INCoH 2017
The Second International Conference on Humanities

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *WASATIYYAH* CONCEPT AND BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL- SPIRITUAL EQUILIBRIUM IN MANAGING STRESS

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Abstract

Stress is strongly related to the biological, psychological, social and spiritual, or sometimes known as biopsychosocial-spiritual elements in people because it is presumed to originate from the imbalance of these four elements. It is also presumed to influence the balance and health of these four elements. In order to manage stress, it is important to achieve a balance between these four elements. Hence, the question is what kind of balance should be achieved. What concept can be adopted to create this balance so that people are able to well-manage the stress-related issues and problems? This working paper aimed to determine how the concept of equilibrium (balance) and moderateness in Islam, or *wasatiyyah*, could shine some light on this issue. Specifically, this working paper aimed to determine how to relate the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islam with achieving a balance among these four elements in order to manage stress in people. For this purpose, this working paper had used the qualitative interpretive approach with the document analysis method and applied relational content analysis. This paper managed to adduce aspects that need to be emphasised based on the *wasatiyyah* concept so that these important human elements are in equilibrium and subsequently help to manage contemporary stress-related issues and problems in a holistic and comprehensive manner. This paper hopes that the findings are sustainable in the future so that it could help overcome increasingly worrying stress-related issues.

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Keywords: Islamic-Based Stress Management, human development, *wasatiyyah*, human elements.

1. Introduction

There are various definitions of stress by numerous parties. However, all these definitions agree that stress is an individual's response to something. This response involves the individual's internal system, including the biological system, such as producing hormones in the body as a reaction to a particular situation that causes stress, increases the heart rate and blood circulation; the psychological system such as increasing anxiety, depression etc.; the social system that could eventually have negative effects on the primary relationships of the stressed person such as family relations, work place relations and social relations; and also the body's spiritual system, which includes the mind, natural inclinations and emotions.

Stress occurs quite easily because individuals are exposed to sources of stress such as physical factors, for example, work load, illness or lack of nutrition; mental factors that involve hope, disappointment and fear related to one's life; and situational factors that include roles and responsibilities such as role of a husband or wife, role of a son/daughter or role of an employee (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Heckman, Lim, & Montalto, 2014; Baghurst & Kelly, 2014; Donovan & Kleiner, 1994).

Since stress is such a vulnerable state, it has become a global issue as it could affect individuals all over the world. Stress strikes silently and leads to chaos. Hence, stress is considered a disease or a state of panic or mental confusion (Scheid & Brown, 2010). However, not all forms of stress lead to negative circumstances because there are types of stress that have positive effects. For example, stress could increase the motivation to succeed or it could help lead to self-enrichment. Stress that has a positive effect (eustress) is not the issue compared to stress that has a negative effect (distress). The question arises as to how a person could balance one's inner self when faced with stress (Parker & Ragsdale, 2015).

The stress issue cannot be allowed to continue because it could get out of control or even cause negative effects on people, society, organization or the nation. Therefore, this paper puts forth a solution by emphasising on a harmonious concept from an Islamic perspective, which is the *wasatiyyah* concept. This working paper will discuss the *wasatiyyah* concept as well as a discussion on stress based on the biological, psychological, social and spiritual aspects. These four aspects are emphasised because these aspects are the basic elements that generally describe the state of a person, especially a person who is in stress. Previously, various experimental and non-experimental studies had discussed these elements resulting in several studies on the health model related to stress, such as the biopsychosocial and biopsychosocial-spiritual models. Both these health models used the biological, social and psychological elements in the treatment of stress, including the spiritual element, which emphasised something that was spiritual in nature. Thus, since these models are rooted in Western epistemology, it would be more suitable if these elements were studied from an Islamic epistemology to be applied by Muslims. Nevertheless, this does not mean one has to totally reject contemporary values, rather highlight centralisation, equilibrium and matters that should be highlighted first, especially those that manage stress. Hence, this paper intends to bring forward values such as centralization, equilibrium and moderation present in the *wasatiyyah* concept that would be able to solve emerging problems relating to stress. Then, after discussing the *wasatiyyah* concept, the equilibrium of the four elements related with the concept is highlighted.

