

# Investigating the relationship between religious lifestyle and social health among Muslim teachers



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Lifestyles are evidence for the influence of systems, cultures and civilisations within various societies. In view of that, all systems of thought aim to maintain certain ways of living in citizens to implement their ideals. Furthermore, if societies do not accept the lifestyles introduced by such systems, their intellectual foundations and values are rejected. In this regard, the Islamic lifestyle does not imply giving up all pleasures and blessings, but it takes on a divine colour to all pleasures. The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between religious lifestyle and social health among 1000 Muslim teachers working in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, over a period of six months, in 2020–21. Utilising the simple random sampling method, 278 teachers were thus selected as the statistical sample and then completed some questionnaires on Islamic lifestyle and social health. Data analysis was also performed using the structural equation modeling (SEM) in the Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) statistical software package. The results demonstrated a significant positive correlation between Islamic lifestyle and social health ( $p = 0.58$ ,  $t = 6.84$ ).

**Contribution:** The study results showed the importance of Islamic lifestyle in improving teachers' social health.

**Keywords:** religious lifestyle; Islamic lifestyle; Islam; religion; social health; teacher.

## Introduction

Ethical principles and human values have been of utmost importance at all times and places. Moreover, humanity has always abided by ethical principles throughout history and even institutionalised their acceptance. As looking up to the lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad and the orders in the Holy Quran in this area are not specific to a particular time and place, the Prophet's adherence to ethical principles and the way he dealt with numerous obstacles have been thus far a model for all human beings (Ghafran & Yasmin 2020). The fulfillment of a religious lifestyle based on Islamic teachings is accordingly a fundamental necessity to achieve a modern Islamic civilisation. Therefore, serious attention needs to be given by Muslim scholars to lifestyle and its occurrence in the life of people and communities. In this regard, it is worth to lay much focus on the principles and foundations of Islamic lifestyle because it is only realised and sustained with such principles. An assessment of both concepts of the meaning of life and lifestyle from the views of human and divine intellect and knowledge accordingly shows that people's way of living is rooted in their meaning of life. Therefore, the occurrence of any type of lifestyle, including the Islamic-religious one, demands the formation of an appropriate meaning of life as a basis (Besharat et al. 2015). While the meaning of life and lifestyle have been continuously integral to human life, and human beings have always sought to find a specific answer to both issues, addressing the problem is a matter of concern in the contemporary period and new sciences arising from human rationality. Accordingly, the findings of such sciences have been utilised to conceptually describe and analyse these two concepts. Asking about the meaning of life occurs in the life of all human beings (Besharat et al. 2021). Even though the question of the philosophy and purpose of life is equal to the history of human consciousness, the crisis of meaning in contemporary human life has made this issue increasingly important and turned it into one of the major concerns discussed by human beings. The threats to leading a meaningful life caused by the pressures of modern life have further made it necessary to reflect on the meaning of life

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(Uzhova et al. 2018). This has urged scholars in various sciences, such as philosophy of religion, philosophy of ethics and even psychology itself to discuss this issue, as its impact on various aspects of human life, especially the realm of the human sciences, has been extraordinary. Despite the universal nature of the subject of the meaning of life and the encounters of all human beings with this concept throughout their lives, it is still vague and lacks clarity.

Moreover, social health is one of the significant factors demanding much more attention by researchers. In other words, the first factors affecting social health in one sector are other health dimensions. For example, boosting employment rate can reduce poverty, violence, depression and symptoms of anxiety in various communities. The beliefs of community members, as well as their levels of social education and position and the impact of the media, can thus affect social health (Bufford, Paloutzian & Ellison 1991). There is also a range of social health promotion programmes, which might be developed and implemented by the government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, they have different purposes; for example, they might assess some risk factors for diseases or health problems or attempt to prevent them (Omididi & Rad 2019). Such programmes are implemented in order to change the attitudes of community members toward diseases and augment social health. In this respect, various programmes have been taken into account, including health, media education and school education campaigns. In some cases, the changes are being made in the environment or the lifestyle of citizens to prevent the worsening of their health or that of the community they belong to (Carmody et al. 2008). Ultimately, it can be concluded that lifestyle plays a vital role in personal and community health. Given the importance of teachers and their roles in educating the new generation in each community, social health assessment from the perspective of these individuals is essential. With this background in mind, the present study aimed to evaluate the role of a religious lifestyle in the social health status of Muslim teachers in Malaysia in 2020–21.

