

The Concept of Family Well-Being from the Perspectives of Islam, Western Thought and Malaysia Madani

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ABSTRACT

Family is the fundamental institution in shaping a prosperous society; however, it currently faces numerous challenges. Statistics indicate a declining marriage rate, a rising number of divorces, and an alarming increase in social crimes within the community. These issues necessitate a re-examination of the concept of family well-being, which serves as the foundation for building a civilized and morally upright society. The primary objective of this study is to identify and analyze the concept of family well-being from the perspectives of Islam, the West and Malaysia Madani. This research adopts a qualitative approach using content analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Content analysis is chosen as it allows the researcher to systematically identify and analyze the concept of family well-being, in order to trace the similarities, differences, and points of integration among the Islamic, Western, and Malaysia Madani perspectives. This study finds that the concept of family well-being in Islam is the most comprehensive, as it is grounded in divine revelation and encompasses both worldly and eternal well-being. Islam emphasizes that the foundation of well-being begins with faith, ṣaliḥ actions and good character, supported by the preservation of the maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah—namely the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. In contrast, the Western perspective on well-being focuses more on psychological well-being and self-actualization, while the Malaysia Madani framework emphasizes social policies and the welfare of citizens. Both can be seen as complementary to the broader framework of family well-being. Nevertheless, the Islamic paradigm remains central, as it integrates material, emotional, and social well-being with divine blessings and the pursuit of Allah’s pleasure, thereby ensuring not only happiness in this world but also lasting well-being in the Hereafter.

Keywords: Well-being, Family, Islam, West, Malaysia Madani

INTRODUCTION

The family is regarded as the most significant social institution in human life. Any discussion on family-related issues is inherently relevant to all members of society, whether married or otherwise (Nurhafilah Musa, 2000). Family well-being can be understood as a state in which the family experiences holistic happiness and harmony—both physically and emotionally—founded upon love and affection (Zainutah Subhan, 2004). Therefore, a well-functioning and harmonious family not only produces morally upright individuals, but also contributes meaningfully to societal cohesion and national stability (Che Hasniza & Fatimah, 2011).

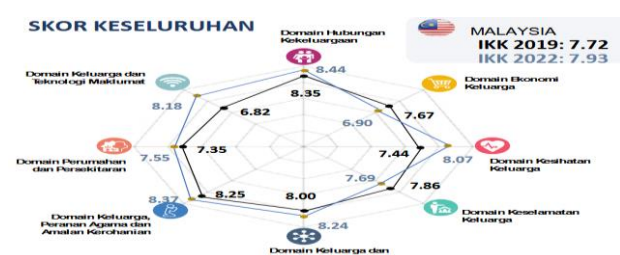


Figure 1.0: Family Well-Being Index (FWBI), 2019 & 2022

Source: Malaysian Family Well-Being Index Report, 2019 & 2022

Based on Figure 1.0, family well-being is measured through the Malaysian Family Well-Being Index (FWBI), which comprises nine key domains. The FWBI report indicates an overall score increase from 7.72 in 2019 to 7.93 in 2022, reflecting a positive trend in family well-being despite the country facing major challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and social changes. Domain-level analysis revealed that family relationships scored the highest at 8.44, followed by religious roles and spiritual practices (8.25), and family safety (7.86). These findings illustrate that the main strengths of Malaysian families continue to lie in emotional bonds, communication, mutual support, and religious adherence, which serve as key protective factors during times of crisis.

However, a significant weakness was identified in the family and information technology domain, which recorded the lowest score of 6.82. This suggests that digital literacy among families remains low and they are vulnerable to the negative effects of technology use. In addition, the family economic domain (7.67) and economic participation domain (8.00) also remained at a moderate level, indicating that the cost of living, income stability, and household debt continue to be major challenges. Overall, the increase in scores across nearly all domains demonstrates that Malaysian families are experiencing improvements in well-being. However, greater attention must be given to enhancing technological literacy within families, so that family well-being can be strengthened in a balanced manner across spiritual, social and material dimensions.

Furthermore, according to the Malaysian Happiness Index (MURNInets) report as illustrated in Figure 2.0, the overall level of happiness among Malaysians has shown an upward trend which is from 81.12% in 2019 to 88.84% in 2025.

