
***Ukhuwah* and Friendship as Spiritual Social Capital in Improving Subjective Well-Being and Mental Health: An Integrative Conceptual Study of Islamic Perspectives**

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

ukhuwah, friendship, subjective well-being, mental health, spiritual social capital.

Modernization and urbanization have changed the patterns of social relations in society and contributed to the increase in mental health problems, especially in urban Muslim communities. The dominant clinically oriented approach to mental health is considered suboptimal without the integration of social and spiritual dimensions. This research aims to analyze the role of *ukhuwah* and friendship as spiritual social capital in improving the subjective well-being and mental health of the Muslim community. The method used is an integrative literature review conducted by analyzing reputable scientific publications, global health reports, and classical and contemporary Islamic literature. The results of the study show that *ukhuwah* strengthens social identity, spiritual solidarity, and a sense of belonging in the community, while communal gathering improves the quality of interpersonal communication and emotional support. Both form a spiritual social capital that contributes significantly to increased life satisfaction, emotional stability, and a reduced risk of mental health disorders. These findings are in line with the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which confirms that the quality of social relationships is a major predictor of long-term happiness and health. This study concludes that strengthening *ukhuwah* and friendship can serve as a community-based promotive-preventive strategy in the promotion of mental health within the Muslim community.

INTRODUCTION

Social changes in the modern era have fundamentally changed the way humans interact (Greenfield, 2016). Rapid urbanization, high workplace productivity pressures, and the dominance of digital technology over daily routines indirectly undermine the quality of social bonds. Although technology simplifies communication, virtual relationships can rarely match the emotional intensity of face-to-face meetings. This situation triggers a rise in loneliness, psychological burden, and a decline in social solidarity among contemporary society (Putnam, 2000; World Health Organization (WHO), 2022).

In Indonesia, the issue of mental health is now in the main spotlight. National statistics indicate an increase in mild to moderate emotional disturbances among working-age people, triggered primarily by a lack of social support, financial stress, and loss of purpose in life. This indicates that clinically oriented mental health strategies alone are less effective without integrating social-psychological aspects holistically (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023; WHO, 2022).

In positive psychology and public health, subjective well-being is a key measure of a person's quality of life. This concept encompasses life satisfaction, emotional balance, and the balance of positive and negative affect. Studies indicate that low subjective well-being makes individuals more susceptible to mental problems, decreased work performance, and difficulty adapting to social-environmental pressures (Diener, 1984; Seligman, 2011).

Friendship is understood as a relational process that is not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual. Activities such as family visits, participation in social activities, and long-distance communication through digital media can still strengthen social relationships if they are based on the value of affection and the intention to maintain brotherhood. This confirms that friendship has high relevance in building spiritual social capital, especially in the midst of modern social transformation that tends to weaken emotional closeness between individuals (Safrizal, 2025).

The quality of social relationships is a crucial determining factor for mental well-being. Close interpersonal bonds, affective support, and a sense of communal belonging serve as protective factors against stress and anxiety. However, today's social conditions create a paradox, where physical proximity does not guarantee emotional closeness due to the erosion of meaningful relationships (Waldinger & Schulz, 2015; Putnam, 2000). Western approaches in the social sciences typically focus on social capital through networking, trust, and community engagement. Although valuable for the analysis of modern dynamics, adaptation for Indonesian Muslim society appears necessary. For religious groups, social interaction goes beyond mere worldly relationships, encompassing spiritual dimensions and transcendent worship (Putnam, 2000; Hassan, 2010).

Islam provides *ukhuwah* and friendship as the main foundation of harmonious relations. *Ukhuwah* builds brotherhood based on faith, empathy, and solidarity, while friendship maintains family-community bonds as a moral-spiritual obligation. This principle not only strengthens social bonds, but also increases psychological resilience through emotional support, a sense of togetherness, and existential meaning (Shihab, 2007; Al-Ghazali, 2013). Recent research confirms that religious practices based on care, empathy, and altruism are positively associated with an increase in subjective well-being and a reduction in anxiety and stress. Spirituality acts as a fortress that fosters emotional stability, optimism, and resilience in facing life's challenges (Hassan, 2010; Yusuf & Hidayat, 2020).

