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Faith Domestic Workload, And Well-Being: Exploring Religiosity and Happiness among Rural Pakistani Women

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Abstract: The connection between religiosity and happiness has been greatly investigated in Western settings, but there is very little qualitative research worldwide on how Muslim women in the rural South Asian setting interpret this relationship. This qualitative research paper examines barriers to religious practice and avenues to happiness among Muslim women aged 40 and above in Tandojam, Pakistan. The sample size for the focused group discussions was 60 women, selected using purposive sampling. The NVIVO software was used to analyze the data thematically with word frequency analysis, word clouds, and thematic mapping. There were four dominant themes, which included: (1) Cultural barriers: as a result of domestic workload and gender role, women have little time to worship; (2) Health constraints: due to physical illness (and especially chronic illness), women are less likely to worship; (3) Knowledge gaps: women were unaware of their religious obligation, which was an obstacle; and (4) Psychological factors: women were unaware of the barriers to practicing religion, and laziness and motivational issues were found to be the common ones. The most salient concepts were identified as health (n=11), cultural (n=8) and unaware (n=7) after analyzing word frequency. The paper draws the conclusion that cultural demands and home burden are central factors restricting rural Muslim women to religious practices, but there are other overlapping barriers. Irrespective of these difficulties, the respondents believed that religiosity is a key to genuine happiness. The results are consistent with Livability Theory, which indicates that material deprivation does not exclude happiness when one is engaged in religion. Among the recommendations there is dealing with time poverty by supporting the family and improving religious education to women.

Keywords: Religiosity, Happiness, Workload, Muslim women, Qualitative Research, Sindh, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is described as a mental or emotional state (Goldman, 2017); Galati & Sotgiu, 2004), often characterized as a positive or enjoyable emotion (Kamiloğlu *et al*., 2025; Raibley, 2012). It is also used in the context of life satisfaction, subjective well-being, and prosperity and well-being (Anand, 2016). Berghella (2014) said that happiness is the only thing that humans desire for its own sake. Moreover, it is a fuzzy concept that has been defined in many ways by many researchers. Related concepts include well-being, gladness, satisfaction, pleasure, quality of life, and flourishing, which help define happiness and identify its sources. A variety of biological, psychological, religious and philosophical approaches had been attempted.

Many researchers and scholars have sought to identify a generally accepted definition of happiness (Anand, 2016; Galati & Sotgiu, 2004), and many organizations have sought to measure happiness levels worldwide for various purposes. A number of organizations have developed their own tools that incorporate various factors and variables (Potocan & Nedelko, 2012). Most of these authors suggest that happiness is part of well-being, which is a more complex construct with multiple dimensions, not all of which are emotional (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Happiness is often considered a determinant of well-being, but happiness is not well-being (Raibley, 2012). Wellbeing is a broader condition that, for most people, involves more than emotion (happiness) and includes other aspects of perception and state of being. Diener (2006) noted that well-being, especially what he called subjective well-being, comprises affective and cognitive elements, with happiness as one of the main affective components. In this view, happiness is central to well-being and can be triggered by ordinary events, such as spending time with loved ones, talking with friends, or simply smiling at others. In this conceptualization, happiness seems easy to achieve and is not always related to more objective conditions, such as level of wealth, specific achievements, physical health, social relationships or being part of an organization (Kesebir & Diener, 2008)

Lyubomirsky *et al*. (2005) developed a theoretical model, based on an analysis of happiness research, of the most important factors that explain an individual's happiness level. This model attributes approximately 50% of happiness to a generic predisposition, termed the happiness set point. Somewhat surprisingly, extensive research suggests that life circumstances, including age, gender, and marital status, account for only

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approximately 10% of the variance in happiness (Diener, 1984; Myers & Ed, 1995; Ryff, 1989). Even material wealth adds little to happiness once basic needs are met (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), as nicely illustrated by Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman (1978), who found that lottery winners were not happier over the long term. Accordingly, the remaining 40% of the variance in happiness is attributed to intentional activities, which is indeed quite significant. Consequently, researchers investigated factors that may positively affect an individual's happiness level. Despite progress in recent years (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013), much remains to be learned about which intentional activities actually boost happiness and which do not. Identifying factors that sustainably enhance happiness could have far-reaching effects, for instance, informing therapeutic models and treatments, potentially providing benefit to people suffering from depression, as well as helping people feel more fulfilled and satisfied with their lives. There is substantial research indicating that a supportive social network is associated with a range of psychological benefits (Koenig, MD & George, 2004). In particular, research has found that satisfying social relationships and social activities are important factors in the development of lasting happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2004). According to Diener *et al*. (2011), there is also evidence that social support mediates the relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being. Sillick *et al*. (2014) found that an extrinsic religious social orientation was positively associated with happiness.

Therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that there is a certain connection between religion and happiness, in which religious factors may fluctuate respondents' happiness levels to a certain extent. Consequently, the variables in the current study are arranged according to awareness of the relationship, including its direction. It is also observed by the researcher that people with a high level of religiosity may become happier than those who are non-religious. Hence, this study could be helpful in identifying the relationships between selected variables (positive or negative), including their levels (religiosity and happiness), within the aged (40-plus) women stratum in Tandojam, district Hyderabad.

REVIEW LITERATURE

According to Jesarati *et al*. (2013), a significant positive link was found among happiness, social relationships, and religious attitudes, which was also observed in a survey of 370 University students. The study on the Sunni sect of Islam also proved a significant relationship between religious personality and mental health. In a manner similar to earlier researchers (Hafeez & Rafique, 2013) surveyed 60 senior citizens in old age homes and found that psychological well-being could be positively predicted by religiosity.

A similar study surveyed 100 elderly people to demonstrate that religiosity positively affects life satisfaction (Gul & Dawood, 2013). In another study by Sahraian *et al*. (2013), Muslim undergraduate students of medical Sciences were surveyed, showing that higher religiosity was associated with greater happiness. The author recommended accounting for religiosity in general mental health and well-being programs. Furthermore, in relation to Achour *et al*. (2017), the determinants of happiness included in their research were positive attitudes, self-esteem, and other-esteem. Their research also claimed that Religiosity has long been considered the main determinant of happiness, and educational level strengthens this relationship. The study found a positive and significant correlation between religious commitment and happiness levels. Religious commitment also showed significant positive correlations with positive attitudes, self-esteem, and other-esteem. The study also concluded that educational attainment moderates the relationship between religious commitment and happiness. Thus, they concluded that religious commitment plays a very important role in increasing happiness levels.

Abdel-khalek and Naceur (2007) explored the associations between religiosity and both positive and negative emotions and traits. The researchers collected a sample of 244 volunteer Muslim college students from Algeria. The students responded to five self-rating scales to assess religiosity, physical health, mental health, happiness, and satisfaction with life, as well as the Arabic Scale of Optimism and Pessimism and the Kuwait University Anxiety Scale. However, by their study, in women, religiosity was significantly and positively correlated with physical health, mental health, happiness, satisfaction with life, and optimism, whereas religiosity correlated negatively with both anxiety and pessimism. Analyzed factors yielded a single bipolar factor labeled positive emotions and religiosity vs. neurotic tendency (anxiety and pessimism) in women. Two orthogonal factors were extracted in men: positive vs. negative mental health traits and religiosity.

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The results were consistent with the broader literature on the association between religion and positive outcomes in a Muslim context.

Consistent with Mohd and Rizvi (2017), Happiness is a feeling desired by every human being. According to him, religiosity is a technique for attaining purpose in life, mental health, physical well-being, and inner peace, ultimately leading to happiness. The researcher analyzed studies conducted over the last two decades to understand the relationship between religiousness and happiness. The study showed that their claim was true in a vast majority of surveys, irrespective of religion, gender, nationality, or race. Although Muslims seemed to be the happiest.

Tiliouine and Belgounmidi (2009) also explored the relationships between religiosity, meaning in Life and subjective well-being (SWB). Researchers selected samples of 495 Muslim students (330 Females, and 165 males) from Algeria. Their Mean age was 21.26 (SD = 2.30). Their study results indicated that Religious Belief and Religious Altruism significantly contribute to a sense of meaning in life. Nevertheless, Hierarchical Regression Analyses showed that only Religious Belief makes a significant contribution in both Satisfaction with Life Scale' SWLS and 'Personal Wellbeing Index' PWI. But this effect has been almost entirely accounted for by meaning in life in the second step. Comparisons on the basis of the demographic characteristics show that males marginally differ from females ($p < .05$) in Religious Altruism, but these latter were higher in SWLS ($p < .05$). Moreover, it has been shown that students of science score marginally higher in Belief and Practice and also in PML, and SWLS compared to their counterparts in Arts studies. Though no differences were found in the strength of religious belief in subjects from rural and urban locations, the former had higher scores on other religiosity subscales. This trend was slightly reversed in PWI ($p < .05$). Furthermore, subjects from high-income families were favored in PML, SWLS, and PWI. These results were discussed in light of international research.