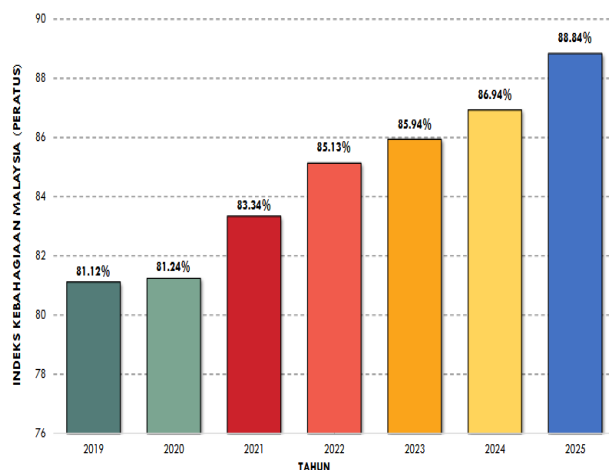


Figure 2.0: Malaysian Happiness Index (MURNInets)

Source: Malaysian Urban Happiness Report 2025

However, this positive outlook does not necessarily reflect the actual situation within Malaysian society, as other data such as persistently high divorce rates and crime levels suggest that family well-being remains fragile and faces a range of serious challenges. According to Figure 3.0, the number of marriages in Malaysia from 2016 to 2023 generally remained around 200,000 per year, but experienced a sharp decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, before rebounding in 2021 and 2022, and then declining again in 2023. Meanwhile, the number of divorces remained around 50,000 cases between 2016 and 2018, increased in 2019, dropped during the pandemic years 2020–2021, but surged significantly to over 60,000 in 2022, before slightly declining again in 2023. A comparison of both trends reveals a narrowing gap between marriage and divorce rates, indicating that while marriage rates have recovered post-pandemic, divorce rates have also risen sharply. Moreover, divorce has adverse effects not only on the husband and wife, but also on the psychological well-being of children and extended family members (Awang Nib Zuhairi Awang Ahmad et al., 2021). This reflects a lack of well-being within the family unit.



Figure 3.0: Number of Marriages and Divorces, 2016–2023

Source: Malaysia Marriage and Divorce Statistics, 2024

Additionally, the Malaysia Crime Index Statistics (2024) report indicates that the total number of criminal cases remains high, with 52,974 cases in 2021, 50,813 cases in 2022, and 52,444 cases in 2023. This situation raises a critical question: how is it possible that Malaysians appear increasingly “happy” at the macro level, while the family institution becomes more fragile and crime rates continue to rise? This phenomenon clearly demonstrates that the general happiness measured through national indices does not necessarily align with the true well-being of families, as the latter involves more complex dimensions encompassing spiritual, emotional, social, and psychological aspects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis of various relevant written sources. Primary sources consist of the Qur'an, Hadith, works of Islamic scholars, as well as official documents related to the Malaysia Madani concept. Secondary sources include books, academic articles, and both international and local reports discussing family well-being. Content analysis was selected as the method because it enables the researcher to systematically identify and compare concepts of family well-being, tracing similarities, differences, and points of integration between the Islamic, Western, and Malaysia Madani perspectives.

Concept Of Family Well-Being

To gain a deeper understanding of family well-being, this discussion examines the concept from three key perspectives which are Islamic, Western, and Malaysia Madani with the aim of identifying points of similarity, difference, and potential integration, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

Concept of Family Well-Being in Islam

The Islamic concept of family well-being is fundamentally rooted in the Qur'an, Hadith, and ijtihad as its primary sources. These sources not only provide a foundation for legal rulings but also offer a comprehensive framework of values that ensure the well-being of the family unit (Awang Nib Zuhairi Awang Ahmad et al., 2023). Islam emphasizes that true well-being in life must be built upon a foundation of faith and righteous action (Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, 1995).

