



## Perspectives: Exploring the Cultural Applicability of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-being in the United Arab Emirates

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**Abstract:** Defining and understanding psychological well-being poses a challenge not only for the general population, clinicians and practitioners, but also for the greater academic psychological community. Part of the challenge stems from the lack of consensus among the community on what constitutes well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Synard & Gazzola, 2017), despite time and resources being devoted to defining, operationalizing, and studying this construct (Diener & Chan, 2011; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff, 2014). Further, most of the research and development of these measures has taken place in the West, raising questions about their applicability and use in non-Western contexts. This article offers a brief overview of the two main perspectives on well-being, namely hedonia and eudaimonia, and then focuses on the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and its application in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

**ملخص البحث :** يشكل تعريف وفهم الصحة النفسية تحدياً ليس فقط بالنسبة إلى عامة الناس و الممارسين ، بل أيضاً للمجتمع الأكاديمي في علم النفس بشكل عام. وينبع جزء من التحدي من عدم وجود إجماع في الآراء حول ما يشكل الصحة النفسية ، على الرغم من تخصيص الكثير من الوقت والموارد لتحديد هذا المفهوم وتفعيله ودراسته فإن معظم الأبحاث والتطوير قد تم في الغرب ، مما يثير مسألة قابلية تطبيق مثل هذه التدابير واستخدامها في سياق غير غربي. تقدم هذه المقالة لمحة موجزة عن اثنين من وجهات النظر الرئيسية عن الرفاهية والصحة النفسية ، وهي "الهايدونيا" و"الإيودية". ثم تركز بشكل خاص على موازين الرفاهية النفسية وتطبيقها في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة حيث تتعايش مجموعة متنوعة من السكان ، ولكن غالبيةهم من المسلمين.

**Keywords:** Psychological well-being; measures, culture; hedonia; eudaimonia; Arab; cultural applicability; United Arab Emirates

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“Well-being” is a term that is pervasive in both the academic and mainstream psychological communities. The term can evoke thoughts and images that range from happiness, living one's



dreams, money, exercise and medication, physical health, feeling good, to mental wellness, authenticity, individuality, to stress-free living and a sense of completeness (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Ryff, 2013; Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017; Tiberius, 2013). This expansive impression of psychological well-being (PWB) poses a unique challenge for those trying to understand, measure and research it, as well as for those attempting to cultivate it in oneself or others. Defining what PWB is and understanding what it takes to build it poses a challenge not only for the general population, clinicians and practitioners, but also for the greater academic psychological community. Part of the challenge stems from the lack of firm consensus among the community on what precisely constitutes well-being (Diener et al., 1999; Synard & Gazzola, 2017; Vitterso, 2016). The psychological community has worked to define, operationalize, and study this multi-dimensional construct (Diener & Chan, 2011; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff, 2014) and has developed sub-theories, as well as scales and measures that have contributed to a more refined understanding of overall well-being. These understandings tend to align with one of two conceptualizations of well-being: psychological (eudaimonic) well-being or subjective (hedonic) well-being.

### **A Brief Look at Well-being**

There are two main perspectives on well-being—subjective well-being, which is more closely associated with a hedonic understanding of well-being, and psychological well-being (PWB), a view more closely associated with a eudaimonic perspective. Both perspectives seek to answer the question, what is “the nature of a good life or a life well-lived?” (Huta & Waterman, 2014, p. 1426), but offer different explanations to that question. In a hedonic perspective, researchers traditionally focus on investigating how the pursuit of pleasure or enjoyment and the absence or minimization of negative emotions impact or contribute to well-being (Disabato, Goodman, Kashdan, Short, & Jarden, 2016; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017). To sum it up, if it feels good then do more of it. This hedonic approach, more commonly called subjective well-being (SWB), is “a way to capture what lay people mean by “happiness”... SWB refers to people’s evaluations of their lives and encompasses both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions” (Kesebir & Diener, 2008, p. 118). As such, SWB asserts that there is subjectivity in what makes one happy—there is an individual’s evaluation (as opposed to universal conditions) of their experiences that influence whether or not what they are experiencing is pleasurable (Synard & Gazzola, 2017). Although SWB is readily associated with the word “happiness,” these terms are not synonymous or interchangeable; happiness is a problematic term for many reasons and there remains a lack of firm consensus on what precisely it constitutes (Diener et al., 2017; Disabato et al., 2016; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Psychological well-being (PWB), on the other hand, stems from a eudaimonic perspective rooted in an Aristotelian pursuit of attempting to understand what constitutes a good life and “the highest human good” (Ryff, 2013, p. 79). From this view, Aristotle proposed that life was about working toward self-realization, the pursuit of virtue and not simply about the hedonic satisfaction of one’s need to feel good or satisfy appetites (Ryff, 2013). Since, PWB has developed into an understanding of wellness based on personal growth, developing purpose and meaning in one’s



