

12-29-2018

# Indonesian Perspective of Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study

Herdiyan Maulana

*Queensland University of Technology*, herdiyanmaulana@gmail.com

Patricia Obst

*Queensland University of Technology*

Nigar Khawaja

*Queensland University of Technology*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended APA Citation

Maulana, H., Obst, P., & Khawaja, N. (2018). Indonesian Perspective of Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(12), 3136-3152. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss12/18>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



## Indonesian Perspective of Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study

### Abstract

Cross-cultural research suggests that wellbeing may be experienced differently by distinct populations. While research on wellbeing in non-Western populations has increased, there is limited empirical evidence regarding wellbeing in Indonesia. As the fourth largest country in the world, and with its unique socio-cultural characteristics, the potentially distinctive Indonesian experience of wellbeing has been overlooked by international scholars. The present research investigated the Indonesian perception of wellbeing using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Thirty Indonesian adults participated in semi structured interviews which focused on their understanding and experience of wellbeing. The analysis revealed a number of keythemes: fulfilment of basic needs; social relations with family and community; and the positive world views of self-acceptance, gratitude, and spirituality as key aspects of wellbeing. Although these overarching themes are commonly reported in wellbeing research, the expression of these themes was unique to the Indonesian context. This study enriches the wellbeing literature and understanding of the experience of wellbeing in the Indonesian context and paves the ways for further research.

### Keywords

Happiness, Indonesia, Thematic Analysis, Qualitative, Wellbeing

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Indonesian Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP), Ministry of Finance, Republic of Indonesia, as a part of the first author's doctoral scholarship at the School of Psychology and Counselling, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Authors are also thankful for the valuable comments and suggestions made by the editor and reviewer team of The Qualitative Report journal.

## Indonesian Perspective of Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study

Herdiyan Maulana

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia  
State University of Jakarta, Indonesia

Patricia Obst and Nigar Khawaja

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

---

*Cross-cultural research suggests that wellbeing may be experienced differently by distinct populations. While research on wellbeing in non-Western populations has increased, there is limited empirical evidence regarding wellbeing in Indonesia. As the fourth largest country in the world, and with its unique socio-cultural characteristics, the potentially distinctive Indonesian experience of wellbeing has been overlooked by international scholars. The present research investigated the Indonesian perception of wellbeing using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Thirty Indonesian adults participated in semi structured interviews which focused on their understanding and experience of wellbeing. The analysis revealed a number of key themes: fulfilment of basic needs; social relations with family and community; and the positive world views of self-acceptance, gratitude, and spirituality as key aspects of wellbeing. Although these overarching themes are commonly reported in wellbeing research, the expression of these themes was unique to the Indonesian context. This study enriches the wellbeing literature and understanding of the experience of wellbeing in the Indonesian context and paves the ways for further research. Keywords: Happiness, Indonesia, Thematic Analysis, Qualitative, Wellbeing*

---

### Introduction

Wellbeing (WB) has been studied extensively as an important indicator of human quality of life (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2015). Numerous international studies provide a growing body of evidence on the importance of wellbeing in multiple life domains, such as health (Marcinko, 2015; Steptoe, Deaton, & Stone, 2015), education (Chen, 2012), and society (MacIlvaine, 2014). Wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to one's capacity to embrace life with a positive emotional state and to evaluate life as satisfactory across various life settings (Diener et al., 2010).

Although the literature identifying the key factors contributing to wellbeing is well established, caution should be taken when applying these findings to more diverse non-Western populations. Subsequently, most of the research using non-Western samples rarely explored the participant's specific cultural perspective regarding to wellbeing. Previous studies in the Indonesian context have tended to focus on exploring factors associated with wellbeing rather than investigating the specific Indonesian perspective of what constitutes wellbeing (Jaafar et al., 2012; Landiyanto, Ling, Puspitasari, & Irianti, 2010; Yeo, 2014). In order to extend our understanding of wellbeing in non-Western cultures, research from an Indonesian perspective is an important addition to the literature. The current research addresses this gap through the qualitative exploration of the experience and meaning of wellbeing within an Indonesian context.

Based on reviews of previous studies, a number of scholars have recommended the importance of such contextual analysis to extend on the current wellbeing research (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters, & Synard, 2017). Contextual exploration refers to the in-depth investigation of wellbeing across cultures and nations to explore differences due to variations in socio-economic and cultural circumstances. Adopting an in-depth qualitative approach, including asking people how they actually define wellbeing is supported in the literature as a method for such contextual exploration (Camfield, Guillen-Royo, & Velazco, 2010). This approach may help to reveal how wellbeing is evaluated or whether the existing definitions of wellbeing are culturally appropriate.

Cultural aspects, such as norms, values and traditions, play an important role in determining the experience of wellbeing. These cultural aspects guide the corresponding effect and cognition in individuals' interpretation of wellbeing (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Self-construal theory helps to explain this link, since it outlines that the very concept of self is constructed within our socio-cultural context and manifested in our attitudes and behaviour (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Self-construal theory implies that people from Western industrialized cultures tend to be more independent and focused on personal over group goals, known as the independent self-construal. Western cultures tend to emphasize the value of autonomy and individuality over others (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). Consequently, people who live in this culture tend to focus on personal needs, achievement, autonomy, freedom, and materialism values as ways to enhance wellbeing (Davey & Rato, 2012; Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2013). Subsequently, Western culture encourages independency and active expression of personal thought, hence, obstacles to autonomy may lower their wellbeing (Deeming, 2013). Alternatively, people from East Asian cultures tend to place higher importance on social cohesion and connectedness to the community, known as the interdependent self-construal, as a basis of self-definition (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003). These orientation differences may guide the way people see their life, their values and attitudes and accordingly shape their understanding and experience of their personal wellbeing.