In the Qur'an, there are various terms that refer to the concept of well-being in life and within the family. Among them are: *al-sa'adah* (happiness), *al-falah* (success), *al-fawz* (victory), *al-salm* (safety), *ladhdhah* (pleasure), *mata'* (comfort), *ni'mah* (blessing), *sakinah* (tranquility), *muṭmainnah* (inner peace), *aflaha* (prosperity), *amnu* (security), *salam* (peace), *farihin* (joy), *yastabshir* (glad tidings), *su'idu* (those who are happy), and *ḥayatan ṭayyibah* (a good life) (Hamzah Ya'qub, 1980). As Allah SWT states:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنَّثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ٩٧

Meaning: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer – We will surely grant them a good life; and We will surely reward them according to the best of what they used to do."
(Surah al-Nahl, 16:97)

Al-Qurtubī, in his work *al-Jāmi‘ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān* (1964), compiled various scholarly interpretations of the term *ḥayatan ṭayyibah* (a good life). Among these interpretations are: blessing in deeds, inner happiness, lawful sustenance, the reward of Paradise, and others. This explanation is further supported by al-Sa‘dī (2000), who emphasized that a good life is manifested through inner peace and strength of faith, even in times of hardship. In the context of family, this principle suggests that domestic well-being is not solely dependent on material factors, but must be founded upon faith, righteous actions, and the value of blessing. This is in line with the saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

عَنْ سَعْدِ بْنِ أَبِي وَقَّاصٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ (أَرْبَعٌ مِنَ السَّعَادَةِ الْمَرْأَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ وَالْمَسْكَنُ الْوَاسِعُ وَالْجَارُ الصَّالِحُ وَالْمَرْكَبُ الْهَنِيءُ وَأَرْبَعٌ مِنَ الشَّقَاوَةِ الْجَارُ السُّوءُ وَالْمَرْأَةُ السُّوءُ وَالْمَسْكَنُ الضَّيِّقُ وَالْمَرْكَبُ السُّوءُ)

Meaning: Narrated by Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (may Allah be pleased with him): The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “Four things are part of happiness: a righteous wife, a spacious dwelling, a good neighbor and a comfortable mount. And four things are part of misery: a bad neighbour, a bad wife, a cramped home, and a troublesome mount.” (Reported by Ibn Ḥibbān, Kitāb al-Nikāḥ, Chapter: Mention of reports on things that bring happiness to a person in this world, vol. 9, p. 340, ḥadīth no. 4032)

This hadith demonstrates that family well-being in Islam encompasses not only spiritual dimensions such as faith and the righteousness of spouses but also physical and social elements, including a comfortable residence, reliable transportation, and righteous neighbors. These factors are integral to fostering a holistic sense of well-being within the family unit (Wan Mohd Yusuf Wan Chik et al., 2018). Conversely, negative influences such as a spouse with poor character, inadequate or cramped living conditions, and harmful neighbors can significantly undermine emotional well-being, lead to conflict, and ultimately disrupt domestic harmony. Furthermore, an unhealthy family environment may contribute to the persistence of broader social issues within the community, such as drug abuse (Farah Syazwah Mohd Ghazalli et al., 2018).

In addition, al-Ghazali (2003) views family well-being as a condition in which the family practices Islam in a comprehensive manner, beginning with the fundamentals of religious obligations (*fardū ‘ain*) that emphasize the aspects of creed (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), and morality (*akhlaq*). Al-Zuhaylī (2000) also stresses that achieving family well-being requires adherence to the *shari‘ah* as prescribed by Allah (SWT), as well as embodying the moral character outlined in Islam. According to al-Zuhaylī, the ultimate aim of a prosperous family is to attain happiness in this world and dignity in the Hereafter. In this regard, parents play a vital role in ensuring that the *aqidah*, *shari‘ah*, and *akhlaq* of family members remain aligned with Islamic teachings. Parents are also responsible for guiding, advising, and educating their children from an early age so that they develop a strong foundation in faith, consistent religious practices, and commendable character (Siti Noor Farahin M. Fariddudin et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Islam positions the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*) as the primary framework for safeguarding human welfare and ensuring family well-being. This framework is founded upon five essential principles: protection of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), protection of intellect (*ḥifẓ al-‘aql*), protection of lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) and protection of property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). Any measure that upholds these five foundations is considered a form of public benefit (*maṣlaḥah*), while anything that harms them is deemed harm (*mafsadah*); thus, the prevention of *mafsadah* is also categorized as *maṣlaḥah*. Al-Ghazali classifies the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* into three levels: essential needs that must be preserved for the stability of religion and worldly life, encompassing the five core elements (*al-darūriyyāt*), important but non-essential needs that serve to complement welfare (*al-hājiyyāt*) and supplementary needs that enhance quality of life, facilitate ease, and uphold proper etiquette and social dealings (*al-taḥṣīniyyāt*) (al-Ghazali, 2008).

