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Islamic Concept of Taqwa and its Relationship with Positive Character Traits

Uzair Ullah¹ Roomana Zeb²

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Uzair Ullah, Email: uzairullahk123@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the link between Islamic concept of Taqwa and positive character traits in Western psychology, specifically in Positive Psychology and moral development theories. This theoretical research seeks to gain insight in the similarities and differences between understanding, development and practice of the concept of moral character in Islamic moral psychology and modern psychological theories. This is a qualitative theoretical study with comparative analysis using textual analysis of the Qur'an, Islamic literature and contemporary psychological literature. Findings indicate that the Islamic concept of Taqwa is an integrated moral and spiritual understanding that unifies awareness, thought and behaviour in its understanding of divine accountability. It promotes and develops virtues such as honesty, patience, gratitude, self-control, justice and so on. Western psychological theories, particularly the Values in Action (VIA) measures of character strengths by Peterson and Seligman, (2004) on the other hand, single out empirically measurable traits that lead to mental health and social harmony. While the virtues noted are comparable, the approaches are different. Islamic psychology uses the revelations and accountability as a foundation for it, while Western psychology uses human reasoning and as well as empirical evidences. The research also highlights a gap in the absence of integrated models of moral development that highlights both the spiritual and psychological aspects. This discussion adds that Taqwa offers an integrated moral direction that encompasses positive traits and gives them a spiritual and moral purpose.

Introduction

Moral psychology examines the development of moral actions, virtues, and personality strengths that lead individuals to act ethically in the world. Within modern psychology, this area is mainly influenced by Positive Psychology, which focuses

on strengths, virtues, and well-being rather than just pathology and mental illness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). But in Islamic philosophy, moral development is heavily influenced by the notion of Taqwa, which translates to God-consciousness, self-discipline and moral



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consciousness in all areas of life (Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.). In contrast to many contemporary psychological approaches, which generally examine moral development through psychological, social, and developmental processes, Islamic moral psychology incorporates divine guidance and spiritual accountability into the understanding of moral development.

Taqwa is a spiritual as well as a holistic moral framework that influences personality, conduct and decision-making. It affects the regulation of emotions, control of desires, and social interactions (Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, n.d.). Accordingly, this research examines Taqwa in relation to positive character traits to draw parallels and distinctions between the development of moral character in Islam and Western psychological theories of virtues.

Islamic moral psychology is grounded in the idea that behaviour is related to the state of the heart (*qalb*) and faith (*iman*) (Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.). The Qur'an places a strong emphasis on moral awareness and responsibility, especially through the notion of Taqwa, which is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an (Surah Al-Baqarah (Qur'an 2:2, 2:197; Qur'an 49:13) and is integral to human guidance and moral development.

Moral psychology has been enriched by classical Islamic scholars. Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* discusses moral actions as outcomes of the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) in which the heart needs to be purified from negative attributes like pride, envy and arrogance before the positive virtues emerge (Al-Ghazali, 1995). Likewise, Ibn Taymiyyah stresses that moral integrity is demonstrated through external actions that stem from pure faith and purity of the heart (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.).

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah also extends this concept by portraying moral development as an incremental spiritual journey in which the individual progresses towards higher consciousness and faith (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2020). In this sense, Islamic moral psychology is not confined to external acts but also encompasses the inner transformation of consciousness, intention (*niyyah*), and spiritual integrity towards the divine. In this way, Islamic moral psychology is comprehensive because it incorporates both the

spiritual and moral dimensions of human life.

Taqwa is an important concept in Islamic psychology, and the foundation for moral and ethical conduct. It is typically interpreted as knowledge of God which inspires individuals to refrain from sinful actions and to engage in good actions throughout their entire life. The highest rank with Allah is the rank of those who have the greatest Taqwa (fear of Allah) (Qur'an 49:13). This is what is meant by Taqwa, it is a measurement of moral superiority and human dignity. Taqwa is a self-regulatory behaviour. It helps to direct behavior, instead of self-interest, by inviting others to consider their actions through the lens of their relationship with God. This type of moral consciousness enhances self-control, emotional management and moral integrity in individuals and societies (Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.). In the past, such as by Al-Ghazali, Taqwa is seen as a safeguard against the corruption of the heart by immoral desires and inclinations. It fosters qualities like truthfulness, tolerance, modesty and fairness, crucial for social cohesion. Likewise, Ibn Taymiyyah notes that Taqwa changes behaviour by congruent external and internal actions, seamlessly integrating belief and behaviour.

