the MRPI originally contains 33 items and that 18 items represented the rituals subscale. Three items were removed following a pilot study because they were considered inappropriate for the local cultural context, resulting in 15 items used in the present study. Items were rated on a five-point response scale ranging from Never to Always. The total reported mean was 48.725. The source thesis classified the mean item score (48.725/15 = 3.25) as moderate.

Subjective Happiness Scale. Subjective happiness was measured with the four-item Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Each item is rated on a seven-point scale. The fourth item is negatively worded and is normally reverse scored before calculating the scale mean. The source thesis reports item-level means of 5.03, 4.98, 4.88, and 4.38 and reports gender-specific total scores used in the inferential analyses. Because the original thesis contains inconsistent reporting of the overall SHS mean, the present article does not substitute a newly calculated overall mean and instead reports the inferential results exactly as documented.

Procedure

Data were collected from Muslim university students at the Bahawalnagar campus. Participation was voluntary, and respondents completed the study measures. The source thesis describes the research as a survey of religious attitude/practices and happiness. Specific institutional ethical approval information and the exact informed-consent wording are not reported in the available thesis text; these details should be added to the manuscript if they are available in the original research records.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 22. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize religious practices and happiness. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine gender differences. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine associations of age with happiness and religious practices. A simple linear regression examined whether religious practices predicted subjective happiness. Statistical significance was evaluated using the reported p values.

Results

Religious Practices

The mean score for religious practices was 48.73 across the 15 items. Dividing the total mean by the number of items produced an average item score of 3.25 on the five-point response scale. According to the classification used in the source thesis, this represented a moderate level of religious practice.

Gender Differences

Male students had a higher reported mean religious-practice score (M = 49.07) than female students (M = 48.46). The difference was not

statistically significant, F(1, 198) = 0.43, p = .513. Male students also had a higher reported happiness score (M = 19.90) than female students (M = 18.77), but this difference was not statistically significant, F(1, 198) = 3.03, p = .084.

Table 1 Gender Differences in Religious Practices and Subjective Happiness

Outcome	Male *M*	Female *M*	*F*(1, 198)	*p*
Religious practices	49.07	48.46	0.43	.513
Subjective happiness	19.90	18.77	3.03	.084

Note. M = mean; *F* = F statistic; *p* = significance level. Higher scores indicate greater levels of religious practices and subjective happiness, respectively. All *p* values are two-tailed.

Age and Study Variables

Age was not significantly associated with subjective happiness, r = −.04, p = .552. Age was also not significantly associated with religious practices, r = .09, p = .189. These findings indicate that age showed little linear association with either outcome in the reported sample.

Table 2 Correlations of age with subjective happiness and religious practices

Variable	*r*	*p*	*N*
Age–Subjective happiness	−.04	.552	200
Age–Religious practices	.09	.189	200

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient; p = significance level; N = sample size. Correlations were two-tailed.

Item-Level Descriptive Findings

The highest mean among the reported religious-practice items concerned feeling peace when hearing Qur'an recitation (M = 4.69), followed by expressing love for fellow Muslims (M = 4.61) and ensuring that family members follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (M = 4.55). The lowest reported item means concerned increasing non-obligatory prayer (M = 3.59) and maintaining ablution at all times (M = 3.68). These item-level findings suggest variation across specific practices rather than uniformly high endorsement of every practice.

Table 3 Selected descriptive statistics for religious-practice items

Practice	M
Feeling peace when hearing Qur'an recited	4.69
Loving brothers and sisters in Islam as oneself	4.61
Encouraging family members to follow Sunnah	4.55

Feeling sad when Ramadan ends	4.42
Understanding Islamic teachings with family	4.34
Deepening understanding of Islamic law	4.25
Thanking Allah when beggars come to the house	4.30
Understanding Qur'anic words/verses	4.14
Understanding Qur'anic demands/teachings	4.05
Inviting others to obligatory prayer	3.96
Reciting Qur'an despite being busy	3.84
Discussing religious issues with family	3.76
Maintaining ablution	3.68
Increasing non-obligatory prayer	3.59

Note. Item means are reproduced from the thesis. The 15-item scale also included the item concerning internalizing the Prophet's conduct in daily life (M = 4.18), which is discussed in the text.

Prediction of Subjective Happiness

Simple linear regression was conducted with religious practices as the predictor and subjective happiness as the outcome. The model produced $R = .113$ and $R^2 = .013$, indicating that religious practices accounted for approximately 1.3% of the variance in happiness. The overall regression model was not statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 2.56$, $p = .111$. Thus, the reported data do not support the hypothesis that religious practices significantly predict subjective happiness in this sample.

Table 4 Simple linear regression predicting subjective happiness from religious practices

Predictor	*R*	R^2	Adjusted R^2	$F(1, 198)$	*p*
Religious practices → Happiness	.113	.013	.008	2.56	.111

Note. Dependent variable = subjective happiness; N = 200.

