



University of Pennsylvania  
**ScholarlyCommons**

---

Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP)  
Capstone Projects

Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP)  
Capstones

---

8-28-2018

# Well-being in the United Arab Emirates: How Findings From Positive Psychology Can Inform Government Programs and Research

Noof Mohammed Aljneibi  
[noof@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:noof@sas.upenn.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp\\_capstone](https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp_capstone)

---

Aljneibi, Noof Mohammed, "Well-being in the United Arab Emirates: How Findings From Positive Psychology Can Inform Government Programs and Research" (2018). *Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Capstone Projects*. 147.  
[https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp\\_capstone/147](https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp_capstone/147)

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp\\_capstone/147](https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp_capstone/147)  
For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# Well-being in the United Arab Emirates: How Findings From Positive Psychology Can Inform Government Programs and Research

## **Abstract**

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a minister of happiness was selected to start initiatives that could enhance citizen well-being. One major early accomplishment was starting the Program for Happiness. This program focuses on three main pillars: 1) include consideration of citizen happiness and well-being in every governmental program and policy; 2) promote happiness and well-being as an important part of one's lifestyle; and 3) develop tools to measure national happiness and well-being. Though these projects have already made a positive impact, especially in organizational contexts, one major aspect of UAE culture was not included – religion. As an Islamic country, religion plays a vital role for most citizens in the UAE. Religion is considered to be a part of life that most people in UAE practice on a daily basis. Therefore, religion likely plays an important role in the well-being of many citizens in the UAE. This capstone will address well-being in the UAE while also discussing the specific role of religion. First, it will describe the UAE happiness initiative's past, present, and future. Second, it will analyze some of the projects under the Program for Happiness using the lens of contemporary Positive Psychology theory and research. Third, it will discuss religion and well-being in the UAE and propose a study on the relationship between well-being and Islamic prayer.

## **Keywords**

Islamic Rituals, Praying, Well-being and Religiosity, Positive Psychology and Religiosity

Running Head: WELL-BEING IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Well-being in the United Arab Emirates:  
How Findings From Positive Psychology can Inform Government Programs and Research

Noof Aljneibi

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: David Yaden

August 1, 2018

Noof Aljneibi

Capstone Project  
Master of Applied Positive Psychology  
University of Pennsylvania  
Advisor: David Yaden  
August, 2018

### Abstract

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a minister of happiness was selected to start initiatives that could enhance citizen well-being. One major early accomplishment was starting the Program for Happiness. This program focuses on three main pillars: 1) include consideration of citizen happiness and well-being in every governmental program and policy; 2) promote happiness and well-being as an important part of one's lifestyle; and 3) develop tools to measure national happiness and well-being. Though these projects have already made a positive impact, especially in organizational contexts, one major aspect of UAE culture was not included – religion. As an Islamic country, religion plays a vital role for most citizens in the UAE. Religion is considered to be a part of life that most people in UAE practice on a daily basis. Therefore, religion likely plays an important role in the well-being of many citizens in the UAE. This capstone will address well-being in the UAE while also discussing the specific role of religion. First, it will describe the UAE happiness initiative's past, present, and future. Second, it will analyze some of the projects under the Program for Happiness using the lens of contemporary Positive Psychology theory and research. Third, it will discuss religion and well-being in the UAE and propose a study on the relationship between well-being and Islamic prayer.

*Keywords: Islamic Rituals, Praying, Well-being and Religiosity, Positive Psychology and Religiosity,*

## **Table of Contents**

### **Introduction**

#### **Part One: The National Program for Happiness and Positivity in UAE**

A description of the national Program for Happiness and Positivity NPHP

The Main Three pillars (the three Goals of NPHP)

The past, present, and future initiatives related to each pillars

#### **Part 2: Positive Psychology Research**

What is Positive Psychology (PP)

PERMA Model

How can research findings in Positive Psychology help the UAE achieve its goal?

#### **Part Three: Positive psycholgy and Religion**

Describe religious context in UAE

Religion and Well-being.

Propose a study on well-being and prayer

Propose a survey on well-being and religion

### **Personal Reflections**

### **Conclusion**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The United Arab Emirates Vice president Mohammed Bin Rashed once remarked “Everybody starts small. We all begin life as a single cell. Every business starts as one person with an idea. How fast you go, how far you get, is in your hands. The bigger your vision, the bigger your achievement will be. Will you stumble on the way? Perhaps, but we cannot let fear keep us small. We have to be brave to dream big.” Indeed, that has been my experience as I started this program in working with my capstone. Throughout the year, my friends, family, colleagues, and advisors have all patiently guided my ideas so that I now can present them as coherent.

I would like to thank first and foremost, and express my deep gratitude to my outstanding advisor David Yaden for his support, guidance, and honest feedback. I felt stimulated by his unwavering enthusiasm for my thesis ideas. Thank you, David, for letting me experience positive emotions from the very beginning.

I also want to thank Martin E. P Seligman, James O. Pawelski, and Leona Brandwene for stimulating discussions, inspiration and laughter throughout the year. Without your support and contributions this thesis would have been very different and Difficult to accomplish. In addition, this thesis would not have been completed without the contribution of my colleagues at United Arab Emirates University and Team at the UAE national Program for Happiness and Positivity. I am deeply grateful to the valuable time you spent assisting me.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents and siblings for their love, encouragement and support as well as their kindness and sense of humor, which was a constant reminder for me that “I am blessed.” My late Grandmother, whose prayers were so inspiring,

without watching her praying I would never be interested in finding out more about religion and well-being.

## Introduction

In 2016, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government appointed a “minister of happiness” with the goal to make the country among the happiest in the world. One of the minister’s main aims is to synchronize government strategies and regulations to attain a happier society. This happiness is measured according to the World Happiness Index, which is an annual publication that ranks well-being in different countries. The group that produces the report also works to assist governments in setting policies to enhance citizen happiness. After selecting the minister, the National Program for Happiness and Positivity was created to set policies and programs to support a positive lifestyle in UAE communities and to measure national happiness. Most of the initiatives started by the UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity were inspired by research findings from the field of positive psychology. The science of positive psychology aims to address factors that can promote the development of certain psychological traits and mental states that contribute to having a life that is considered ‘well-lived.’ (Seligman,2004; Peterson 2006) Further, Positive psychology explores what builds up individuals in terms of achieving their goals and helps communities to flourish. The field generally provides scientific findings and techniques that can increase individual happiness and well-being regardless of one’s political or religious orientations (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The National Program for Happiness and Positivity office has said that various projects were initiated using concepts of positive psychology (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017). For example, one of the policies implemented by all government agencies was the introduction of the “Appreciation Moment,” which takes place at the beginning of every meeting in government organizations. In this practice, the person who runs the meeting starts the



meeting by acknowledging the efforts of their peers, the meeting attendees seemed to appreciate such initiative as they feel their work has been perceived positively (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017) This example represents how a simple initiative using research from positive psychology can promote one's positive emotions and sense of mattering (Prilleltensky, 2014).

