

Emotional Well-Being and Social Support Through Zakat: A Sociological and Psychological Approach (Overview)

Mohamad Qamarulzaman Bin Mohamad Zani^{1*}, Azman Ab Rahman^{2*},
Muhammad Azhad Al-Bohari²

¹Faculty of Quranic & Sunnah, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Bandar Baru Nilai 78100, Nilai Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

²Faculty of Syariah and Law, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Bandar Baru Nilai 78100, Nilai Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

*Corresponding Author; E-mail: mohd.qamarulzaman@gmail.com, azman@usim.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between zakat, emotional well-being, and social support through a multidisciplinary lens combining sociological and psychological perspectives. Using a qualitative, descriptive approach, the study synthesizes insights from a selection of older and recent scholarly works relevant to the topic. The analysis highlights how zakat, as an Islamic social-financial obligation, alleviates financial stress, fosters dignity among recipients, and strengthens emotional resilience. From a sociological standpoint, zakat promotes community cohesion, reduces social inequality, and reinforces mutual responsibility. Psychologically, it contributes to reduced anxiety, increased gratitude, and enhanced life satisfaction. Findings suggest that zakat functions not only as an economic instrument but also as a psychosocial intervention with long-term benefits for both individuals and communities. The study underscores the importance of integrating emotional well-being programs into zakat distribution frameworks to maximize its holistic impact.

Keywords: well-being, emotional social support, zakat.

INTRODUCTION

Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, is a mandatory almsgiving obligation for eligible Muslims, aimed at purifying wealth and redistributing resources to eight categories of recipients (asnaf), including the poor, the needy, and those in debt (A. Arif, et. al, 2024). In Malaysia, zakat administration has evolved from informal community-based giving to a structured system managed by state Islamic religious councils. This institutionalization has allowed more systematic poverty alleviation efforts, which, in turn, can ease financial strain a significant contributor to emotional stress in modern society. By providing essentials and reducing economic uncertainty, zakat can indirectly improve recipients' emotional well-being, helping them regain dignity, stability, and hope in a climate where rising living costs and social pressures often erode mental health.

Today, Malaysia's zakat institutions use digital platforms, payroll deductions, and corporate collaborations to expand reach and ensure compliance. Growing collections reflect not only improved systems but also a public recognition that economic security is tied to overall well-

being. For many beneficiaries, timely zakat support alleviates immediate stress, allowing them to focus on family, education, or community participation. However, perceptions remain mixed: supporters praise its potential to reduce poverty-related distress, while critics point to bureaucratic delays or limited emotional support beyond material aid. From a broader perspective, integrating zakat distribution with mental health and social support programs could transform it from a purely financial intervention into a holistic tool for reducing stress and enhancing emotional resilience in Malaysian society.

While zakat can help reduce individual and household financial pressures, its impact is still shaped by wider economic and social conditions. During times of national or global upheaval, even strong community support systems like zakat face limitations in buffering the surge of emotional strain. The exacerbation of emotional stress during past crises such as the 2008 economic downturn and the COVID-19 pandemic underscores how societal, economic, and public health disruptions amplify psychological vulnerability. The pandemic in particular saw emotional stress spike, affecting populations across all living environments and employment statuses (Xiangdan Piao, et. al, 2024). This data highlights how modern stress is shaped not only by personal factors but also by broader social and structural pressures. Consequently, there is growing urgency to address emotional well-being at both individual and societal levels, as growing emotional strain threatens overall social resilience and collective functioning.

Beyond global trends in stress, modern cultural norms themselves are contributing to emotional difficulties. In many contemporary societies, there is a strong and often unrealistic culture of relentless happiness. Negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or anxiety tend to be stigmatized, seen as maladaptive rather than natural responses. A study published in *Scientific Reports* found that societal pressure to appear happy can actually impair well-being, because negative emotions are discouraged rather than acknowledged and managed healthily (Egon Dejonckheere, et. al, 2022). By invalidating natural emotional experiences, this single-sided push for positivity can lead individuals to suppress or dismiss their genuine feelings, exacerbating internal distress and undermining emotional resilience.