life, and a kind of flourishing (Disabato et al., 2016; Kryza-Lacombe, Tanzini, & O’Neil, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff, 2014; Wright & Pascoe, 2015). Within the eudaimonic perspective, there is a consensus that there are overarching or objective pursuits—autonomy, growth, meaning, and awareness—that are inherently part of well-being (Synard & Gazzola, 2017). As such, PWB offers an objective understanding of well-being wherein these concepts are universal among people and not based on one’s subjective interpretation of life circumstances.

While there is utility in both perspectives, this article will focus on the eudaimonic view of well-being, or PWB (Ryff, 2014). PWB offers a clear and concise multi-dimensional model that is useful for researchers, clinicians, educators, and policy makers alike. As research continues to grow in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the field of psychological well-being, there may be questions concerning the applicability of Western-developed measures to a diverse and non-Western population. One such measure for consideration is the Scales of Psychological Well-being, a measure developed by Ryff (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1996) and one many accepted assessment tools for eudaimonic well-being. Rather than focusing on the eudaimonic-hedonic debate, this paper will provide an overview of Ryff’s scales of psychological well-being and consider the relevance and challenges of using such scales in the UAE.

To place the present work in context, a brief explanation of the UAE is needed. The UAE is a highly-diverse and technologically advanced country of approximately 9.5 million people (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). Expatriates migrate to the UAE for employment and comprise more than 88% of the population. These groups include; 38% Indian, 9.5% Bangladeshi, 9% Pakistani, 10% Egyptian, 6% Philippines, and 13% classified as ‘Other’ (World Fact Book, 2018). The national population, Emiratis, consists of a mere 11.6%. With such diversity in one country, it is beyond the scope of this article to consider the PWB measure’s appropriateness within a specific sub-population or ethnic and/or cultural group. Given that the overwhelming majority of the population is expatriate, there is the added complexity of the expatriate identity along with the degree to which various groups have assimilated to, or acculturated to the UAE’s ‘international culture.’

### **Using PWB when Clinical Diagnostic Measures are Effective**

Although PWB and SWB differ in their interpretation of well-being, they are united in advancing the understanding of mental health and wellness beyond the dominating focus of psychological distress and psychopathology (Goodman, Doorley, & Kashdan, 2018; Ryff & Singer, 1996). Consequently, this article also seeks to promote the idea among clinicians that psychological well-being can be an integral part of therapy and treatment and a useful complement to traditional models that focus primarily on diagnosis and symptom reduction. Researchers and clinicians often have the impression that the presence of negative affect precludes the existence of positive emotions and experiences (Goodman et al., 2018) and therapeutic concepts such as growth, autonomy, or purpose in life may not be readily helpful. Yet, such one-sidedness does not capture what is a growing expansive and inclusive understanding of mental health. The World Health Organization (2014) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively



and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community... [it is] not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” As such, diagnosis and symptom reduction are critical to the treatment of psychological disorders, but they are not the entire story. More and more treatment approaches are incorporating growth into the treatment of psychological disorders. Comprehensive treatment should not solely focus on helping a person feel “less depressed,” but also help individuals connect with a sense of meaning, autonomy, and life purpose. Many approaches already incorporate PWB components into therapy, for example, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Luoma, Hayes, & Walser, 2007) wherein mindfulness and values clarification are major components. As a result, it becomes important to rely upon scales and measures that expand the resource repertoire of clinicians beyond psychiatric diagnosis and distress.

### **Defining PWB from Ryff's Perspective**

Ryff's (2014) model of PWB goes beyond feeling good, happy, positive or satisfied with life and provides specific factors associated with a fulfilling and meaningful existence. Interest in “positive human functioning” is not specific to Ryff's work – prior to the development of her model, the humanistic, existential and developmental approaches had a history of exploring this concept. Yet, these orientations struggled to quantify, operationalize, or test these theories (Ryff, 2014). Drawing from and synthesizing from previous theories, PWB was developed as a model and instrument comprising of six factors: personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-awareness, positive relationships, and autonomy. The overall instrument includes a total of 84 Likert scale items, with each of the six subscales composed of 14-items (Ryff, 2014). This scale has been used in numerous studies resulting in over 350 publications in over 150 scientific journals (Oprea, Buijzen, & van Reijmersdal, 2018; Ryff, 2014). It has been translated into over 30 languages with research results supporting their use in different cultural contexts (Ryff et al., 2014).