## Lifestyle

While discussing both the meaning of life and lifestyle, Adler (1923) has clearly mentioned a strong relationship between the two concepts. His definition of lifestyle is largely based on a person's specific mind map. From his perspective, lifestyle is recognised as ideas and goals used by a person to measure one's own values and interactions with others. In addition, this approach shows the reliance of lifestyle on a person's mind map, objectives and meaningfulness system. According to Gibbins and Reimer (1999), lifestyle is the product of the choices made by individuals in their everyday life. While there is no indication of the subject of purpose, there is an implicit reference to the system of meaningfulness by deliberating the topic of selection, which links lifestyle to the meaning of life. Giddens (1991) has also focused on choices in the realm of lifestyle and more vividly discussed the link between lifestyle and the meaning of life. As stated by this scholar, modernity has led to a wide range of choices,

compounding the importance of lifestyle. This claim clearly shows the link between lifestyle and a particular system of meaningful justification. Any lifestyle accordingly requires a set of habits and driving forces. Therefore, it has a kind of unity that, in addition to the special importance in terms of the continuity of existential security, creates a link between the sub-options in a more or less regular pattern. Bourdieu (1977), a prominent theorist, has similarly followed such an approach. One of the basic concepts of thought raised by Bourdieu is mental structure, which is defined as a mental or cognitive structure and even structured systems of tendencies through which human beings interact with their social world.

## Religious lifestyle

Various new American and European lifestyles are currently in serious conflict with the spirit of religion and the Islamic way of living due to their specific elements and concepts. For instance, being daily is one of the serious components of the Western lifestyle, without which life has no meaning. In nature, dailiness is associated with negligence, which is the result of Western 'nihilism'. Meanwhile, the soul of the believer is elusive from neglect and involves self-awareness and faithful insight (Hosseini et al. 2019). Therefore, the Islamic lifestyle (which is based on the Holy Quran) has some requirements. Such requirements for formulating and designing the doctrine of the Islamic lifestyle necessitate reflections and thinking about the nature and needs of this way of living. This is a special lifestyle, in line with the spirit of religion, religiosity and faithful life, which also considers the requirements of the new era and its technologies. Islamic societies have long been plagued by eclecticism. Similar to many other prophets, the Prophet Muhammad has attempted to present a specific Islamic lifestyle within the general framework of the Islamic way of living. As God says, civil society has been a model in the way of living achieved through the efforts and struggles of the Prophet, and many endeavours in the field of jihad have been introduced as a model to the world (Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 143). The Prophet has seriously fought against ignorant thoughts. He has also critically assessed the culture of ignorance, rejected some principles and accepted some others. He attempted to present a new lifestyle, based on the revelatory teachings of the Holy Quran as well as human intellect and nature. Moreover, there is no doubt that each person's lifestyle is determined based on life purposes. In addition, according to Surah Adh-Dhariyat, Ayat 56, God created human beings for no purpose other than that they should worship Him. In other words, the Islamic way of living is worship. Religious life is also part of the larger Seleucid plan (*viz.* the Islamic worship rituals), in which all life is to get closer to God. This plan, however, is a dynamic one and requires constant adjustments (Coruh et al. 2005). In a favourable religious life, all actions and states can be a form of worship. Meanwhile, there is a more fundamental part, known as specific worship rituals. If all life of a believer is worship, these components form the pillars of a devotional life. Therefore, it can be recognised as an independent part of life, which is among the most important things in life. Prayer, fasting, Hajj, worship,

