

# Views of Students at Universities and Religious Institutes towards Materialism, Gratitude, Satisfaction with Life, Spiritual Jihad, and Ecofriendly Consumption

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## Abstract

There is a constant debate among scholars in social sciences about the role of religion in spiritual struggles and satisfaction with life. The literature concerning the meditative effects of Islam, specifically the Quran is however not well explored. In this study, we use a quasi-experimental research design to explore the relationship between contemplation of Quran and materialism, gratitude, satisfaction with life, Spiritual Jihad, and eco-friendly consumption. The comparisons were made between two groups of students - students from mainstream educational institutes (n=255) and students from religious institutions and academies (n=204). The results indicated that the students from religious institutes engaged with higher spiritual jihad than university students and as a result had higher levels of gratitude and satisfaction with life. The students from religious institutes also had lower levels of materialism and higher environmental consciousness compared to university students. Furthermore, we were able to see clear gender differences in the levels of spiritual jihad, gratitude, life satisfaction and ecofriendly values among females' students, whereas males had scored higher on materialism. We conclude that these results were driven by higher levels of qur'anic contemplations among students engaging with higher contemplation had more positive values and attitudes leading to positive relationship between spiritual jihad and gratitude and life satisfaction. Lastly, there was an overall negative relationship between materialism and eco-friendly behavior. These findings have strong implications for our contemporary

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lifestyles and values and especially for Muslim populations.

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## **Introduction**

Research in the field of positive psychology reflects the growing importance of the role of religion in promoting positive values and in helping one deal with negative issues. The importance of Religion can also be assessed in the context of a global rise in mental health related wellness issues since religious faith tends to help people in difficult situations. For example, in the wake of the recent Christchurch Mosque shootings in New Zealand, remarkably many bereaved Muslim family members expressed their compassion and forgiveness instead of choosing hatred or revenge. This was an example of spiritual jihad<sup>1</sup>.

The term spiritual jihad refers literally to “struggling against the soul (al-nafs)<sup>2</sup> for the sake of God” (Picken, 2011). In the larger context, it is seen as an element of Islamic spirituality and helps an individual to move towards growth in the face of struggles. Spiritual jihad is an important concept for Muslims, especially in a world where Islamophobia continues to rise. In this context, Jihad is wrongly assumed to have strong negative connotations in terms of it being associated to just the battlefield and terrorism. However, the concept of spiritual jihad is much larger than that and has broader and far-reaching implications. This study attempts to highlight the positive impact of engaging in Quranic contemplation including spiritual jihad, gratitude, satisfaction with life, eco-friendly consumption, and anti-consumerism.

## **Quranic Contemplation: Implications for Spiritual Jihad**

In this world, people may face different kind of challenges and difficulties including moral, social, psychological, and personal ones. These may be caused by external factors in which case it is not in the hands of the individual or they may be caused by a desire of the nafs (soul) of that person in which case s/he should work against it. The Quran claims that people who claim to have faith will be tested with trials in this world (Qu’ran 29:2). This can be in the form of danger, hunger, loss of worldly

goods and lives but in return also promises Paradise on passing the test if they remain patient (Qu'ran 2:155). In fact, Muslims are being tested even when they are living a life of ease with generous sustenance (Qu'ran 89:15-17). Thus, the entire life of a Muslim can be considered a test as also explicitly stated in the Quran that "He created death and life in order to test humans" (Qu'ran 67:2). Apart from being patient, staying steadfast and mindful of God is described as the best course of action when facing a test (The Qu'ran 3:186). The Quran also calls the worldly life "matā' al ghurūr" (a life of deceit) if it is not buttressed by faith in the transcendental realm (al-ghayb) (The Quran 57:20-23). Only those people tend to overcome this deception and rise above the carnal desires who have mindfulness/consciousness of God and God's constant intervention in the world and in their lives. Otherwise, human beings tend to give prerogative to the worldly life (al-Ḥayāt al-Dunya) that leads them to transgress in many ways:

"Then, for him who transgressed all bounds (in disbelief, oppression, and evil deeds of disobedience to Allah). And preferred the life of this world (by following his evil desires and lusts). Verily, his abode will be Hellfire. But as for him who feared standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires, and lusts. Verily, Paradise will be his abode" (The Quran 79: 37-41).

We will see in this study that the transgression referred to in this verse can take the form of oppression to oneself by indulging in a hedonistic lifestyle that lowers one's life satisfaction and in the form of overindulgence and overconsumption that does injustice (ẓulm) to the environment. Thus, Quranic contemplation is supposed to strengthen a Muslim's use of a Spiritual Jihad framework in the face of struggles. It is worth mentioning here that the term Spiritual Jihad is redundant in the Islamic context since all Jihad is striving in the path of Allah and therefore spiritual. It is only due to misconceptions prevailing in the popular imagination whereby a false dichotomy is created between the physical and the spiritual jihad. Personal cum Social Jihad is perhaps a more apt characterization.