### **Wellbeing in the Non-Western Cultures**

According to self-construal theory, the majority of non-Western societies are identified as the interdependent self-construal type (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000), which is characterized by a strong embeddedness of self with family and society. This self-construct guides the individual's cognitive framework to understand wellbeing in ways that are compatible with their cultural principles (Markus & Kitayama, 2001; Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008). The following studies exemplify how interdependent self-construal may be associated with the experience of wellbeing. Research conducted in the Chinese context provides evidence for a distinct conception of wellbeing that focuses strongly on the fulfillment of social role obligations, and the dialectical balance between positive and negative circumstances (Chen & Davey, 2008). Similarly, in an Indian population, Parnami, Mittal, and Hingar (2013) found that community support and religion are important determinants in promoting wellbeing over other self-oriented factors. Such research indicates that for individuals from non-Western cultures, inter-personal relations, spirituality and social connectedness with family and community may be strongly linked to their experience of wellbeing.

## **The Current Study**

Indonesia is an example of a non-Western developing nation, with a collectivist culture, which emphasizes group membership and loyalty over and above individual needs (Jaafar et al., 2012; Jetten et al., 2002). As the world's largest Muslim population, with religious principles influencing almost all of life aspects, Indonesian holds spirituality as the key factor that strongly correlates with a sense of wellbeing (Harpan, 2015). The interaction between local tradition and religion is difficult to separate in Indonesian society. For example, some Indonesian laws are inspired by religious values and are applied as a significant social reference and hence, represent a common way of life for Indonesians (Landiyanto et al., 2010; MacDonald, Marshall, Gere, Shimotomai, & Lies, 2012; Trommsdorff & Schwarz, 2007). The growing body of research examining wellbeing in Indonesia has shown that the Indonesian experience of wellbeing does reflect the collectivistic culture, the important role of family (Schwarz et al., 2010; Trommsdorff & Schwarz, 2007), and spirituality (Jaafar et al., 2012; Yeo, 2014).

National level correlational studies regarding the factors associated with wellbeing have been conducted in the Indonesian context (e.g., Eggleston et al., 2001; Landiyanto et al., 2010; Sujarwoto & Tampubolon, 2015). These studies have been limited to correlational designs and restricted samples (e.g., university student and sub-cultural groups) and have employed measures of wellbeing based on Western theoretical perspectives. Such research has provided important understanding of the broad experience of wellbeing in Indonesia. However, the literature still lacks an in-depth contextual exploration of the meaning and experience of wellbeing from an Indonesian cultural perspective that examine the components essential to the individual experience of wellbeing in this cultural context, such as social support and spirituality.

The current research aimed to extend the exploration of wellbeing in the Indonesian context through a qualitative enquiry to elucidate the unique experience of wellbeing within this cultural context. Qualitative research has proven beneficial in exploring the experience of wellbeing across cultural groups (e.g., Camfield et al., 2010; Glozlah, 2015), allowing an exploration of deeper psychological mechanisms from the respondent's point of view. A qualitative approach will explore the cultural relevance of current concepts of wellbeing in the Indonesian context and provide an opportunity for alternative views to be expressed (Yardley, 2017). The current research aimed to contribute to cross-cultural wellbeing literature and further to provide Indonesian stakeholders (researcher, health practices, and government agency) with information that may improve the wellbeing research and policy in Indonesia.

## **Author's Research Note**

All authors have a keen interest in wellbeing in a cross-cultural context, which has grown from their own research experience and the paucity of studies focusing on the cultural context of wellbeing. We believe that understanding wellbeing from a cultural point of view will provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the human experience of flourishing. The first author is from Jakarta, Indonesia, a country full of cultural diversity, characterized by a strong collectivistic society with a solid religious attachment. He works as a psychology lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology, State University of Jakarta and received a full scholarship from the Indonesian government to pursue his doctoral study in Australia. For the last five years, the first author has worked extensively on the construct of wellbeing in a wide range of settings, including university students, people with terminal illnesses and minority groups. Based on this experience and his knowledge of the literature, he believed the experience of wellbeing in the Indonesian cultural context was not well captured by the existing

research. One of his academic goals is to lead research in the field of wellbeing from the specific Indonesian cultural perspective and to develop a valid measurement tool to build the research in this area. The second and third authors are the supervisory team from the School of Psychology and Counselling at the Queensland University of Technology. The second author is a social psychologist with particular interest in the constructs of social support, sense of community, and wellbeing. The third author is a clinical psychologist with an interest in clinical/transcultural and cross-cultural psychology topics. Her research also focuses on culturally sensitive and safe assessments and interventions for communities from diverse cultures. All authors were highly invested in giving voice to the experience of wellbeing of everyday Indonesians.

## Method

This study based in a thematic qualitative approach aimed to explore the participant's experience of wellbeing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen as it is based on the constructivist paradigm, in which social reality is based on the individual perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Constructivism holds the assumption that people essentially construct their attitude and behaviour together with how they interpret the world around them, which is strongly tied to their socio-cultural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Thematic analysis has also been noted as having the flexibility and adaptability to suit a wide range of data types and research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, this analysis allows for the researcher to take an active part in the identification and interpretation of themes, guided by the research questions.