From a contemporary psychological perspective, Taqwa can be likened to self-control and virtue-approach theories of behavior in Positive Psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). But unlike these models, Taqwa is grounded in divine accountability, which ensures ongoing motivation to engage in ethical behaviour even in the absence of external oversight.

Thus, Taqwa has a vital role in regulating human behaviour by connecting faith and practice. It not only helps people to live ethically but also to develop their personality in the long run by promoting sincerity, accountability and awareness of God (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2020).

Psychology research on positive character traits is mostly done in the field of Positive Psychology, which examines positive aspects of human life such as positive traits, virtues, and well-being rather than mental illness. Character traits, according to Peterson and Seligman (2004), are enduring positive ways of thinking, feeling and acting that promote well-being and benefit others.

Their book, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, offers a classification of positive traits called the VIA (Values in Action) model.

The VIA model outlines six core virtues that are thought to be universal: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Each virtue contains a number of character strengths including honesty, gratitude, kindness, perseverance and self-control. These character strengths have also been empirically linked to indicators of well-being and life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004).

Seligman (2011) extends this idea in his PERMA model of well-being, which builds upon positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. In this model, character strengths are key to long-term psychological well-being. For instance, optimism and resilience contribute to emotional well-being, while gratitude and compassion contribute to positive relationships.

Character strengths are defined as capacities that can be expressed, developed and strengthened through practice and contextual influences (Niemi & Pearce, 2021). It is primarily descriptive and functional, in that traits are assessed primarily in terms of how they contribute to human well-being and not their religious meaning. As such, contemporary psychology offers a systematic but secular approach to moral and character development.

While Islamic teachings and Western psychology focus on human morality and personality development, there is a theoretical and conceptual disconnect between the two approaches. Western approaches, such as Positive Psychology focuses on positive human functioning, character strengths and well-being from an empirical psychological perspective. While Islamic moral psychology also introduces theological concepts like divine accountability. (Niemi & Pearce, 2021; Seligman, 2011). However, Islamic moral psychology is rooted in *Taqwa*, which combines both spiritual and outward moral practices, guided by divine revelation.

Firstly, the basis for moral Western moral psychology often defines moral traits based on human rationality, social agreement and empirical evidence. On the other hand, Islam bases morals on revelation (Qur'an and Sunnah), (Peterson &

Seligman, 2004; Al-Ghazali, 1995) and the "divine eye". This results in a different motivation for why: psychological theories emphasize personal well-being and social success whereas Islamic morals emphasize following God's orders and achieving eternal life.

A further difference is in the appraisal of character traits. Positive Psychology categorize virtues like honesty, gratitude and kindness as universal psychological strengths that lead to well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). But Islam categorizes these attributes as psychological strengths as well as good deeds if done with the right intention (*niyyah*) (Al-Ghazali, 2014). This adds a spiritual element that is not included in Western psychology.

Furthermore, Islamic psychology differs from the western psychology in that it does not focus on personality traits but on the unity of the heart (*qalb*), intention and behavior. Al-Ghazali (1995) and other Islamic thinkers also state that moral training is not only through behaviour, but also through purifying the inner self. However, there is significant overlap as well. Both recognize the importance of character strengths such as self-control, compassion and justice for well-being. However, an important gap is that of models that integrate the accountability of our spiritual being with empirical psychological concepts. There are few studies (Gillani & Khan, 2025) that compare and contrast *Taqwa* based moral development with modern theories of character strengths, especially in an integrated model.

