

The Effect of Islamic Giving Behavior on Psychological Well-Being through Dopaminergic Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

Islamic giving behavior, such as zakat, infaq, alms, and waqaf, possesses not only theological dimensions but also significant impacts on psychological well-being. This study aims to analyze Islamic giving behavior as a psychospiritual strategy to increase dopamine production as a happiness hormone. The method employed in this study was a library study of latest psychospiritual literature. The results show that sharing activities based on spiritual sincerity trigger activity in the brain's reward system, specifically the Ventral Tegmental Area (VTA). This psychospiritual process stimulates the release of dopamine, which elicits feelings of happiness, calm, and meaning (a helper's high). In conclusion, Islamic giving behavior is an effective psychospiritual intervention for increasing subjective happiness through neurobiological mechanisms. This research has implications for the integration of Islamic psychology and neuroscience in strengthening public mental health.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Worship in Islam is a form of devotion to Allah SWT that is not only valuable in terms of reward, but also provides psychological benefits. Sincerity and philosophical understanding in paying zakat encourage the birth of positive attitudes such as compassion and gratitude, while reducing negative traits such as greed and egoism. 'Who is he who will lend to Allah, a good loan, then Allah will increase it many times over.' [2:245]. The verse above explains that sharing does not cause our wealth to run out, in fact Allah will multiply the wealth we spend [1]. Giving also awakens our souls and sparks caring for others. This trait contributes to

improved psychological well-being when done with sincerity and an understanding of its spiritual significance. Recent research findings suggest that humans are wired to care, that providing support is an innate behavior with neurobiological roots shared across species. When humans utilize the trait of giving, they can experience improved physical health and social connectivity. Emerging experimental evidence suggests that giving reduces physiological responses associated with poor health and improves social and emotional well-being [2], [3].

Increasing gratitude can be realized through various forms of sharing practices in social life. Some of these include zakat (alms),

infaq (infaq), sedekah (alms), and waqf (waqf). Each form of contribution has different characteristics and objectives, but essentially aims to foster caring, strengthen solidarity, and hone an individual's sense of gratitude for the blessings received. Gratitude is an important foundation of human life. It is not merely a verbal expression, but rather an inner attitude that encourages a person to appreciate every blessing they receive. Giving aligns with broader prosocial behavior, linked to improved emotional and psychological health by encouraging social connectedness and reducing stress. This behavior makes others feel cared for and prevents the emergence of needs, two interrelated aspects of the relationship between sharing and health[4], [5].

From a psychological perspective, giving is closely linked to the concept of psychological well-being. Sharing can increase self-acceptance, strengthen positive relationships with others, and foster a more meaningful sense of purpose in life. Thus, giving is not only a moral act but also a scientific strategy for improving human well-being holistically.

2. METHODS

Islam emphasizes the importance of giving as part of worship and purification. This is emphasized in Surah Al-Baqarah [2:261], which states that charity in the path of Allah will be multiplied like a seed that grows seven spikes, each containing one hundred grains. This verse not only encourages spiritual reward but also shows that showing positive attitudes such as gratitude and empathy leads to increased well-being through the brain's reward system. Giving zakat, infaq, sadaqah, and waqf are forms of worship that draw us closer to Allah SWT. This is in accordance with the maqasid al shari'ah, such as safeguarding the soul (hifz al-nafs) and wealth (hifz al-mal), which can provide peace of mind and soul for both the giver and the recipient [6].

Rasulallah SAW said "almsgiving can wash away sins like water from the realization of fire" [HR. Tirmidhi]. Almsgiving not only

helps others, but also gives peace of mind to those who give it. In the Islamic view, humans are creatures who have been given a mission by Allah SWT and are obliged to fulfill it.

This study used a library research approach to examine the relationship between Islamic giving behavior and psychological well-being through dopaminergic mechanisms. Data were collected from various academic sources, including social and positive psychology journals, Islamic literature on zakat, infaq, sedekah, and waqf, as well as neuroscience research related to the brain's reward system. The data collection process was carried out systematically through database searches such as Google Scholar and Scopus using the keywords 'Islamic Giving Behavior', 'zakat', 'sedekah', 'infaq', 'waqf', 'dopamine', and 'psychological well-being'. Analysis was conducted using thematic and comparative synthesis methods, namely grouping literature based on main themes and comparing the results of Islamic studies with modern psychological theories.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic giving behavior refers to philanthropic practices rooted in Islamic teachings, emphasizing both spiritual and social dimensions. It is closely linked to the principles of religiosity, faith, and the ethical responsibility to help those in need and promote social justice. This behavior is not merely an act of generosity but is also considered a religious obligation and a means of inner purification. Giving in Islam is certainly driven by spiritual beliefs, with motivations such as seeking forgiveness, self-satisfaction, and fulfilling religious obligations.