## Participants

The participants were 30 Indonesian adults (Age 19 to 54) from Jakarta ( $M_{age} = 26.6$  years,  $SD = 8.14$ ). This number is considered as a good sample size for thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Recruitment information was disseminated through flyers, official university emails, and social media (e.g., Line and WhatsApp). Initially, snowballing was used to garner interest in the research and then purposive sampling was used to ensure the participants were from a variety of demographic categories. Table 1 shows the key demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Characteristics	Distribution (Percentage)
Age	(SD) 8.14
Range	19 - 54
Mean	26.6
Gender: n (%)	
Female	18 (60 %)
Male	12 (40 %)
Marital Status: n (%)	
Married	9 (30%)
Single	20 (66.7%)
Divorced	1 (3.3%)
Employment: n (%)	
Administration staff	2 (6.7%)
Freelancer/Part time	3 (10%)
Private employee	2 (6.7%)
Lecturer	8 (26.7%)

Student	13 (43%)
Not employed	2 (6.7%)
Religion: n (%)	
Islam	28 (93%)
Christianity	2 (7%)
Education: n (%)	
High school	11 (36.7%)
Diploma	2 (6.7%)
Undergraduate	11 (36.7%)
Postgraduate	6 (20%)
Place of living: n (%)	
Own house	9 (30%)
Live with parent	21 (70%)

## Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from both Australian and Indonesian universities before data collection commenced. Recruitment flyers were widely disseminated. Prospective participants contacted the lead author and were invited to interview sessions located at the Faculty of Psychology, State University of Jakarta, Indonesia at times convenient to the participant during the office hours (8AM to 5PM). All relevant research documents were translated from English into the Indonesian language through back-translation (Brislin, 1970). The associate research team members reviewed the back-translation version of questions in English for validation purpose. A semi-structured interview protocol with probes; (e.g., “*How do you understand the word wellbeing?*”, “*What is wellbeing according to you?*”, “*What factors affect your wellbeing?*”, and “*How do you achieve wellbeing?*”); was used to explore the participant’s experience of wellbeing. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted using the Indonesian language and ranged from 45 to 70 minutes long. The initial data analysis was conducted in Indonesian and a summary table of initial themes was created.

## Analysis

NVIVO Version 11 was used to organize and code the qualitative data transcripts. The following interactive steps of thematic analysis were undertaken. The first named author read all interview transcripts and did the initial coding of descriptive nodes in the Indonesian language. These nodes were identified through the semantic approach, which focused on the explicit meanings of the text. Through this approach, participants’ comments were used as grounds to identify the initial themes (low-order themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These low-order themes were then grouped together to form high-order themes in a summary table based on an inductive method. In this way, themes were generated from the data (Patton, 1990). The objective of this step was to ensure that the theme was substantially derived from an actual respondent’s point of view and without any attempt to adjust the data into either an early theoretical framework or the researcher’s conceptual presumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes identified described the respondent’s initial perception of wellbeing. The relevant quotes presented in the results section have been translated into English and are presented in italics followed by the participant’s age, gender, and employment status (e.g., 22-year-old female student).

From this summary table, an iterative process was conducted by all members of the research team to arrive at three mutually agreed higher order themes. Results are presented below under these three key themes: Basic Needs, Social Needs, and Positive Worldview. To

ensure the reliability of the data analysis, an inter-rater analysis was conducted. Two raters coded 15 pages of participant comments. These two raters were asked to put a number, which represents a particular overarching theme beside each comment. This data was analysed using the Cohen's Kappa analysis which measures the level of agreement between two dichotomous scores, ranging from -1.0 to +1.0, where +1.0 indicates perfect agreement between raters (McHugh, 2012). The inter-rater reliability score was .759 ( $p = .000$ ) which indicates a good reliability score (Wood, 2007).

## Research Setting

The first author collected the data in Jakarta over the period of three months (July – September 2016). Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world with a population of 255 million people (Indonesia, 2016), and is a home to 300 distinct ethnic groups living on 17,000 islands. Indonesian *Bahasa* is the official language of the nation; however, there are 700 different languages and dialects used in daily social interaction (Indonesia, 2012). Generally, Indonesians live in the extended family system, due to the country's collectivist society characteristic. Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, is listed as one of the densest places among Asian major cities with the population of more than ten million people in 2015 (Indonesia, 2016). Located in the northwest of Java Island, Jakarta is Indonesia's economic, cultural, and government centre and home to the full diversity of Indonesia's multi-ethnic and religious groups.

Eighty-five percent of the population follows the Islamic faith (Indonesia, 2012). As a religion-based society, Indonesians implement religious values in almost all aspects of life. The Ministry of Religious Affairs was established to ensure that religious beliefs and policies are properly implemented. Government through the ministry monitors the functioning of mosques, the management of *halal* food, organizing the pilgrimage, and regulate the marital system. The interaction between tradition and religion is hard to separate in Indonesia. Many cultural values, such as the obligation to respect one's parents and elders, interactions between men and women, and how to acceptably express one's emotions in social circumstances, also align with religious teaching.

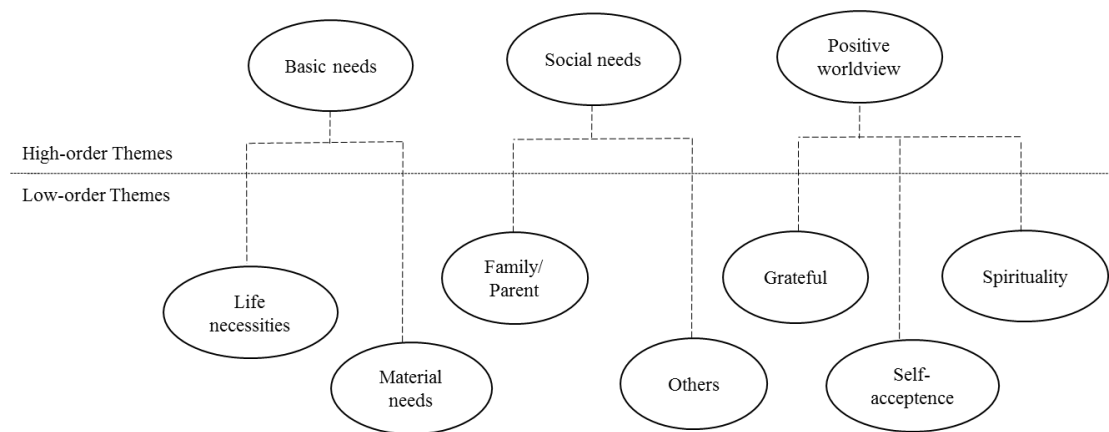
## Results

### The Indonesian Meaning of Wellbeing

Three key overarching themes emerged from the analyses in terms of how participants expressed their experience of wellbeing in daily life. The participants reflected their experience of wellbeing as a state of fulfilment and satisfaction within three distinct aspects of life: Basic Needs, Social Needs, and a Positive Worldview. Figure 1 below shows the key themes and sub themes that emerged from the analysis. The themes are presented in two levels, the higher order themes and the constituent themes from which the higher order themes were derived.