Thus, this research aims to fill this void by examining how Islamic notions of *Taqwa* can enhance and broaden modern psychological theories of positive character traits, leading to an integrated model of moral psychology.

Literature Review

Taqwa is a key term in the psychology of Islamic moral and spiritual development that is emphasized in the Qur'an as a basis for moral conduct and human flourishing (Al-Ghazali, 1995; The Qur'an, n.d.). The term *Taqwa* is linguistically related to the Arabic word *waqā*, which means to guard or protect, and refers to the protection of oneself from sin and the wrath of God (Ibn Manzur, n.d.). The Qur'anic concept of *Taqwa* denotes a state of heightened awareness of God that inspires individuals to engage in good

deeds and avoid evil.

Taqwa is a distinguishing characteristic of moral superiority in human beings (The Qur'an, n.d.). In Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13), Allah declares, "Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" (Qur'an 49:13), highlighting its significance as a mark of human dignity, rather than racial, economic and social distinctions. Likewise, the Qur'an in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:2) is identified as a source of guidance for "those who have Taqwa", suggesting that spiritual consciousness is essential for divine guidance.

Additionally, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183) presents Taqwa in the context of fasting, explaining that fasting is ordained for believers to attain Taqwa (Qur'an 2:183). This verse highlights its practical dimension, by showing that Taqwa is not only about belief, but also a moral practice that is cultivated through self-discipline and obedience to God. As a result, the Qur'an refers to Taqwa as a state of being and a moral guideline.

Muslim theologians have written about Taqwa, in terms of moral development and spiritual development. One of these is Imam Al-Ghazali, who has written about Taqwa in his book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. Al-Ghazali explains Taqwa is achieved through purifying the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), which means purifying the soul from bad moral qualities such as pride, envy and greed, and promoting good moral qualities such as sincerity, patience and gratitude. He notes that outward actions are a reflection of the inner state of the heart, and moral improvement begins with the heart (Al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah stresses the practical dimension of Taqwa in his relation to good works and sincerity in religious matters (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.). He explains in his books that a believer has Taqwa when he is consistent between his actions and his faith, in a way that his practices reflect his beliefs. In addition, he explains the difference between true faith and religious practices, and implies that Taqwa is affirmed by one's behaviour and submission to God's commands.

In addition, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah builds on this by depicting Taqwa as a journey through stages of faith (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, n.d.). In *Madarij al-Salikin*, he explains the way in which a person progresses in their moral and spiritual

development through introspection, repentance and worship. This is in line with the idea that moral character can be cultivated.

Overall, these thinkers provide us with a conception of Taqwa as an amalgam of belief, intention, feeling and behaviour. Unlike approaches that primarily explain moral behaviour through psychological, cognitive, social, or behavioural processes, Islamic moral psychology integrates spiritual accountability and inner moral transformation with observable behaviour, Islamic moral psychology combines elements of spirituality and behaviour, instead of viewing Taqwa as a method of character formation.

Spiritual purification and development are important themes in Islamic moral psychology, as seen in *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* (purification of the self). This is a purification of human soul through the removal of bad moral traits and cultivation of good character. The process of moral purification in Islamic tradition is not limited to changing a person's actions; it also involves changing their intentions (*niyyah*), feelings and awareness (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2020). Purification of the self is a condition for success, as the Qur'an says, "He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it" (Qur'an 91:9-10). The moral and spiritual cultivation is connected to human success here, implying that moral and spiritual growth is essential to achieving worldly balance and salvation. The Qur'an also calls Muslims to be disciplined and repent, for further moral development. This is described in classical Islamic texts. Al-Ghazali (1995) presents a systematic method for cleansing the heart in his book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which includes the purification of the heart from spiritual diseases such as vanity, jealousy, hypocrisy, and an undue attachment to the world. He considers the heart (*qalb*) to be the location of moral consciousness and the purity of the heart is reflected in human behaviour. Al-Ghazali considers moral purification to be an outcome of spiritual practices such as self-reflection (*muhasaba*), remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*), repentance (*tawbah*) and regular worship, which ultimately results in change of heart and behaviour. Similarly, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (2020) said that moral purification is a gradual process, and people move from one stage