Based on the above explanation, well-being can be divided into two categories: worldly well-being and well-being in the Hereafter. However, well-being in the Hereafter is regarded as the ultimate goal, as it is eternal and perfect, whereas worldly well-being is temporary and subject to the trials and challenges of life. Therefore, Islam emphasizes that worldly well-being should serve as a mean (*wasīlah*) to attain well-being in the Hereafter.

The Concept of Family Well-Being According to Western Perspectives

According to Western scholars, the concept of family well-being is abstract and difficult to measure (Shin & Johnson, 1978). However, there are several terms that are often used in relation to family well-being. Western scholars have outlined a number of characteristics associated with a happy family. Family well-being is not measured solely through material means, but also includes emotional and psychological factors (A. Khawari & Khawari, 1989).

A well-functioning family also encompasses strong emotional bonds, closeness among members, mutual affection, cooperation, love, complementarity, and the ability to compensate for each other's shortcomings (Nuerbauer & Lank, 1998; Astrachan & McMillian, 2003). Western scholars use various terms to describe family well-being, such as "happy family," "family harmony," and "wellness family." All these terms convey a similar meaning—namely, feelings of happiness, peace, and well-being among family members (Hamzah Ya'qub, 1980).

Greek philosophers were among the earliest Western thinkers to explore the concept of well-being. Some of the most renowned philosophers include Socrates (469 BC – 399 BC), Plato (427 BC – 347 BC), and Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) (Mursi, 2000). The philosophy of well-being according to Socrates can be understood through his famous maxim: "Know thyself." According to him, self-knowledge leads an individual to examine truth, goodness, and personal happiness (Baryali Fetrat, 2020).

Plato, on the other hand, divided well-being into two categories: worldly well-being and ultimate well-being. Worldly well-being is achieved when the rational soul (*nafs al-'aqliah*) governs the irascible (*ghadabiyyah*) and appetitive (*shahwaniyyah*) souls. Ultimate well-being, according to Plato, is only experienced at the moment of death when the soul departs the body. However, this well-being cannot be attained if a person remains immersed in impurity, desires, and ignorance (Mursi, 2000).

Aristotle proposed that well-being must meet five key conditions. First, physical health and functional senses. Second, the attainment of wealth, children, power, and status. Third, success in one's career and personal aspirations. Fourth, intellectual well-being, wisdom, and a correct belief system. And fifth, a good reputation along with social acceptance and recognition from others (Mursi, 2000).

The concept of well-being according to Western scholars can also be examined through the perspectives of Western psychologists. One of the most prominent psychologists who discussed this concept is Abraham Maslow. He developed a theory that seeks to determine the factors contributing to an individual's well-being, known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow identified five levels of human needs that influence an individual's well-being: first, physiological needs; second, safety needs; third, the need for love and belonging; fourth, the need for self-esteem; and fifth, the need for self-actualization (Ridzuan Masri et al., 2018).

The Concept of Family Well-Being in Malaysia Madani

The concept of Malaysia Madani emerged in response to the growing societal challenges and imbalances affecting various aspects of life in Malaysia, including the economic, political, and social spheres. Malaysia Madani is a slogan introduced by the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia as an integrated and holistic initiative aimed at shaping national policies and implementations to be more human-centric, continuously improved through public consultation (*musyawarah*) and feedback (Ummi Munirah, 2023). The slogan "Developing a Civil Malaysia (Malaysia Madani)", first introduced on 19 January 2023, encapsulates six core values: Sustainability (M), Well-being (A), Innovation (D), Respect (A), Trust (N), and Compassion (I). These values form the foundational framework and guiding philosophy of the Malaysia Madani concept, with each element being interrelated and mutually reinforcing (Anwar, 2023).