Figure 1. Thematic analysis result map



### Basic Needs

The first overarching theme that emerged from the data was expressed in participants' concern for meeting their family's basic needs. Having their own and their family's basic needs met was a fundamental precursor to their experience of wellbeing. This fulfilment of basic need was expressed through two interrelated but distinct elements, firstly having the necessary basic life commodities such as food, shelter, and clothing for themselves and family, and secondly, through having some financial independence and the ability to purchase discretionary items such as a motorcycle. Most participants clearly stated that wellbeing starts with the fulfilment of these basic necessities, for example:

Wellbeing is an ability to fulfil all of our needs in life . . . like if I want food (to eat), then I can afford it, (and) if I want to go somewhere, I can go easily, and, if I want to enrol my child in school, I can afford that, yes just like that [39-year-old male lecturer].

Even younger participants with less economic responsibilities also listed this concern as important, for example:

For me if all needs are fulfilled . . . yes, it's like our physiological needs like I can afford for food and shelter. For me, wellbeing is when I can fulfil my material and financial need [23-year-old female unemployed].

Such comments indicated that the ability to meet basic needs was seen as a key mechanism for achieving a good and satisfying life, regardless of participants' varied ages and socio-economic backgrounds.

The second element under the key theme of having basic needs met was focused more on the ability to access secondary material needs, which included things such as being able to afford a small vehicle, to have some savings, and to be able to own a small house. Fulfilment of such secondary material needs seemed to be related to participants' sense of life satisfaction. This finding may be particular to a developing economic country, such as Indonesia, in which the ability to afford luxury material things is limited for much of the population. Interestingly, this desire for material extras was expressed within a context of acceptance of circumstances and gratitude for what you have, for example:

Therefore, for me, wellbeing is not merely about satisfied because if we do so, there would be no end. Like today I have a Rush (type of medium-class car),

truly I don't want this kind of car, instead maybe I want a BMW, but no, (with this condition) I still happy (with my current car) [37 years-old female lecturer].

In light of the fact that many participants in this study came from a medium to high socio-economic status, with the ability to afford small luxuries, the strong endorsement of meeting basic needs and financial independence as an essential first step in wellbeing is an indication of the strong influence of their cultural context. Further, the carefully worded comments for small luxuries showed participants preferred to not excessively express desire for materialistic goods but still acknowledged the importance of being able to afford small extras to their sense of wellbeing.

### **Social Needs**

The next key theme to emerge from the data was that maintaining good social relations was an essential aspect of participants' wellbeing. The fulfilment of Social Needs was expressed through participants' comments indicating the importance of their social relations with significant others (e.g., parent, family, and neighbours) to their everyday life satisfaction and feelings of wellbeing. The theme is underpinned by two distinct social domains: relationships with family and those with others outside the family. An Indonesian family is typically an extended system comprised of parents, children, as well as grandparents and even uncles and aunts that may all live together. The importance of family to wellbeing is evidenced in such comments as:

I mean it's like having a nice communication with your family and it is the best thing you have as wellbeing, because when you have a good communication with your parents and family, (then) it would give a really good feeling to our self [20-year-old female unemployed].

Participants also referred to the importance of family as a source of support, such as providing companionship, motivation, and financial support, for example:

It's like moral support received from my family and when we are in a difficult time, family is there (they) ready for us [21-year-old male college student].

The importance of family was also underpinned by the acknowledgement of the role of family in the development of identity, attitudes, morals and values. For example:

Family . . . that is the first lesson you received before you got the life [23-year-old female college student].

For me, the family is the first environment for all of us. From there, we learn our values. I mean from our interaction with our family, these values will help us as a foundation for our upcoming life [22-year-old female college student].

Relationships outside family such as positive interactions with neighbours and the broader community also emerged as an important aspect of participants' wellbeing. Most Indonesians live in a close neighbourhood environment, which consists of a number of families and is led by the neighbourhood leader who is elected through social consensus. The neighbourhood organizes regular social activities, and hence, maintains social cohesion among its members.

A number of participants noted the importance of these relationships and support outside the extended family structure to their sense of wellbeing. For example:

I have a positive relationship with my friends and other, like friends and people surround me (community/neighbour) [21-year-old female student].

I have good relations with my community . . . yes, like I have people that I can rely on, I have best friends in the local neighbourhood [22-year-old female unemployment].

The importance of the reciprocal nature of these positive relations was also highlighted by many participants as a requirement for their social need to be fulfilled, for example:

For me personally, wellbeing is giving what we have to others . . . yes, helping those in need, well, able to help others, help them with their daily needs, such as food, clothing. Wellbeing is when we have some Rizq (Islamic conception for any blessed came from God, and its formed in material things, such as money and food) and you can share to others and help whoever in need [25-years-old academic staff].

The strong endorsement of the importance of family and a strong connection to the broader community is consistent with the Indonesian cultural context and collectivist culture. Of note is that this theme was expressed not just as being supported by family and neighbours, but also about contributing to family and community. Fulfilment of social needs was expressed as rich, reciprocal relationships with family and others, and it was this that was linked to participants' feeling of wellbeing.