However, some researchers assert that these constructs are not readily applicable in a non-Western context; these scales originated from a Western perspective that places a particular emphasis on the individual, their growth and needs above those of family and/or community (Chirkov, 2007; Ingersoll-Dayton, Saengtienchai, Kespichayawattana, & Aungsuroch, 2004). Accordingly, such Western-oriented constructs may not adequately reflect the experience of psychological well-being of individuals from non-Western cultures (Gao & McLellan, 2018; Malla, 2013), although some have shown its applicability and relevance in assessing psychological well-being in collectivist communities (Cheng & Chan, 2005; Hamdan-Mansour & Marmash, 2007; Jibeen & Khalid, 2012; Villarosa & Ganotice, 2018). In fact, some theorists assert that such constructs could still be helpful in understanding psychological well-being regardless of culture. For instance, in response to the sub-construct of autonomy, Sheldon and Ryan (2011) assert that “Feeling that one identifies and enjoys one's goals, rather than feeling pressured or compelled to do them, predicts better emotional tone” and distinguish “autonomy” from the more “corrosive forms of modern individualism, such as narcissism, materialism, and excessive status-seeking...” (p. 42). Despite mixed reviews, the model of PWB still offers utility among diverse populations; yet, there are considerations to bear in mind when using such a measure.



### A Closer Look at the Sub-Constructs

*Purpose in Life.* According to Ryff and Singer (1996), purpose in life is when an individual “functions positively and has goals, intentions, and a sense of direction, all of which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful” (p. 15). Thus, the purpose in life subscale asks participants to respond to some of the following statements: “Sometimes people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them...I don’t have a good sense of what it is I’m trying to accomplish in life... I live one day at a time and don’t really think about the future.” Those high in purpose in life are thought to have a sense of direction, set and meet goals and objectives, and hold beliefs they find meaningful (Ryff, 2014).

Many citizens and residents of the UAE subscribe to a particular religion (55% Muslim, 25% Hindu, 10% Christian, 5% Buddhist, and 5% categorizing as ‘Other’; United Arab Emirates, 2005). Such statistics suggest that religion in the UAE is very much interwoven into the fabric of society for nationals and expatriates alike. In many ways, Islam is not only a religion, but a culture and way of life (Joshi, 2013). While Ryff’s conceptualization of purpose in life does not expressly mention religion, it would seem compatible with a religious context. In fact, religion is a contributing factor to psychological well-being through providing a sense of meaning, community and belonging, a system of beliefs and values, traditions, and means of coping (Fatima, Sharif, & Khalid, 2018; Krok, 2015; Newman & Graham, 2018; Rizvi & Hossain, 2017; Wang, Koenig, Ma, & Shohaib, 2016). As a result, the consideration of psychological well-being without mention of religion might be a significant omission when using such measures in the UAE.

*Personal Growth.* Personal growth is conceptualized as developing one’s potential, and is exemplified by “the need to actualize oneself and realize one’s potential... openness to experience, for example, is a key characteristic of the fully functioning person” (Ryff & Singer, 1996, p.15). The PWB personal growth subscale asks individuals to note the degree to which statements resonate with them, such as: “I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time... I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.” High scores reflect an individual who sees themselves as developing and growing, and has improved their behavior, self-knowledge, and sense of effectiveness (Ryff, 2014). A low scorer is someone who experiences personal stagnation or boredom, and feels unable to take on new attitudes or behaviors.

Yet, this notion of personal growth may reflect a more Western orientation. Some researchers assert that the collectivistic or individualistic orientation of group could have an impact on the score of personal growth (Mohammed, Unher, & Sugawara, 2010). From a cultural view, UAE citizens and residents score higher in collectivism and, thus, feel a stronger sense of duty to their family or social groups (Lambert D’raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2016). In considering the major subgroups of nationalities: Emirati, Indian, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, and the Philippines, the majority of these groups could be considered as emerging from collectivist societies with some groups more collectivist than others (Hofstede Insights, n. d.). In one study, researchers found that collectivists from Egypt scored lower on personal growth than individualistic students from Japan. Although Japan is often considered collectivist, there appears to be a shift towards greater individualism (Mohammed et al., 2010) as evidenced by its absence of the extended family system





and strong loyalty to companies (Hofstede, n.d.). As a result, there is the notion that perhaps this dimension may not accurately capture societies in transition, which is very much the case in the UAE, which has undergone tremendous change—arguably a poster child for the very definition of growth. Many of the questions on this subscale, i.e., “expand new horizons... give new things a try... new experiences, new situations... trying to make big improvements or changes in my life...” could be reflective of a strong, growing economy and the experience of many people in the UAE. At the same time, this is not to say that such a dimension of PWB is not applicable, but rather that the unique demography and socio-economic landscape of the UAE poses a unique challenge for adequate interpretation of this subscale.