Suhail and Chaudhry (2004) conducted their work to determine the prevalence and predictors of personal well-being in an Eastern Muslim culture in Pakistan. Their study was also aimed at comparing current subjective well-being ratings with those from other regions of the world. To make that survey representative of the vast majority of Pakistani people, a total of 1,000 people, with an age range of 16–80, living in diverse areas of Lahore (the provincial capital) were contacted. Study findings were consistent with previous worldwide reports, showing that the number of happy people exceeded that of unhappy people, and that people in Eastern countries were as happy and satisfied as those in many Western countries. Work satisfaction, social support, religious affiliation, social class, income level, and marital status and satisfaction were found to be the better predictors of subjective well-being.

Although religion is part of the human make-up, it's also part of cultural and intellectual history (Gauchet, 2021). The basic concept of religious refers to the orientation. Individuals with an intrinsic religious orientation are described as having strong beliefs and being committed to their religion; they may use religion as a guide in their everyday decisions and activities (Wenas & Verana, 2024). This kind of religious orientation may help people adapt, even to very difficult situations, and can support them in thinking positively about stressful events. On the other hand, individuals with extrinsic religious orientation tend to use religion as a means to obtain social support, social status, protection and consolation (Wenas & Verana, 2024). Further, extrinsic religious orientation can be divided into two dimensions: extrinsic-personal, meaning a person prefers to obey and engage in religious activity to obtain personal benefits, such as protection, happiness, comfort, peace, and consolation. Religion was our first attempt at literature, the texts, our first attempt at cosmology (McMullin, 2023) making sense of where we are in the universe, our first attempt at health care, believing in faith healing and our first attempt at philosophy. Religiosity is the degree to which a person engages in religious activity, is dedicated to their religion and believes in the doctrines of their faith. The literature contains several theories about this aspect of psychology. An extrinsic social orientation means that a person is involved in religious activity because he or she wants to be acknowledged and recognized by the environment or build a network for personal reasons. Religion has been one of the most influential forces in human history. (O'Murchu, 2016) stated that the twenty-first century will be ''the most religious century'' in recent times.

Musa (2015) also explored the associations between spiritual beliefs and practices, religiosity, and spiritual well-being for Jordanian Arab

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Muslim University students. The findings also showed that participants with greater spiritual beliefs and practices, and higher religiosity, were more likely to report better spiritual, religious, and existential well-being. Only income had a significant effect on the spiritual well-being and existential well-being. The study concluded that spirituality and religiosity were important to the lives of young Arab Muslims, with potential implications for well-being.

Tiliouine (2009) aimed to examine the relationship between Satisfaction with Religiosity/Spirituality (SR/S) and the sights on a large sample of Muslims (1388 males, 1172 females) from Algeria. It also provided empirical evidence for the addition of an SR/S Domain item to the Personal Well-Being Index (PWI). A questionnaire dealing with satisfaction with a range of personal and societal domains was used. Results supported previous findings and were in agreement with the recommendations of the International Well-being Group (Eduardo, 2009). The new domain item made a statistically significant, albeit slight, contribution to predicting general satisfaction with life (SWL). Notably, higher satisfaction with religiosity/spirituality was found among women compared to men, married individuals compared to single individuals, and inhabitants of the Sahara Desert compared to people from other regions of Algeria.

The research by Tavakoli and Pour (2011) examined the relationship between religiosity and happiness among female students at Kerman Islamic Azad University in the academic year 2009-2010. Among those, 200 students out of 5440 were randomly selected as the sample group by the researcher. The study used a correlational research method. The research instruments were (a) the Religiosity Test and (b) the Happiness Test. Descriptive statistics and statistical inferential methods were used to analyze the data and examine the hypothesizes. Their results revealed a positive and meaningful correlation between religiosity and happiness. It was also found that there was a positive and meaningful correlation between three other components of religiosity behavior, religious knowledge and religious outlook and happiness.