Research on spiritual jihad as a concept is rare as it has been devised as a scale recently. The available research by Saritoprak and his colleagues which was conducted on a sample of 354 U.S. Muslims suggests that the use of a Spiritual Jihad framework in one's life is predicted by Islamic Religiousness and daily spiritual experiences with God. Endorsement of

the spiritual jihad mindset predicted greater levels of spiritual and post-traumatic growth and virtuous behaviors such as patience, gratitude, and forgiveness. It was also linked to higher levels of positive religious coping and lower levels of depression and anxiety (Saritoprak, Exline, & Stauner, 2018). The study signifies the merit of employing a Spiritual Jihad mindset in the face of struggles. However, the sample was U.S. based and there was no control group to compare the results with.

### **Quranic Contemplation: Implications for Materialism**

Islam teaches one to ascribe importance to Allah, His apostle and Jihad over worldly material possessions (The Qu'ran 9:24) and to good deeds over material possessions (The Qu'ran 18:46) and prescribes a grievous punishment for those who hoard it (The Qu'ran 9:34-35). The Quran attempts to eliminate any love for materialism and a consumeristic lifestyle from its followers because ultimate success is not dependent on accumulating worldly possessions. Thus, a person engaged in Quranic contemplation will assign less value to material goods. This proposition has also been confirmed in various research including those done on consumers belonging to a different religion.

In a survey-based study conducted on 243 participants from Churches and shopping malls to compare the subjective well-being (SWB) of consumers, La Barbera and Gürhan found that though income and materialism were positively related to the SWB of low religiosity consumers, the same variables were negatively related to the SWB of high religiosity consumers. Furthermore, overall main effects for a negative relation between materialism and SWB and positive relation between religiosity and SWB were found for the participants (La Barbera & Gürhan, 1997). This study highlights the moderating role of religiosity between materialism and SWB. However, the sample that was used in the study were non-Muslims.

In another study conducted in Malaysia on 357 Malay and 581 Chinese college and university students, the researchers found that those Muslim youth were happier who had strong religious orientations whereas such a relationship was not true for their Buddhist counterparts. In addition, it also found that there was no relationship between materialism and well-being in either religious group, but religiosity had a significant negative effect on the well-being of Muslims who had strong materialistic values compared to

the Buddhists who held equally strong materialistic orientations (Choong, Ong & Moschis, 2013). This highlights the fact that when the religious values of a group come into conflict with the materialistic values they hold, it leads to a decrease in their well-being. Their well-being could start improving once the grip of materialistic values over their life, decreases, and the conflict is resolved. Such a situation is specific to Muslims in this instance because as highlighted above, Islamic teachings discourage materialism.

### **Quranic Contemplation: Implications for Well-being**

Quranic teachings intend to stimulate various virtues. These have been promoted at several places in the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet. Among other things, it teaches gratitude and to be satisfied with one's life as it is. For this research, both the aspects were to be focused on with their relation to the overall well-being of an individual.

**Gratitude:** In Islam, one's ultimate gratitude is toward God because He not just created us, but He is also the creator of everything else. In a verse of the Quran, God describes his favors on human beings from bringing them forth from the wombs to giving them functioning senses and intelligence so that they were grateful (The Qur'an, 16:78). Perhaps the best example of His perfect creation and abundant blessings that have been given to human beings, is an entire surah of the Quran titled "The Lord of Mercy," in which God lists His blessings upon humankind which reflects the fact that only those who are not mindful of His favors can be unthankful (The Qur'an, 55). In fact, in one verse He himself asserts that if wo/men were to count His blessings on them, they would never be able to do so (The Qur'an 14:34).

Gratitude leads to prosperity not just in this life but also in the Hereafter as God promises to reward people in both (The Qur'an, 3:145). In a hadith of the Prophet, the believer is told that all his affairs are 'good'<sup>3</sup> because if something good happens to them and they are thankful for it then that is good for them and if something bad happens and they are patient over it, then even that is good for them as they shall be rewarded for both (Narrated by Muslim, 2999). Additionally, God has also promised to give more to those who are thankful (The Qur'an, 14:7). This implies that even in the face of a hardship or a trial where something or someone has been

taken away, if one is grateful, s/he will be blessed with more. Thus, gratitude is also related to a spiritual jihad mindset.