Positive psychology is a quickly evolving scientific field with new concepts and findings emerging every year. This capstone will provide updates from the field of positive psychology that can inform the ministry's mission and projects. It will also address certain cultural differences between the UAE and the US that may help to translate the research findings into the UAE context. In particular, this capstone will address the intersection of religion and well-being in the UAE as it relates to the ministry's goals. Lastly, I will suggest an experimental study between prayer and well-being and discuss how this study could help the national program for happiness begin to think about initiatives related to religion.

### **Happiness is not a new concept in United Arab Emirates**

The journey to the start of the UAE Program for Happiness began with the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father of UAE. Al Nahyan worked hard towards making the UAE a land of tolerance, prosperity, generosity, and sustainable growth. Part of his vision was also that UAE citizens and residents would serve humanity and, crucially for this capstone, *be happy*.

Since then, the happiness of the UAE's people has become one of the ultimate goals of its leaders (Al Maktoum & Bishtawi, 2006). The UAE's government has attempted pioneering approaches to achieving the prosperity and well-being of its citizens and residents. The UAE is recognized in the Arab region and around the world for its happiness and quality of life, as it has

acquired the first position in the Arab world in the Global Happiness Index 2017 (The United Arab Emirates Government portal, 2017; Al Maktoum & Bishtawi, 2006). In terms of its international standing, the UAE occupies the 21st position in having the happiest population, based on world happiness report (The United Arab Emirates Government portal, 2017).

The UAE government policies and initiatives have worked to promote happiness of the UAE's citizens and residents. Challenges to achieving this goal in the UAE are similar to the challenges that other countries face, including the need to be sensitive to diversity of citizen and resident nationalities, cultures, and religions. Speeches by UAE leaders highlight the priority given by the government and people to the value of happiness and the many challenges associated with this goal (Al Maktoum & Bishtawi, 2006).

### **Part One: The National Program for Happiness and Positivity in UAE**

#### **The UAE Program for Happiness**

The UAE is not currently ranked as one of the world's most advanced nation. But Emirates, the founding father of UAE, had a vision that the country would become among the world's most advanced nations. The current UAE governors are entrusted to sustaining the founding father's vision, by engaging developing and executing policies in line with his initial vision for the country. Along with successes that the country has earned, the UAE has also faced many challenges. Many difficulties arise from its geographic location, for example. The Arab region has and still faces political instability, which has forced some individuals to relocate to the UAE to look for stability and safety. The UAE's government does acknowledge the challenges of refugees and the rising political, religious, and social extremism in the Arab Region (Stern, 2010; Venhaus, 2010). Nevertheless, its commitment to steer the country with confidence and optimism towards prosperity and happiness remains enact (The National Vision 2020, 2018).

In order for the UAE's government to achieve its vision of being one of the most advanced nations in the world, the country's vice president formed what is called the "UAE 2021" plan, which entails improving health and education systems, in addition to sustainable environmental practices. To achieve these goals, sets of specific projects were launched. These include: World-Class Healthcare, Competitive Knowledge Economy, Sustainable Environment, Infrastructure, First Rate Education System, Safe Public and Fair Judiciary, Cohesive Society and Preserved Identity. The indicators are monitored and followed by Government leadership to ensure that their targets are achieved by 2021. Periodical meetings with all governmental entities an update of how the projects under each categories are going as well as how well are they going is shared to the public on the official government portal (The United Arab Emirates Government portal, 2018; The National Agenda 2020, 2018)

### **The National Program for Happiness and Positivity**

One of United Arab Emirates national agenda's pillars is Cohesive Society and Preserved Identity (The National Agenda 2020, 2018). This pillar aims to foster an inclusive social environment for all divisions in society while keeping the UAE's unique culture, heritage, and traditions in addition to strengthening social and family cohesion. Under this particular pillar, the UAE government aims to make the UAE among the top five happiest countries by 2021 in the world happiness index (The National Agenda 2020, 2018). To this end, in February 2016, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Cabinet announced a new ministry, the Ministry of Happiness, and her Excellency Ohoud Al Roumi was appointed as minister of state for happiness and well-being (The United Arab Emirates Government portal, 2017).

The UAE has always aimed to promote happiness throughout its society by creating programs to ensure the wellbeing of its citizens; however, with the formation of the Ministry of

Happiness, the government began to more explicitly implement initiatives and policies to make happiness a measurable reality for its citizens and residents. An example for one initiative was to rename “Customer Service Centers” in government agencies to “Customer Happiness Centers,” throughout the UAE (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017). The individuals working at these centers were tasked with helping to increase the happiness of every person that they interact with. Then, the National Program for Happiness and Positivity was created by the minister and approved by UAE’s vice president Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum. The program aimed to set various program and policies that could promote positivity in the community (The United Arab Emirates Government portal, 2017). The Vice President stated: “happiness and positivity in the UAE are a lifestyle, a government commitment and a spirit uniting the UAE community.” (Khaishgi, 2016)

**The National Program for Happiness and Positivity works under three main pillars:**

**Pillar 1 - Ensure the inclusion of happiness in all governmental policies and services.**

This pillar aims to plant happiness and positivity at work through policies that develop happier workplace environment also the methods of designing the way receiving services from any governmental entity in a way that ensures not only customer satisfaction but happiness (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017). The team who works to achieve the first pillar includes Emiratis as well as expatriate residents and visitors. It seeks to encourage government and private sectors to launch, recommend and adopt initiatives in that regard (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017). Moreover, the National Program for Happiness and Positivity developed a program called “CEOs for Happiness and Positivity.” In this program, representatives are selected from different government entities and they take a full course on how to promote happiness and positivity in workplace, hence providing them with

tools that can help with promoting a positive workplace. Some examples of these policies include: providing flexible working hours for employees and providing the option for employees to work remotely.

### **Projects started under first pillar**

- *Happiness and Positivity chief officers (HPCO)*

The program was designed by national program for happiness and positivity office in collaboration with Greater Good Science Center at the University of California – Berkley. The program aims to prepare young Emiratis who are representatives from different government or federal entities to learn about infusing positivity in the workplace

- *Positivity Hours*

Where staff members do several activities “non-work related”. Every federal or government entities can plan for positivity hours on regular basis (this initiative also falls under the second pillar)

- *Happiness and Positivity Medal*

The medal is awarded for first-line employees who provides a high level of positivity while serving customers.

### **Pillar 2 - Encouragement of Positivity in Community to be a part of individual’s Lifestyle.**

This pillar is about raising awareness in the UAE community about the importance of happiness and positivity. This program aims to help make this concept a part of the culture in the UAE. Awareness campaigns provide informational materials and posts on social media, which provide people with scientific evidence about how individuals can promote well-being.

### **Projects Started Under Second Pillar**

- *Announcing UAE declaration of happiness and positivity:*

The declaration states the government responsibility toward its citizens to ensure their happiness (See Appendix for the full version of the declaration)

- *Start an awareness campaign on mental health*

The educational events are mainly designed for the community, for instance, one of the recent events was “*The National bullying Prevention Week*“ where the students were taught how to look at their own strengths and focus on others’ strengths. The school administrations that participated in the event shared their enthusiasm about such events (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017.)