### **Positive Worldviews**

Participants spoke at length about their personal attitudes and the importance of these to their wellbeing. These attitudes were expressed in terms of acceptance of your place in life, gratitude with what you have, and living a spiritual life as essential elements of wellbeing. These attitudes were labelled positive worldviews, in line with the literature which defines a worldview as a constructed conceptual framework from which people understand the world by organising, evaluating, and acting upon social reality, and in this case, the framework that helps them to live well (Kagee & Dixon, 2000).

This notion of accepting your place in life was labelled self-acceptance. Self-acceptance means that participants unconditionally accept their self and their life circumstances. This acceptance was spoken about by many participants as forming a fundamental aspect of their wellbeing. Participants in following comments described that idea above:

It's like accept your life. Why we need to be jealous with others life? Just accept yourself [37-year-old female lecturer].

Wellbeing is an ability to accept yourself and be happy with your life now, you can achieve your life goal with sincere (heart) [20-year-old college student].

The notion of self-acceptance was found across age, gender, and socio-economic background and seen as helping participants to achieve a calm and peaceful life.

The second related but distinct constituent theme to emerge from the data was gratitude. Many participants spoke about feeling gratitude for what they had as an important foundation of their experience of wellbeing. Gratitude refers to a positive emotional reaction for others help or assistance to self or for what one has achieved. Participants' comments indicated that gratitude contributed to their sense of fulfilment and was a key foundation of their happiness. For example:

If I can feel be grateful, it will be very joyous. By grateful means that I do not worry about things [of] something that I still don't have, no . . . but by being grateful we can be more relaxed in living the life [27-year-old male administrator].

I describe wellbeing as a feeling of fullness. Feeling completed, and to feel complete you have to be grateful for what you already have, so if you are not grateful you will never be feel fulfilled [23-year-old female student].

This theme appears to be unique to the social cultural context of Indonesia and is very distinct from the Western understanding of wellbeing. This deeply felt need to accept your life and be grateful for what you have was expressed by participants' as leading to a calm and peaceful existence which, in turn, leads to a deep sense of fulfilment and wellbeing.

The third constituent theme to emerge from the data was that of spirituality. Again, participants expressed that spirituality was deeply related to their sense of wellbeing. Participants indicated spirituality as an attitude based on the presence of God in some way in their life. Spirituality was often expressed as an important coping mechanism in their lives, for example:

Yeah . . . personally when I don't have someone to talk, even to my parents, the things that I have is praying, because when you pray, like God would not judge you, so you just say what you want to say and what you want to have in your life [20-year-old female college student].

It was seen by some as a way to overcome unfavourable life circumstances by helping them re-frame and accept it. For example:

Even a poor person can achieve wellbeing as long as they embraced the religious values [22-year-old female student].

These three constituent themes are strongly interrelated to each other but allude to an individual's distinct way of viewing their world and place in it. These positive world views help participants endure daily life challenges, through acceptance of their circumstance and gratitude for what they have as well as reframing their circumstances from a spiritual point of view. In this way these world views helped participants achieve a sense of fulfilment which contributed strongly to their happiness and wellbeing.

## Discussion

The present study explored the meaning and expression of wellbeing in the Indonesian general population. These findings contribute to the contextual understanding of wellbeing for people in different socio-cultural backgrounds, identified as an important gap in the extant research (Knoop & Delle Fave, 2012). The qualitative data analyses revealed that key

components of wellbeing for these Indonesian participants were having their basic and social needs met and having a positive worldview, expressed through acceptance, gratitude and spirituality. While some of these broad themes are similar to other conceptualizations of wellbeing, the constituent subthemes encapsulated an Indonesian cultural expression of wellbeing. The data indicates that Indonesians appear to view wellbeing as a multi-dimensional construct in line with existing multi-dimensional frameworks of wellbeing.

For most of the participants, the fulfilment of basic needs, which includes access to health facilities, affordable education and transportation, were reported as the main indicator of wellbeing. The majority of participants expressed the fulfilment of basic needs was needed first before they were able to achieve a satisfactory life. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which underline the importance of materialistic fulfilment as a precursor of wellbeing in developing countries (Gori-Maia, 2013; Ngoo, Tey, & Tan, 2015).

Furthermore, the importance of maintaining good social relations for individuals' wellbeing was clearly expressed by all participants. Good relations were seen as reciprocal with giving to others as important as receiving their support and friendship. In fact, many of the Indonesian participants commented that happiness of parents, family, and others was as important to their own personal wellbeing as their own happiness. This is in line with previous studies (e.g., Delle et al., 2011; Lu & Gilmour, 2004), which have also highlighted the importance of social connections to wellbeing in non-Western societies. Asian cultures, in particular, place a high value on social harmony and family responsibility. This value arises from the collectivist nature of these cultures which places mutual support among community members as an important life goal (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011). Research in Asian cultures has shown that helping others (family and community members) even if you struggle to afford it, is a fulfilment of social expectation, and hence contributes to a sense of personal satisfaction and wellbeing (Lu, 2005; Lu & Gilmour, 2004). Such findings are also consistent with emerging research conducted in the Indonesian context (Jaafar et al., 2012; Primasari & Yuniarti, 2012; Sohn, 2013), which also found evidence for the importance of good social relationships as a predictor of a satisfied life above wealth and material satisfaction. As a result, in the current study participants also spoke about how the fulfilment of material needs allowed them to help and support others.

Of particular interest in the current findings was the personal attitudes or worldviews that participants expressed as underpinning their wellbeing. These included self-acceptance, gratitude and spirituality. The importance of self-acceptance for wellbeing is consistent with findings from a study by Kasser (2011), which indicated that an individual's ability to acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses and accept them, was an important determinant of living a fulfilled life. Respondents in the current study pointed to accepting themselves and their place in life as helping them cope with their life challenges and respond to their external reality. Interestingly, this concept of self-acceptance is seen within Indonesian classic philosophical teaching, such as the old Javanese proverb "*Nrimo*" that can be translated as a sincere, self-accepting attitude (Yuniarti, 2006).