In a comparative study of 99 Muslim youth and 77 comparison youth, gratitude scores were higher in the American youth identified as highly religious (Ahmed, 2009). Psychological research also shows the diverse positive effects of exercising gratitude. A study conducted on 277 participants found that gratitude was positively related to various measures of positive affect, happiness, intrinsic religiosity, and internal locus of control while it was negatively associated with depression, extrinsic religiosity, narcissism, and facets of aggression such as physical aggression and hostility (Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003). This study was not specifically conducted on religious samples, but it did explore a wide variety of variables. Another experimental investigation of having a grateful outlook on psychological and physical wellbeing also found positive associations between gratitude and most aspects of wellbeing, the greatest being positive affect (Emmons and McCullough, 2003).

Further studies show that gratitude is also related to materialism. In a study conducted on 1035 high school students, gratitude (while controlling for materialism) predicted higher grade point average, life satisfaction, social integration, and absorption, as well as lower envy and depression while materialism (while controlling for gratitude) predicted only lower grade point average, as well as higher envy and higher or lower life satisfaction. Generally, they found gratitude to be a stronger predictor than materialism for these six outcomes (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono & Wilson, 2010). In a particularly practicing Muslim group, gratitude should be negatively associated to materialism because Islam encourages gratitude but also discourages materialism. Polak and McCullough reviewed empirical research on gratitude, materialism and well-being and concluded that gratitude may possibly have the effect of diminishing materialistic strivings and subsequently reducing the negative effects of materialistic strivings on psychological well-being as the “hedonic profiles of materialistic people and grateful people are mirror opposites” (Polak and McCullough, 2006).

**Satisfaction with life:** The Quran also teaches to be content with whatever Allah has given and this encourages one to feel satisfied with life despite the limitations or problems they face. This is because as humans we have limited knowledge and may infer seemingly negative things as inherently just negative. God reminds us in the Quran that there might be things that

we dislike but they are good for us, or we may like something which is harmful to us (The Qur'an 2:216). Thus, being satisfied with life, regardless of the specific conditions is an important teaching in the Quran because satisfaction is related to our ultimate trust in God. This is also intricately linked to gratitude as satisfaction with any situation will make one grateful.

Moreover, research shows the connection between gratitude, life satisfaction and materialism. Lambert and his colleagues conducted two studies to explore the relationship amongst these three variables. In their first study on a sample of 126 undergraduates, which was survey based, they found that life satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between gratitude and materialism while in the second experimental study on 171 undergraduates they found decreased scores on materialism in the high gratitude condition as compared to an envy (low gratitude) condition (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman & Dean, 2009). Another survey-based study on a sample of 246 students from a private university in the U.S. found that negative affect mediated the relationship between materialism and dissatisfaction with life while gratitude functioned as a moderator of the effect of materialism on life satisfaction (Roberts, Tsang & Manolis, 2015).

Studies have found positive associations between levels of religiosity and life satisfaction in 499 Muslim Kuwaiti adolescents (Abdul-Khalek, 2011); in 224 Kuwaiti University undergraduates (Abdul-Khalek, 2010) and 495 Algerian Muslim students (Tiliouine & Belgoumidi, 2009). Another paper that investigated the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction across participants from 79 nations concluded that an important factor in determining this relationship was the context or social setting as religious people tended to be more satisfied in religious nations (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2010). An important factor to consider in Muslim samples is also that their concept of satisfaction in life is derived from engaging in spiritual practices as that becomes the purpose of life. Contentment has an important association to Paradise in Quranic texts as well as Islamic scholarly literature. In a Quranic verse, God describes contentment as having three aspects: the human soul to be content with itself and God and for God to be content with the state of the human soul. According to Nasr, this contentment may also be achieved in this life by engaging in spiritual practices (Nasr, 2014).

## **Quranic Contemplation: Implications for Environmental Consciousness**

Quranic Contemplation may affect one's relationship with the environment in terms of increasing the level of accountability one feels for his/her actions with regards to harming the environment since they are answerable for every deed they do in this world. Additionally, the Quran also warns that human beings cause corruption on earth by destroying crops and animals and this is disliked by God (The Qur'an, 2:205).

Currently there are no significant research that has been conducted on environmental consciousness and other variables including religiosity. Ideally speaking a Muslim should be more mindful about their relationship with the environment but practically speaking this may not be so. A study by Saniotis highlighted the comprehensive Islamic environmental ethics and its implementation trajectory until today. The researcher outlined various reasons for the neglect of environment in Islamic countries including the pressure to become a developed nation, overpopulation, poverty, and foreign debts (Saniotis, 2011).

### **Rationale/ Significance**

At present there is a serious dearth of research that studies the positive impact of Quranic teachings especially in Pakistan. Although, this may be because such research is not shared publically or may have been done in a different language, the main reason is that such studies are not pursued.

