



Editorial:

(Continuing) the Development of a Regional Positive Psychology

Lambert, L., & Pasha-Zaidi, N.

In our 2015 inaugural issue of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology (MEJPP), we launched a call for the development of an indigenous positive psychology in the UAE and across the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region (Lambert, Pasha-Zaidi, Passmore, & York Al-Karam, 2015) and we have seen tremendous strides towards this endeavor in that time. Yet, there is much terrain to cover and in this issue, we wanted to explore what was not yet being done and what existed as possibilities for researchers and practitioners alike. This came about as a result of emails and phone calls from practitioners, researchers and regular people asking, what can we do to take part? What are some good research questions; what's "hot" right now? Where do we go from here?

We asked ourselves the very same questions and decided to dedicate this volume to those currently in the field of positive psychology exploring questions of culture, religion, and wellbeing constructs of relevance to the region. Some work in organizations, others focus on quality of life research and social development across the Arab world. Others still take a view on mental health, Islamic identity, refugees, or even the green building and design movement. We portrayed these people for the range of work they do across the region that pertains to wellbeing and because they each had a measure of insight as to what would help further the field in their respective areas. To this end, we also include in Table 1, a number of research questions that are broad enough to be tailored to a variety of regional contexts from which researchers can develop some great initiatives to help further advance knowledge. If you feel inspired to pull out a pen, note some ideas, plan initiatives, or set goals for your workplace, school, or community as a result, we'll be pleased!

As the development of a regional positive psychology is still new and like all good ideas, takes time to flourish, we at the MEJPP, feel our publication should reflect that same speed of development. Thus, in a future issue, we would like to highlight shorter articles that reflect first attempts at local research in the field, in essence, "minis" - mini feasibility research studies that show promise for larger, more structured interventions. Henceforth, we will be open to accepting mini-studies conducted on small numbers of individuals involving concepts and models under the umbrella of positive psychology. Mini-studies must nonetheless be grounded in the scientific method, include a literature review, overview of methods, results and discussion section, but large sample numbers will be less of a concern. What is of most interest is the idea put forward, the rationale for it based on local needs and opportunities or other unique points of cultural and/or religious consideration, as well as implications for future research and applications. We hope that when readers see what was done for example, by researcher or student A in university Y and think, we can do that too but with a modification here, a different scale there and a bigger sample to meet a specific opportunity. Better yet, we hope they will find the courage to call the authors and say let's do coffee and see how we can work together to make this project even more awesome.



Table 1. Research questions of interest in positive psychology

Stream and Scope	Research Questions/Activity
Positive Clinical Psychology focuses on the determinants of flourishing states of mental health, as well as the strategies to remediate negative states of functioning.	What role do positive psychology interventions play in increasing wellbeing in the elderly? How can increasing kindness cultivate greater meaning? How can positive emotions remediate and prevent mental illness? How (and are) positive psychology interventions mediated by culture and religion?
Positive Health promotes physical/psychological strengths which prolong life, promote better disease prognosis and predict health outcomes, like optimism, physical activity, cardiorespiratory strength.	What role does optimism play in the treatment of cardiovascular disease? Does religiosity influence the remission of cancer? What effect does mindfulness have on blood pressure? How can positive psychology interventions be used in primary health care? How can researchers partner with healthcare institutions to develop interventions for patients as well as healthy people?
Positive Media aims to facilitate, depict, and promote aspects of wellbeing by creating a positive outcome or process in viewers, as well as investigate the effects of positive media on societies.	How can media promote prosocial behavior in children, or positive relationships in adults? Can video games promote character strengths? How can media become more positive without a loss in viewers? How can researchers be useful in developing television series, cartoons, or video games to boost wellbeing rather than be a negative or null force?
Positive Urban Planning aims to inform the master planning and building of cities, neighborhoods, and other public spaces for greater psychological, social and ecological wellbeing.	How can architects, urban planners and municipalities integrate wellbeing into cities to build social trust, physical and mental health, and a better relationship with the environment? What role do green spaces, pedestrian zones, and affordable housing play in creating a sense of belonging, attachment, or community engagement? Can community gardens reduce crime?
Positive Community Development investigates what allows people to feel included and work towards shared goals, as well as determine the features of good communities in boosting psychosocial wealth.	Can reconciliation programs increase peace in post-war societies? What role does sport play in the unification of divided nations? How does community engagement boost gender equality, microenterprise, or school attendance? What role do the arts, culture, food and music play in strengthening social cohesion? How should diversity inclusion be developed?
Positive Education focuses on the delivery of academics with the skills to promote wellbeing, and promotes educational institutions as settings in which to teach social, moral, emotional and intellectual skills.	How can character strengths and positive psychology interventions be embedded into curricula? Can positive parenting be a pillar of positive education? How can school administrators champion positivity for teachers and management through HR policies? What efficacy can be shown as a result?
Positive Organizational Psychology seeks to increase productivity and innovation, as well as create virtuous organizations that contribute to a common good.	Can positive psychology interventions boost organizational citizenship behavior? What leadership qualities contribute to virtuous organizations? What leads to employee engagement? How can resilience mitigate the stress of economic downturns? How can researchers partner with industry to test interventions?



As researchers and practitioners, we spend a lot of our time developing great ideas, yet enacting few of them. In fact, many good ideas are stopped in their tracks due to a lack of intellectual confidence, fear of rejection, the weight of bureaucratic entanglements, or the lack of innovation many research institutes show when they reward publications that have an impact on the field, but little impact on society. Some universities are realizing that their own criteria for academic promotion are not entirely fulfilling the goals of psychology or the needs of the communities who support them and in which they work and live. These lost opportunities may be reversed by universities taking a courageous new approach and mandate their researchers to work on one annual real life problem or opportunity as a condition for advancement. Is it time for MENA researchers to push their universities to commit to improving their communities through a positive lens? It is certainly food for thought.

Before we conclude, we wish to highlight some news. To help encourage the development of a regional positive psychology, we draw your attention to an upcoming Springer publication (Lambert & Pasha-Zaidi, 2018) in positive psychology, a gathering of chapters by practitioners and researchers that cover national wellbeing policies, positive education, positive organizational scholarship, positive clinical psychology, positive building and architectural design and other regional interests. Each chapter was picked for its relevance to the region and future research directions. We hope you will find a copy once it is available.

Second, we would also like to highlight a dedicated positive psychology conference happening in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on March 29, 2018 organized by the Department of Psychology at Effat University (Jeddah, KSA). They invite your participation as well as paper submissions by December 31, 2017 which you can submit and/or register for here: [Call for Papers](#). The MEJPP is proud to be publishing the symposium's proceedings. Check our next issue to learn all about it.

We wish to thank Mr. Wael Samir El Sokkary, lecturer from the Department of English and Communication with the Khalifa University of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi (UAE) for the translation of this issue's abstracts. His quick response, wit, and willingness to help are much appreciated! People like him, along with the support of community members, academics, and practitioners are a tremendous help and facilitate our ability to get information to you. Finally, we thank our interviewees who gave their time to speak with us through email, Skype, over coffee and lunch to share their thoughts, one by one, for what would help in the development of a future Middle East positive psychology. Your contributions are noticed and appreciated. It is likely that you can expect to see your recommendations discussed in future issues.

Happy reading and as always, thanks for supporting the MEJPP!

References

- Lambert, L., & Pasha-Zaidi, N. (Eds.) (2018). *Positive psychology in the Middle East/North Africa: Research, policy, and practise*. Springer.
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