### **Pillar 3 - Measuring Happiness.**

This pillar aims to develop surveys and other scientific tools that can help with measuring happiness in the UAE. These tools should work in all different classes in the society. Such measurement tools will help the UAE’s government to understand how best to help its citizens and residents to have a good life. These tools will show UAE leaders which programs are working best, and perhaps some insights into why and how (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017; Emirates24/7, 2016).

#### **Projects under third pillar:**

- *Measuring Happiness and Positivity Through Surveys*

As an example the national program for happiness and positive office collaborated with Gallup to run the first survey right after appointing the minister, to measure happiness of staff members across the country. The First survey outcome clarified for some governmental entities what factors impacted employees happiness level. As an example

some of the common comments in the report addressed how the employee felt at times abandoned and missed fairness in some internal process like promotion or being selected to attend conferences. Other comments stated that the way of getting tasks done are not aligned with polices. The Vice President Mohammed Bin Rashid reviews survey report and later he gives deadline for every governmental or federal entity to work on enhancing employee's happiness rate if its below certain percentage. For instance in current year 2018 the department was given up to 6 months to increase happiness rate for organization who were 60% or below the Sheikh Mohammed remarked "the government's main task is to ensure that conditions are conducive for delivering happiness to individuals, families and employees and promoting positivity as a core value in the local community" (AlKaleej times, 2018; Khaishgi, 2016)

## **Part Two: Positive Psychology Research**

### **What is positive Psychology?**

In a world where people face tough challenges to be healthy and happy, there is great need for a scientific approach to wellbeing, happiness, and having a flourishing life in a modern-day context. The science of positive psychology aims to address factors that can promote the development of certain traits, which help individuals to thrive (Seligman, 2012). Some examples of the kinds of concepts that positive psychology focuses on are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement which are summed up in well-being model PERMA, which will be described more fully below (Seligman, 2012). Another vital concept that positive psychology focuses on is finding signature strength or character strength, which does not focus on the elements of human well-being like PERMA model does, but in the means by which well-being can be experienced by all individuals (Molony, Henwood, 2010) through personal

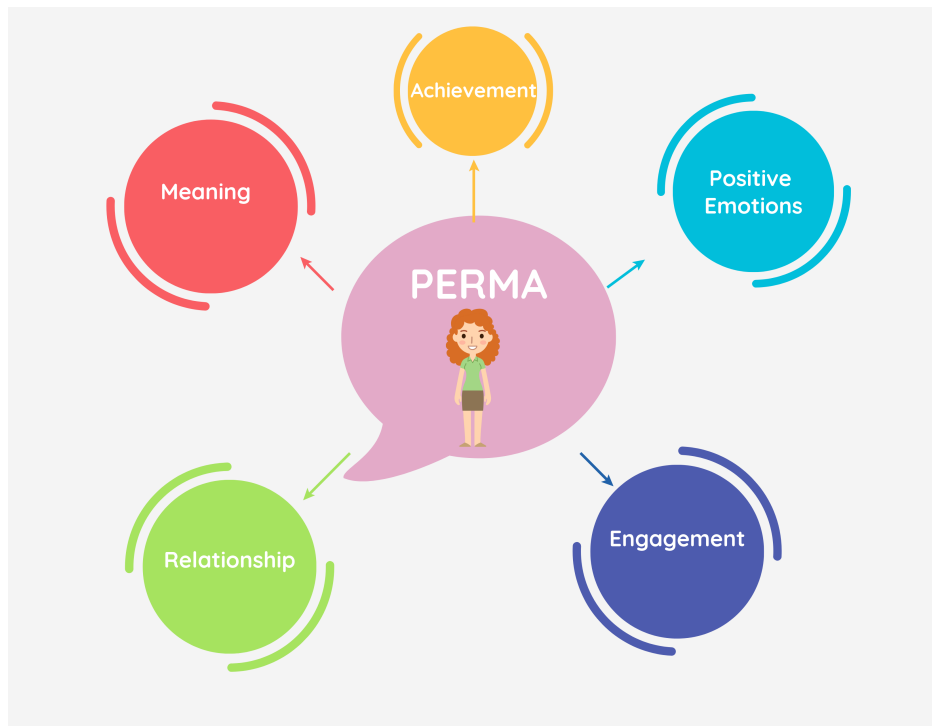
strength, like creativity, wisdom, and love of learning – such traits are not meant to be experienced or taught only on an individual level but also on a group level, by better understanding those concepts it is believed to improve overall life-satisfaction across the lifespan by helping people to find their authentic way to involve and use their signature strengths (Seligman ,2006).

Positive psychology is not solely about focusing on positive thinking and positive emotions; it is much more than that (Seligman, 2006). Indeed, the area of positive psychology explores the factors that build up individual well-being and helps communities flourish, rather than languish. According to Michalec et al. (2009: 391), flourishing is a state of positive mental health; to thrive, to prosper and to fare well in endeavors free of mental illness, filled with emotional vitality and function.” Thus, a science that emphasizes the growth and facilitation of flourishing environments and individuals is a vital addition to the psychological discipline.

Unlike self-help techniques, positive psychology uses scientific methods to understand one’s feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2010) in order to suggest the best interventions to improve quality of life (Seligman, 2012). Positive psychology is a science that can be implemented in various fields like: education, religion, humanities, and organizations. The main three pillars that positive psychology covers are: positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Peterson, 2004).

### **Description Of PERMA The Theory of Well- Being**





*Figure 1:* Illustration of PERMA Model – well-being model by Martin E. P. Seligman

One model of well-being is called PERMA. Psychologist Martin Seligman believes that flourishing consists of five elements – **P**ositive Emotion, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishment (See Figure 1). Seligman believes that they are measurable and one can improve on them (Seligman, 2006). What defines a good life for one person does not necessarily a good life for another, but each of these elements of well-being tend to produce good outcomes for most people. Positive psychology offers findings from scientific research, which helps individuals to understand the factors that contribute to a good life. Positive psychology is not prescriptive – it does not give instructions on what to do, but rather provides information from scientific research (Seligman, 2006). Therefore, positive psychology helps people to become more informed about their choices to have a life that is aligned with their values and interests. The PERMA model is a useful way to organize important elements of well-being.

**Positive Emotion:**

Positive emotions are a key component in subjective well-being (Diener, 2000) Every individual has the ability to increase positive emotions, whether from reflecting on the past like by using gratitude journal, or in the present by practicing mindfulness (Baime, 2017) or taking a walk with loved ones while sharing positive news. Positive emotions can also be about the future by being hopeful and optimistic. This element of the model emphasizes the hedonic road to well-being (Seligman, 2002). This element relies a lot on how much we experience positive emotions and the intensity of those emotions, and it varies among individuals (Seligman, 2012). Another interesting theory of positive emotions, the “broaden and build” theory, was developed by psychologist Barbara Fredrickson (Fredrickson, 2001) specifically about how such emotions allow individuals to expand their views on themselves and on the world, that can lead them to build better social relations and other skills. Her theory indicated that positive emotions have a broaden effect on our way of thinking and actions “Broaden-and-build theory is notable for drawing explicit attention to the positive and showing that insights result when we do something more than simply look at the absence of the negative” (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 55)