This study takes its inspiration from a study done in Turkey on the readers of the *Risala-e-Nur* (a 20th century Turkish tafsir) that found that people who were advanced readers of the *Risala-e-Nur* and were therefore more spiritually grown, had better scores on well-being and life satisfaction than those who were into seeking hedonistic pleasures and materialism (Aydin & Manusov, 2014). We intend to replicate these finding in the Pakistani context to see whether Muslims who have a strong connection to the Quran- those who regularly read/recite the Quran with a high level of understanding of its' themes and subjects, and spend a good amount of time contemplating on the practical implementation of those themes in their lives, fare better than those who either do not have any engagement with the Quran or do not have any meaningful engagement with the Quran,

that is they merely recite the verses without understanding their meanings and explanations and not being able to ponder and reflect on the verses.

It will be assumed that the Muslims who have a reflective relationship with the Quran, constantly undergo spiritual jihad in their lives and hence their consumption ought to be more thoughtful and therefore less than the societal norm. Such individuals would find higher need to work more on their gratitude and satisfaction with life and reduce their material consumption and eco-wastage. We also speculate that people, who are not contemplatively connected with the Quran on an everyday basis, would generally consume more goods and services and still be dissatisfied. Despite high levels of consumption, these individuals might know that their craving for constant consumption is a sign of spiritual deprivation, but they find themselves helpless against their perpetual desires, because of lower cognitive, spiritual, and moral engagement with the Quranic text.

Based on the literature review, we speculate the following testable hypothesis for our study:

1. Students from Religious institutes will score higher on spiritual jihad than university students.
2. Students from Religious institutes will score higher on gratitude than university students.
3. Students from Religious institutes will score higher on satisfaction with life than university students.
4. Students from Religious institutes will score lower on materialistic values than university students.
5. There will be gender differences in the levels of spiritual jihad.
6. There will be a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and gratitude.
7. There will be a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and satisfaction with life.
8. There will be a direct and negative relationship between spiritual jihad and materialistic values.
9. There will be a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and eco-friendly behavior and sensitivity.

## **Method**

- **Research Design**

We conducted a comparative survey based quantitative study to compare the results of two groups: religious institutes' students and university students. Students from religious institutions in this study can understand the Quranic text without translation and ponder on the depth and breadth of the Quranic ideas and therefore relate it to their everyday choices and decisions while university students are mostly engaged in secular studies and lack an in-depth understanding of the Quran. The construct of Spiritual Jihad was used to explore how it relates to one's consumption behavior. We measure their consumption levels, to see how much hedonistic their lifestyles were. We also measure the value they place on materialism, their gratification, satisfaction with life and environmental consciousness scores.

- **Participants**

The present study involved a total of 459 participants, 163 of whom were males and 296 were females. The sample was broadly categorized into two major groups: those who were university students- majorly involved in secular studies and those who were students at religious institutes. Among the 255 university students, 144 were females and 111 were males, while from the 204 Madrasah students, 152 were females and 52 were males. The age of the participants ranged from 16-70 years with 91.5% (420/459) of them falling under the 16-35 category. The initial inclusion criteria were to gather a sample of equal males and females ranging between the ages 18-25, from both religious and educational institutes, mainly belonging to middle and upper class. The latter criteria were set to see if participants with higher levels of spiritual awareness, who had the spending power still choose to consume lesser physical goods to satisfy their presumed material needs. For students having Quranic education, a specific criterion was that they are at an advance stage of their studies so that it can be safely assumed that they have a meaningful and in-depth relationship with the Quran.

- **Instruments**

To assess the economic and social background of respondents, we asked a few demographic questions including age, gender, educational details, social class, household monthly income and expenditure. This was

followed by 49 items from five psychological scales that were included to measure the variables of the study:

**The Material Values Scale:**

Materialism was measured using 15-item The Material Values Scale (MVS; Richins 2004). This scale uses a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and measures three dimensions of materialism with five items each- success (e.g., “I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.”), centrality (e.g., “Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.”), and happiness (e.g., “I’d be happier if I could afford to buy more things”).

**Gratitude Questionnaire:**

Gratitude as an affective trait was measured using the six-item Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). The scale uses a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) including items such as, ‘I have so much in life to be thankful for,’ and ‘I am grateful for a wide variety of people.’

**Life Satisfaction Scale:**

Life satisfaction was measured using the well-known five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The scale uses 7-point Likert scale to rate the items from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and the items are like, ‘In most ways my life is close to ideal,’ ‘If I could live my life over again, I would change nothing’.