2.   Problem Statement

Before investigating the *wasatiyyah* concept it would be proper to state the definition or meaning of *wasatiyyah* because this term originated from Arabic. Generally, from a linguistic aspect, *wasatiyyah* originates from the Arabic root word *al-wasat*, which means moderation, intermediate, balanced and declaration (Omer, 2015). Al-Qaradawi (2011) had previously defined *wasatiyyah* as a terminology and something that needs prescribed rights, which is acknowledged rights brought about by moderation and not beyond the limits set by Islamic rulings. Besides that, al-Qaradawi (2011); Wan Husin (2013); Omer (2015) also stated that the *wasatiyyah* concept and its dimensions is a concept that has been invigorated now in the context of delivering an Islamic message.

The definition of *wasatiyyah* found in the al-Qur'an also portrays the characteristics of *wasatiyyah* that should be practiced in everyday life. The characteristics mentioned such as being just, the best, humble, perfect, not extreme, moderate, balanced etc. need a bridge in the form of spirituality in order to obtain (Ibn Kathir, 1992; al-Qurtubiy, 1993; al-Raziy,1990; al-Nasafiy,1996; al-Zamakhsyariy, 1995; al-Nawawi, n.d.; al-Zuhayliy, 1991; al-Suyutiy, 2017). This matter must be understood thoroughly so that each person knows the origin of this concept, how it is practiced and its appreciation should be intense so that the person is conscious of the aims of its implementation. This is explained in detail by the diagram below (Figure 01).
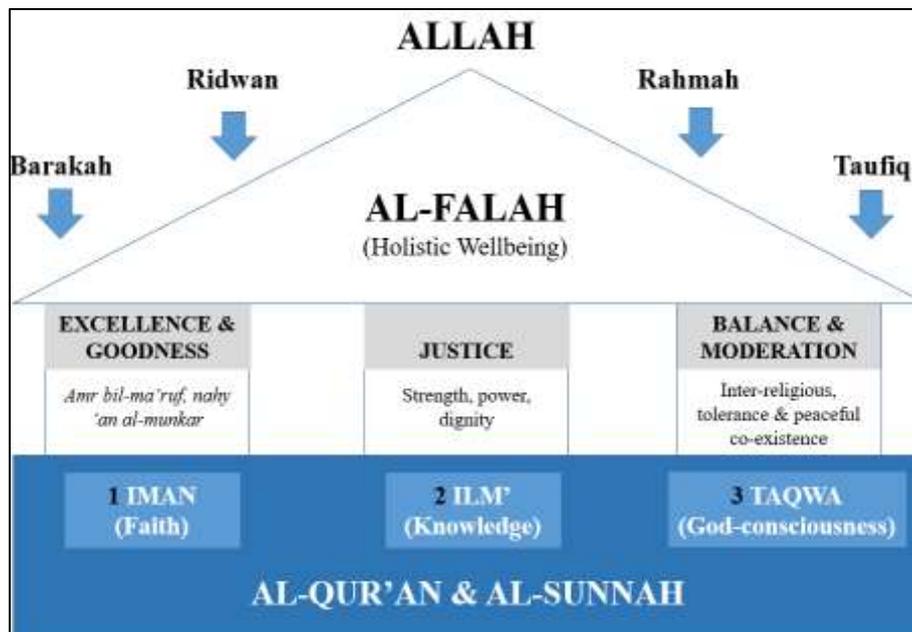

Figure 01. Hassan's Graphic Representation of the *Wasatiyyah* Concept.
Image Source: Hasaan (2013).

According to Figure 01 1, the characteristics that portray the *wasatiyyah* concept could be obtained through the faith (*iman*), knowledge ('*ilm*) and God-consciousness (*taqwa*) platforms. Basically, these three platforms were obtained based on the al-Qur'an and as-Sunnah. The process of faith (*iman*) leads to excellence and goodness through good practices and the avoidance of what is prohibited.

According to Quranic verse, Ali Imraan, 3:110, al-Suyutiy (2017) stated that humans were chosen by Allah SWT in accordance with the wishes of Allah SWT, who wants propriety and abstinence from despicable acts as well as a wholehearted believe in Allah SWT. The process of knowledge leads towards justice through strength, power and morality.

Al-Nawawi (n.d.) mentioned that the duty of safeguarding religion, especially by people who possess knowledge, is not an easy task because one has to safeguard the sanctity from deviations and exegesis (*takwil*) by extremist and ignorant groups. Lastly, the process of achieving God-consciousness (*taqwa*) would lead towards equilibrium or moderation, which is achievable through tolerance and universal peace.