**Engagement:**

Engagement is usually experienced when individuals put their skill or strength into accomplishing a task. Engagement is often accompanied by ‘flow,’ according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Individuals who experience flow are often engaging in activities for their own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). However, In order to reach a state of flow, Csikszentmihalyi argues that there must be certain components, such as having a clear goal and immediate feedback. Disappearance of concern for the self often accompanies flow, making it a kind of ‘self-transcendent experience’ (Yaden, Haidt, Hood, Vago, & Newberg, 2017). The types of activities in which individuals often reach state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997)

include: reading a book, playing a musical instrument, and working on a task at work. When one becomes fully engaged, self-awareness can disappear and one can lose track of time

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997)

### **Relationships:**

Relationships are essential to well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Relationships may or may not contribute to well-being since not every relationship is fruitful (Lyubomirsky, 2008). There are several ways to make relationships more healthy and to contribute more to well-being, including: the sense of belonging and the frequent experience of positive emotions. Research shows that having a support system, or a reliable relationship, can contribute to well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Another important aspect of relationships one should consider is doing acts of kindness for others, as this has also been shown to increase well-being (Fredrickson, 2009). Developing a strong relationship can help to enhance the sense of meaning and purpose in life (Smith, 2017). Lastly, relationships can improve the capacity for kindness, love and compassion (Fredrickson, 2009).

**Meaning:** Serving something bigger than oneself can help someone derive a sense of meaning and purpose (Smith, 2017). The sense of meaning can be enhanced through relationships, practicing religious rituals, work in organization that helps you feel matter, or being part of community (Frankl, 1985). Meaning gives us hope and the ability to move through life's changes and challenges as it provides individual with intrinsic motivation (Frankl, 1985). When individual has a sense of meaning in life they seek to make a connection with events that happened to them with how can such event lead them to their desired goals (Frankl, 1985)

### **Accomplishment:**

People strive towards achievement, competence, victory, and mastery, in a variety of spheres, including games, workplace, or personal interests like hobbies (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). This is accomplishment. People pursue accomplishment even when it does not necessarily lead to positive emotion, meaning, or relationships (Locke, 1996). According to Seligman (Seligman, 2011) accomplishment is pursued for its own sake even when you don't get desired results or that achievement brings no positive emotions or meaning in its way.

### **How can research findings in Positive Psychology help the UAE achieve its goal?**

Most of programs run by the UAE's National Program for Happiness and Positivity are based on scientific research and teams are working to measure their effectiveness (Albiriki, 2018). However, to help enhance the effectiveness of those programs, I will review current concepts and research from positive psychology in order to integrate more recent empirical findings into existing initiatives:

#### 1- Happiness and Positivity Hours

This initiative was designed for all government or federal entities. It involves allocating time for workers to socialize during certain periods during the work day (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017). When this initiative was first introduced, every government agency was given the chance to either hold those hours internally, in order to achieve and sustain employee happiness, or externally, in order to achieve community happiness (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017). Besides the requirement to host the happiness and positivity hours, no other guidelines were given and entities decided how to execute them in the way that they believed would work best for them.

In cases in which the positivity hours are held internally (with agency employees, not with the community), the concept of high quality connections (HQC) could help to enhance this initiative. HQC are short-term, dyadic interactions that are positive in terms of the subjective experience of the connected individuals and the structural features of the connection (Jane Dutton, 2006). HQC can help managers or directors to renew and energize their working environment at their organization (Jane Dutton, 2006). Moreover, HQC provides also a scheme on how managers and practitioners overcome various barriers to knowledge sharing (e.g. Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003; McDermott & O'Dell, 2001; Riege, 2005; Rivera- Vazquez, Ortiz-Fournier & Rogelio Flores, 2011). Emphasizing HQC could help to shift the focus of organizational research from fixing issues to build positive qualities (Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton, 2011) an example of how HQC is implemented by encouraging directors to listen to their employees with full attention by listening to their ideas , support them and guide them

When more people in an organization have meaningful relationships in which they share personal experiences and trust one another, the productivity level will be expected to rise as well as their well-being (Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton, 2011). The management level can start introducing the concept in one of those positivity hours and start implementing it through emails, meeting or face-to-face interaction with colleagues (Dutton, 2006). Implementing those minor changes on management level could create an inspiration for the rest of organization teams to implement the same (Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton, 2011)

Another way to take the best advantage of such a socializing hour is to plan for luncheon events that would involve learning about how other concepts from positive psychology can be infused at work and community. For instance, introducing the concept of Character Strengths and Virtues, and how can they pursued their daily tasks (Niemiec, 2017). According to Niemiec, when one

not only focuses on identifying signature strengths, but also finding new ways to using them, can help with building well-being. Researchers found that application of strengths at work help with various positive outcome like elevating your productivity level (Hodges & Asplund, 2010), which can also can help perceiving your work more meaningful (Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2012).

Lastly, due to the amount of stress that the workers face while working, organizations can plan for meditation session during happiness and positivity hours in which all workers are invited to the session. Prior to the session, explaining the beneficial side of experiencing mindfulness will help workers relate such benefits and noticing them (Baime, 2017). While educating the employees on the importance of mindfulness it is noteworthy to mention that in order, to experience mindfulness one needs to be fully aware that you are in the present without any judgmental thoughts (Smalley & Winston, 2010). The definition can be unclear to those who do not have any background with mindfulness, how can it improve the quality of their lives. Furthermore, it can improve their memory capacity and relief their stress level (Baime, 2017).

## **2- Happiness and Positivity Councils:**

This initiative was intended to promote happiness and positivity in the workplace through polices and internal procedures. The initiative seemed to be promising in terms of making the workers feel mattered, though what seems to be missing is involving workers to set those policies and understand exactly what is it there for them? When workers are part of suggesting and executing new policies and procedures, they will likely sense that they matter more to their organization. Issac Prilleltensky believes in the power of mattering at work, to Prilleltensky (Prilleltensky ,2012) mattering means that you count and when workers have such feelings toward their organization they start what is called meaning-making (Prilleltensky ,2012). When you feel positive about your work your other perspectives of life gets better (Fredrickson, 2001).

**Religious context in UAE:**

UAE was formed in 1971 by its founding father Zayed Bin Sultan from an Arabian Muslim culture. Due to the increase in openness and diversity in recent decades, the UAE culture has also been influenced by other cultures. The UAE society is generally family-oriented and close-knit where values are basically extracted from religion, social and moral values of Emirati people (Al Maktoum & Bishtawi, 2006) such values play a fundamental role in everyday life.

Islam is the official religion of the UAE. As an example of how Islam influences Emirati people's behavior, parents encourage their children to show great care to the most vulnerable segments of society (Lambert, Pasha Zaidi, Passmore and Al-Karam, 2015). Politically, the UAE constitution was formed according to the Islamic practices (Lambert, Pasha Zaidi, Passmore and Al-Karam, 2015). Most of policies were formed in aligned with Islam.

Religion and culture are closely linked in the UAE. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish whether certain norms in the UAE originate from culture or religion. Many individuals in the Middle East do not have separation between forming their own identity without relating to their religion. This is the case in the UAE. (Lambert, Pasha Zaidi, Passmore and Al-Karam, 2015) Many people do not separate religion and other aspects of their lives. Many actions of Arab people are fundamentally connected to their beliefs and identity as Muslims (Abdel Khalek, 2011). During hard times people perceive their faith as a source of hope (Abdel Khalek, 2006) as part of their Islamic identity Arab believes that what happens in life is out of their control and it is in the hands of Allah (God). Therefore, fate plays an enormous role in how many individuals perceive life (Abdel Khalek, 2011; King, 2001).