pilgrimage, fervent prayer and attending mosques are thus examples of worship rituals that constitute an important part of life (according to Islamic teachings). Paying attention to one's ethical characteristics is also a vital part of a religious life considered in this Seleucid plan, which has been mentioned in multiple Ayats (e.g. Surah An-Nisa, Ayat 135; Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayat 8; and Surah Al-Mumtahanah, Ayat 8). Its primary level includes the ability to control behaviours based on regulations, whereas the other level evaluates the changes in ethical or psychological traits. In fact, one of the pillars of religious life is to constantly make efforts to eliminate some characteristics or generate new ones. Meditation on creation, divine blessings and attributes, and resurrection and death accordingly requires the opening of a new chapter of life, which is known as a voluntary act of thinking. It should be allocated with enough time and planning. There are also teachings in religion and reflections on them are an important part of human life. In this respect, multiple Ayats have advised human beings to think (e.g. Surah Al Imran, Ayat 190–191; Surah Al-Anfal, Ayat 22; and Surah Al-An'am, Ayat 77). From an Islamic perspective, lifestyle refers to a way of living approved by Islam, in which behavioural criteria should be based on Islam and Islamic teachings. God-centeredness and governance of Islamic values in life are thus the most important Islam-approved lifestyle criteria. In fact, in this lifestyle, the individual and social life of people must be based on Islam and Quranic guidelines. Human beings also naturally choose a model that is more in harmony with closeness to God, which is favourable in individual and social life and leads to meeting God (Mitra 2021). Therefore, all ways of living, from praying to business, education, leisure time, sociability, health, food, architecture, art, speaking, production, consumption and physical beauty are done in accordance with this path (e.g. Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 186; Surah Hud, Ayat 61; Surah Saba, Ayat 50).

## Social health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), social health originates from the concept of health. In this definition, it is expressed that 'health' is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. On the other hand, social health is multifaceted. Therefore, it might not be possible to provide a comprehensive definition for this concept based on different views. However, there are some concepts of social health, including social health, as a combination of physical and psychological health, meaning that the body is physically healthy and the mind is healthy in terms of psychological well-being (Genia 2001). In the second definition of social health, however, much attention is paid to the social presence of a person in a community, meaning that the person has good interactions with others, helps others when required and receives help from others. In addition to the absence of psychological disorders, mental health entails coping with the typical psychological and neurological stresses of life, being productive and participating in the living environment (Barger, Donoho &

Wayment 2008). There are elements of humans' social presence in the environment that makes it impossible to summarise mental health as only anxiety, psychosis, etc., thus the social aspect must be considered too in the definition of mental health. However, the question is that how social conditions must be? Two theories exist in this regard. The first theory highlights a healthy community, meaning that social conditions improve health, which is known as social health determinants. The other theory puts emphasis on a healthy community, but a healthy community is not one that merely leads to the health of individuals but results in improved social conditions (Bradshaw, Ellison & Marcum 2010). Based on this definition, a healthy society is one that is free of social damages and on the way to development. Health has also various dimensions that mostly emphasise individual aspects. However, the health of a community is determined by some indexes recognised as social health. In general, the health of the community is also studied in the scope of health psychology and it helps to deal with related problems and challenges. In addition, social health involves health indexes in a community that resides in a geographical location. Social factors also affect social health, and social dimensions are more emphasised, compared with individual health, in this regard (Yeary et al. 2012). Figures and statistics reported about divorce, unemployment, corruption, insurance and other social issues or growth rates are considered as the information about social health (Diener & Tov 2012). Besides, social health has very broad dimensions and includes any subjects related to community health. Various social services, such as insurance, public education and government policies in different areas of community health and their extent also show the high importance of this issue in all aspects of community life. Moreover, different aspects of social health can shape each other. Psychological, economic, political, physical and social dimensions are thus considered in social health and each one affects the other. For instance, an important political or economic phenomenon in the community can either improve or threaten individuals' psychological health (Diener & Tov 2012).

## Social health in the Holy Quran

In the Holy Quran, multiple Ayats have mentioned community health and have even provided a roadmap for Muslims to achieve social health. God says:

[O] you who believe! obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the last day; this is better and very good in the end. (Surah An-Nisa, Ayat 13)

Therefore, from the Islamic point of view, the first and foremost strategy to form a healthy society is the establishment of a monotheistic system based on *Walayah*. This strategy can be defined as the governance level. According to the Holy Quran, three major strategies must exist in a community to establish a healthy Islamic society, including justice, cooperation and unity. There are also many Ayats in the Holy Quran about justice, such as Surah Al-Hadid, Ayat 25, in

which, God says: ‘Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity’ (Surah Al-Hadid, Ayat 25). If, as we know, justice is defined as putting everything in its place, it must be said that the divine commandments have been proposed with the aim of regulating society and putting everything in its place. This definition leads to the second strategy, that is, cooperation. In addition to reviewing some rules and rituals in Surah Al-Ma’idah, Ayat 2, God says:

[O] you who believe! do not violate the signs appointed by Allah nor the sacred month, nor (interfere with) the offerings, nor the sacrificial animals with garlands, nor those going to the sacred house seeking the grace and pleasure of their Lord; and when you are free from the obligations of the pilgrimage, then hunt, and let not hatred of a people – because they hindered you from the Sacred Masjid- incite you to exceed the limits, and help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil).