Achour *et al*. (2015) explored religiosity in an Islamic context and assessed its effects on Muslims' personal well-being. Their study sought the determinants of religiosity, including prayer, beliefs, and worship. This research also attempted to examine the coping strategies Muslims use to deal with life problems and changes, such as prayer, supplication, trust and reliance on God, remembrance of death, and the concept of life after death. This study measured religiosity and its effects on the well-being of Muslim academicians. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60 years. The results of their study showed a positive yet significant correlation between personal well-being and religiosity. The well-being also showed significant positive correlations with beliefs, worship, and prayer.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this research, a qualitative exploratory design was used, with Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted to obtain insights into women's perceptions of religiosity and happiness.

Study Area

The study was done in the town of Tandojam in the District of Hyderabad, Sindh province, Pakistan. Tandojam is a semi-urban town that is mainly Muslim, with rural features such as a joint family structure and agricultural life.

Sampling and Participants

Using purposive sampling, a total of 60 women aged 40 years and above were recruited for five FGDs (12 women per group). The selection of participants was conducted to ensure diversity in education (illiterate to graduate), occupation (housewives to professionals), and family structure (joint and nuclear). The 40+ years age criterion was applied based on the belief that women in this stage of life have mature religious views and place fewer demands on caring for children.

Data Collection

The FGDs took place between the Month and Month 2021, in the Department of Rural Sociology, Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam. The discussions took 60-90 minutes each and were guided by the researcher using a semi-structured discussion guide wherein the following areas were discussed: (a) conceptualization of happiness, (b) religion, (c) obstacles to religious participation, and (d) the connection between faith and well-being. The conversations were held in Urdu/Sindhi, tape-recorded with the consent and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The NVivo 12 package was applied to data according to the thematic analysis framework

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suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization (through reading), (2) initial coding, (3) theme development, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) writing the report. The frequency analysis of words was also performed to identify salient words, and word clouds were visualized. Triangulation was achieved through various FGDs and the researcher's debriefing.

Ethical Considerations

The Department of Rural Sociology at the Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam, gave ethical approval. Every participant gave informed consent, was guaranteed confidentiality, and was advised of their right to withdraw. Reporting involves the use of pseudonyms.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Mean/Percent
Occupation of the respondents	Household	52	86.7
Marital Status	Married	44	73.4
Education	Primary-Matriculation	30	50.0
Family System of Respondent	Joint Family	33	55.0
Status in Family of the Respondent	Dependent	20	84.0
House Structure of the Respondent	Cemented	32	53.7
House Status of the Respondent	Family Owned	38	63.3
Occupation of the head of the Respondent	Non-Agricultural	34	56.7

The respondents in this study were only females, with a minimum age of 40 years. Additionally, the data in Table-4.1 show that the overwhelming majority (86.7%) of respondents were not engaged in any economic activity other than managing their household activities. Subsequently, marital status indicates that a little less than (73.4%) of the respondents were married, representing a local cultural value. Similarly, education is an important factor in shaping attitudes and behaviors toward a matter, so almost half (50%) of the respondents have either primary education or matriculation, indicating a positive trend. It also shows that more than one simple majority (55%) of respondents lived in a joint family system, indicating cultural bonding and a rural characteristic. As the researcher was restricted to getting information from female respondents and culturally, the majority of the females are dependent on their male partners; therefore, the researcher also decided to get information regarding the matter, which indicates that the overwhelming majority (84%) of the respondents were dependent on either their husband, father or son. The study revealed that the simple majority (53.7%) of respondents were habituated to cemented houses, indicating a reasonable socioeconomic background. The data also shows that a little less than two-thirds of respondents (63.3%) were settled in their family-owned houses. The data revealed that overall, a simple majority (56.7%) of respondents were non-agriculture and considered agriculture a risky occupation.