The dopaminergic system plays a key role in happiness by regulating motivation, reward, and emotion. Balanced dopamine activity is essential for supporting emotional well-being, while dysfunction in this system can lead to various neurological and psychiatric disorders. Dopamine is a crucial neurotransmitter involved in various brain functions, such as motivation, reward, emotional regulation, and happiness.

Dopamine acts as a key modulator in the brain's reward system, which is closely linked to feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. Dopamine activity in areas such as the nucleus accumbens and ventral tegmental area (VTA) mediates the experience of happiness or euphoria. The dopaminergic system processes reward prediction errors, helping the brain learn from positive experiences and reinforce behaviors that produce happiness.

Prosocial behavior, including giving, is often associated with dopamine-related neural activity. Increased dopamine has been shown to increase egalitarian tendencies and generosity in prosocial activities. Similarly, sharing activates reward-related brain areas, such as the striatum, ventral tegmental area, and nucleus accumbens, which are linked to dopamine signaling. Islamic giving behavior is motivated by religious principles such as seeking reward in the afterlife (targhib) and avoiding divine punishment (tarhib). These motivations align with prosocial behavior, which is often reinforced by internal rewards, such as satisfaction and emotional well-being, involving dopaminergic receptors. Islamic giving, whether altruistic or egoistic, activates reward-related brain areas such as the ventral striatum and nucleus accumbens, triggering dopamine release, which then creates a sense of satisfaction. In addition to dopamine, other hormones, such as serotonin (a mood-stabilizing hormone) and oxytocin (a social bonding hormone), are also increased. This suggests that giving behavior, regardless of religious context, can involve the dopaminergic system. Giving behavior is also driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which can activate neural pathways associated with rewards, similar to other forms of altruistic or religious behavior. Furthermore, several phenomena in psychology are closely linked to happiness [7], [8], [9].

a. Subjective well-being (SWB)

A person's SWB refers to his or her own sense of well-being and consists of various cognitive and emotional components.

[10] Cognitive SWB includes life satisfaction, which measures an individual's evaluation of their own life. Emotional SWB is generally assessed based on the frequency of pleasant emotions and a low frequency of negative emotions.

b. Helper's High

Helper's High is a term in psychology and neuroscience used to describe the feeling of joy, warmth, and energy that arises after someone gives or helps others. This phenomenon is highly relevant to Islamic giving behaviors such as alms, zakat, infaq, etc., as both emphasize the inner happiness born of social concern.

c. Combination of Neurotransmitters

Serotonin and oxytocin are two neurotransmitters/hormones that play a significant role in the development of feelings of happiness and social bonding when someone gives or helps. In the context of Islamic Giving Behavior, these two complement the effects of dopamine, making giving not only pleasurable but also emotionally calming.

4. CONCLUSION

Islamic Giving Behavior Islamic giving is a philanthropic practice rooted in Islamic teachings, with strong spiritual and social dimensions. Giving is not only an act of generosity, but also a religious obligation and a means of inner purification, driven by religious motivations such as seeking rewards, seeking forgiveness, and fulfilling religious commands. From a neuroscientific perspective, giving activates the dopaminergic system, which plays a role in regulating motivation, reward, and happiness. Islamic giving behavior is motivated by religious principles such as seeking rewards in the afterlife (targhib) and avoiding divine punishment (tarhib). These motivations align with prosocial behavior, which is often reinforced by internal rewards, a form of satisfaction and emotional well-being that involves dopaminergic receptors.

Dopamine activity in brain areas such as the Nucleus Accumbens and Ventral Tegmental Area triggers feelings of satisfaction and euphoria, reinforcing prosocial behavior. In addition to dopamine, other neurotransmitters such as serotonin and oxytocin also increase, stabilizing mood and strengthening social bonds. Psychological phenomena such as subjective well-being and

the helper's high indicate that giving also brings inner happiness, positive energy, and emotional satisfaction. Thus, Islamic Giving Behavior not only has spiritual value, but is also scientifically proven to support emotional and social well-being, as well as making it a source of happiness in this world as well as rewards in the hereafter.

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