to another in their spiritual state. He emphasizes in his book *Madarij al-Salikin* the connection between human actions and the state of the heart, and the importance of constant spiritual practice leading to increased moral awareness and discipline. He stresses that spiritual purification is an ongoing process of refinement and development. Ibn Taymiyyah (n.d.) says that purification of the moral character is connected with sincerity (*ikhlas*) and surrender to divine guidance. He explains that spiritual development is evident in the harmony between belief and practice, where external actions align with internal convictions. In the absence of sincerity, even religious practices lack moral and spiritual significance, and this importance of inner change in moral development.

Positive Psychology is a modern approach to psychology that examines the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing. It aims to complement the study of pathology by focusing on the positive aspects of human functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Under this approach, Peterson and Seligman (2004) created the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues, which offers a systematic model of positive human attributes. According to VIA, there are six key virtues that are valued across cultures: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These virtues are linked to specific character strengths including honesty, kindness, perseverance, self-control and gratitude. These traits are viewed as stable positive psychological traits that shape people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

There are character strengths that have been linked to well-being and life satisfaction, but the strength of the links varies by character strength (Park et al., 2004). Research indicates that using character strengths is linked to positive outcomes and well-being, and modern strengths-based interventions focus on the capacity to build and cultivate character strengths (Niemi & Pearce, 2021). However, the model is largely empirical, focusing on measurement and behaviour, but not on spiritual and theological considerations of morality.

Theories of moral development explain the development of moral reasoning about ethical

behaviour and justice. One of the more popular theories is Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, which proposes moral development unfolds in three stages: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional morality (Kohlberg, 1981). The pre-conventional level of moral development refers to making moral decisions based on reward and punishment. The conventional level involves making moral decisions in a way that conforms to societal rules and norms to avoid social disorder and to socially approve of ourselves and others. At the post-conventional level, moral choices are made based on moral principles of justice, human rights and ethics (Kohlberg, 1981).

Kohlberg's theory is based on intellectual development and not emotional and spiritual factors. It suggests moral development occurs with intellectual and social maturity. Although Kohlberg's theory presents moral development as a broadly generalizable sequence of stages, subsequent research has questioned the extent to which his model adequately captures moral reasoning across different cultural contexts. Cross-cultural reviews have identified limitations in the universality of Kohlberg's stage model and have called for greater consideration of cultural variation in moral judgment (Snarey, 1985; Gibbs et al., 2007). Alternative theories, such as Gilligan's ethics of care, build on this theory, focusing more on care, relationships and empathy (Gilligan, 1982). These models stress the role of cognitive development, social and cultural factors in moral development.

Psychological theories of virtues, personality and behaviour explain personality and moral behaviour in terms of psychological traits. The Five-Factor Model (Big Five) of personality outlines five major traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1997). In particular, the agreeableness and conscientiousness traits are associated with moral behaviours such as kindness, responsibility and self-control.

In contrast, behavioural theories highlight environmental and learning factors in moral behaviour. Traits are not seen as innate but rather learned through reinforcement, punishment and social modelling (Skinner, 1953). This suggests that positive traits can be acquired through this

learning.

Further, humanistic psychology, particularly theories by Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1943), suggest that self-actualization and development play an important role in positive trait learning. Maslow's theory of self-actualization proposes that those who reach self-actualization are creative, moral and solve problems. Similarly, Rogers characterizes the "fully functioning person" as an open, self-actualizing and valuing person.

Comparative Analysis

An interdisciplinary study between the Islamic notion of Taqwa and psychology's virtue and character strengths suggests a number of conceptual parallels in the realms of moral development, self-control and well-being. While the frameworks are based on different sources of knowledge (revelation in Islam and empirical evidence in psychology), they both advocate for the development of virtuous character traits that inform moral behaviour (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

A key commonality is the role of self-control and restraint. In Islamic psychology, Taqwa serves as an internal motivator to avoid sin and be aware of the reward and punishment of Allah (God). This resonates with the virtue of temperance in Positive Psychology that includes self-control, prudence and emotional regulation (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The control of desires and emotions is important for moral functioning and psychological well-being, but the two traditions describe the process in different conceptual frameworks (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Park et al., 2004).