Compounding this cultural pressure is the impact of digital technologies and social media on psychological health. A systematic review reported that social networking site usage is linked to elevated risk of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress, particularly among youth (Egon Dejonckheere, et. al, 2022). The always-on nature of social media amplifies social comparison, fear of missing out, and emotional dysregulation. Total exposure to curated images of others' "perfect" lives can heighten feelings of inadequacy and emotional depletion. Combined with broader cultural norms that discourage authenticity and emotional complexity, the digital environment becomes a double burden, amplifying emotional stress rather than supporting well-being. These factors show why emotional health is becoming a central public concern in modern societies—not just in clinical settings, but across cultural, educational, and digital landscapes.

Recognising the growing urgency of emotional well-being, scholars and practitioners are advocating for more holistic, culturally attuned, and community-based approaches to emotional health. The traditional medical model—which focuses on diagnosing and treating disorders—must be complemented by proactive strategies that foster emotional resilience, community connection, and structural support. For example, promoting social support (through family, friendships, community groups) is essential for buffering emotional distress and cultivating psychological well-being. Recent literature underscores that people with strong social networks experience less anxiety, depression, and overall lower psychological distress. Policies and programs that strengthen communal ties, reduce isolation, and provide access to meaningful social practices can therefore play a crucial role in nurturing emotional well-being at scale.

Further, redefining cultural attitudes toward emotion is equally important. Rather than pathologizing negative emotions, societies can benefit from embracing emotional literacy—teaching individuals to recognize, validate, and regulate complex emotions. Educational institutions, workplaces, and media can contribute by normalizing emotional diversity and encouraging dialogue around emotional struggles. Digital platforms, too, should be redesigned to support—not exploit—emotional well-being, by reducing harmful comparisons and fostering genuine engagement. Finally, mental health strategies should be inclusive: they should address the needs of vulnerable groups such as young people, rural populations, and communities facing socioeconomic stress. By combining emotional awareness with community investment and structural interventions, modern societies can counter the rise in emotional distress and build a foundation for sustainable emotional health.

In some modern Muslim societies, initiatives like zakat distribution have also played a modest yet meaningful role in supporting emotional well-being. While primarily aimed at alleviating material hardship, zakat often provides recipients with a renewed sense of dignity, stability, and hope. By easing financial stress, it can indirectly reduce emotional strain, allowing individuals and families to focus on personal growth, relationships, and community engagement. Though its impact on emotional health may not be as extensively documented as clinical interventions, such faith-based social support mechanisms remind us that well-being is deeply interconnected with social justice and compassionate community care.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A robust foundation of review literature confirms that social support significantly enhances emotional well-being by buffering stress, reducing depression and anxiety, and increasing life satisfaction. For instance, Asres Bedaso et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 67 studies (64,449 participants) showing that low social support correlates with higher risks of antenatal depression, anxiety, and self-harm (*Reproductive Health*) (Thijs Becker, et. al, 2022). In modern societies, there is mounting evidence that emotional well-being is under significant strain, prompting deep concern among researchers, policymakers, and mental health professionals. One influential global study analyzed data from the Gallup World Poll across 149 countries and tracked emotional stress such as whether respondents felt stress “yesterday” from 2007 to 2021. It revealed a steady and alarming increase in emotional stress worldwide: only about 26% of respondents reported stress in 2007, which rose to approximately 38% by 2020. Notably, 85% of countries experienced worsening stress over that period, with younger people and rural communities being especially affected (Xiangdan Piao, et. al, 2024). These findings offer a theoretical base for understanding zakat: beyond merely alleviating financial hardship, zakat can strengthen supportive networks and emotional resilience, foundational elements of psychological well-being.

Beyond global trends in stress, modern cultural norms themselves are contributing to emotional difficulties. In many contemporary societies, there is a strong and often unrealistic culture of relentless happiness. Negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or anxiety tend to be stigmatized, seen as maladaptive rather than natural responses. A study published in *Scientific Reports* found that societal pressure to appear happy can actually impair well-being, because negative emotions are discouraged rather than acknowledged and managed healthily (Kai Ruggeri, et. al, 2020). By invalidating natural emotional experiences, this single-sided push for positivity can lead individuals to suppress or dismiss their genuine feelings, exacerbating internal distress and undermining emotional resilience.