Before public schools, Emirati people used to take their children to Quran recitation schools. These schools were designed to teach children in neighborhoods how to read and

understand the Islamic religion while applying it in their lives. Children were not only taught how to recite Quran accurately but also live according to what it says. Therefore, Quran was a valuable source of education for people in UAE (King, 2001).

Another illustration of the role of religion in the UAE is Friday prayers. During this ritual, people perform their prayer rituals and listen to “Al khateeb”, or Sermon, every Friday. During these sermons, Islamic topics are introduced to the worshipers. These topics are Islamic guidelines that can provide Muslims with a decent and happy life. Muslims do not perceive Friday as a religious day only but also a day to socialize and connect with family and friends (Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto and Koeing, 2006)

### **Part Three: Positive psychology and Religion**

There are many definitions of religion. In early 1912, the psychologist James Leuba found almost 48 distinct definitions of religion (Behere, Das and Yadav, 2013). In this paper, I will refer to the definition given by Koenig et al. which is “an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality” (Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto and Koeing, 2006, 242) Religion is considered by some researchers to be one of the most universal influences in human kind (Jung, 1992; Haidt 2006) as many individual actions are derived and formulated in accordance with their religion meanings (Elliott & Hayward, 2009). Further, other people express themselves through religion by referring to religion in providing explanations for every action they perform (Behere, Das and Yadav, 2013). Therefore, psychologists have developed an interest in the effect of religiosity on mental health, physical health, and one’s overall well-being (Pargament, Smith, Koenig and Perez, 1998). The interest of psychologists in field of religion dates back more than century (Al-Issa, 2000; Hall, 1882; James, 1902; Koenig, 1998; Larson & Larson, 1994; Wulff, 1997).



### **Why Do we Need to Study Religion?**

It could be true for many individuals across the globe that seeking guidelines by which they can live a good and decent life is an important factor (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2009). For some people, religious teachings represent those life guidelines that help them to acquire a good life (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Believing in a higher power can give people a sense of stability knowing that such power has control over their life course (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Another aspect of religion is how it often encourages people to show kindness for those who are in need and to respect elder (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003), while others are inspired by their religion in forming their life values (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Hope, a concept in which is part of various religions, has been shown in research to be a valuable factor in one's life, it encourages individuals to look for their inner resources to help them with experiencing positive emotions and be more resilient and able to handle stressful moments in life (Fiori, Brown, Cortina, Antonucci, 2006). Hope can be reflected in one's behavior, in interacting with others, as well as through forming hopeful thoughts, which can be a source of motivation. Hope is considered to be future-oriented yet rooted in present (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2009) Religious people often have a sense of hope (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003).

In a religion like Islam, people often rely on prayer to make decisions - even critical ones. In these cases, if the outcome turned out not to be in their favor, the faith they have in Allah (God) and the afterlife can help to give them sense of comfort and satisfaction (Abdel-Khalek, 2014). A part of religiosity for Muslims is believing that whatever happens to a person is based on God's will, and one must comply and become satisfied with this will.

### **Religion and well-being:**

Since religion plays an important part in one's life, it also likely plays a role in one's well-being (Abdel-Khalek, 2014). A wealth of research has shown a connection between well-being and religion (see Argyle, 2002; Francis, Jones, & Wilcox, 2000; French & Joseph, 1999; Myers & Diener, 1995). One article reviewed several studies that have examined the relationship between religious contribution in one's life and while measuring well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction (Abdel-Khalek, 2014). The authors claim that about 80% of the 100 studies that have statistically examined that relationship report a positive correlation, 13% percent of studies reviewed reported no association, and 7% reported mixed or complex findings (Abdel-Khalek, 2014). This shows that religion seems to be associated well-being, at least in some contexts (although causality has not been established in these studies).

When it comes to religion, the community and other social aspects play an important role (Fowler & Christakis 2008). Various religion rituals are performed in community and during such rituals one might feel immersed in those rituals and practices and reach to state of flow with other people (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Pargament, 2001) During other times people might have a sense of meaning while performing rituals (Jung, 1992)

During life adversities or traumatic events (TE) people can sometimes develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Studies have shown that religion can help people find ways to bounce back from such adversity (Thomas & Savoy, 2014). Research has also shown an interacting relationship between religion and PTSD (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007). One study that investigated the interaction between religiosity and trauma noted that people who have faith (i.e. more religious people) have a better sense of meaning while going through adversities or TEs (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007) and they appear to be less shaken by those events. Despite

the negative feelings and emotions that a TE might provoke (Manstead & Fischer, 2000), individuals seem to turn to their religion as a source of coping after they experience a TE (Thomas & Savoy, 2014). Finding meaning in life as well as hope tend to indicate one's well-being (Abdel-Khalek 2006; Chang 1988; Gilman et al. 2006), since both hope and meaning correlate positively with life satisfaction (Abdel-Khalek 2006; Chang 1988; Gilman et al. 2006). Religion can induce hope and meaning in one's life, as at least one study has confirmed by showing that meaning is increased after interventions targeting religiosity, A study by Harris et al. (2011) used religious integrated intervention for veterans who experienced PTS, and concluded that individuals who views their religion as source of validation seemed to be able to form meanings and cope with life adversities.

Another important factor which determines one's well-being is life satisfaction. Being happy means your in-the-moment experience, while satisfaction means how positive we feel when looking to our overall life or the broader picture of our life (Abdel-Khalek 2006; Chang 1988; Gilman et al. 2006). Various religions promote related concepts and encourage individuals to look at what they have rather than what they don't have (Abdel-Khalek 2006). In Islam, for instance, satisfaction is an important construct. Research has shown that life satisfaction predicts individual religiosity in some cultural contexts (Abdel-Khalek 2006), Muslims relate satisfaction as fate or destiny (Al-Sharawi, 1993). As mentioned earlier, Islam encourages Muslims to have faith in God that what happened is based on Gods will and one must become satisfied with divine will (Abdel-Khalek 2006).

Mental health is a main topic in positive psychology, which is not just the absence of negative symptoms and any resulting reactions that come from it, such as depression and anxiety (Masse', Poulin, Dassa, Lambert, Belair, and Battaglini, 1998). Mental health also includes

positive signs like signs of happiness, self-control and self-esteem. (Emmons, Paloutzian, 2003) Importantly, a low level of negative symptoms doesn't directly mean a high level of happiness or well-being (Satcher, 2000). Mental health is defined as: successful performance of mental functions, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity (Satcher, 2000). Mental health is vital part of individual's well-being as it reflected on ones relationship, behavior, self-image as well as health (Reich, Oser, & Scarlett, 1999).