However, this study focuses specifically on well-being as a key element in the Malaysia Madani concept. The word well-being often means balance especially a balanced life in all aspects. It is also linked to the Arabic word *al-falāh*, which means success and happiness that comes from spiritual growth and obeying God's commands. Creating well-being for the people must include good and sustainable values. It should not focus only on material success, but also include spiritual and emotional needs. This kind of well-being is meant to be progressive and inclusive, allowing all Malaysians to grow and succeed without harming others (Anwar Ibrahim, 2023).

The vision of a Prosperous Malaysia is to build a peaceful and balanced country that grows economically while also strengthening spiritual values. It aims to uplift all Malaysians, no matter their religion, race, or background. This vision includes everyone, without leaving anyone behind. Building national well-being is an ongoing process that needs everyone's ideas and support. Well-being here is seen as a result of combining sustainability, creativity, respect, trust, and compassion (Anwar Ibrahim, 2023).

Any policy created must consider Malaysia's rich diversity of religions and cultures. If done right, these well-being-based policies can not only improve Malaysia's achievement and performance, but also become an example for other countries to follow (Anwar Ibrahim, 2023).

According to Malaysia Madani, well-being is rooted in efforts to build a balanced society in terms of economy, social development, and education. The Malaysia Madani framework aims to create a prosperous nation through sustainable and balanced economic growth, along with the strengthening of spiritual practices. At the same time, it seeks to empower all Malaysians, regardless of religion, ethnicity or background (Anwar Ibrahim, 2023).

The Madani vision of well-being emphasizes an ethical economy by restoring public savings, reforming the tax system, supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and introducing pro-B40 initiatives such as toll and PTPTN cancellations. From a legal perspective, new laws are introduced to protect workers, safeguard the environment and uphold judicial independence. Institutions are strengthened through big data, the well-being Index, and corporate involvement in social welfare. Education reforms include the Madani curriculum, a focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), language learning, and technology-driven universities that prioritize student well-being. Societal well-being is supported through healthcare schemes, open public discourse, anti-corruption culture, urban development through tech training and community space revitalization and rural support through agricultural incentives, FELDA debt cancellation and modern farming (Agriculture 4.0). In short, Madani integrates economic, social, cultural, and environmental efforts to ensure inclusive well-being for all Malaysians (Anwar Ibrahim, 2023).

Analysis Of The Concept Of Family Well-Being According To Islam, The West, And Malaysia Madani

The concept of family well-being is a broad idea that spans multiple disciplines and approaches, depending on the religious, philosophical, and intellectual frameworks applied.

Aspects	Similarities in the Concept of Family Well-Being in Islam, The West & Malaysia Madani
Spiritual/Religious	Emphasizes the importance of spiritual well-being as the foundation of family peace and stability
Emotional & Social	Values love, harmonious relationships, and good communication within family life.
Physical & Economic	Prioritizes the basic needs such as comfortable housing, food, and financial stability for family well-being.
Security	Ensures protection and safety of family members from physical and social threats.
Human Development	Focuses on holistic human development in terms of spiritual, moral, mental, and physical aspects.
Goals	Aims to create a happy life that is balanced, prosperous, and harmonious within the family.

Table 1.0: Similarities in the Concept of Family Well-Being in Islam, The West & Malaysia Madani

Table 1.0 presents the similarities among the three concepts of family well-being from the perspectives of Islam, Western thought and Malaysia Madani, indicating that family well-being cannot be viewed from a single dimension alone. All three perspectives acknowledge the importance of the spiritual aspect in shaping a happy and stable family. In Islam, well-being is founded on faith, righteous deeds and blessings. In contrast, Western thought understands well-being through emotional fulfilment and the search for life's meaning, as highlighted by thinkers such as Socrates and Maslow. The Malaysia Madani framework, meanwhile, integrates spiritual elements with values of compassion (ihsan) and humanity as key pillars within its national framework.