Discussion

This study examined whether religious practices were associated with subjective happiness among Muslim university students in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. The findings provide a mixed picture. Students demonstrated a moderate overall level of religious practices according to the classification used in the original thesis. However, religious practices did not significantly predict subjective happiness, and age was not significantly related to either religious practices or happiness. Gender differences were also not statistically significant for either principal variable.

The absence of a statistically significant predictive relationship between religious practices and happiness is important because religious practice and subjective well-being are conceptually related but are not interchangeable constructs. Religious practices can provide structure, meaning, community, and opportunities for reflection, but subjective happiness is influenced by a broader range of individual and contextual factors. Diener (2000) emphasized that subjective well-being reflects cognitive and affective evaluations of life and is shaped by multiple influences. Therefore, a nonsignificant association in this sample should not be interpreted as evidence that religion is unrelated to well-being in general.

The item-level results show that participants reported particularly high endorsement of experiences involving Qur'anic recitation, Islamic social connectedness, and family religious guidance. In contrast, some more frequent

behavioral practices, such as increasing voluntary prayer or maintaining ablution, received lower mean ratings. This pattern suggests that religious practice may be multidimensional. Future research could examine whether devotional, interpersonal, cognitive, and ritual dimensions of religiosity have different relationships with happiness.

The findings concerning age were also nonsignificant. The correlation between age and happiness was small and negative, whereas the correlation between age and religious practices was small and positive. The narrow and university-based nature of the sample may have restricted age variability and therefore reduced the likelihood of detecting age-related differences. Future studies should include broader age ranges and compare university students with community adults and other populations.

The gender findings should likewise be interpreted cautiously. Although male students had higher reported mean scores on both religious practices and happiness, neither difference reached statistical significance. The results therefore do not justify a conclusion that gender determines either religious practice or happiness. Larger samples and more detailed demographic information would be useful for examining whether gender differences vary by age, educational field, socioeconomic circumstances, family environment, or specific dimensions of religiosity.

The study contributes to the empirical literature by examining Islamic religious practices and subjective happiness within a Southern Punjab university context. The use of the MRPI-derived practices measure is also relevant because the MRPI was developed specifically to represent Muslim religiosity within an Islamic conceptual framework (Krauss, 2005; Krauss et al., 2005). At the same time, the adaptation of the rituals subscale and removal of three items for cultural reasons mean that the psychometric properties of the resulting 15-item measure should be established explicitly in future work.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings support a cautious, multidimensional understanding of religion and well-being. Religious practice may contribute to meaning and social connection, but the present data indicate that practice alone explained little variation in subjective happiness. Researchers should therefore consider additional variables such as social support, perceived meaning in life, psychological distress, socioeconomic circumstances, personality, family relationships, and life satisfaction. For practitioners and educators, the findings suggest that religious engagement should not be treated as a single proxy for psychological well-being. Programs concerned with student well-being should recognize the diversity of religious experiences and avoid assuming that higher reported practice necessarily corresponds to higher happiness.

Limitations

- The sample was limited to 200 university students from a single geographical setting in Southern Punjab.
- Convenience sampling limits representativeness and generalizability.
- The cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causal relationships between religious practices and happiness.
- The religious-practice measure was adapted from a larger instrument, with three items removed following a local pilot study; the present article does not have sufficient source information to report a full independent psychometric validation of the adapted scale.
- The available thesis text does not provide complete demographic characteristics such as the exact gender-group sample sizes and age distribution.
- The thesis contains inconsistent reporting of the overall Subjective Happiness Scale mean; therefore, the present article avoids replacing the reported inferential statistics with an independently reconstructed overall mean.
- Ethical approval and detailed informed-consent documentation are not specified in the

available thesis text and should be inserted if available.

Future Research

Future studies should recruit larger and more diverse samples across Southern Punjab and other regions of Pakistan and use probability or stratified sampling where feasible. Longitudinal research could examine whether changes in religious practices precede changes in happiness or whether the relationship is reciprocal. Mixed-method studies could also explore how Muslim students understand the relationship between worship, meaning, social relationships, and well-being. Researchers should validate the adapted Religious Practices Scale in Pakistani samples, report internal consistency and factor structure, and examine whether specific dimensions of religious practice have differential associations with subjective happiness.

Conclusion

Among the 200 Muslim university students examined in the source study, religious practices were classified as moderate at the overall item level. However, religious practices did not significantly predict subjective happiness, explaining approximately 1.3% of its variance, and neither age nor gender showed statistically significant associations with the principal outcomes. The findings indicate that religious practice should be examined as one component of a broader psychosocial and cultural framework of student well-being. Replication with larger, more representative samples and stronger measurement procedures is needed before broader conclusions can be drawn.

REFERENCES

Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. American Psychologist, 55(1), 34–43. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.34

Krauss, S. E. (2005). Development of the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory for measuring the religiosity of Malaysian Muslim youth [Doctoral dissertation, Universiti Putra Malaysia].

Krauss, S. E., Hamzah, A., Juhari, R., & Abdul Hamid, J. (2005). The Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI): Toward understanding differences in the Islamic religiosity among the Malaysian youth. Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 13(2), 173–186.

Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. Social Indicators Research, 46(2), 137–155. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006824100041

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