In fact, justice is achieved as a result of cooperation in the implementation of divine rules. Meanwhile, the execution of divine commands is made possible by resorting to and following the Holy Quran and Sunnah, referred to as the third strategy, known as unity. In Surah Al Imran, Ayat 103, God says:

[A]nd hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it, thus does Allah make clear to you His communications that you may follow the right way.

Muslim thinkers have further mentioned different examples of the ‘rope of God’ such as the religion of Islam, monotheism and guardianship, Ahl al-Bayt and the Holy Quran. Overall, a healthy community can be established by using the mentioned strategies at the governmental, public and individual levels. The system of government should be thus based on divine Walayah, whereas it should seek the realisation of justice, cooperation and collective unity at the general administrative level of society. Moreover, strategies such as perfection, righteousness, Shari’a-centredness and rationalism are the most central ones required to form a healthy society at the individual level.

## Methodology

The present study aimed to evaluate the relationship between Islamic lifestyle and social health among Muslim teachers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2020–21, to address the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis:* Islamic Lifestyle has a significant positive effect on social health.

The statistical population included 1000 Muslim teachers at various levels of education. The minimum sample size was

also estimated by 278, using Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) table. To obtain sufficient data, 350 questionnaires were distributed among the teachers, selected via simple random sampling method, and 334 completed questionnaires were returned. According to the data obtained, 43% of the participants were female and the rest (57%) were male. Moreover, 32% of the teachers were aged below 35 years, whereas 46% and 22% of the participants were aged 35–45 years and above 45 years, respectively. Furthermore, 66% of the participants were married and 34% of them were single. Moreover, the data were collected using Kaviani’s (2011) Islamic Lifestyle Survey and the standardised Social Well-Being Questionnaire developed by Keyes (1998). The former contained 30 items to evaluate the thinking, social, ethical, financial, belief, health, family, chronology, security and worship components. On the other hand, the latter encompassed 15 items to reflect on the five components of social integration, social acceptance, social actualisation, social contribution and social coherence. The reliability of the questionnaires was further confirmed at the Cronbach’s alpha above 0.7 (Table 1) (Momeni & Faal Qayoumi 2019). In addition, the validity of the given instruments was established based on the opinions of experts in the fields of sociology and theology, such as university professors who were conducting notable research on similar topics. Moreover, data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

## Data analysis

In this study, the structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to evaluate the relationship between the variables concerned, as depicted in Figure 1. If the relationship between the variables was a positive decimal number, the relationship would be positive. In addition, the relationship between the research variables could be significant given that the t-value was above 1.96. Table 2 presents the results of testing the research hypothesis.

## Discussion

As discussed in the present study, Islamic lifestyle plays an important role in the individual and social life of citizens. Lifestyle also indicates the amount of influence of systems, cultures and civilisations within societies. All systems of thought accordingly attempt to present certain lifestyles to people to survive and implement their ideals. Meanwhile, if a society does not accept the lifestyle of a

**TABLE 1:** Evaluating the reliability of the study questionnaires.

Components of Islamic lifestyle	Cronbach’s alpha	Components of social health	Cronbach’s alpha
Thinking	0.78	Social integration	0.81
Social	0.75		
Ethical	0.81	Social acceptance	0.85
Financial	0.80		
Belief	0.76	Social actualisation	0.76
Health	0.83		
Family	0.82	Social contribution	0.78
Chronology	0.84		
Security	0.74	Social coherence	0.81
Worship	0.83		