The belief in a higher unseen power is one basic character of most religions (Yang & Lu, 2007) and religion, as mentioned above, provides a psychological benefit for many individuals (Ahmed, Fowler, Toro, 2011). Despite the differences in many religious practices, they continue to provide individuals with much needed guideline (Yang & Lu, 2007) that can help individuals to devise a course for their lives (Headey, Hoehne, and Wanger, 2014) on how to deal or react in certain situations to how to deal with other people (Abdel-Khalek,2012). Religion also plays an important role in guiding individuals throughout their personal quest for understanding answers to critical questions about life, like finding meaning(Smith, 2017), and about relationship with the sacred, which may arise from the development of religious rituals (Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo Neto, Koenig, 2006) to some extent religion may also provide certain individuals with a sense of connection and valued contribution to a greater purpose as well as acceptance and belonging (Thomas & Savoy, 2014) Therefore, for many people, religious practices can encourage a positive growth which might influence mental health (Thomas & Savoy, 2014) In Islam for instance, the definition of balanced person refers to the one who has a control over his mind and emotions, and one who can gain fulfillment in different aspects of his life by following the

religion, for Muslims their religion rituals and practices do provide them with such balance (Abdel-Khalek ,2012; Al-Sharawi, 1993).

Studies have shown that the impact of religion does not only implies over one aspect which is mental health only but also physical health; Gartner, Larson and Allen reviewed the literature and discovered health variables that have a positive correlations with religion. For instance, the controls of smoking or Alcohol consumption, as well as, heart disease are related to religion (Abu-Raiya, Hamama, Fokra, 2015). Religion also encourages many people to adopt a healthier lifestyle and many religions prohibit behaviors which can cause a negative effect on health (Abdel-Khalek, 2006). Various religions provide its believers some teachings which motivate acquiring and sustaining a good physical health, as an example, in Islam the Prophet Mohammed encouraged his peers to maintain good physical health by saying “you are blessed when you are psychically active” (Al-Sharawi, 1993).

In other studies (Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Rasic, Belik, Elias, Katz, Enns and Sareen, 2009) it has been noted that suicide has a negative correlation with religiosity. Religion might also have a protective role against suicidal thoughts (Beit-Hallahmi, 1975) In Islam for instance it is believed that you don't have the right to take your life. This belief likely plays a role in the observed reduction of suicide (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; Al-Sharawi, 1993).

A sense of belonging in a religious community can help promote health. Some religious practices have been found to support social cohesion, maintain a positive relationship with friends, family and other supportive and caring groups (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, Seligman 2005). What social support that one can have with religious practices can eliminate stress (Fredrickson, 2013), find someone who support them during life challenges, such support can diminish the impact of stress and anxiety (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; Zullig, Ward and Horn, 2006).

Many religious people use religion as a tool to cope with medical or non-medical problems (Abu-Raiya, Hamama, Fokra, 2015). Many Muslims, for instance, think of such incidents as a lesson from God (Abdel-Khalek & Eid , 2011) and how their reactions defines how patient they are in terms of facing such difficulties with a growth mindset (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2009) Moreover, Islam encourages Muslims to think about doing their best and leave the rest in God's hands (Abdel-Khalek , 2006; Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2009). People might also seek out for help from clergy members to think about a new ways to live their lives and guide them through understanding why such incidents happened to them through the lens of religion (Emmons, Paloutzian, 2003; Baumeister. & Vohs. 2002).

### **Proposal for a Study Examining Prayer and Well-being**

In order to examine the relationship between a religious practice and well-being in the UAE, it is important to note that most of studies conducted so far in field of religiosity and positive psychology in Western, Judeo-Christian participants (Abdel-Khalek & Eid , 2011). Few studies have been carried out in Muslim cultures, and even fewer within the UAE on the Emirati culture. The importance of conducting such studies are crucial for decision makers to know what factors influence Emiratis well-being and how can policies changed in accordance with findings. In terms of focusing on religion and religiosity, it is noteworthy that religion is a core factor for how people in UAE lives their lives and interact with each-other whether on family or community level. Therefore, a study examining the relationship between a religious practice and well-being in the UAE context would provide important information.

Religion plays a powerful role in United Arab Emirate, as it is considered a main pillar of daily life. Therefore, in this cultural context, religion is reflected in individual behavior, emotional expressions, and life meaning (Smith, 2017; Lambert, Pasha Zaidi, Passmore and Al-

Karam, 2015). Previous initiatives and projects started by the National Program for Happiness and Positivity have examined individual happiness and well-being without considering religion. However, this study will examine the relationship between religion, Islam in particular, on happiness and well-being.

### **Research design:**

#### **Participants**

The participants will be undergraduate university students (age range 21-24). The subjects will be assigned to group A (intervention group) who are registered in a positive psychology course. Group B (control group) will be asked to sign their names as waiting list for the next course.

#### **Procedure**

Group A will be asked to take several surveys (PERMA meter, Authentic Happiness Inventory and Meaning in life questionnaire) before and after the course. The purpose of this step is to measure happiness and meaning while comparing pre-intervention results with post-intervention as the students will be asked to re-take same surveys by the end of the semester.

The intervention will be a teaching course on positive psychology. Most of the concepts introduced in the course will be modified in accordance with Emiratis culture and religion, while also emphasizing on the concept of prayer. Hence the culture in UAE emphasized more on the collectivity rather than individuality. Individuals in UAE seem to show more loyalty and commitment toward their tribe than themselves. Also, they tend to have a great sense of obligation toward family (Lambert, Pasha-Zaidi, Passmore, Al-Karam ,2015). Therefore, the perception of well-being in UAE is focused on groups (Lambert et. al. 2015). Another important element to consider is the religion and how its essential to individual in UAE, where they live

virtuously based on Islamic codes of conduct (Al-Darmaki, Hassane, Ahammed and Abdulla, 2012; Lambert et. al. 2015)

The course will be offered for undergrad students by United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) the skills they need to become fully flourishing individuals who will later can contribute positively to their communities. To that effect, the course will offer students the opportunity to experience and employ in a variety of positive psychology interventions like savoring, an attainable goal setting, having purpose in life, and deepening their relationships with others. Students will learn and explore different strategies from different well-being models, such as the Broaden and Build (Fredrickson, 2009), Flourishing (Keyes & Haidt, 2003), Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and PERMA (Seligman, 2002) models. Futhermore, how can the teachings of positive psychology models can be implacable within the context of religion, the students can later create their own intervention and seek for its effectiveness on their own wellbeing.

Throughout the course, one of the main concepts that we will try to shed the light on is the importance of prayer and how such rituals help them attain mindfulness, also maintain a structured schedule as they pray five times a day and plan for their day according to the prayer timings, which has a positive influence over their well-being and could help with coping with life adversities. The other topic is the traditional norms that can also enhance their well-being, for instance: family gatherings, lending hand to others, maintaining a positive relation with neighbors. When introducing these concepts, the course will give students a chance to share their experiences. They will be asked to share whether they have experienced flow, when they experienced it, whether or not they experience it on regular basis, and how it made them feel. Then participants will respond about meaning: does praying brings meaning to them, do they



sense meaning when praying individually or in a group. Throughout the course of the semester the students will also have the chance to write their experience with praying rituals after introducing various concepts of positive psychology.

As for Group B, the wait list control group, they will be asked to do respond to self-reports about what praying means to them how do they feel after performing prayers. Further, the students will be asked to pay attention to prayer as well as the traditions and the norms they perform on regular basis.