Figure 1: Word cloud of qualitative findings

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The term cloud itself illustrates the most common ideas when speaking to Muslim females about the issue of religiosity and happiness. The high frequency of words such as cultural, health, issue, unaware and psychological shows that the participants reacted to various obstacles to religious practice. The most frequent mention is of the cultural factor, which underscores the strong influence of traditional norms and gender roles on women's involvement in religious life. The fact that it encompasses health and psychological aspects implies that physical and mental health greatly influence religious observance. Terms such as unaware and issue indicate gaps in women's knowledge of religion and the practical difficulties they encounter in their everyday spiritual life.

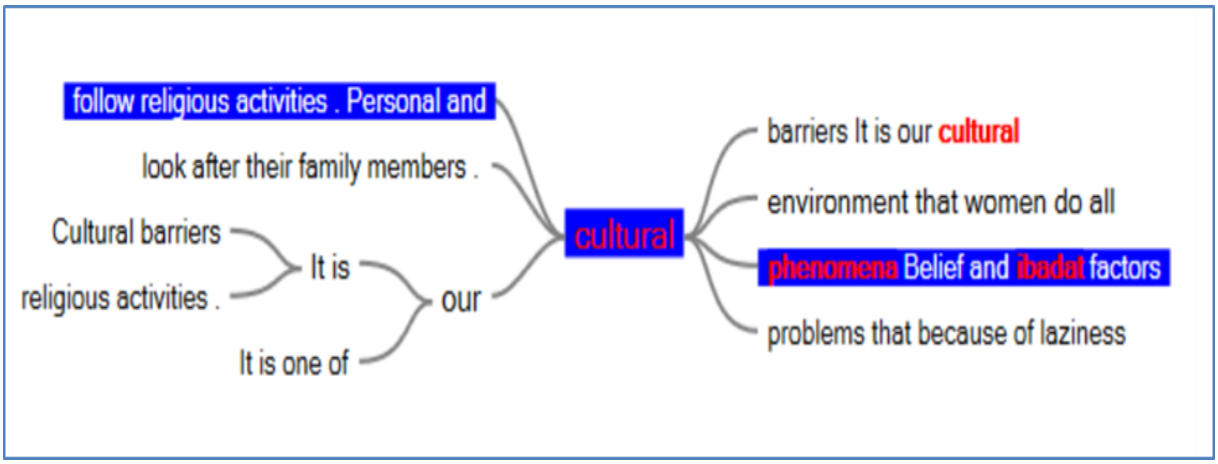


Figure 2: Thematic mapping of cultural barriers

This value is the result of a thematic analysis of the qualitative data on cultural limitations. Excerpts of the text have shown that the respondents regularly referred to domestic workload as the main barrier to practicing religion-phrases such as I have already said how much domestic life, the burden of domestic tasks and it is our cultural environment that women do all the domestic work show this theme. As can be seen, women bear significant household duties and have little time to devote to prayer and religious practices, which is burdensome given cultural expectations of women. The male members of the family do not help with the domestic chores as a rule, which poses structural challenges to women in their spiritual activities. The figure also illustrates how psychological reasons (laziness and unawareness) were cited, though they were less common than cultural ones.