The notion of self-acceptance has not been studied widely in the wellbeing area in Indonesian context. This current finding opens an interesting discussion regarding the value of self-acceptance as a part of the experience of wellbeing in different cultural contexts. Further research examining the expression of self-acceptance and its role in wellbeing across distinct cultures will be important in developing this discussion further.

Extending on the concept of self-acceptance, participants have also expressed the importance of being grateful for what they have as underpinning their wellbeing. Gratitude represents a worldview which acknowledges positive mutual interactions in life (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008). Gratitude has been described as a major component of wellbeing associated with a meaningful life (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). The

theme of gratitude has been found to be strong determinant of positive life experiences (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010) and particularly, as an important indicator for wellbeing (Mokrova, Merçon-Vargas, & Tudge, 2018; Ruini & Vescovelli, 2013). Other studies conducted in non-Western nations, also indicate that gratitude may play a role as a protective factor for daily life challenges (Datu, 2014; Ramzan & Rana, 2014; Washizu & Naito, 2015).

Finally, spirituality also emerged as an important aspect of wellbeing in the Indonesian context. This finding is in line with previous research conducted in Indonesia (Budiman & O’Cass, 2007; Jaafar et al., 2012; Yeo, 2014). It is not surprising, since Indonesia is a religiously oriented society, and as such, people regularly apply religious principles in their daily life. Research suggests that religious values may play an important role as a protective factor, as it can help individuals to cope with unpleasant life experiences through a belief in a greater protective power and provide a way of reframing misfortune (Lun & Bond, 2013; Rahayu, 2016). Therefore, such beliefs may enable people to attain a state of equanimity and calmness, even in times of stress.

Through the integration of the existing literature with the current findings, this research has illuminated the importance of acknowledging a deep, socio-cultural perspective toward the structure of wellbeing in the Indonesian context. While the broad categories are in line with a universal definition of wellbeing, the nuances of the expression of these elements were uniquely Indonesian. Indonesia is a nation of diverse multi-ethnic groups and the largest Muslim population in the world, and its people share a strong collectivist and hierarchical cultures in their daily social life. This socio-cultural context was clearly evident in the participants’ expression of wellbeing. Hence, this research reinforced the important association between socio-cultural contexts and the perception of wellbeing, and how different cultural groups shape their unique perspective of personal wellbeing. The application of a qualitative approach allowed for a deeper, more comprehensive exploration of the unique Indonesian perception of wellbeing.

Existing theories of wellbeing in a cross-cultural context acknowledge that some components of wellbeing may not be universal (Diener, 2012; Knoop & Delle Fave, 2012; Lu & Gilmour, 2004; Tov & Diener, 2007) and since it is a multi-dimensional concept, wellbeing consists of different subjective aspects and hence needs to be understood in an appropriate socio-cultural context. It is important in applying existing conceptualisations of wellbeing to different socio-cultural backgrounds to be cognizant of how the context may affect how people view and experience wellbeing. This worldview serves as a cognitive framework to help individuals construct their social reality (Matsumoto, 2006) and to interpret events (Diener, 2009)

With a population of more than 200 million, equivalent to 3.5 % of the total world population, Indonesian initiatives to promote wellbeing have been limited to objective determinants, such as economic and physical infrastructure. Hence, studies that contribute a deeper understanding of psychosocial factors that lead to a better quality of life are important. This study enriches the wellbeing literature and understanding of the experience of wellbeing in the Indonesia context and paves the ways for developing further research.

### **Conclusion and Limitation**

Although this study has provided valuable insight into Indonesians’ experience of wellbeing, the findings were based on a small sample (N=30) recruited from a university in Jakarta, Indonesia, and hence do not represent all of Indonesia’s cultural and social diversity. More research in Indonesia using a variety of methodological approaches and participant pools will continue to build our understanding of this important construct.

Overall, this study elucidated the unique Indonesian experience of wellbeing. The participants' understanding of wellbeing was related to fulfilling basic needs, good social relations, and a number of positive worldviews. This research contributes to the extant cross-cultural literature on wellbeing and will be useful for researchers, practitioners, and policy developers in Indonesia in the enhancement of wellbeing research in the Indonesian context.

### References

- Boehm, J. K., Lyubomirsky, S., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). A longitudinal experimental study comparing the effectiveness of happiness-enhancing strategies in Anglo Americans and Asian Americans. *Cognition & Emotion*, 25(7), 1263-1272.
- Bono, G., & McCullough, M. E. (2006). Positive responses to benefit and harm: Bringing forgiveness and gratitude into cognitive psychotherapy. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 20(2), 147-158.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brislin, R. W. (1970). Back-translation for cross-cultural research. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1(3), 185-216.
- Budiman, A., & O'Cass, A. (December 2007). *Studying the effects of materialism, religiosity and status consumption on subjective wellbeing: An Indonesian perspective*. Retrieved from: [http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/25410/20080806-0000/smib.vuw.ac.nz\\_8081/WWW/ANZMAC2007/papers/Arief\\_1.pdf](http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/25410/20080806-0000/smib.vuw.ac.nz_8081/WWW/ANZMAC2007/papers/Arief_1.pdf)
- Camfield, L., Guillen-Royo, M., & Velazco, J., (2010). Does needs satisfaction matter for psychological and subjective wellbeing in developing countries: A mixed-methods illustration from Bangladesh and Thailand. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11(4), 497-516.
- Chen, W. (2012). How education enhances happiness: Comparison of mediating factors in four East Asian countries. *Social Indicators Research*, 106(1), 117-131.
- Chen, Z., & Davey, G. (2008). Happiness and subjective wellbeing in mainland China. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(4), 589-600.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cross, S. E., Bacon, P. L., & Morris, M. L. (2000). The relational-interdependent self-construal and relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4), 791-801.
- Cross, S. E., Gore, J. S., & Morris, M. L. (2003). The relational-interdependent self-construal, self-concept consistency, and wellbeing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(5), 933-944.
- Datu, J. A. D. (2014). Forgiveness, gratitude and subjective wellbeing among Filipino adolescents. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 36(3), 262-273.
- Deeming, C. (2013). Addressing the social determinants of subjective wellbeing: The latest challenge for social policy. *Journal of Social Policy*, 42(3), 541-565.
- Delle Fave, A., & Bassi, M. (2009). The contribution of diversity to happiness research. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(3), 205-207.
- Delle Fave, A., Brdar, I., Freire, T., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Wissing, M. P. (2011). The eudaimonic and hedonic components of happiness: Qualitative and quantitative findings. *Social Indicators Research*, 100(2), 185-207.
- Davey, G., & Rato, R. (2012). Subjective wellbeing in China: A review. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13(2), 333-346.
- Diener, E. (2009). *The science of wellbeing: The collected works of Ed Diener* (Vol. 37). Berlin, Germany: Springer Science & Business Media.