A further shared emphasis is on compassion and social responsibility. Islam's Taqwa promotes social justice (*adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*) and compassion towards others (The Qur'an, n.d.; Al-Ghazali, 1995). Similarly, Positive Psychology classifies humanity related strengths like kindness, love, and social intelligence as character strengths related to positive interpersonal functioning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). Both views interpret moral character as not only guiding individual actions, but also social relationships and societal harmony.

Moreover, both Taqwa and psychological virtues include integrity and honesty as key moral virtues. In Islamic contexts, honesty (*siddq*) is seen as an

expression of faith and Taqwa, in which actions align with inner integrity (Al-Ghazali, 2014; Ibn Taymiyyah, 2004). In psychology, honesty is related to the virtue of courage and justice, promoting trust and social stability. Kohlberg's stages of moral development also indirectly reinforce this connection through principled reasoning at higher levels of morality, whereby one acts according to universal moral principles, rather than self-interest (Kohlberg, 1981).

A significant overlap is the idea of meaningful and purposeful living. In Islam, Taqwa offers a spiritual purpose that is derived from obeying Allah and preparing for the next life (Al-Ghazali, 2015). This provides a clear structure for moral decision-making and living. In Positive Psychology, the virtue of transcendence, which includes gratitude, hope and spirituality, also emphasizes meaning, purpose and connection to a higher being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While the sources of meaning vary, both approaches acknowledge the benefit of meaning for psychological and moral well-being.

In addition, both methods acknowledge that character strengths can be developed and practiced intentionally (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2020; Niemiec & Pearce, 2021). In Islam, spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, reflection and remembrance contribute to spiritual and moral purification (Al-Ghazali, 1995). Likewise, psychological theories propose that character traits can be learned, reinforced, and honed through practice. This developmental view underscores that moral character is not static but can be cultivated over time through intentional practices. One of the striking contrast between Islamic moral psychology and the western psychological theories is the basis on which they conceptualize morality, human behaviors and character formation. Islamic psychology is based on the revelation, while secular psychology is based on empirical data, human reasoning and scientific method (Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Iqbal & Skinner, 2021). This foundation affects the way these approaches understand morality, human behaviour and human nature.

In Islam, morality is founded on the authority of Allah as expressed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Ibn Taymiyyah, 2004). Humans are moral beings who will be held to account for

their sins in this world and the next. This is reflected in the notion of Taqwa, which involves consciousness of God and moral responsibility before Him (Qur'an 49:13). Ethical values like sincerity, fairness, forbearance and mercy are not relative, but rather absolute moral truths determined by God. Muslim thinkers like Al-Ghazali stress that moral development is, in fact, a spiritual journey in which purification of the heart brings one closer to God and moral perfection (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). As a result, Islamic psychology's morality is theocentric, or God-centered.

On the other hand, in secular psychology, especially in Positive Psychology, morality is rooted in anthropocentric and empirical foundations. For Peterson and Seligman (2004), character strengths and virtues are discovered through cross-cultural studies and psychological inquiry, not by revelation. Morality is assessed in terms of its impact on human flourishing, well-being and social harmony. For instance, virtues like kindness, gratitude and self-control are considered valuable because they contribute to personal well-being and social cohesion. These virtues are not based on fixed moral values, but rather are considered desirable traits, with empirical support, that are universal. The other difference is the motive for doing good. In Islamic psychology, moral action is driven by the basis of faith, sincerity (Ikhlas) and fear of Allah (Al-Ghazali, 2014; Ibn Taymiyyah, 2004). People are expected to behave ethically even if no one is looking over them, as they know that Allah is always watching them. This creates a moral check within the person. Secular psychology tends to focus on psychological needs, social influences and the internalization of values and goals, and theories like those of self-determination theory emphasize the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness in psychological development and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Moral behaviour is therefore due to internal thought processes and external environmental factors. Furthermore, there are differing philosophies about what man is from the two perspectives. Islamic psychology views human beings as having a physical and spiritual aspect, and the soul (Ruh) plays a key role in the moral development of human beings (Nasr, 2002). Humans are good and bad, and purification