Ibn Kathir (1992) elaborated about the command of Allah SWT, whereby to safeguarding religion and always uphold the truth because of Allah SWT and not because of humankind or self-pride as well as not to yield to hatred that would eventually lead to injustice towards all, friends and foe alike. According to Ibnu Kathir (1992), Allah SWT will reward all actions to those who are just and fair based from God-consciousness (*taqwa*).

According to Hassan (2013), if the three platforms are implemented correctly, there would be added value that will be assimilated into the person during the process of seeking equilibrium in a holistic manner such as *barakah* (productivity), *ridwan* (pleased), *rahmah* (mercy or forgiveness) and *taufiq* (agreement or reconcile). The holistic equilibrium mentioned above is also called *al-falah* by Allah SWT.

3. Research Questions

What concept can be adopted to create *wasatiyyah* concept with the biological, psychological, social and spiritual equilibrium so that people are able to well-manage the stress-related issues and problems?

4. Purpose of the Study

This working paper purposed to determine how the concept of equilibrium (balance) and moderateness in Islam, or *wasatiyyah*, could shine some light on this issue. Specifically, this working paper purposed to determine how to relate the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islam with achieving a balance among these four elements in order to manage stress in people.

5. Research Methods

This conceptual paper uses the revealed sources of knowledge (the Quran and Sunnah) and relevant literature to document the *wasatiyyah* concept and its linkages with stress management specifically from the biological, psychological, social and spiritual viewpoint. With qualitative interpretive design approach, relational content analysis was used to identify significant themes related to *wasatiyyah* concept, human biological-psychological-social-spiritual elements and stress management.

6. Findings

The Relationship Between the *Wasatiyyah* Concept and The Biological, Psychological, Social and Spiritual Equilibrium in Managing Stress

A balance from a biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspect is important in managing stress. This is because the four elements do already exist in a person. These four elements can determine the state of health of a person in a holistic manner. If one of these elements are not in a good state, then the person cannot be said to be healthy overall. According to Sulmasy (2002), the founder of the biopsychosocial-spiritual model (known as the holistic human health safeguarding model):

A human person is a being in relationship-biologically, psychologically, socially and transcendently. The patient is a human person. Illness disrupts all of the dimensions of relationship that constitute the patient as a human person and therefore only biopsychosocial-spiritual model can provide a foundation for treating patients holistically.

This statement shows the importance of equilibrium or balance that must exist within a person. Before the *wasatiyyah* concept and the balance of these four factors are co-related, this working paper will adduce the process of how the biological, psychological, social and spiritual aspects turn into stress factors.
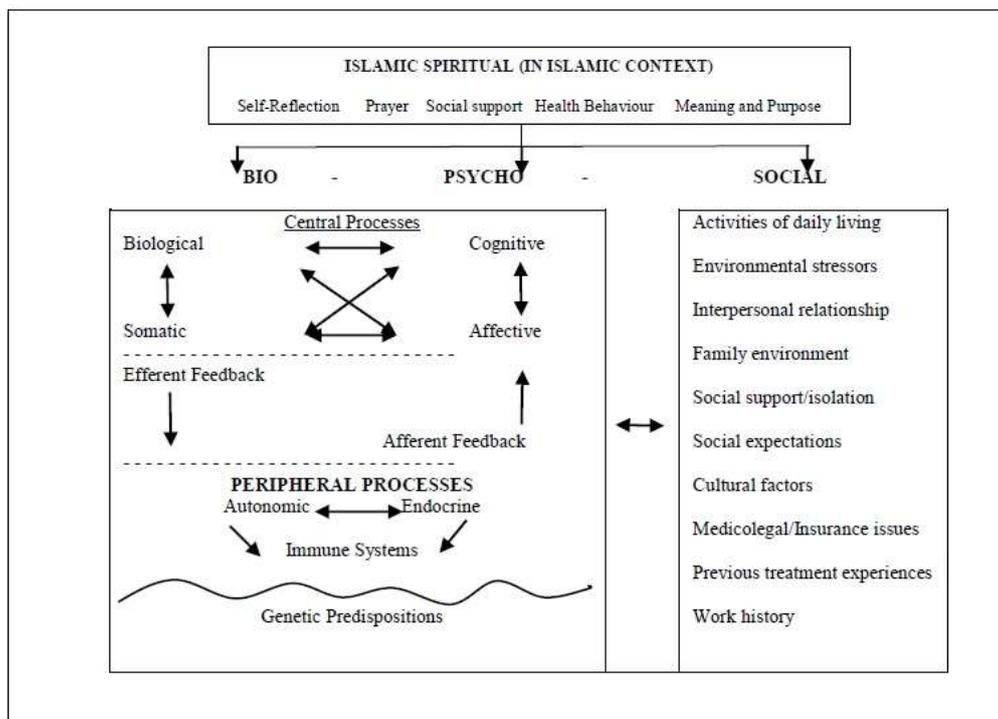

Figure 02. Shows the biopsychosocial-spiritual interactive process according to the health and illness aspects. Source: Adapted from Gatchel (2004).