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Meta-analytic work by Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) found that individuals with stronger social relationships had a 50% increased likelihood of survival across multiple health outcomes. Parallel reviews on religion and mental health suggest that religious practices, when tied to supportive communities, can improve resilience, though effects vary by context. Taken together, these literatures provide a broad theoretical base for viewing zakat as more than a financial transfer: it is a norm-driven practice that can strengthen social ties, reduce financial strain, and reinforce belonging all of which are foundational for emotional well-being.

Zakat intersects with prosocial behavior and the affective benefits of giving and receiving help. A landmark meta-analysis finds that kindness interventions paradigmatically, acts of giving produce small-to-moderate boosts in subjective well-being for the actor, suggesting plausible emotional payoffs for donors who participate in zakat with empathic engagement and visible social impact. On the recipient side, reviews on social support indicate that assistance perceived as responsive and dignity-preserving is most likely to reduce stress and improve mood and life satisfaction, offering a pathway through which zakat may indirectly support mental health. The literature thus bridges motives (compassion, obligation), mechanisms (stress-buffering, positive affect), and outcomes (lower distress, higher satisfaction), while stressing that design matters: transparency, fit to needs (consumptive vs. productive zakat), and community involvement tend to strengthen psychological benefits (Fasihi Harandi, et. al, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach and employs content analysis as its main research design. Document analysis is used as the primary data collection instrument, allowing the researcher to conduct an in-depth review of relevant written sources. The documents examined include academic theses, books, conference proceedings, and scholarly articles obtained in both physical and digital formats. The selection of documents is based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives. Each document is systematically reviewed to identify key concepts, themes, and patterns that can inform the study's overall analysis. The data are then organized, compared, and critically evaluated to ensure accuracy and depth of understanding. This process is iterative, with the researcher revisiting and refining interpretations as new insights emerge. The aim is to build a coherent set of findings grounded in credible evidence, which will then form the basis for drawing informed conclusions. By relying on established qualitative methods, this approach provides flexibility, depth, and contextual understanding suited to the nature of the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Long-term financial stress poses serious risks to both mental and physical health. Plus, financial stress has also managed to emerged as one of the most consistent predictors of poor emotional and physical well-being across societies in the last two decades. Defined as the psychological strain associated with real or perceived financial difficulties, it is more than a passing discomfort, it is a chronic condition that can erode an individual's quality of life over time. A comprehensive

systematic review of 40 observational studies found robust evidence that financial stress, whether manifested in debt, insecure income, or perceived hardship, is strongly linked to higher levels of depressive symptoms. The review concluded that people who face persistent financial difficulties are at increased risk of mental health deterioration, and the effect is especially strong among those with lower socioeconomic status and limited social resources (Naijie Guan, et. al, 2022; John Sturgeon, et. al, 2016). In the long term, this sustained psychological burden not only increases vulnerability to depression and anxiety but also contributes to physical ailments such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and weakened immune responses, further illustrating the holistic damage of financial strain.

Human reactions to financial stress vary depending on individual circumstances and structural factors. Many respond with heightened worry, which often translates into behavioral changes such as cutting back on social activities, experiencing sleep disturbances, or even adopting unhealthy coping mechanisms like overeating or substance use. A large-scale U.S. survey showed that financial worry was significantly associated with elevated psychological distress, particularly among groups with limited buffers such as renters, unemployed individuals, and unmarried adults (Soomin Ryu & Lu Fan, 2022). This suggests that financial stress is not simply a matter of insufficient income, it is deeply intertwined with social status, housing security, and access to supportive networks. When these protective factors are absent, financial pressures can magnify feelings of helplessness, fear, and social isolation.