### **The Research Findings:**

The findings which are extracted from surveys given to the student throughout the course, will be used to develop an intervention for students across the UAE to promote their well-being. We also hope that along the study we will be able to design a scale, which can measure the effectiveness of prayer for Muslims across the world.

### **Personal Reflections**

Since starting the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program, I have shared what we discussed in classroom and what we read with my mother. My mother, who is a great inspiration to me, helped make the connection between positive psychology and our religion, Islam. I was fascinated by how powerful Islamic rituals can make us feel and now some of our ritual practices made more sense to me in the context of well-being. To me personally I consider praying as a source of joy and peacefulness. From what I have experienced, people in UAE and Muslims in general try to find the scientific reasoning for their religion practices and its impact on them, as most of them have assumptions only on how positively religion impact can be. The way that we have been taught about religion was to focus on performing its rituals without explaining its positive influence, we were taught that if we did not follow our Islamic code of conduct we will

suffer in our lives and hereafter. Therefore, I would like to call the study *Positive Praying* as I want to focus on its positive impact of this particular ritual.

One of the goals I am trying to achieve by running the study is to create an awareness on the question of: how should we consider our religion as a positive intervention and we should also ponder a positive ways to teach our children without intimidating them? Since there are not many studies that examined the effectiveness or religiosity my other aim is to start encouraging Muslim Psychologists to focus on the field of positive religion and to study its influence on Muslim's well-being.

While writing this paper, I realized that I have formed an interest in finding out more about our religion. While looking for references, I have realized how many people who are not scientists manipulated facts about our religion and they use fraudulent information to catch people's attention to create negative impressions of the Islamic religion. Hence, I believe that having more accurate scientific papers will help to provide a more accurate and truthful picture to people about Islam. Science may not give the ultimate truth about religiosity, but it will provide more reliable information.

One of the goals that the UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity aims to accomplish is to run programs that are more universal, since the country hosts many nationalities and diversity is obvious in the UAE. Therefore, to some Emiratis they could not relate to those programs especially when it does not reflect on religion and culture. So my other aim is to inspire the National Program for Happiness and Positivity to focus more on our religion as well as other social norms and tradition, so that all Emirate people can relate to those programs.

### **Conclusion**

Upon the appointment of minister for state of happiness and well-being in 2016 by the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there was a tremendous expectation from the people of UAE, knowing that the government wanted to make the country among the happiest countries in the world according to the World Happiness Index. Therefore, the minister had to synchronize government strategies and regulations to attain a happier society. The minister started her work by forming the National Program for Happiness and Positivity, the program aimed to meet three main pillars which are (UAE National Program for Happiness and Positivity, 2017):

1. Inclusion of happiness in the policies, programs and services of all government bodies and at work
2. Promotion of positivity and happiness as a lifestyle in the community
3. Development of benchmarks and tools to measure happiness.

The focus of the programs under these pillars was to not only to create happy working environment, but also to promote positivity within the country's communities. The team at the National Program for Happiness and Positivity wanted to make sure that every program/initiative was created according to scientific findings and that the effects are measurable in order for them to assess its success and impact. The team tried to tie most of programs to findings from the field of positive psychology.

One main challenge that the program had was most of the findings of positive psychology field were made in accordance with western culture, and due to the differences that the western culture has along with the culture in the UAE, it seemed very challenging for the team at the National Program for Happiness and Positivity to adopt every findings from the field of positive psychology and implement it in the UAE without making some amendments. As an Arab culture,

people in UAE rely a lot on religion as it main source for them to have a well-guided life (Abdel-Khalek, 2006), so in some cases, addressing religious concepts could help certain programs to have a greater impact in the UAE. It's worth pointing out that much of the work carried out by the National Program for Happiness and positivity seems to miss out on some opportunities by not addressing religion, as religion and tradition are main sources of meaning for Arab people (and Emirati in particular). For many people in these cultures, religion can provide a guide towards what they consider a well-lived life. As a result, it is important for the team to consider these cultural and religious aspects in order for their programs to have a greater impact. However, they must also keep in mind the diversity of people in the UAE and provide programs that serve all people regardless of religion as well. The suggested study will try examining the impact of prayer on college student well-being as they will be taught on the positive effect of praying and how can they form meaning, experience positive emotions through praying, the research findings is to elaborate on the factor whether prayer is an important variable for well-being in the UAE.

## References

- Albiriki, Farah, Personal Communication (June, 24, 2018)
- Al Khaleej Times ( 2018, July 30) *Sheikh Mohammed Warns 5 Federal departments over staff satisfaction*. Retrieved from <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/news/government/sheikh-mohammeds-stern-warning-to-govt-departments-over-performance-->
- Abu-Raiya, H., Hamama, L., & Fokra, F. (2015). Contribution of religious coping and social support to the subjective well-being of Israeli Muslim parents of children with cancer: A preliminary study. *Health & Social Work, 40*(3), e83-e91.
- Al-Darmaki, F., Hassane, S., Ahammed, S., & Abdulla, A. (2012). Developing counselor education identity in UAE: Evaluation of an undergraduate program. *Journal for International Counselor Education, 4*(1), 1-28.
- Ahmed, S. R., Fowler, P. J., & Toro, P. A. (2011). Family, public and private religiousness and psychological well-being over time in at-risk adolescents. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 14*(4), 393-408.
- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2012). Subjective well-being and religiosity: A cross-sectional study with adolescents, young and middle-age adults. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 15*(1), 39-52.
- Abdel-Khalek, A. M., & Eid, G. K. (2011). Religiosity and its association with subjective well-being and depression among Kuwaiti and Palestinian Muslim children and adolescents. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 14*(2), 117-127.
- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2014). Religiosity, health and happiness: Significant relations in adolescents from Qatar. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 60*(7), 656-661.
- Abdel-Khalek, A. M., & Lester, D. (2009). A significant association between religiosity and happiness in a sample of Kuwaiti students. *Psychological Reports, 105*(2), 381-382.

- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2006). Happiness, health, and religiosity: Significant relations. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 9*(1), 85-97.
- Al Maktoum, M. B. R., & Bishtawi, A. (2006). *My vision: challenges in the race for excellence*. Dubai: Motivate.
- Al-Sharawi, S. M. M. (1993) *The miracles of the qur'an*. dar al taqwa Ltd., London, UK. nd.
- Behere, P. B., Das, A., Yadav, R., & Behere, A. P. (2013). Religion and mental health. *Indian journal of psychiatry, 55*(Suppl 2), S187.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2002). *The pursuit of meaningfulness in life*.
- Beit-Hallahmi, B. (1975). Religion and suicidal behavior. *Psychological Reports, 37*(3\_suppl), 1303-1306.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. Basic Books.
- Duckworth, A., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term Goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 1087-1101.
- Dutton, J. E. (2006). *Energize your workplace: How to create and sustain high-quality connections at work*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Dahlsgaard, K., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Shared virtue: The convergence of valued human strengths across culture and history. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 203-213.
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 34.