The biopsychosocial-spiritual interactive process shown by Gatchel (2004) still needs to be enhanced although the interactive process indicates a holistic interaction. In Figure 02, the spiritual

element is highlighted as an element that functions as a reversible reaction with the biological, psychological and social elements. The biological and psychological elements each possess a contextual relationship (physical–physiology and emotions) and are also influenced by the reversible reaction of the social element. This process or model should be further enhanced, as mentioned by Miresco and Kirmayer (2006): *"The continual maturing of the BPS model may also depend upon the extent to which any and all of these levels (genetics, biology, psychology, sociality, ecology, and spirituality) are involved and overlap within even the simplest of interventions"* (p. 918).

This working paper intends to substantiate the spiritual element, which is still being studied by various parties, particularly researchers including Hatala (2013) and Sulmasy (2016). Since the spiritual element is an element with reversible reactions to the three elements, it is proper to say that the spiritual element is the most important element that acts as a factor in managing stress if it is looked specifically from the scope of stress management. The spiritual element in this study will be enhanced by the *wasatiyyah* concept according to the Islamic perspective so that stress management is initiated with an effective method and fulfils the actual objective.
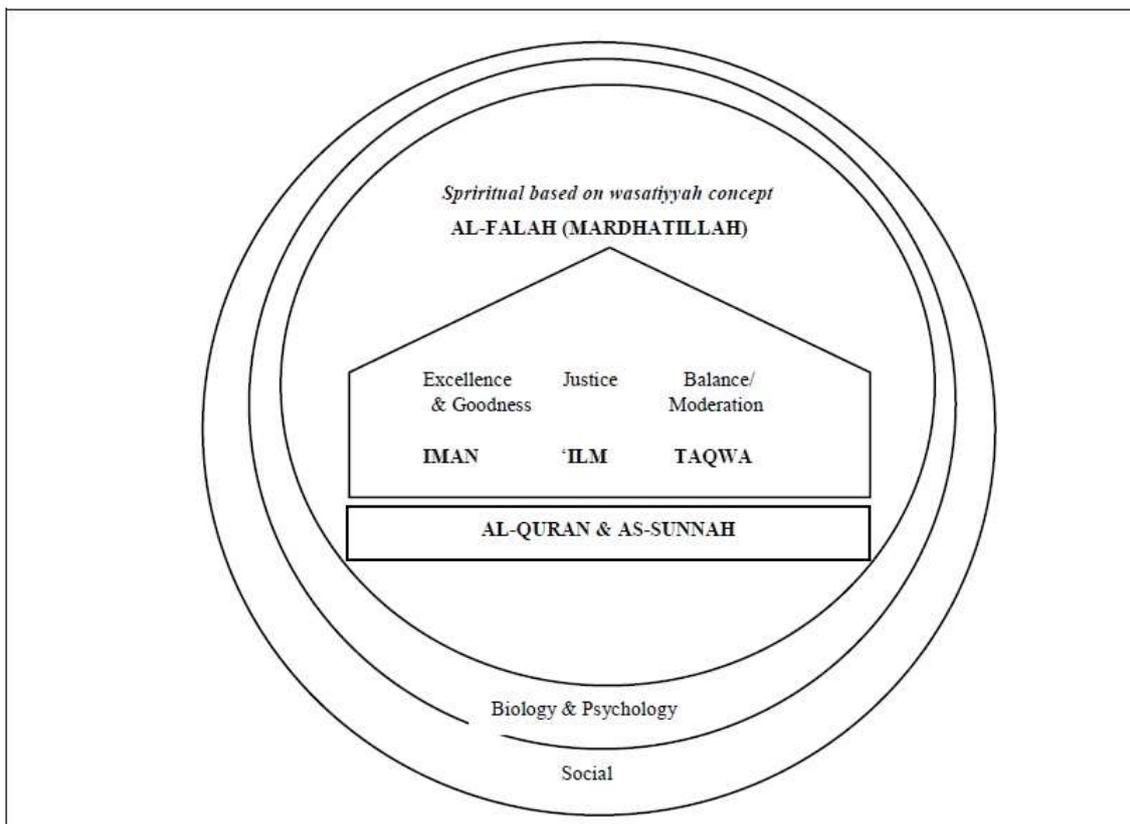

Figure 03. The relationship between the *Wasatiyyah* concept and the biological, psychological, social and spiritual equilibrium.