However, empirical studies that combine *ukhuwah* and friendship with contemporary theories of subjective well-being and mental health are still rare. Most research separates the religious and psychological realms, so the synergy between Islamic values and mental health science has not been explored to the fullest. In fact, the social-psychological-spiritual integrative model is essential to overcome the mental health crisis of modern Muslims (Rahman, 2009; Ryff, 1995). Therefore, this research is relevant to explore the role of *ukhuwah* and friendship as social-spiritual capital to improve subjective well-being and mental health. This conceptual integrative framework is expected to contribute theoretically to the Islamic mental health literature, as well as to offer practical implications for mental health promotion programs, character building, and strengthening Muslim solidarity in the present era (Seligman, 2011; Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

This research aims to explore the role of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and friendship as a form of spiritual social capital in improving the subjective well-being and mental health of

the Muslim community. The study also aims to analyze the integration of Islamic spiritual values with contemporary theories of mental health, focusing on how these social connections can strengthen emotional resilience, reduce stress, and improve individual psychological stability. In addition, this study seeks to develop a conceptual framework that connects social capital, subjective well-being, and mental health from an Islamic perspective, so as to provide a holistic approach to improving mental health in modern Muslim societies. Thus, this research is also expected to contribute to the mental health literature, particularly in connecting social and spiritual aspects in the context of Muslim communities.

This research is expected to make a practical contribution in designing community-based mental health programs, which prioritize strengthening *ukhuwah* and friendship as a strategy to promote mental well-being and prevent mental health disorders among Muslim communities. Theoretically, this research will enrich the understanding of the integration of social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions in the study of mental health, as well as bridge the gap between Islamic values and modern psychological theories. This research also has important policy implications, by demonstrating the need for mental health programs based on strengthening social relationships, emotional support, and spiritual practices in Muslim communities. In addition, this research is expected to have a positive social impact by encouraging active involvement in strengthening social ties and solidarity in urban Muslim communities, as well as increasing the psychosocial resilience of these communities.

METHOD

This study employed an integrative literature review approach. Data were obtained through a search of scientific literature from reputable national and international journals, reports of global health organizations, as well as classical and contemporary Islamic references. Source inclusion criteria included scientific publications discussing subjective well-being, mental health, social capital, and Islamic spirituality; empirical and theoretical articles published within the last ten years; and Islamic literature relevant to the concepts of *ukhuwah* and friendship. The analysis was carried out using a thematic approach by identifying the main concepts, grouping findings, and conducting theoretical synthesis to build a conceptual model of the relationship between *ukhuwah*, friendship, spiritual social capital, subjective well-being, and mental health.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

***Ukhuwah* and Friendship as Spiritual Social Capital**

The results of this study show that *ukhuwah* and friendship have a strategic role as a form of spiritual social capital that strengthens the subjective well-being and mental health of the Muslim community. *Ukhuwah* serves as the foundation of brotherhood based on faith, empathy, and social solidarity, while friendship is a practical mechanism that maintains interpersonal relationships in a sustainable manner.

Putnam (2000) explained that social capital is formed through social networks, beliefs, and reciprocal norms that increase community cohesion. In the context of Islam, social capital is strengthened by a spiritual dimension that gives transcendental meaning to social relations (Hassan, 2010). This makes *ukhuwah* and friendship not only social interaction, but also worship that has positive psychological implications.

Research by Yusuf and Hidayat (2020) shows that Islamic spirituality has a significant correlation with increasing subjective well-being through strengthening the meaning of life, optimism, and emotional stability. This finding is in line with the results of this study which places *ukhuwah* and friendship as protective factors for mental health.

Friendship as a Means of Quality Interpersonal Communication

Safrizal (2025) emphasized that gathering plays a role as a form of interpersonal communication that strengthens emotional relationships, increases social solidarity, and creates a sense of togetherness in the community. Friendship involves not only verbal communication, but also nonverbal aspects such as empathy, body language, and emotional presence.