*Environmental Mastery.* In line with developmental theories, environmental mastery requires that an individual be able to exert influence on their environment and be effective at using the resources or opportunities available (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Environmental mastery asks individuals the extent to which “I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live... I feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities... My efforts to find the kinds of activities and relationships that I need have been quite successful.” Those scoring low on this construct experience difficulty manipulating their environment and may feel ineffective at changing or improving their situation (Ryff, 2014). Environmental mastery poses a unique factor in the UAE. Although illegal, discrimination according to gender, race, and ethnicity is “rife” within the UAE (Duncan, 2018). A quick look at employment advertisements in the newspapers highlights these practices: “preferably Filipino/Indian candidates... [only] male candidate... Western female (preferably European)... nationality—Indian... Qualification from UK/USA/Western Europe/South Africa preferred...” Past research has suggested that environmental mastery can be adversely affected by racial, gender, or ethnic discrimination (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003; Rostosky, Cardom, Hammer, & Riggle, 2018; Velez, Watson, Cox, & Flores, 2017). Researchers theorize that the degree to which one is aware of their minority status and discrimination could be reflective of one’s awareness of institutional stigma, discrimination beyond one’s control, and/or increased vigilance or anticipation of rejection by others (Rostosky et al., 2018). It is this awareness that may impact environmental mastery scores. As such, researchers or clinicians using this scale should consider the racial, ethnic, and gender realities of people when interpreting scores on this subscale.

*Positive Relations with Others.* Positive relations with others are a universally accepted construct in terms of its importance to psychological well-being and mental health in general (Beier & Spelke, 2012; Bornstein, Suwalsky, & Breakstone, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Having social support or a sense of connection to others is often cited as a protective factor for many disorders and diseases alike (Brinker & Cheruvu, 2017; Hernandez, Reitzel, Wetter, & McNeill, 2014; Roberson & Fincham, 2018). Within the construct of PWB, positive relations with others is characterized as the presence of close, loving, and trusting relationships, with empathy and affection being foundational to fostering connection with others (Ryff & Singer, 1996). In the questionnaire, participants respond to statements such as: “people see me as loving and affectionate... I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns... I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others... I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me.”



While in a Western construct these statements are relatively straightforward to answer, these statements fail to consider a collectivist context, where large extended families live together and exert influence over family members (Salem, 2009; What Does Family Mean to UAE Residents, 2016). Many of the questions in this subsection omit words related to family and instead use the word “friends.” In fact, there is no reference to family in the entire PWB measures. With this in mind, this section of the survey may overemphasize the importance of friends and underemphasize the role of family and not accurately capture the extensiveness or diversity of an individual’s “positive relationships with others.” While survey takers may infer “family” in this section, it is not guaranteed and calls its accuracy into question.

*Self-Acceptance.* Self-acceptance is often cited as a prominent feature of well-being defined as maintaining a positive stance toward one’s self and one’s past (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Self-acceptance is not merely about liking oneself, but rather about having the capacity to accept one’s good and bad qualities (Ryff, 2014). Individuals who score low in self-acceptance may be unhappy with themselves or dissatisfied with or troubled by certain qualities (Ryff, 2014). This subscale asks participants to respond to statements like, “I like most aspects of my personality... In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life... The past had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn’t want to change it.” Self-exploration can be complicated within the context of the UAE. Within self-acceptance, there is the assumption that one needs to understand the self and have formed a sense of self (Sheldon, Oliver, & Balaghi, 2015). On the surface, the understanding of the self may pose an interesting question in traditional, collectivist, Islamic societies like those in the UAE, wherein there is often a group or familial identity. The literature suggests that the conceptualization of the self is different within a collectivist society where it is “viewed as an interdependent entity fundamentally connected by relationships to others” compared to a Western or individualistic society where the self is considered “an independent and unique entity defined by its internal attributes, which is distinct from the surrounding context” (Miyamoto et al., 2018, p. 429). Yet, some theorists argue against this binary comparison of individualism and collectivism, suggesting the self and a family identity are not mutually exclusive (Mateo, Cabanis, Stenmanns, & Krach, 2013).