From an Islamic perspective, financial struggles are recognized as part of the trials (*ibtilā'*) that every human being will inevitably face. Rather than dismissing such challenges, Islamic teachings place them within a spiritual framework, encouraging believers to approach them with patience, trust, and remembrance of Allah. One Hadith highlights this dimension:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: "لَيْسَ الْغِنَى عَنْ كَثْرَةِ الْعَرَضِ،
وَلَكِنَّ الْغِنَى غِنَى النَّفْسِ

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Messenger of Allah SAW said, "True wealth is not in having many possessions, but true wealth is the richness of the soul."
– *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Riqāq* (Hadith No. 6446).

The Hadith above provides a profound insight: financial security alone does not guarantee peace of mind. Rather, contentment (*qanā'ah*) and inner resilience are key determinants of emotional well-being. Islam thus frames financial stress not only as an economic issue but as a spiritual opportunity reminding believers that while worldly trials are inevitable, cultivating patience (*ṣabr*), trust in Allah (*tawakkul*), and gratitude (*shukr*) can transform hardship into a path of growth.

In daily life, sociological realities show that financial strain not only burdens individuals but also shapes wider social structures and norms. John A. Sturgeon (2016) explains that financial stress often generates psychological distress which spills over into family relationships, friendships, and workplace dynamics. Chronic economic pressure erodes social harmony and weakens interpersonal networks, creating cycles of tension and conflict that extend far beyond the individual. This illustrates that financial challenges are simultaneously personal and sociological, capable of undermining trust, stability, and collective resilience if left unaddressed.

At the institutional level, financial support plays an important role in mitigating these destructive dynamics by stabilizing communities and reducing social turnover. A study by Yan et al. (2021) demonstrated that low financial satisfaction among healthcare providers was strongly

associated with higher turnover intention, while perceived social support and burnout acted as mediating factors (Huosheng Yan, et. al 2021). Although this research is specific to healthcare, the findings are broadly sociological: when financial security is strengthened, people are more likely to remain engaged, productive, and committed to their social and professional environments. This principle can be applied to zakat, where timely and effective financial assistance has the potential to reduce instability within vulnerable groups and foster a more cohesive society.

The Qur'an profoundly emphasizes the imperative of wealth redistribution as a means to uphold societal balance and prevent wealth from concentrating among the privileged. Allah commands :

وَأَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعَ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَاقٍ ۚ
وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

"...and spend from what We have provided for you before there comes a Day on which there is no exchange or friendship; and the disbelievers—they are the wrongdoers." (Surah Al-Baqarah, 254).

This verse highlights that material wealth must be channeled responsibly, not hoarded. By institutionalizing zakat, Islam protects society from the destabilization that financial inequality can generate. In sociological terms, such redistribution fosters social cohesion, reduces resentment, and defends the emotional well-being of most vulnerable community members.

From a sociological standpoint, Émile Durkheim (1893) articulated that social solidarity in modern societies is maintained through organic solidarity a form of cohesion built on role specialization, interdependence, and mutual reliance rather than shared traditions and similarities (Ritzer, 2008). In contemporary societies, individuals depend on each other's diverse functions like organs in a living body to keep the social organism healthy. Zakat can be understood as a religiously grounded structural mechanism that reinforces this organic solidarity. By ensuring that the financially vulnerable are supported, zakat maintains interdependence and reduces the social rupture that financial stress can cause. This interplay of faith, morality, and sociology demonstrates that zakat transcends charity, it is a form of organized social solidarity deeply embedded in both divine guidance and modern social theory.

Financial shocks do not stay "on the spreadsheet"; they seep into minds and communities at the same time. Also, they reshape how minds, families, and communities function. Contemporary scholarship on the social determinants of mental health shows that economic insecurity and unequal social conditions heighten the risk of anxiety, depression, and distress across the life course linking what looks like a "private" psychological struggle to structural forces such as jobs, housing, and safety nets (Kirkbride et al., 2024). A large systematic review on economic recessions shows consistent links between downturns and deteriorations in mental health especially rises in depression, anxiety, and suicide because job loss, income volatility, and debt restructure everyday roles and relationships, not only budgets (Diana Frاسquilho et al., 2016). In other words, a crisis operates on two planes at once: psychologically (threat, uncertainty, loss of control) and sociologically (status disruption, weaker networks, stressed family systems). When households oscillate between arrears and austerity, people report rumination, sleep problems, and irritability that feed into relational strain and social withdrawal classic pathways by which individual distress becomes a neighborhood problem.