- Diener, E. (2012). New findings and future directions for subjective wellbeing research. *American Psychologist*, 67(8), 590-597.
- Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Diener, R. B. (2010). New wellbeing measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 97(2), 143-156.
- Eggleston, E., Wong, E. L., Hardee, K., Irwanto, Poerwandari, E. K., & Severy, L. J. (2001). Measuring women's psychological wellbeing in Indonesia. *Women & Health*, 32(4), 17-32.
- Froh, J. J., Bono, G., & Emmons, R. (2010). Being grateful is beyond good manners: Gratitude and motivation to contribute to society among early adolescents. *Motivation and Emotion*, 34(2), 144-157.
- Glozlah, F. N. (2015). Exploring Ghanaian adolescents' meaning of health and wellbeing: A psychosocial perspective. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 10(1), 263-270
- Gori-Maia, A. (2013). Relative income, inequality and subjective wellbeing: evidence for Brazil. *Social Indicators Research*, 113(3), 1193-1204.
- Harpan, A. (2015). Peran religiusitas dan optimisme terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis pada remaja [The role of religiosity and optimism on psychological welfare in adolescents]. *Empathy Journal Fakultas Psikologi*, 3(1), 1-18.
- Hefferon, K., Ashfield, A., Waters, L., & Synard, J. (2017). Understanding optimal human functioning—The 'call for qual' in exploring human flourishing and wellbeing. *The Journal of Positive Psychology (1743-9760)*, 12(3), 211-219.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2015). *World happiness report 2015*. New York, NY: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Indonesia, S. (2012). Statistical yearbook of Indonesia 2012. *BPS Republik Indonesia*.
- Indonesia, B. S. (2016). Statistical yearbook of Indonesia 2016. *BPS Republik Indonesia* Retrieved from <https://www.bps.go.id/publication/2016/06/29/7aa1e8f93b4148234a9b4bc3/statistik-indonesia-2016>
- Jaafar, J. L., Idris, M. A., Ismuni, J., Fei, Y., Jaafar, S., Ahmad, Z., & Sugandi, Y. S. (2012). The sources of happiness to the Malaysians and Indonesians: Data from a smaller nation. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 65, 549-556.
- Jetten, J., Postmes, T., & McAuliffe, B. J. (2002). 'We're all individuals': Group norms of individualism and collectivism, levels of identification and identity threat. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 32(2), 189-207.
- Kagee, A., & Dixon, D. N. (2000). Worldview and health promoting behavior: A causal model. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 23(2), 163-179.
- Kasser, T. (2011). Cultural values and the wellbeing of future generations: A cross-national study. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(2), 206-215.
- Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Kurokawa, M. (2000). Culture, emotion, and wellbeing: Good feelings in Japan and the United States. *Cognition & Emotion*, 14(1), 93-124.
- Knoop, H. H., & Delle Fave, A. (Eds.) (2012). *Wellbeing and cultures: Perspectives from positive psychology* (vol. 3). Berlin, Germany: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Landiyanto, E. A., Ling, J., Puspitasari, M., & Irianti, S. E. (2010). Wealth and happiness: empirical evidence from Indonesia. *Chulalongkorn Journal of Economics*, 23, 1-16.
- Lu, L. (2005). In pursuit of happiness: The cultural psychological study of SWB. *中華心理學刊* [Chinese Psychology Journal], 47(2), 99-112.
- Lu, L., & Gilmour, R. (2004). Culture and conceptions of happiness: Individual oriented and social oriented SWB. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 5(3), 269-291.
- Lun, V. M. C., & Bond, M. H. (2013). Examining the relation of religion and spirituality to