Further, not all collectivistic societies are the same. There are a number of factors—religion, socio-economic circumstance and speed of development, political structures, history, colonialization, as well as philosophical and ethical teachings—that influence the type and degree of collectivism (Miyamoto et al., 2018). Thus, it is important to consider not just an East-West distinction, but the role of religion as well. Other theorists emphasize that Islam encourages an exploration of the self, i.e., “the true knowledge of the self would lead one to closeness with the Creator” (Tekke & Ismail, 2016). Islam indeed provides a structure for understanding the self; the psyche, soul, and heart (Weatherhead & Daiches, 2015). Respectively, the psyche comprises an individual’s negative desires, peace and harmony, and one’s ability to learn from wrongdoing, the soul is eternal, and finally, the heart has both physical and spiritual elements and is where pain is located. Within this understanding, it would seem that self-acceptance is relevant and appropriate within the context of the UAE.



*Autonomy.* Within many theories of human development, autonomy overlaps with concepts related to independence, self-determination, and self-actualization (Ryff, 2014; Ryff & Singer, 1996). In Ryff's conceptualization, "the fully functioning person is described as having an internal locus of evaluation, whereby one does not look to others for approval, but evaluates oneself by personal standard... the person no longer clings to the collective fears, beliefs, and laws of the masses" (Ryff & Singer, 1996, p. 15). The questions involve asking the degree to which "I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition... being happy with myself is more important than having others approve of me... I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree." On the surface, this construct could appear to be problematic for collectivist cultures that comprise the majority of the UAE. Some of the language used, for example, "the person no longer clings to the collective fears, beliefs, and laws..." could seem to suggest a negative tone toward those that belong to a cultural context where interdependence is the norm. Some researchers assert that individual choice is not as important to individuals from collectivist cultures (Rudy, Seldon, Awong, & Hoon Tan, 2007), and that the self in collectivist cultures is considered to be interdependent as opposed to independent. Sheldon and Ryan (2011) assert that some "cultural relativists" see autonomy as a distinctly Western or individualistic construct (2011). In this context, the notion of interdependence includes a sense of self which overlaps with "the selves of others, with shared interests, goals, and values," as opposed to an independent self where people are considered distinct from others, with different interests, goals, and values (Rudy et al., 2007, p. 985). In a cross-cultural context, when people are interdependent, autonomy and choice lose importance (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). In a UAE context, healthy development is dependent upon meaningful and lasting relationships with the group (Lambert, 2008).

Yet, there is growing research on the refinement of the definition of autonomy and how it can be applicable to individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Part of the challenge is that autonomy is often misinterpreted as individualism or independence, both of which are different constructs. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) asserts that autonomy is compatible with collectivist cultures and assert that it is distinct from independence and individualism, stating that, "the opposite of autonomy is not dependence but rather heteronomy, in which one's actions are experienced as controlled by forces that are phenomenally alien to the self or that compel one to behave in specific ways regardless of one's values or interests" (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003, p. 98). While there are varied opinions, there remains a need for greater refinement and clarity on the concept of autonomy, with one suggestion to call it "inclusive autonomy," which incorporates the importance of the group within the concept of autonomy (Rudy et al., 2007). For example, when disseminating the survey to more collectivist groups, autonomy-related items could be from "I try to do X because I think it is important" to a more inclusive stance of "I try to do X because my family and I think it is important" (Rudy et al., 2007, p. 987). By rephrasing questions, researchers can capture such nuances.

Studies conducted in China, Turkey, South Korea, and Taiwan (Sheldon et al., 2004; Chirkov, Ryan, Kaplan, & Kim, 2003) support the assertion that autonomy is a universal construct as "feeling that one identifies and enjoys one's goals, rather than feeling pressure or compelled to





do them, predicts better emotional tone in any context” (Sheldon & Ryan, 2011, p. 42). SDT provides compelling data on the basic and universal need of autonomy, with their definition including “feelings or self-ownership, feelings of internally endorsing (rather than resisting one’s behavior), and feelings of following one’s own developing interests” standing in contrast with the cultural relativist notion of autonomy as “go it alone and damn the consequences” (Sheldon & Ryan, 2011, p. 42). Their definition captures the complexity of autonomy, and posits it as worthy of consideration as a universally applicable construct. Yet, like the sub-construct of “positive relations with others,” it might benefit from language modifications.