- Emirates 24/7 (2016, March 7) *Mohammed reviews UAE Program for Happiness and Positivity*. Retrieved from <https://www.emirates247.com/news/government/mohammed-reviews-uae-programme-for-happiness-and-positivity-2016-03-07-1.623503>.
- Emmons, R. A., & Paloutzian, R. F. (2003). The psychology of religion. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54(1), 377-402.
- Elliott, M., & Hayward, R. D. (2009). Religion and life satisfaction worldwide: The role of government regulation. *Sociology of Religion*, 70(3), 285-310.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Updated thinking on positivity ratios. *American Psychologist*, 68(9), 814-822.
- Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity*. Harmony.
- Fowler, J. H., & Christakis, N. A. (2008). Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network: longitudinal analysis over 20 years in the Framingham Heart Study. *Bmj*, 337, a2338.
- Fiori, K. L., Brown, E. E., Cortina, K. S., & Antonucci, T. C. (2006). Locus of control as a mediator of the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction: Age, race, and gender differences. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 9(03), 239-263.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218.
- Frankl, V. E. (1985). *Man's search for meaning*. Simon and Schuster.
- Headey, B., Hoehne, G., & Wagner, G. G. (2014). Does religion make you healthier and longer lived? Evidence for Germany. *Social Indicators Research*, 119(3), 1335-1361.
- Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2012) *The role of Character Strengths for task performance, job dedication, interpersonal facilitation and organizational support*. Unpublished Manuscript.

- Hodges, T. D., & Asplund, J. (2010). Strengths development in the workplace. In Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work.
- Haidt, J. (2006). *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. Basic Books.
- Harris, J. I., Erbes, C. R., Engdahl, B. E., Thuras, P., Murray, Swank, N., Grace, D., ... & Malec, C. (2011). The effectiveness of a trauma focused spiritually integrated intervention for veterans exposed to trauma. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 67*(4), 425-438.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. Penguin.
- Jung, C. G. (1992). *Psychology and religion*. Yale University Press.
- Khaishgi, Ehtesham. A (2016, March 20) *Happiness is a serious job': UAE's Minister of Happiness embraces new role*. The National. Retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/happiness-is-a-serious-job-uae-s-minister-of-happiness-embraces-new-role-1.201750>
- Keyes, C. L., & Haidt, J. E. (2003). Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived. *American Psychological Association*.
- King, G. R. (2001). The Coming of Islam and the Islamic Period in the UAE. Al Abed & P. Hellyer (ed.) *United Arab Emirates: a new perspective*, 70-97.
- Lambert, L., Pasha-Zaidi, N., Passmore, H. A., & Al-Karam, C. Y. (2015). Developing an indigenous positive psychology in the United Arab Emirates. *Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*(1), 1-23.
- Locke, E. A. (1996). Motivation through conscious goal-setting. *Applied & Preventive Psychology, 5*, 117-124.



- Moreira-Almeida, A., Lotufo Neto, F., & Koenig, H. G. (2006). Religiousness and mental health: a review. *Revista Brasileira De Psiquiatria*, 28(3), 242-250.
- Manstead, A. S., & Fischer, A. H. (2000). Emotion regulation in full. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(3), 188-191.
- Niemiec, R. M. (2017). *Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners*. Hogrefe Publishing.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2014). Meaning-making, mattering, and thriving in community psychology: From co-optation to amelioration and transformation. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 23(2), 151-154.
- Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pargament, K. I. (2001). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. Guilford Press.
- Pargament, K. I., Smith, B. W., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (1998). Patterns of positive and negative religious coping with major life stressors. *Journal For the Scientific Study of Religion*, 710-724.
- Rasic, D. T., Belik, S. L., Elias, B., Katz, L. Y., Enns, M., Sareen, J., & Team, S. C. S. P. (2009). Spirituality, religion and suicidal behavior in a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 114(1-3), 32-40.
- Smith, E. E. (2017). *The power of meaning: Crafting a life that matters*. Random House.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Free Press.
- Stephens, J. P., Heaphy, E., & Dutton, J. E. (2011). *High quality connections*. The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship, 385-399.
- Sheldon, K. M., Kashdan, T. B., & Steger, M. F. (Eds.). (2010). *Designing positive psychology: Taking stock and moving forward*. Oxford University Press.

- Smalley, S. L. & Winston, D. (2010). *Fully present: The science, art, and practice of mindfulness*. Boston: Da Capo Press
- Seligman, M. E. P.(2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. Vintage.
- Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Special issue on happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-183.
- The National Vision 2020 (2018). *UAE Vision*. Retrieved from <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/uae-vision>
- The United Arab Emirates Government portal (2017). *Happiness*. Retrieved from <https://www.government.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/government-of-future/happiness>
- The United Arab Emirates Government portal (2018). *Fact sheet*. Retrieved from <https://www.government.ae/en/about-the-uae/fact-sheet>
- The National Program for Happiness (2017). *Pillars*. Retrieved From <https://www.happy.ae/en/home>
- Thomas, E., & Savoy, S. (2014). Relationships between traumatic events, religious coping style, and posttraumatic outcomes. *Traumatology: An International Journal*, 20(2), 84.
- Tugade, M. M., Fredrickson, B. L., & Feldman Barrett, L. (2004). Psychological resilience and positive emotional granularity: Examining the benefits of positive emotions on coping and health. *Journal of Personality*, 72(6), 1161-1190.
- Yaden, D. B., Haidt, J., Hood Jr, R. W., Vago, D. R., & Newberg, A. B. (2017). The varieties of self-transcendent experience. *Review of General Psychology*, 21(2), 143.

- Yang, C. P., & Lu, F. (2007). Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context– A book review from the transpersonal psychology perspective. *Pastoral Psychology*, 56(1), 105-113.
- Zullig, K. J., Ward, R. M., & Horn, T. (2006). The association between perceived spirituality, religiosity, and life satisfaction: The mediating role of self-rated health. *Social Indicators Research*, 79(2), 255.



GOVERNMENT OF  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



حكومة  
الإمارات العربية المتحدة

## The United Arab Emirates Declaration of Happiness and Positivity

The Government of the United Arab Emirates believes that the achievement of happiness is a fundamental human goal and aspiration of all people. Happiness represents a holistic approach for development, wellbeing and prosperity, and it is the path towards a better world.

Happiness is the ultimate goal of the UAE government. Through its policies, plans, projects and services the government is committed, to create the enabling environment for the happiness of the individuals, families and society. It is also committed to inspire them to adopt positivity as a fundamental value and enabler to realize themselves and their dreams and aspirations.

The UAE government works to capture and measure happiness, and is keen to pursue comprehensive and sustainable economic, social and environmental development in order to achieve happiness and prosperity of current and future generations. It also works to strengthen the culture of happiness and positivity as a lifestyle, in line with the ambition of the UAE society, its aspiration, customs and culture, and in a holistic manner across government, social and private institutions.

The members of the UAE society embody positive and noble values and they strive to choose happiness for their lives and the lives of their families and their organizations. This spirit is the engine of national economic development and social and cultural prosperity, and it provides an example of happy and positive humans for the world.

The UAE government aspires to play a key role in the international efforts to achieve happiness and positivity as a way toward global prosperity and wellbeing. It also aims for the country to become a global hub and destination for happiness and positivity.