**Spiritual Jihad Mindset Measure:**

The 13- item Spiritual jihad mindset measure was adapted (Adapted from Saritoprak, Exline, & Stauner, 2018) to examine the extent to which participants endorse a spiritual jihad interpretive framework in reference to a spiritual struggle that they experienced. The scale uses 7-point Likert scale to rate the items from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and sample items included “It is a test that will bring me closer to God” and “It is a desire of my nafs that I must work against” (Saritoprak, Exline, & Stauner, 2018).

**Environmental Consciousness in Daily Activities Scales:**

The original scale is a lengthy measure, we have used and adapted shortened version of the measure with 10 items (Adapted from Hiramatsu, Kurisu & Hanaki, 2015). This questionnaire is aimed to gauge the

infrequency of people's sensitivity to behaviors that intend to keep to a minimum the harm caused to the environment by one's actions. The scale uses 7-point Likert scale to rate the items from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and the items ask how much attention people pay to environmental concern, who is to be held responsible for the damage being caused to the environment, and what is the perceived role played by people in boosting or controlling environmental problems (Hiramatsu, Kurisu & Hanaki, 2015).

## **Procedure**

University students were directly accessed through our colleague professor networks while religious institution students were contacted through their institute administration, so the sampling procedure was therefore convenience and snowball sampling. The surveys were either filled online or were group administered.

The inclusion criteria of the sample significantly changed as we approached different religious institutions to request participation in our survey. While university students could easily be accessed and had a high response rate, many of the religious institutes either refused to participate in the study at all despite being professionally contacted from a reputable educational institute or had a much lower response rate. For this reason, almost all the surveys from religious institution students were group-administered yet out of the 450 manually distributed surveys, 50 of them were left 3/4th incomplete and 28 were left 1/4th incomplete because of which they were eliminated from the study. Additionally, the demographics of the religious institution students group diverged from what was originally set. Initially the idea was to target more contemporary places of Islamic learning where there was a heightened emphasis on understanding the Quran to inspire personal reflection and implementation of the Quranic insights. Since required number of surveys could not be carried out at the contemporary institutes, some traditional religious schools (madras) were also included in the surveys. Further implications of these practical difficulties will be referred to in the discussion section.

## **Results**

All results were analyzed using IBM SPSS-23. Data was analyzed by initially conducting an independent-samples t-test to compare the

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materialism, gratitude, life satisfaction, spiritual jihad and environmental consciousness scores between University and Religious institution students.

In order to explore differences between the two groups, between group t-tests were conducted on the data. The summary table 1 indicates that our hypothesis 1 was proved i.e., students from religious institutes scored higher on spiritual jihad than university students. The difference in their spiritual attitudes was highly significant, religious institution students scored significantly higher (M= 6.38, SD= 0.57) than university students (M= 5.78, SD = 1.07;  $t = -7.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The second research hypothesis was also proven correct because the students from religious institutes scored significantly higher on gratitude than university students (Religious Institute: M= 5.98, SD= 0.76; University: M= 5.67, SD = 0.87;  $t = -4.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Supporting our research assumptions further, our research hypothesis 3 was also proven in the expected direction i.e., students from religious institutes scored higher on satisfaction with life than university students (Religious Institute: M= 5.16, SD= 1.06; University: M= 4.68, SD = 1.32;  $t = -4.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 4 for this research was also positive endorsed by the data of this study. As shown in the table summary, students from religious institutes scored lower on materialistic values than university students (Religious Institute: M= 3.23, SD= 0.84; University: M= 3.71, SD = 0.88;  $t = 5.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1:** Summary of Mean Comparisons for Dependent Variables (N=459)

Variables	University Students (n=255)		Madrasah Students (n=204)		t	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		Lower	Upper	
Materialism	3.71	0.88	3.23	0.84	5.90**	.32	.64	.56
Gratitude	5.65	0.87	5.98	0.76	-4.31**	-.49	-.18	.40
Life Satisfaction	4.68	1.32	5.16	1.06	-4.37**	-.71	-.27	.40
Spiritual Jihad	5.78	1.07	6.38	0.57	-7.60**	-.75	-.44	.70
Environmental Consciousness	4.84	0.76	5.02	0.84	-2.46	-.33	-.04	.22