(Tazkiya) is needed to purify actions based on God's commands. Secular psychology, on the other hand, tends to be more focused on behaviour and mental processes, and usually omits metaphysics such as the soul and afterlife (Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Iqbal & Skinner, 2021). The human nature is generally explained by biological, psychological and social factors and not taking into account the spiritual responsibility. Moreover, the goal of moral development varies widely. The ultimate aim in Islamic psychology is to obtain pleasure from Allah (Rida Allah) and success in the afterlife (Al-Ghazali, 2015).

Moral and spiritual development is therefore both a worldly and eternal pursuit. In secular psychology, the goal is generally centered on well-being, life satisfaction, and optimal functioning in the present life, as reflected in models such as Seligman's PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011). While both aim to improve human life, their ultimate objectives differ in scope and orientation.

Research Methodology

A theoretical research design was adopted in the study, which focuses on gathering, analyzing and synthesizing existing data from literature, rather than collecting new data. The goal of this approach is to gain conceptual and critical insight into the connection between Taqwa (Islamic psychology) and positive character traits in Western psychology. Theoretical research is well suited for areas in which conceptual, philosophical, and comparative approaches, as well as multiple systems of knowledge need to be integrated (Creswell, 2014).

In this research, the theoretical approach is applied to study moral development in the Islamic and psychological perspectives. The study does not involve experiments or surveys, instead it involves the analysis of previously written literature, including the Qur'an, Hadith, classical Islamic texts and modern psychological theories. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of moral values such as Taqwa, virtue and character strengths and moral reasoning. Research methodology adopted is Comparative Analysis, in which the authors compare and contrast the attitudes towards moral character of the Islamic world and the western world. One of these ways is by comparing what matters such as Taqwa, good

character, etc., to find their similarities and differences. This approach adopts a primary sources-based approach, which involves using the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the teachings of Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah. These focus on a spiritual perspective of moral growth and responsibility towards God, purification (Tazkiya): Western psychological theories, on the other hand, are analyzed in terms of Positive Psychology (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and moral development (Kohlberg, 1981) with a focus on empirical, developmental and cognitive aspects of moral in Western thinking. The comparative approach allows the analysis of the understanding of the moral, the cultivation of the virtues and the rationalization of behaviour on both systems. It also shows similarities/differences between ethical values (truthfulness, justice, self-discipline); philosophical approaches (especially the influence of the divine versus human rationality). In this study, qualitative analysis of the Islamic and psychological texts was applied. In the Islamic tradition, there are several reliable sources which provide information: The Qur'an, the books of authentic Hadith, the works of Al-Ghazali, such as *Ihya Ulum al-Din*; and the works of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and Ibn Taymiyyah. They are examined for fundamental principles of Taqwa, moral purification and growth.

Also, psychological books serve to explain positive character traits, and moral development from scientific perspectives. The main sources are Peterson and Seligman's (2004) book on *Character Strengths and Virtues*, Seligman's (2011) book on *Positive Psychology*, and Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development. These are used to determine how contemporary psychology understands virtues, moral development and behaviour.

The use of both these sources of literature provides a holistic comparative approach. Islamic literature provides normative and spiritual understanding, while psychological literature provides empirical and theoretical understanding. These sources provide a basis to examine moral development from both spiritual and empirical viewpoints.

Discussion

In Islamic moral psychology, the virtue of Taqwa

is an overarching framework that regulates and coordinates several positive personality traits within a spiritual system (Al-Ghazali, 1995; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 2020). This means that rather than virtues being considered isolated psychological phenomena, Taqwa functions as a higher psychological state of being God-conscious that informs moral thinking, feeling and action. It thus functions as a core process that integrates and supports moral development.