In the perspective of social psychology, quality interpersonal communication contributes to the improvement of the psychological well-being of individuals. Individuals who have warm and supportive social relationships show lower levels of stress and better social adaptability (Seligman, 2011).

The findings of Safrizal (2025) show that gathering provides space for information exchange, peaceful conflict resolution, and strengthening the sense of belonging in social groups. This supports the results of this study which places friendship as the main instrument in building social and mental welfare based on Islamic values.

***Ukhuwah*, Friendship, and Subjective Well-Being**

Subjective well-being according to Diener (1984) includes life satisfaction, high positive affect, and low negative affect. *Ukhuwah* and friendship contribute directly to these three components through increasing social support, emotional security, and strengthening the meaning of life.

Seligman (2011) explained that meaningful social relationships are one of the main pillars of psychological well-being. Individuals who have strong social attachments tend to be more optimistic, more resilient to stress, and have higher life satisfaction.

In the context of urban Muslim society, *ukhuwah* expands social support networks across communities, while gatherings strengthen family ties and interpersonal relationships. The combination of the two forms a social ecosystem that supports emotional balance and mental stability

Integration of the Harvard Study of Adult Development Findings

The results of this study obtained strong empirical validation from the Harvard Study of Adult Development led by Robert Waldinger. This longitudinal study since 1938 involved more than 700 participants who were monitored for more than 85 years (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Waldinger (2015) concludes that quality social relationships are a major predictor of happiness, physical health, and long-term mental health.

Individuals who have warm interpersonal relationships are shown to live longer, have better health conditions, and more stable cognitive function. Talen (2024) in his scientific review emphasized that the main message of this study is that "good relationships keep us healthier and happier". Social relationships are not just an emotional factor, but a determinant of health comparable to conventional medical factors. These findings are consistent with the results of this study which shows that *ukhuwah* and gathering function as a form of meaningful social relations that have direct implications for the quality of life of Muslims.

Synthesis of Samarchyan's Findings on Happiness and Social Relations

Samarchyan (2024) summarizes seven main findings from the Harvard Study that are relevant to this study. First, strong social relationships have been shown to prolong life and increase happiness. The impact of loneliness is even equated with the risk of heavy smoking and obesity.

Second, material wealth and achievement are not the primary determinants of long-term happiness. Older individuals regret losing time with their families more than economic failures. Third, physical health plays a role as the foundation of psychological well-being. Light physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of mortality and slow down the decline in cognitive function.

Fourth, toxic interpersonal relationships increase stress and accelerate biological aging. This confirms that the quality of the relationship is more important than the quantity of the relationship. Fifth, giving activities and social engagement increase the meaning of life and existential satisfaction. Sixth, social isolation is increasing in the digital age and is a serious threat to mental health. Seventh, safe social relationships protect brain function and lower the risk of dementia.

These findings strengthen the argument that *ukhuwah* and *silaturahmi* as a form of Islamic social relations have scientific relevance in building mental well-being and long-term happiness.

Implications for the Mental Health of the Muslim Community

The WHO (2022) emphasizes that mental health is not only related to the absence of mental disorders, but also the ability of individuals to manage stress, work productively, and establish healthy social relationships. *Ukhuwah* and friendship fulfill these three dimensions. Social relationships based on spiritual values create a sense of psychological security, strengthen social identity, and increase emotional resilience.

A promotive-preventive approach to Muslim community-based mental health needs to integrate strengthening *ukhuwah*, revitalizing mosque social activities, family gathering forums, and social empowerment programs as sustainable mental health intervention strategies.

Integrative Model of *Ukhuwah*–Friendship–Subjective Well-Being

Based on the results of the study, an integrative conceptual model can be formulated as follows:

1. *Ukhuwah* strengthens social identity and spiritual solidarity.
2. Friendship strengthens interpersonal communication and emotional support.
3. Both form spiritual social capital.
4. Spiritual social capital increases subjective well-being.
5. Subjective well-being strengthens mental health and quality of life.