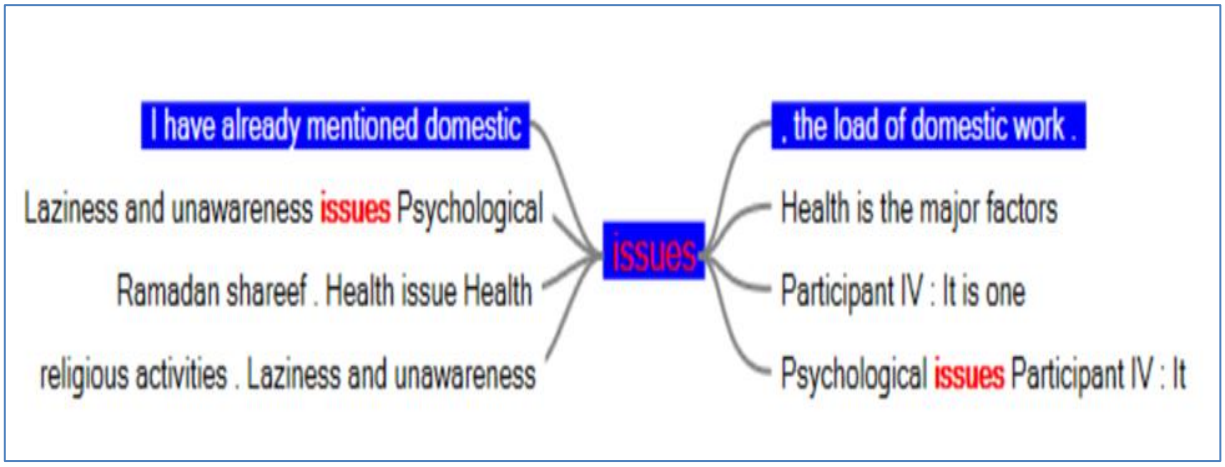


Figure 3: Word tree map of health issues and psychological factors

This figure cross-tabulates the results across participants and datasets, showing that barriers to religious practice are interrelated. The use of expressions such as "the load of domestic work" by different participants underscores the dominance of household chores as a limiting factor. Another theme that comes out as one of the most profound is that health is a major factor, as participants mentioned that their inability to conduct prayers and fast during Ramadan is

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restricted due to illness, especially chronic conditions. The terms laziness and unawareness are stated alongside psychological issues, indicating that the participants were aware of the presence of internal (motivational, knowledge-related) and external (health, cultural) influences on their religious practices. This triangulation enhances the validity of the findings by showing consistency among respondents.

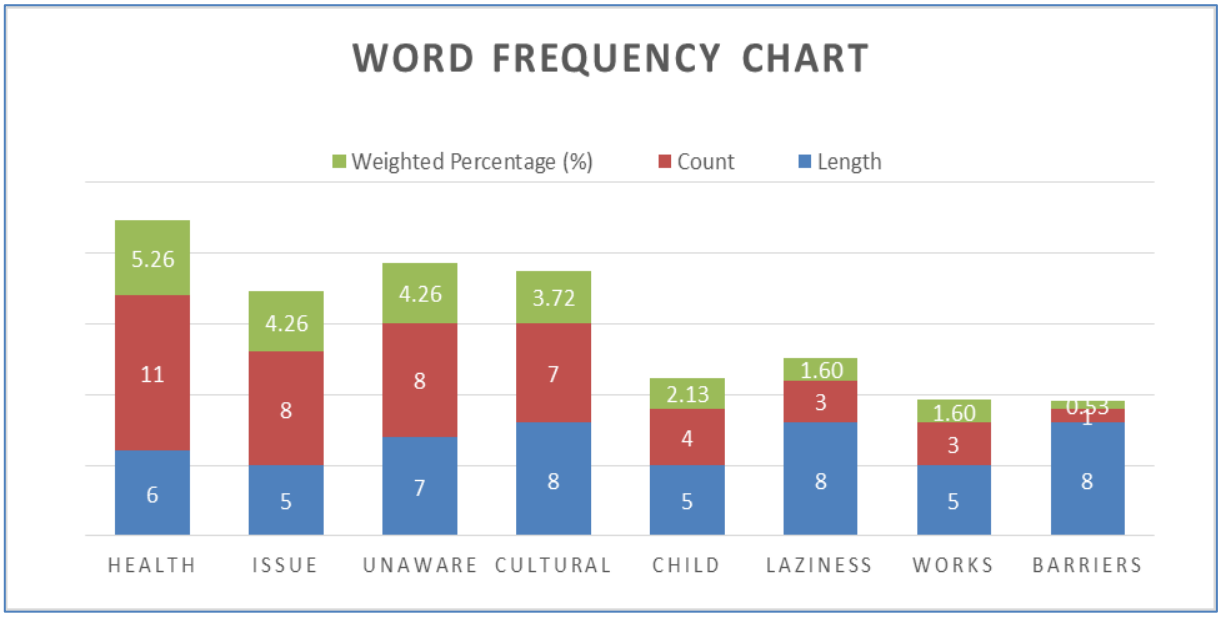


Figure 4: Quantitative word frequencies showing percentages, counts and lengths

The word frequency chart provides quantitative support for qualitative themes, showing the frequency of particular concepts in the interview transcripts. The most commonly used words are health (count=11) and issue (count=8), cultural (count=8) and unaware (count=7). The weighted percentage column shows the relative importance of these terms, with cultural (4.26) and unaware (4.26) having the highest weighted percentages (because they took up more conversational space than other words). Laziness (count=4, weighted percentage=2.13%) and works (count=3, weighted percentage=1.60%) are not so common but still relevant. The presented mixed-methods combination shows that health-related concerns and cultural obstacles were the most salient among women discussing religiosity, and practical limitations, such as housework and perceived laziness, were secondary yet important factors influencing women's religious experience and well-being.