\*\* $p < .00$

Regarding hypothesis 5, The summary table 2 shows that our hypothesis was proved for gender differences in multiple constructs. First, female students scored higher on spiritual jihad than male students. The difference in their spiritual attitudes was directional but not statistically significant (Males:  $M= 5.91$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ; Females:  $M=6.20$ ,  $SD= 0.84$ ,  $t= 7.39$ ,  $p > .001$ ). In the second aspect, the male students from scored significantly lower on gratitude than female students (Males:  $M= 5.62$ ,  $SD= 0.88$ ; Females:  $M= 5.93$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ;  $t= 2.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There were also directional differences in satisfaction with life with respect to gender; female students scored higher on this aspect than males (Male students:  $M= 4.80$ ,  $SD= 1.23$ ; Female students:  $M= 5.03$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ;  $t= 1.46$ ,  $p > .05$ ). As shown in the table 2 summary, female students scored lower on materialistic values than male students (Male students:  $M= 3.76$ ,  $SD= 0.86$ ; Female students:  $M= 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ;  $t= -.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Lastly, females scored higher on environmental consciousness compared with male students (Male students:  $M= 4.74$ ,  $SD= 0.84$ ; Female students:  $M= 5.04$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ;  $t= 2.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 2:** Summary of Mean Comparisons for Dependent Variables across Genders

Variables	Male Students (n= 81)		Female Students (n= 226)		t	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		Lower	Upper	
Materialism	3.76	0.86	3.26	0.90	-4.31**	-.72	-.27	.57
Gratitude	5.62	0.88	5.93	0.80	2.91*	.10	.52	.37
Life Satisfaction	4.80	1.23	5.03	1.20	1.46	-.08	.54	.19
Spiritual Jihad	5.91	1.10	6.20	0.84	2.39	.05	.52	.29
Environmental Consciousness	4.74	0.84	5.04	0.81	2.86*	.09	.51	.36

\*\* $p < .000$ ; \* $p < .01$

To explore the relationships between different constructs, we conducted Pearson correlations by controlling for other demographic variables. Our analysis indicated that Hypothesis 6 was proven such that there was a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and gratitude. Meaning that higher spiritual jihad is associated with higher levels of gratitude among our participants. Similarly, hypothesis 7 was proved because our results indicate that there was a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and satisfaction with life i.e., higher levels of spiritual jihad were associated with higher life satisfaction in our sample.

As indicated in table 3, our last two hypotheses explored relationship between spiritual Jihad, materialism, and eco-friendly behavior. Correlational analysis indicates that our hypothesis 8 was proven such that there was a direct and negative relationship between spiritual jihad and materialistic values i.e., higher levels of spiritual Jihad would be associated with lower levels of materialistic values. In accordance with these findings, hypothesis 9 indicated that there was a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and eco-friendly behavior and sensitivity i.e., higher levels of spiritual jihad would lead to more eco-friendly behavior and sensitivity. However, this relationship was not highly significant.

**Table 3:** Scale Reliability Coefficients and Correlations among Variables (N=459)

Variables	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	1	2	3	4	5
1. Materialism	.65	3.47	0.86	-				
2. Gratitude	.71	5.81	0.82	-.28**	-			
3. Life Satisfaction	.79	4.92	1.19	-.26**	.34**	-		
4. Spiritual Jihad	.92	6.08	0.82	-.23**	.36**	.36**	-	
5. Environmental Consciousness	.68	4.93	0.80	-.30**	.30**	.07	.11*	-

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4: ANOVA**

One-way ANOVA for comparison of the effect of time spent on religious education on Dependent Variables. (N= 459)

Variables	A=0 hrs		B= 5<hrs		C=6-7(0hrs		D=11-20hrs		E=21-40hrs		F=40>hrs		G=DNR		ANOVA Statistics			
	n=18		n=43		n=34		n=34		n=35		n=45		n=136		F	p	LSD Post Hoc	Partial eta squared
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
1. Materialism	4.12	1	3.47	.96	3.42	.78	3.02	.95	3.05	.86	3.38	.84	3.63	.85	6.03	.000	A>G>B>C>F	0.074
																	>E>D	
2. Gratitude	5.09	.87	5.92	.77	5.93	.69	5.91	.84	6.14	.84	6.04	.72	5.68	.86	5.21	.000	E>F>C>B>D>	0.065
																	G>A	
3. Life Satisfaction	4.48	1.33	5.21	1.13	4.9	.95	4.94	1.13	5.03	1.23	5.38	.99	4.74	1.33	2.69	.014	ns	0.035
4. Spiritual Jihad	5.79	1.34	6.1	.87	6.31	.57	6.47	.47	6.45	.57	6.4	.47	5.82	1.05	7.14	.000	D>E>F>C>B>	0.087
																	G>A	
5. Environmental Consciousness	4.38	.83	4.83	.92	4.97	.86	4.83	.8	5.05	.83	5.25	.77	4.89	.74	.005	ns	ns	0.04

Most importantly, based on our speculation that the more time spent in contemplation about religion many have an impact on various aspects of attitudes and values of our participants, we conducted ANOVAs comparing the number of hours invested in religious education. As shown in table 4, there was a significant impact of hours on these attitudes and behaviors. The more time spent on religious education and Quranic reflection,

reported materialism of participants became significantly lower, gratitude went higher, life satisfaction was higher, level of spiritual jihad was higher, and environmental consciousness was also higher.