In Islam, Taqwa includes and promotes virtues such as sincerity (Sidq), patience (Sabr), gratitude (Shukr), humility (Tawadu) and forbearance (Hilm). They are not seen as discrete virtues but rather as interrelated and resulting from a purified heart (Qalb) and intention (Niyyah) (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Once a person reaches a higher level of Taqwa, their ethical conduct becomes systematic and intrinsic because it is in line with a sense of divine consciousness and responsibility (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Qur'anic teachings associate Taqwa with divine guidance and moral distinction (Qur'an 2:2; 49:13). Here, Taqwa can be seen as a meta-virtue that not only represents a virtuous trait but also serves as a master trait that integrates all other virtues. Taqwa offers a spiritual integration that aligns all positive qualities under a coherent moral compass, rather than a classification of traits.

Western psychological approaches, such as Positive Psychology, focus on categorization, measurement and cultivation of positive traits based on empirical findings. Specific character strengths like courage, kindness and self-control, which are linked to psychological well-being and social success. Similarly, Seligman's (2011) PERMA will focus on positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment as aspects of well-being.

These methods offer systematic ways to identify strengths and assess them as well as ways to use strengths-based concepts in psychological and educational settings (Niemic & Pearce, 2021). But their primary emphasis is on behavior and on the sense of well-being, not on spiritual responsibility and on the trans-metaphysical meaning. So, the evaluation of moral qualities is based on the capacity to improve one's life and the peace and harmony in society and not on God's laws.

A negative aspect of the Western models is that they give no weight to the final moral norm or ultimate moral basis for moral attributes. Honesty and compassion are good and are supported by human agreement, cultural norms or evolutionary advantage, but not by larger values. Moreover, Internal spiritual change is typically not a central focus of mainstream psychological models (Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Iqbal & Skinner, 2021). Therefore, in its approach Positive Psychology provides an empirical method to human virtues or strengths, but it could miss out on other profound existential, spiritual ideas that are much more significant in religious moral frameworks, such as Islam.

The main distinctions between Islamic and western models appear with regard to the emphasis placed on spiritual, rather than behavioral. Islamic psychology has a spiritual dimension to it, which holds that people are responsible to Allah for their actions (both physical and internal) (Al-Ghazali, 2010; Ibn Taymiyyah, 2004). The spiritual internal state of Taqwa is an example of this which is when we behave morally even when we are not being watched, we are always being watched by Allah. This creates a continuous moral self-control within oneself and involves consideration of beliefs, intentions and actions.

It is true that the authors have laid emphasis on purification of the heart such as Al-Ghazali (n.d.). It is also true that external act cannot be sufficient if there is no sincere internal change. Similarly, in moral psychology, the importance of the moral states is emphasized by Ibn Taymiyyah, who says that actions are tied to sincerity (Ikhlas) and faith.

In contrast, the theories of psychology in the west are more behaviourist in nature, focusing on superficial behaviour, thinking, and characteristics. Learning theory, cognitive reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981) and reinforcement are regarded as the factors causing the moral development. While these theories have shown to explain behaviour and development well, they do not frequently include concepts of the soul, responsibility to God, or rewards and punishments for future life (Iqbal & Skinner, 2021; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

The primary difference, therefore, is related to the depth and focus: Islamic psychology takes the

inner spirituality and the external actions as an equal and integrated system, while Western psychology focuses mainly on describing the outer actions and psychological processes. In this respect, this difference has demonstrated that Taqwa provides a more comprehensive moral way of thinking by connecting moral performance with spiritual consciousness; while the Western models provide a more empirical and limited psychological explanation of human virtues.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine how the moral psychology of the Islamic world (Taqwa) is related to Western psychological theories such as Positive Psychology and moral development. The findings indicate that there are some similarities in the way the two methods emphasize the importance of characteristics (such as honesty, self-control, compassion, justice and gratitude) as central elements of moral character. They differ, however, in terms of their foundation, shape and objective for moral development.