DISCUSSION

Happiness is a feeling that is desired by every human being (Mohd & Rizvi, 2017). The researcher found this topic (happiness) interesting, with the primary objective of the study to establish a correlation between happiness and ignorance (of health). In this research, the levels of happiness and health ignorance were also investigated, including the socioeconomic factors of health ignorance.

The results of the study revealed that an overwhelming majority of the women of Tandojam had a medium level of happiness. Throughout history, various philosophers have examined the subjective description of the good life and happiness. Some quarrel that the most desirable life can be characterized by a number of features, for example, quality, while others hold that an enjoyable state of mind is the spirit of the good life. Also, when happiness was the center, some claimed that the best approach was an educated self-satisfaction, while some argued that impassiveness was the best policy. Simply, in the end, many eras have seen researchers of the good life working on the experimental procedures of science and happiness (Diener, E., 2009). (Hirschauer *et al*., 2015) reflected a new worldwide demand for more attention to happiness and the absence of misery as criteria for government policy. It reviews the state of happiness in the world today and shows how the new science of happiness explains personal and national variations in happiness.

Subsequently, the aim of the study was to explore the relationship between religiosity and happiness among older adults. Result of the study showed

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that religiosity and happiness are moderately positively correlated. The findings can be explained by the fact that engaging in religiosity increases happiness. Our study results are consistent with previous research reporting a positive correlation between religiosity and happiness (Inglehart, 2008). These results can be explained by religious people engaging in various activities, such as helping others and showing sympathy, which might enhance their happiness (Krause *et al*., 2018).

Moreover, religiosity is a great source of hope that fosters a sense of purpose in life and makes people happier (Cohen & Koenig, 2003). Further clarification: religiosity and happiness are also great buffers against negative emotions, as spiritual beliefs view this world as temporary and hardships as a means to achieve self-actualization or a close connection with a divine, making them strong enough to bear hardships and remain contented. (Bassey *et al*., 2018) have further elaborated that individuals who are religious and have higher levels of religiosity and happiness have higher levels of mental and psychological functioning despite negative life circumstances. It has also been emphasized that religiosity and happiness were strongly connected to being hopeful about life and to finding a meaningful existence, rather than viewing life as a miserable phenomenon. (Rahman, 2025) discussed how focusing on religiosity and happiness can help senior citizens in spending a more meaningful life than those who are not inclined towards religion and religiosity. Moreover, (Borges, *et al*., 2021) have examined religiosity and happiness as a multidimensional construct, illustrating that meaningful connection with a higher power, as well as a close relationship with family members and other people in the social circle, increases positive perceptions of quality of life.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative research paper examined the relationship between religiosity and happiness, focusing on its interpretation among rural Muslim women in Pakistan. The results show that women face numerous overlapping obstacles to practicing religion, such as cultural norms, household duties, health, and a lack of knowledge, yet still trust that faith is a key part of true well-being.

The three main contributions of the study are as follows: First, it empirically supports the Livability Theory in a non-Western setting, showing that material deprivation does not mean a person cannot be happy, provided they do not cease to be religious. Second, it demonstrates the gendered aspect of religious practice and how cultural conventions restrict women's time for spiritual practices. Third, it gives rural Muslim women a higher voice - a group of people that is frequently marginalized in scholarly literature on well-being.

The results indicate that interventions to make women happier must focus on eliminating structural obstacles to religious participation, such as encouraging equal division of household labor and increasing women's access to religious education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote domestic chore-sharing to free women's time for religious practice.
2. Encourage women to attend religious events and education.
3. Prepare religious education programs that target women.
4. Overcome health barriers with the help of adaptive practice accommodations.
5. Attend to the issue of time poverty as a hindrance to women.
6. Empower women, health, and religion. Support community-based programs based on the integration of health, religion, and women.
7. Conduct comparative studies with younger women and men.
8. Measure barriers and outcomes using mixed methods.
9. Investigate ways to improve women's participation in religion.

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