The spiritual element based on the *wasatiyyah* concept is like a strong building. The strong building stands on its foundation or the al-Qur'an and as-Sunnah platform. In this context, it means that if the al-Qur'an and as-Sunnah are not the main pillars in this foundation, spiritual development will not develop. Then, faith (*iman*), knowledge (*'ilm*) and God-consciousness (*taqwa*) would become the pillars before spiritual development, which acts as the bricks, becomes the wall that protects the building. The

bricks symbolise the existence of faith (*iman*) and God-consciousness (*taqwa*). Implementing goodwill, excellence, equilibrium and moderation indicates the existence of values such as faith (*iman*), knowledge ('*ilm*) and God-consciousness (*taqwa*) within the person. A person who has faith (*iman*) will not be rattled when his faith (*iman*) is tested, including tests that are in the form of stress in everyday life.

Ibn Kathir (1992) elaborated on the qur'anic verse (al-Baqarah, 2:155) by saying that Allah SWT tests humankind by subjecting them to several forms of misfortunes such as fear, hunger and the lack of property, soul and fruits. Thus, only those who are patient when faced with these misfortunes would receive praise and goodness from Allah SWT. The various forms of tests mentioned in the al-Qur'an are also categorised as stress from a biological (hunger), psychological (fear), social (lack of property and soul) and spiritual (the value of patience) aspect.

Through knowledge, people who face stress can evaluate situations that they face in a just manner. A just evaluation in this context means a person can think in a justified manner as to what the person faces is good or bad. If the person experiences a misfortune, the person will return the misfortune to Allah SWT. According to the citation by Ibn Kathir (1992) based on Surah al-Baqarah verse 156 and the testament by the Prophet SAW, humankind who face misfortunes and tests would mention the word that shows restitution to Allah SWT (*istirja'*).

The Prophet SAW exhorted, meaning:

"Ummu Salamah said: I heard the Prophet SAW saying: There will not be a Muslim who faces misfortune then recites what Allah SWT has commanded him to: Verily we are owned by Allah and to HIM we will return, O Allah, give me the blessings for the misfortunes that befall us, and change it to something of goodness, as Allah would surely change it to something better" (Muslim, no. 1531).

The God-consciousness (*taqwa*) platform is built within a person when the responsible person portrays loyalty to Allah SWT through prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, paying alms (zakat) and performing the Hajj (Abdul Majid, 2013). Loyalty to Allah SWT is not restricted to ritual worship only but considers each and every daily activity as a form of worship to Allah SWT. The Prophet SAW also practised a tolerant attitude and guarded the relationship with non-Muslims. Hence, it could be said that the value of God-consciousness (*taqwa*) within a person not only guarantees a relationship with Allah SWT but also the relationship amongst humans is nurtured. Salleh (2013) also characterised the relationship as one that is within the scope of receiving the blessings of Allah SWT. Therefore, if the social relationship of the person is nurtured, the stress issues caused by social elements will not exist or be evident because both the relationships are in an equilibrium.

After faith (*iman*), knowledge ('*ilm*) and God-consciousness (*taqwa*) become the wall, then spiritual development would be strengthened. The 'roof' of the person's spiritual development would be formed in order to balance the spiritual characteristic. The analogy of the 'roof' in this context is the *al-falah*, which means success. *Al-falah* can be achieved if spiritual development is built perfectly (based on the analogy mentioned earlier). Lastly, this perfect spiritual development would function well in handling stress-related problems.

7. Conclusion

Although Gatchel (2004) had mentioned that the spiritual element is the main instigator in the biopsychosocial-spiritual element; hence, the spiritual element highlighted in not the spiritual element in an Islamic context. Following this, the *wasatiyyah* concept in this working paper further elaborates the spiritual element according to the Islamic context and relates it with the biological, psychological, social and spiritual elements. It can be concluded that if the spiritual element is in the *wasatiyyah* concept, then the biological, psychological, social and spiritual elements are in equilibrium and stress could be well-managed.

Acknowledgments

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