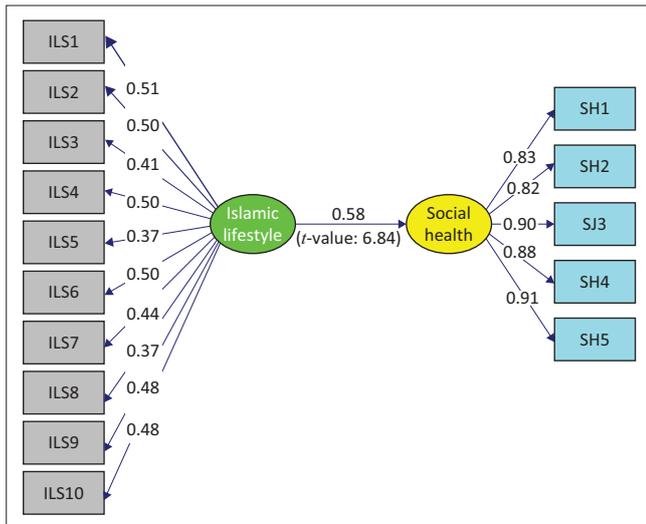


FIGURE 1: Structural equation modelling.

TABLE 2: Hypothesis test results.

Research hypothesis	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	Results
Islamic lifestyle → Social health	0.58	6.84	Significant and positive

system, it means that it will reject the ideological foundations and values of that system. Islamic lifestyle does not mean ignoring material pleasures and blessings. In fact, this way of life is meaningful in the presence of God. Humans are not capable of living a fake life, and if that is the case, their lives will not last. Lifestyle also becomes Islamic when it is based on the Quranic teachings. When the Holy Qur'an instructs believers and seekers of truth to follow the example of the Prophet (Surah Al-Ahzab, Ayat 21), there is no doubt that Muslim men and women should follow the example of the Prophet and learn the general principles of behaviour from this great Islamic figure. Because this order of the Holy Quran is not specific to a certain time and place, the Prophet's adherence to such principles and the quality of their approach to deal with obstacles and act on them is a model for all human beings. The Holy Quran's view of social health is based on a monotheistic vision and worldview that distinguishes it from all other existing interpretations. In the existing scientific perspectives, social health is defined with a worldly view and according to the interactions of human beings with each other. In Western researchers' definitions, as mentioned before, social health is synonymous with the degree of performance of individuals and much attention is paid to the positive and negative behaviours of individuals in relation to others. Social health has received less attention in these definitions. In the meantime, the social health of the individual, society and government finds meaning in interaction with each other and in the light of divine revelation, because all human actions are in the direction of divine pleasure. In this respect, God says:

[W]ith it, Allah guides him who will follow His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by

His will and guides them to the right path. (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayat 16)

Following the divine commandments is a matter of worship even in physical health. In the collective dimension of social health, from the perspective of the Holy Quran, the family environment, place of residence and even occupations and habitats have divine meanings. Collective health along with individual health accordingly lays the foundations for a healthy society.

## Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, Islamic lifestyle had a significant positive effect on social health in Malaysia ( $p = 0.58$ ;  $t = 6.84$ ) as the  $p$ -value was positive and the  $t$ -value was over 1.96. It also means that Islamic lifestyle leads to improvements in social health. Given the significant role of teachers in the community in terms of educating the new generations, it is suggested to conduct similar studies in the future. However, a healthy community is identified by different strategies, which are the process and outcome of health in other areas. At the government level, these strategies include monotheism and Walayah, which is at the level of monotheism and denotes the right of guardianship and acts of lordship by God. Moreover, the Walayah of its messengers and pure Imams is connected to Hazrat Haqq through revelation, and they carry out the divine rule on earth. At the public level, a healthy society must promote justice at the community level based on unity and cooperation. Cooperation accordingly recommends collaboration and assistance to establish charity and piety in society, whereas unity presupposes harmony in the words and coordination in the affairs of the Islamic society. Along with these two general strategies, there is another fundamental strategy, known as the implementation of justice in society. At the individual level, human beings should also pursue the grand goals of a healthy society based on rationalism, perfection, right-centeredness and Shari'a-centeredness, which means happiness in this world and the hereafter. According to the results of the present study, religious lifestyle plays an important role in social health. The citizens of the community are thus recommended to form their lifestyle based on Islamic teachings to benefit from the advantages of personal and social health.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

The authors contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Alim Al Ayub Ahmed, upon reasonable request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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