## **Discussion**

To contribute to the ongoing debate on religiosity and spiritual struggles and their impacts on wellbeing and consumption, a survey was conducted on Pakistani students. Using a quasi-experimental research design, we explored the relationship between contemplation of Quran and materialism, gratitude, satisfaction with life, Spiritual Jihad, and eco-friendly consumption. A significant aspect of this study was that instead of studying general religiosity it focused on a cognitive dimension of religion which is pondering over the scripture and relating it to the ethical questions and dilemmas of personal-social-environmental nature.

To this end, we studied how the individual reflection on deeper intellectual questions of the nature of worldly reality, human life, its meaning, and purpose, which form the central themes of the Quranic scripture, then go on to inform the individual's approach and orientation toward life. This cognitive understanding of the scripture emerges as critical-ethical reasoning that allows the individual to question the prevailing conceptions of hedonistic consumption and materialism and instead adopt a different lifestyle that is at the same time spiritual and ecological. Interestingly this cognitive reflection influences and impacts the affective domains of gratitude, satisfaction, and spiritual struggle. This interconnection of cognitive understanding, spiritual state, emotional satisfaction, and ethical maturity that leads to a more environmentally and socially responsible lifestyle contains immense potential for tapping this untapped resource of using the Quranic scripture as a springboard for intellectual-ethical-spiritual reflection of the Muslim population.

Quran is central to every Muslim's life and this study has shown how this could not only result in higher levels of gratitude and life-satisfaction for the Muslim individual, but also in inspiring an eco-friendly attitude and environmental consciousness that is deeply rooted in the Quranic metaphysics, spirituality, and ethics. Unthinking consumerism inspired by a materialistic philosophy, has been found to negatively impact subjective well-being as well as planetary health.

Quranic reflection on a wider scale could trigger a new wave of mindful lifestyles and thinking consumption amongst Muslims. We found out that the Quran studies curriculum of these religious institutes did not have a special emphasis on combating consumerism philosophy or inspiring an environmentalist lifestyle. Despite this, the Quranic reflection by virtue of the Quranic themes, inspired and motivated the respondents to defy the consumerist mindset and articulate a divinely inspired criterion of life satisfaction independent of their material consumption of goods and services. If these Quran study programs could be more geared toward a specific critical appraisal of Consumerism and its devastating effects on subjective and environmental well-being, this will result in even better decisions and lifestyle choices.

The comparisons were made based on the groups (University and Religious Institution), gender (male and female) and relationships between these constructs. Most significantly, we explored the impact of Quranic contemplation on all these constructs. Based on our sample of 459 participants, our findings are well placed in the contemporary literature, and they further extend the available literature in meaningful ways.

The first set of findings in our study showed that the type of students had a significant effect, i.e., students from religious institutes showed higher levels of spiritual jihad and gratitude and life satisfaction than university students. These findings are supported by and extend previous research.

In this comparative exploration, one very interesting finding was that students from religious institutes scored lower on materialistic values than university students. These findings were further supported by our key exploration regarding religious contemplation. It is possible to extrapolate from these findings that when students are spending more time in contemplating on the Quranic teachings then their likelihood of being materialistic reduces. This less materialism, shown in the result, leads to a more meaningful life (gratitude and satisfaction) where people become eco-friendlier as materialism is not needed.

Both, Materialism, and religiosity tend to shift the locus of control, as observed by Watkins et.al (2013). Materialism shifts the locus of control of an individual to external factors which may breed envy, narcissism and even hostility. On the other hand, intrinsic religiosity and an internal locus of control leads to an overall positive affect in the form of happiness, lower

level of depression and even physical aggression (Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003). Intrinsic control may even be the reason for greater self-accountability and higher gratitude which translates into lower envy (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman & Dean, 2009).

Another very important element that this study explored in detail was regarding gender differences that were explored and confirmed in this study. Not many studies have focused on the gendered lenses on these constructs which makes these results unique. It was interesting to note that there were significant gender differences such that female students scored higher on spiritual jihad, gratitude, satisfaction with life than male students. To make it more significant finding, our results indicated that female students scored lower on materialistic values than male students. These findings could indicate that scoring low on materialism might become a source for positive effects on constructs such as life satisfaction and subjective well which was further endorsed by our findings on the relationships between the constructs.

Among the relationships between the constructs, we saw there was a direct and positive relationship between spiritual jihad and gratitude. As indicated by our data, our participants showed a positive association between spiritual jihad and satisfaction with life. It is clear from these results that when religious people perceive their sacrifice of material goods and pleasures as means of controlling the lower desires of their self (nafs), they do not suffer on account of less consumption. Instead, this feeling of personal spiritual struggle gives them a higher sense of wellbeing through gratitude and satisfaction with life.