Based on the Qur'an (49:13) and Sunnah, Islamic psychology understands Taqwa as a primary moral and spiritual attitude that is linked with consciousness about Allah and the ability to distinguish good from evil. The concept of purification (Tazkiya al nafs) was advocated by traditional authors such as Al—Ghazali with Emphasis on moral character building. But western psychological frameworks, such as the VIA model of positive traits (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and Kohlberg's (1981) cognitive moral development, focus on observable characteristics and rational thought without taking account of spiritual and metaphysical factors.

A comprehensive perspective of moral development is provided by the institution of marriage between Islamic and western viewpoints. The institution of marriage between Islamic and western viewpoints gives a comprehensive perspective on moral development. While Positive Psychology provides empirical typologies of human potentials and their impact on the well-being, Islamic moral psychology equips a spiritual terrain where moral behavior relates to a greater goal or responsibility.

Taqwa is an integrating factor because it not only merges together the various individual virtues, but also gives them a moral coherence. Incorporating

the psychological model of character into models of overall spiritual health and well-being can help to develop a more robust model that is inclusive of both spiritual and psychological perspectives on health and well-being. This allows a unity of perception of behaviour in which the processes inside and outside the body are all but seen together.

The findings from this research study is significant to the field of moral development in education and psychology. First, by integrating Taqwa into moral psychology we can better understand the intrinsic motivation to act morally—particularly in interreligious and cultural contexts. First, Taqwa can be incorporated in moral psychology to better understand the intrinsic motivation to act morally, particularly within the interreligious and cultural context. It shows that moral development does not only concern cognitive and behavioural aspects but also a spiritual aspect, which includes purification and self-awareness.

Second, the integration of psychological models with Islamic moral perspectives can help build

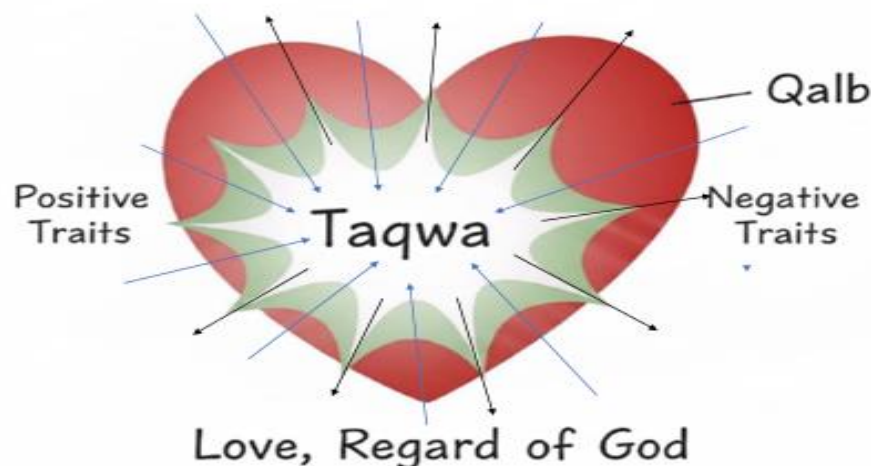
more comprehensive models of character development. This may help to reconcile secular and religious views, and offer a more comprehensive model of virtue that can be applied to both individual flourishing and social morality.

Lastly, this research implies that more work needs to be done to understand how interdisciplinary models of spiritual psychology and Positive Psychology can help us understand how to develop moral character in a manner that takes account of empirical and spirituality.

Taqwa Model

This model represents Taqwa as the central component reside within heart (Qalb), attracting positive traits while repelling negative traits and emphasizing the love and regard of God. The sharp edges show its repulsion for negative traits and it does not let them corrupt the heart, whereas, the curved surfaces show its acceptance of positive character traits or virtues. The capacity of taqwa lies in every heart but remains underdeveloped due to indulgence in mundane desires.

Figure 1: *Integrated Model of Taqwa and Positive Character Traits Showing the Relationship Between the State of the Heart (Taqwa) and Character Traits.*



Conflict of Interest

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