If those pressures are ignored or under-addressed, the fallout compounds. Cross-national evidence from the 2008–2010 period indicates that inadequate social protection during recessions was associated with higher suicide mortality, whereas every additional US\$10 per capita in social-welfare spending correlated with a reduction in suicide rates (David Stuckler et

al., 2011). This is not merely a statistic; it is a policy signal. When governments and citizens fail to mount timely, dignifying assistance, distress hardens into clinical morbidity, family instability, and community fragmentation. Schools see concentration fall; workplaces absorb presenteeism; clinics face heavier caseloads. Conversely, targeted, trusted safety nets blunt the slide from financial uncertainty to psychological crisis and social dislocation.

Against that backdrop, the Qur'an's guidance channels material relief through a rule-bound institution like zakat, that targets specific categories (the poor, the needy, those in debt, administrators, etc.), turning compassion into an organized obligation rather than sporadic charity. Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Tawbah, 60:

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَمِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَرَمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَأَبْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

Translation: "Indeed, zakat expenditures are only for the poor and the needy, and for those employed to collect it, and for bringing hearts together [for Islam], and for freeing captives, and for those in debt, and for the cause of Allah, and for the stranded traveler – an obligation imposed by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise." - (Al-Tawbah; 60)

This matters in modern societies because predictable, criteria-based transfers reduce uncertainty for households and make it easier for institutions to coordinate help at scale. Empirical work increasingly finds that when zakat is administered with clear targeting and, where feasible, "productive" uses (skills, micro-capital), it correlates with reductions in headcount poverty and improvements in recipient welfare evidence that the classical design can be operationalized effectively today (Evi Choiriyah, et. al, 2020). Practically, this blends psychology and sociology: at the household level, timely zakat lowers fear about bills and debt, stabilizing mood and attention; at the community level, it signals shared responsibility, supporting social cohesion during downturns. In short, the Qur'an's path does more than urge generosity it institutionalizes it, ensuring that relief is predictable, distributive, and dignity-preserving. In a world where economic shocks travel fast and social comparison amplifies stress, that combination moral duty plus administrative clarity offers a resilient way to cushion psychological strain while strengthening collective welfare.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the pressing reality that financial stress and emotional distress are deeply interwoven challenges in modern society. Economic hardship, whether arising from unstable employment, rising costs of living, or sudden crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, not only burdens individuals materially but also threatens long-term psychological stability and collective resilience. The findings emphasize that stress is not experienced in isolation; it is shaped by social structures, community dynamics, and the presence or absence of support mechanisms. Without systematic intervention, these strains risk escalating into broader social instability.

From both sociological and psychological perspectives, zakat emerges as a crucial intervention that bridges material support with emotional well-being. Unlike voluntary charity, zakat is an institutionalized duty designed to directly target categories of individuals most at risk such as the poor, indebted, and vulnerable. This structured redistribution provides immediate relief to households while reinforcing communal solidarity. In contemporary Malaysia and other Muslim societies, zakat has shown promise in reducing poverty indices, easing the weight of financial obligations, and creating a sense of shared responsibility. When properly managed, it

not only mitigates short-term stress but also fosters longer-term empowerment through social inclusion and economic stability.

The Islamic framework thus positions zakat as more than a religious obligation; it is a holistic social safety net with psychological benefits. By lessening uncertainty and reaffirming that one's hardships are acknowledged within the community, zakat contributes to reduced anxiety, strengthened trust, and improved emotional health. At the same time, its systematic nature aligns well with modern governance and policy approaches that seek to institutionalize welfare without compromising dignity.

In conclusion, the integration of zakat within contemporary approaches to emotional well-being underscores a vital synergy between faith-based obligations and modern social science insights. Addressing financial stress and emotional strain requires both structural and personal solutions, and zakat embodies this balance. As financial and emotional challenges continue to evolve, zakat offers a timeless model of social support anchored in spirituality, yet profoundly relevant to the psychological and sociological needs of modern societies.

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