Seeing higher sense of wellbeing as a function of gratitude and satisfaction with life was also done in a study conducted by Saritoprak et.al (2018) where the spiritual jihad mindset was noted to predict not only virtuous behaviors such as gratitude, patience, and forgiveness but also post-traumatic growth and positive religious coping for depression and anxiety (Saritoprak, Exline, & Stauner, 2018). Religion, spirituality, and wellbeing then become tied as the primary motive of spiritual jihad is to avoid a hedonistic lifestyle that is driven by overconsumption which is an extension of overcoming the desires of the self (nafs) that may be counterproductive to subjective well-being (La Barbera & Gürhan, 1997).

Furthermore, when people are engaged in spiritual struggles then their focus is more on living for a higher purpose. This leads to higher subjective well-being than one achieved by sheer consumption. They therefore become less materialistic and eco-friendlier. Our findings support this notion by directly showing that there was a negative relationship between spiritual jihad and materialistic values whereas a positive relationship between spiritual jihad and eco-friendly behavior and sensitivity. These findings also answer the question why females might be more environmentally conscious compared to males.

## **Strengths**

This study has many strengths from methods to its additive value to the contemporary literature on spiritual struggles and Qur'anic contemplations. First and foremost, this is first comparative study that explores differences between religious institution and university students. There are no major survey-based studies in the Muslim majority countries that compare within country samples to see the impacts of different types of teachings. Secondly, the study had a good representative sample from both types of institutions as well as genders and this study is one of its kind to compare the gender differences in impacts of contemplation on spiritual struggles, life satisfaction and ecofriendly behavior.

Another strength of our study was the design of the survey such that we were able to directly ask people how much time they spent in religious studies and contemplation. This was then quantified to undertake direct analysis for various variables. In order to ensure that our participants understood our constructs, we had made a sincere effort to remove any language barrier. We ensured to cater to this issue by getting the surveys translated into Urdu. Finally, a key aspect in design and implementation that was taken care of was to control social desirability. To this end, we added reverse coded items in our scales in the hope that we could gauge true responses of our participants.

## **Limitations**

Despite our best efforts, there were a few caveats in our research. First, there was a gender gap between the two groups, due to a practical difficulty in getting access to male students in religious institutions. Second, we had asked for expenditure levels in this study to gauge if the expenditure levels

were different between university students and students of religious institutions. We could not substantiate this objective because the students in religious institutes mostly belonged to a different social class than the university students and this may have caused a disruption in results. These two groups aren't comparable because of the unbalanced baseline. Furthermore, most respondents remarked that the categories for expenditure were too broad.

## **Conclusion**

Essentially this study explored the effect that Quranic contemplation has on materialism, gratitude, satisfaction with life, Spiritual Jihad and eco-friendly consumption using a quasi-experimental design. The hypothesis tested in this study were based on comparative measures that included demographic measures such as gender, group membership (religious and university institutions) and the relationships between interconnected constructs that predict overall well-being. Results from the study established that Quranic contemplation which is observed by Religious Institutions had an overall positive effect on life satisfaction, gratitude, and eco-friendly behavior.

Our findings lead us to conclude that Quranic contemplation serves two functions. First, it helps an individual move away from a hedonistic lifestyle that is founded on overconsumption of material and worldly desires, in doing so the individual can achieve Spiritual Jihad as they are actively controlling their nafs (self) which is termed as the ultimate success in religious scripture. Secondly, such intrinsic religious motivations that negate materialistic dependency and boast self-accountability translate into eco-friendly behaviors.

The implications of this research are vast as they potentially connect Quranic contemplation to an overall way of life. Understanding and contemplating religious theology then does not remain limited to the act of simply pondering over it for the sake of tradition, rather, contemplation seeps into practice and behavior. As established by our study, Quranic contemplation translated into behavior that is eco-friendly in nature and practices that increase satisfaction with life, gratitude and has a positive effect on well-being.

## **Endnotes**

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- <sup>1</sup> Jihad is an Arabic word which literally means *striving or struggling*, especially with a praiseworthy aim. In an Islamic context, spiritual jihad refers to any spiritual effort that attempts to make aspects of personal and social life conform with God's guidance.
- <sup>2</sup> Nafs is an Arabic word occurring in the Quran, literally meaning "self". Variations of its translations include "psyche", "ego" or "soul". The Quranic use of the term implies that human beings are individually responsible for exercising their agency or free will.
- <sup>3</sup> The Arabic term used in the hadith is khair which translates to 'good' in English but has the connotation of being beneficial and rewarding.

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