In addition, all three approaches recognize the necessity of physical and economic stability as fundamental to well-being. In Islam, factors such as a comfortable home, a good spouse and a peaceful environment are essential elements. From the Western perspective, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory emphasizes basic needs and security as foundations for psychological well-being. Malaysia Madani, on the other hand, stress on policy-based initiatives such as tax reform, financial aid for the B40 income group, and broader economic development to ensure material well-being for its citizens. Furthermore, all three concepts agree on the importance of close family relationships such as love, communication and emotional support in building a harmonious family.

Table 2.0 illustrates significant differences among the three concepts. In terms of sources of reference, Islam is based on divine revelation through the Quran and Sunnah, while Western thought is more secular and empirical, drawing from philosophy and psychological studies. Malaysia Madani, on the other hand, is grounded in national policies and inclusive humanitarian principles, fitting for a multicultural and multi-religious society.

Aspects	Islam	Western Thought	Malaysia Madani
Source/Reference	Al-Quran, Hadith, Ijtihad	Philosophy, Psychology, Social Sciences	Nation-state, Islamic and local values
Spiritual Aspect	Faith, righteous deeds	Belief in God, balance in life	Belief in God, spirituality in society
Physical & Economic Aspect	Stability, peace, lawful sustenance	Security, health, stability, well-being	B40 group empowerment, tax reform, economic development
Emotional & Social Aspect	Love, good relationships, righteous deeds	Mutual care, communication, love	Respect, tolerance, social welfare
Ultimate Goal	Well-being in this life as a preparation for the hereafter	Good life, achievement of goals	People's development and balanced progress
Target Scope	Family as the basic unit of society	Individual and family	All people regardless of background
Implementation Approach	Principles of Shariah (faith, worship, lineage, property)	Psychological theories (Maslow), philosophy (Plato, Aristotle)	Economic, spiritual, social, and legal policies

Table 2.0: Comparison of Family Well-Being Concepts: Islam, Western Thought, and Malaysia Madani

Regarding the ultimate goal, Islam emphasizes that worldly well-being is merely a mean to achieve eternal well-being in the hereafter. In contrast, Western thought focuses on life satisfaction and self-actualization in this world. Malaysia Madani stresses a balance between spiritual and physical development, as well as comprehensive national progress.

Differences are also proved in the scope of targets. Islam views the family as the basic unit of the *ummah* and underscores social and religious responsibilities. Western thought tends to focus more on the individual and family from psychological and emotional perspectives. Malaysia Madani considers well-being in a national context, where every policy is designed to benefit all citizens regardless of religion or ethnicity. In terms of implementation approaches, Islam follows the principles of objectives of Islamic law (maqāsid al-sharī'ah), the West uses psychological and philosophical methods, while Malaysia Madani formulates various policies and reforms touching on economic, educational, and social aspects.

The integration of these three approaches which are Islamic, Western and Malaysia Madani can create a more comprehensive model of family well-being. Islam provides the foundational values and ultimate purpose in life; Western thought contributes insights into psychological and emotional dimensions and Malaysia Madani offers a policy framework and conducive environment for society. Therefore, the integration of these perspectives is crucial in the context of contemporary Malaysia, which comprises a society rich in cultural, religious and social diversity.

CONCLUSION

The concept of family well-being according to Islam, Western thought and Malaysia Madani reveals clear similarities in their holistic approaches. All three perspectives emphasize that well-being cannot be measured solely by material aspects but must encompass emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Islam highlights the importance of faith, righteous deeds, tranquility and blessings as the fundamental pillars. Western thought focuses on emotional relationships, communication and self-actualization, while Malaysia Madani emphasizes a balance between economic, social, educational and spiritual needs within national policies. All recognize that harmonious family relationships, love and a safe environment form the essential foundation for happiness and well-being.

However, notable differences exist in epistemological foundations, ultimate goals and implementation mechanisms among the three frameworks. Islam is grounded primarily in divine revelation (the Quran and Sunnah) and the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*), in contrast to the West's reliance on rational philosophy and empirical social sciences. Malaysia Madani, meanwhile, is rooted in the nation's public policy, guided by MADANI values and modern administrative data. Regarding objectives, Islam stresses well-being in both this world and the hereafter to attain the pleasure of Allah SWT. Western thought emphasizes life happiness and personal achievement, whereas Malaysia Madani focuses on inclusive and sustainable societal well-being.

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