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# Does Religious Obedience Affect Happiness? The NU Muslims Indonesian Case

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## Abstract

Happiness is one of the benchmarks of individual welfare. Currently, welfare is not only calculated from the income but also the individual's perspective on life. Welfare is a multi-dimensional component, and happiness is part of subjective well-being. This study aims to empirically prove the role of religious obedience on the happiness of Muslims, especially for those closely related to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This research approach is quantitative with secondary data sources obtained from the 5th wave of the Indonesia Family Life Survey (IFLS). This study took 481 respondents which were estimated by the logistic regression model. The results show that piety is empirically proven to increase the happiness of NU Muslims in Indonesia. In addition, economic factors such as income also play a role in increasing happiness. Other result shows that age is also determinant of happiness which display distinct functional relations (linear decline and U-shape). While formal education in madrasa schools has no impact on happiness. The contribution of this research is that NU institutions will focus more on activities that can increase citizen piety.

**Keywords:** Happiness, IFLS 5, Logit, NU, Obedience.

## 1. Introduction

Given traditional economic matters, individuals can be distinguished as prosperous if they have extra percapita pay. It implies that each occupant partakes in an expansion at the financial level. The community uses increased income to purchase various goods and services, increasing contentment and well-being (S.Pindyck, n.d.; Sexton, Fortura, and Kovacs, 2016). Subsequently, higher income leads to a better quality of life for the

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community. It is not expected that percapita pay is the primary government assistance variable.

Even so, an expansion in percapita pay alone is viewed as lacking to address the genuine degree of social government assistance. Climate Change (IPCC), 2014 states that although pay and government assistance have areas of strength, different parts can, in any case, be utilized to quantify individual government assistance. In their capacity hypothesis, Nussbaum and Sen, 1993 underlined that thriving does not just mean expanding pay. Capacity, limit, or ability to oversee pay ought to likewise be considered. Hence, the Human Improvement File (HDI) arose as one more government assistance measure presented by the UNDP. Government assistance pointers in the HDI take on Sen's capacity hypothesis, which adds the wellbeing and schooling level of the local area as a proportion of government assistance equivalent to percapita pay, which is as yet a key benchmark (Agus, 2017).

Moreover, Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002 stress that government assistance is abstract. According to Diener Seligman (2004), despite the economy's positive development, life satisfaction has remained the same as a result. From a variety of points of view, the factors that influence happiness and well-being differ from person to person. Like other people, people have various perspectives about something of significant worth.

Even though pay is viewed as a significant determinant of joy, this just at times is the situation. Easterlin, 1974, in his examination of America, found that an increment did not follow an expansion in pay in joy. This peculiarity is known as the "Easterlin Paradox". Moreover, a few specialists are beginning to understand the significance of estimating prosperity, not just in light of pay, but also suggest estimating prosperity by considering individual viewpoints (Marie et al., 2020).

In light of this idea, the World Bank delivered another pointer that can be utilized as a proportion of individuals' government assistance. One of the parts in the government assistance pointer other than percapita pay is the joy list. Based on how each person views various aspects of their life, the happiness index measures the level of well-being of the population. Non-material needs, which percapita income cannot meet, are expected to be included in this index to measure welfare.

Interest in monetary satisfaction research has arisen quickly (Frey and Stutzer, 2002). Expanded bliss is a fitting marker for estimating social advancement and public approach objectives (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, 2021). However, income remains the primary determinant of happiness in most economic studies.

Research on the determinants of bliss in Indonesia utilizing IFLS information has been done by a few researchers, like Sohn (2010); Landiyanto et al., n.d.; Aryogi, 2016; Rahayu, 2016, and Sekar and Prasetyani, 2021. The factors utilized in this study are similar, yet there are contrasts in the meaning of factors and the quantity of perceptions. The aftereffects of these investigations are indistinguishable: That happiness is fueled by socioeconomic, demographic, and social factors.

This study provides a different view of the determinants of happiness. Apart from being influenced by the factors mentioned above, happiness is also determined by the level of one's piety/obedience in practicing one's religion. That is, religious factors also have a vital role in encouraging one's happiness. This view was sourced from the study of QS. An Nahl [16]: 97 and QS. At Thalaq [65]: 3, both emphasize that anyone who does good and believes in Allah SWT is promised a good life.

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From an Islamic perspective, happiness can be achieved in six ways (Hamim, 2016). First, instill the belief that behind difficulties, there must be ease. Second, be grateful for the favors given, be pleased, be patient, and trust in all calamities. Third, forgive others if they make mistakes. Fourth, avoid prejudice. Fifth, stay away from the habit of getting angry when facing or being hit by something. Sixth, reducing worldly desires with *zuhud* and *qona'ah*. This opinion strengthens the allegation that the possibility of attaining happiness for Muslims depends not only on the income level but also on aspects of religiosity. There are subjective indicators related to piety to the teachings of the religion adhered to and maintaining good relations with God.

Meanwhile, research that focuses on happiness from an Islamic perspective is still dominated by a literature study approach that is still focused on discussing the concept of happiness, such as research conducted by Harahap, 2016, Hamim, 2016, Sodik, 2015, and Nanum and Sari, 2018. This research prioritizes a quantitative approach to tracing the determinants of the happiness of Muslims.

The results of a survey by the RAND Corporation (2015) show that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) members tend to be happier. In the survey, the Muslim population is more than 30,000 people. About 60% or more than 18,500 respondents are NU Muslims. Furthermore, around 92% of NU Muslims say that they are happy. Its adherents' overall, heavenly, and worldly happiness is central to Islam. Islam anticipates that humankind should get material and otherworldly prosperity. The main objective is to accomplish satisfaction on the planet and the great beyond (*falah*) and a decent and good life (*al-hayah al-thayyibah*).