- subjective wellbeing across national cultures. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 5(4), 304-315.
- MacDonald, G., Marshall, T. C., Gere, J., Shimotomai, A., & Lies, J. (2012). Valuing romantic relationships the role of family approval across cultures. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 46(4), 366-393.
- MacIrvine, W. R., Nelson, L. A., Stewart, J. A., & Stewart, W. C. (2014). Association of strength of community service to personal wellbeing. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 50(5), 577-582.
- Marcinko, I. (2015). The moderating role of autonomous motivation on the relationship between subjective wellbeing and physical health. *PloS ONE*, 10(5), e0126399.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2001). The cultural construction of self and emotion: Implications for social behavior. In W. G. Parrott (Ed.), *Emotions in social psychology: Essential reading* (pp. 119-137). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Matsumoto, D. (2006). Culture and cultural worldviews: Do verbal descriptions about culture reflect anything other than verbal descriptions of culture? *Culture & Psychology*, 12(1), 33-62.
- McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(2), 249-266.
- McHugh, M. L. (2012). Interrater reliability: The Kappa statistic. *Biochemia medica*, 22(3), 276-282.
- Mokrova, I. L., Merçon-Vargas, E. A., & Tudge, J. R. (2018). Wishes, gratitude, and spending preferences in Russian children. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 52(1), 102-116
- Ngoo, Y. T., Tey, N. P., & Tan, E. C (2015). Determinants of life satisfaction in Asia. *Social Indicators Research*, 124(1), 141-156.
- Parnami, M., Mittal, U., & Hingar, A. (2013). Impact of religiosity on subjective well-being in various groups: A comparative study. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 4(4), 903908.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Primasari, A., & Yuniarti, K. W. (2012). What make teenagers happy? An exploratory study using indigenous psychology approach. *International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology*, 1(2), 53-61
- Rahayu, T. P. (2016). The determinants of happiness in Indonesia. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2), 393-404.
- Ramzan, N., & Rana, S. A. (2014). Expression of gratitude and subjective well-being among university teachers. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5(4), 363-367.
- Ratelle, C. F., Simard, K., & Guay, F. (2013). University students' subjective wellbeing: The role of autonomy support from parents, friends, and the romantic partner. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(3), 893-910.
- Ruini, C., & Vescovelli, F. (2013). The role of gratitude in breast cancer: Its relationships with post-traumatic growth, psychological well-being and distress. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(1), 263-274.
- Schwarz, B., Albert, I., Trommsdorff, G., Zheng, G., Shi, S., & Nelwan, P. R. (2010). Intergenerational support and life satisfaction: A comparison of Chinese, Indonesian, and German elderly mothers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 41(5-6), 706-722.
- Sohn, K. (2013). Sources of happiness in Indonesia. *The Singapore Economic Review*, 58(02), 1350014.
- Steptoe, A., Deaton, A., & Stone, A. A. (2015). Subjective wellbeing, health, and ageing. *The*

- Lancet*, 385(9968), 640-648.
- Suh, E., Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Triandis, H. C. (1998). The shifting basis of life satisfaction judgments across cultures: Emotions versus norms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(2), 482-493.
- Suh, E. M., Diener, E., & Updegraff, J. A. (2008). From culture to priming conditions self-construal influences on life satisfaction judgments. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39(1), 3-15.
- Sujarwoto, S., & Tampubolon, G. (2015). Decentralisation and citizen happiness: A multilevel analysis of self-rated happiness in Indonesia. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 16(2), 455-475.
- Tov, W., & Diener, E. (2007). Culture and subjective wellbeing. In S. Kitayama, & D. Cohen, (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp. 691-713). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Trommsdorff, G., & Schwarz, B. (2007). The intergenerational stake hypothesis' in Indonesia and Germany adult daughters' and their mothers' perception of their relationship. *Current Sociology*, 55(4), 599-620.
- Washizu, N., & Naito, T. (2015). The emotions sumanai, gratitude, and indebtedness, and their relations to interpersonal orientation and psychological wellbeing among Japanese university students. *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation*, 4(3), 209-222.
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., & Maltby, J. (2008). Gratitude uniquely predicts satisfaction with life: Incremental validity above the domains and facets of the five factor model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 45(1), 49-54.
- Wood, J. M. (2007). Understanding and computing Cohen's Kappa: A tutorial. *WebPsychEmpiricist*, 1-18. Retrieved from <http://wpe.info/vault/wood07/Wood07.pdf>
- Yardley, L. (2017). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 2, 235-251.
- Yeo, P. L. (2014). *Religiosity, personality, and subjective wellbeing among Muslim adults in Indonesia* (Order No. 3667902). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/openview/754f9077e0f9083aca990815aa9c8628/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Yuniarti, K. W. (2006). The magical strength of Nrimo and Gotong-royong a quick response report following the May 27, 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta. *Anima Jurnal Psikologi Anime Journal of Psychology*, 24(3), 201-206.

### Author Note

Herdiyan Maulana is a PhD student in the School of Psychology and Counselling QUT. He also worked as a teaching staff in the Faculty of Psychology at the State University of Jakarta. He is interested in the ways people shaped their perception of wellbeing in different socio-cultural contexts. His study focuses on several important questions; first is how people from different socio-cultural contexts explain wellbeing and whether the definition of this concept is similar across culture; and further how to ensure that the existing measurement is culturally appropriate to accommodate these differences. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [herdiyanmaulana@gmail.com](mailto:herdiyanmaulana@gmail.com) or [herdiyan.maulana@hdr.qut.edu.au](mailto:herdiyan.maulana@hdr.qut.edu.au).

Patricia Obst is a social psychologist and an academic and researcher at the School of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Health, QUT. She specialises in applied social psychology research, with expertise in the constructs of social support, sense of community, and well-being.

Nigar Khawaja is a clinical psychologist and an academic and researcher at the School of Psychology and Counselling, QUT. She is the Director of the Clinical Psychology program at QUT. She is a clinical/ transcultural and cross-cultural psychologist. Her research also focuses on culturally sensitive and safe assessments and interventions for communities from diverse cultures.

This research was funded by the Indonesian Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP), Ministry of Finance, Republic of Indonesia, as a part of the first author's doctoral scholarship at the School of Psychology and Counselling, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Authors are also thankful for the valuable comments and suggestions made by the editor and reviewer team of *The Qualitative Report* journal.

Copyright 2018: Herdian Maulana, Patricia Obst, Nigar Khawaja, and Nova Southeastern University.

### **Article Citation**

Maulana, H., Obst, P., & Khawaja, N. (2018). Indonesian perspective of wellbeing: A qualitative study. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(12), 3136-3152. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss12/18>

---