This model shows that the mental well-being of Muslims can be systematically improved through the strengthening of social relations based on Islamic values.

The Role of *Ukhuwah* and Friendship in Improving Mental Health

Mental health is a condition of psychological well-being that allows individuals to manage life stress, function productively, and build healthy social relationships (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). In the context of a modern society characterized by increasing work pressure, urbanization, and social fragmentation, mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and chronic stress are on the rise.

The results of this study show that *ukhuwah* and friendship have a strategic role as a protective factor for mental health. Social interaction based on the values of empathy, caring, and spirituality contributes to strengthening psychological resilience, emotional stability, and a sense of social security. Individuals who are actively involved in religious-based social networks tend to have lower stress levels as well as better emotional balance (Hassan, 2010).

Research by Yusuf and Hidayat (2020) found that Islamic spirituality is significantly related to a reduction in anxiety symptoms and an increase in psychological well-being. Religious values give meaning to life experiences, help individuals accept difficulties adaptively, and strengthen faith-based coping mechanisms. These findings are reinforced by the Harvard Study of Adult Development which shows that the quality of interpersonal relationships is a major predictor of long-term mental health (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Individuals with warm social relationships showed lower rates of depression, better emotional stability, and higher life satisfaction into old age (Waldinger, 2015).

Talen (2024) emphasized that quality social relationships play a protective role in mental disorders because they provide emotional support, social validation, and a healthy space for emotional processing. Stable interpersonal relationships help individuals cope with life's trauma, loss, and stress.

In contrast, social isolation and loneliness have been shown to increase the risk of mental health disorders. Samarchy (2024) reports that individuals who experience chronic loneliness have a higher risk of depression, anxiety disorders, cardiovascular disease, as well as decreased cognitive function. Loneliness is even equated with severe health risk factors such as smoking and obesity. In an Islamic perspective, *ukhuwah* and friendship conceptually function as a mechanism for the prevention of mental disorders. *Ukhuwah* creates a sense of belonging and collective social identity, while gathering provides a safe space for emotional communication. The combination of the two helps to lower feelings of isolation, increase social support, and strengthen the psychological balance of the individual.

Furthermore, friendship acts as a means of regulating emotions. Face-to-face interactions allow individuals to express emotions, gain empathy, and build healthy social attachment. This process is important in preventing the accumulation of stress and internal conflicts that can develop into mental disorders. Thus, *ukhuwah* and gathering can be positioned as community-based preventive social interventions in promoting the mental health of the Muslim community. Programs to strengthen mosque communities, family forums, study groups, and care-based social activities can be a promotive strategy to reduce the burden of mental disorders in the population.

CONCLUSION

This integrative conceptual study demonstrated that *ukhuwah* and *silaturahmi* function as strategic forms of spiritual social capital in improving the subjective well-being and mental health of the Muslim community. The literature synthesis revealed that *ukhuwah*, as a foundation of faith-based brotherhood, strengthened social identity, solidarity, and a sense of belonging, while *silaturahmi* served as a practical mechanism for sustaining emotional support, empathic communication, and interpersonal stability — together contributing to increased life satisfaction, positive affect, and reduced negative affect. These findings aligned with the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which confirmed that the quality of social

relationships is the strongest predictor of long-term happiness and mental health, and with broader evidence indicating that spiritually grounded social interaction strengthens psychological resilience, coping mechanisms, and protection against anxiety and depression. The integrative *ukhuwah*–*silaturahmi*–spiritual social capital model formulated in this study positioned meaningful social relationships as a primary pathway to mental well-being, pointing to the practical need for community-based programs — such as revitalizing the role of mosques, family forums, and care-based social activities — as promotive-preventive mental health strategies. Future research should pursue empirical validation of this conceptual model through longitudinal and mixed-methods studies across diverse Muslim populations, in order to establish causal pathways and inform culturally grounded mental health policy and intervention design.

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