### Conclusion

The scales of PWB have been used in hundreds of published studies (Oprea et al., 2018) and translated into more than 30 languages (Ryff, 2014). Yet, there remains ongoing debate about its factorial structure wherein some researchers assert that the six-factor model of psychological well-being has too much overlap (Springer, Hauser, & Freese, 2006). At the same time, there have been enough studies to support the existence of a six-factor model and thus propagated their use by the larger academic community (Ryff, 2014). One of the most compelling responses to this controversy is that the variability in the factor structure is likely due to differences in gender, age, and socioeconomic class in the sample population (Chen, Jing, Hayes, & Lee, 2012). This last point is crucial; researchers and practitioners can have exceptional validated, gold-standard instruments for investigating a phenomenon within a population, yet, it comes down to the researcher and/or practitioner to evaluate this data in its context as a measure is only as good as the person administering and interpreting it.

While numerous studies show this measure is culturally relevant and successfully used in several countries (Ryff et al., 2014), including with expatriate university professors in the UAE (Rile, Tan, Salazar, & Perez, 2015), Indian youth (Anand & Nagle, 2016), and Jordanian women (Hamdan-Mansour, Arabiat, Sato, Obaid, & Imoto, 2011), other studies show it has encountered cultural difficulties, mostly centering on the relevance of certain constructs (Malla, 2013; Mehrotra, Tripathi, & Banu, 2013). Nonetheless, these cultural difficulties in application do not render the model obsolete. In a discussion about East-West distinctions on individualism and well-being, Ryff et al. (2014) advise: “cultural contexts shape ideal formulations of human well-being as well as the practices designed to promote them... distinctions between two different models of self and social relationships [East and West],... underscored that well-being is likely to be enhanced by attunement to one’s surrounding cultural context...” (p. 1-2).

This idea of attunement is critical to the measure’s use, where it becomes important to pursue additional research to gain a better sense of the relevance of this scale and guide specific modifications or changes to it. This need for further research is underscored by the sheer demographic diversity, global in-reach, and technological advancements underway in the UAE. While home to a majority expatriate population, there is much diversity in the UAE experience. Many individuals have only known life in the UAE, have no plans to return to their home countries and wish to stay, but are unable to do so due to immigration policies. In the local population, many Emiratis live in a country that is quite different to that of their parents. As such, it



would be premature and potentially inaccurate to offer specific recommendations to modify the scale based on the varied cultural, ethnic, and/or religious groups without more targeted research. Cross-cultural validity of this measure—and of measures in general that are used in contexts different to the ones in which they were derived—should remain an open and ongoing issue (Cooke, Melchert, & Connor, 2016).

At the same time, concrete suggestions can be made, particularly for clinicians and practitioners. Firstly, it is important to reiterate that these scales are not used for diagnosis. When working with individuals with psychopathology, it is critical to first obtain a diagnostic picture of symptomatology. The scales of PWB are a supplemental tool to help facilitate growth, which can be helpful for practitioners already using growth-oriented therapies or interventions as part of their practice. However, these scales are not a replacement for symptom-reduction approaches. As with the use of any new scales or psychological measures, practitioners must ensure they avail themselves of the appropriate training, consultation, and/or review of quality resources on the subject matter to ensure their own expertise and competence. Readers may turn to Fava's (2016) Well-being Therapy (WBT), derived from Ryff's (2016) notion of PWB, as a helpful place to start understanding how to use the scales and expand upon their therapeutic use.

In terms of modifications to the scales themselves, there are two areas of concern. With use in clinical settings and with non-Western individuals, it is important to set aside time for feedback and allow individuals to raise questions and concerns as well as seek clarity about the measure. Challenges or misunderstandings on the scales or how they resonate can lead to a fruitful discussion and be a useful part of the therapy process. Ultimately, the score on the measure in a therapeutic setting is not an end point, but one piece of information used to guide a highly dynamic and collaborative process. Further, from a research perspective, scores hold critical importance in terms of validity and potentially refining the definition of PWB within the UAE's cultural context. With this in mind, it would be useful to see future research suggest minor modifications to the scale by incorporating references to family, religion and spirituality, and notions of "inclusive autonomy" (Rudy et al., 2007). Such changes may capture a more "attuned" understanding of regional PWB. In sum, while the PWB measure is not a perfect, off-the-shelf measure for the UAE, its history, evidence base and extensive use in many places in the world suggest it is a useful construct from which to understand well-being and engage in further research.

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