Based on the background described earlier, this research focuses on empirically proving the role of piety in the happiness of Muslims, especially for those closely related to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). As a religious and social organization, NU aims to preserve the validity of Islamic teachings, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (Hamzah et al., 2017). Thus, piety becomes a mandatory component for every NU Muslim. This research aims to estimate the impact of religious obedience on the happiness of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Muslims in Indonesia.

## 2. Methods

Secondary data from the fifth batch of the Indonesia Family Life Survey (IFLS) are used in this quantitative study. IFLS is microdata from a longitudinal review by RAND Enterprise (2015). Putri Prasetyani (2021) express that respondents in IFLS-5 cover over 20 areas in Indonesia, in particular: North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, Jambi, Riau Islands, Bangka Belitung, South Sumatra, Lampung, West Java, DKI Jakarta, Banten, Focal Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, Bali, NTB, NTT, West Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Focal Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi and West Sulawesi. The IFLS-5 book utilized is Book 3A

This study utilizes strategic/logit relapse investigation methods. Logit estimation was also adopted by Pontarollo, Orellana, and Segovia, 2019 to identify the determinant of subjective well-being in Ecuador. One or zero is used as the categorical or binary dependent variable. Gujarati, 2015 say the logit model aims to ascertain an event's probability. In any case, this exploration plans to decide an individual's joy possibilities. The subjects in this study were Muslim respondents who stated that they adhered more closely

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to the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tradition. Based on the criteria given, the number of respondents can be analyzed is 481 people. Limited data related to wages makes data reduction necessary. This component is essential to maintain because it is critical to tracing happiness.

The dependent variable in the research is happiness. Respondents were asked the question, "How happy are you." Respondents' answers were in 4 categories (very happy with a score of 4; happy with a score of 3; unhappy with a score of 2; and very unhappy with a score of 1). The four categories are then transformed into binary numbers, where 1 is happy, and 0 is unhappy. Furthermore, 4 independent variables will be analyzed for their influence on happiness, namely: (i) obedience, (ii) Islamic schools, (iii) wages, and (iv) age.

The use of the happiness index in measuring well-being has received much attention. First, because this index is relatively new compared to other welfare indexes, it is still experiencing much improvement. Second, it is feared that the happiness index could cause bias in the measurement scale because it assesses welfare from subjective individual perceptions (Gasper, 2010). Furthermore, Lu & Gilmour (2004) said that a person's perception of happiness differs. Differences in individual characteristics, influenced by life experience, cultural background, scientific background, and local wisdom, often make a person's life assessment different. Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002 say a more systematic approach is needed to measure happiness. However, some researchers are okay with this diversity and use them interchangeably.

Obedience is the implementation of piety. The obedience variable is a binary number, where 1 is very obedient and obedient in religion, while 0 is quite obedient and not obedient. Islamic school is a binary number variable, where 1 is a respondent who attended school in a madrasah environment (MI, MTs, and MA), while 0 is the respondent who has never attended school in the madrasa environment. Wages are a ratio-scaled variable with rupiah units transformed into their natural log form. The age variable uses a ratio scale. In addition, this study also includes a quadratic element of age (age<sup>2</sup>) to analyze its relationship pattern to happiness. The age<sup>2</sup> variable adopts research conducted by Nandini Afiatno (2020). All variables used in this study can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Variable Operational Definition

Variable	Definition	Category	Variable on IFLS-5
Happiness	Respondents' assessment of the level of happiness in their life	0 = unhappy (base) 1 = happy	sw12
Religious Obedience	Respondents' assessment of the level of obedience in carrying out religious orders	0 = disobedient (base) 1 = obedient	tr11
Madrasa School	Status of the respondent on attending madrasa education	0 = never (basis) 1 = ever	dl06
Ln_Wage	Total wages received for work (in linear log form)	-	tk1
Age (age, age <sup>2</sup> )	Respondent's age	-	age

There were three stages carried out in this research. First, the pre-estimation stage that needs to be carried out is to explore the incidence of happiness and its determinants (univariate analysis). Second, bivariate analysis was carried out to determine the direct influence of independent variables on happy events. This analysis is also carried out as variable selection to find candidate variables to be analyzed in logistic regression. Third, an analysis of the odds ratio value is carried out to estimate the chance of the incident occurring.

The logistic regression model in this research can be written as follows:

$$Happiness = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Religious\ Obedience + \beta_2 Madrasa\ School + \beta_3 Ln_{wage} + \beta_4 age + \beta_5 age^2 + \mu_i$$

Meanwhile, the possibility of respondents to be happy can be expressed by:

$$P_i = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(Happiness = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Religious\ Obedience + \beta_2 Madrasa\ School + \beta_3 Ln_{wage} + \beta_4 age + \beta_5 age^2 + \mu_i)}}$$

Furthermore, the odds ratio value is used to determine the ratio of the probability of a happy event to the probability of not being happy. The odds ratio equation can be written as follows:

$$OR = e^{\beta_i}$$

### 3. Results and Discussion

This research aims to estimate the impact of piety on the happiness of NU Muslims in Indonesia. Even though 18,762 respondents said they were closer to the NU tradition, only 481 respondents could be sampled in this study. The limited availability of wage data is the leading cause of data reduction, considering that the wage variable is one of the critical variables in this study. The characteristics of the respondents in this study can be seen in Table 2

Based on descriptive data, NU Muslims in Indonesia tend to be happier, with a proportion of 92 percent of the total respondents. Specifically, there are similar patterns in each religious factor. In the obedience variable, around 92.63 percent of people who are devout in religion feel happy, and around 90.65 percent of people who are not religious feel happy. Even though the differences are relatively small, it can be assumed that obedience encourages happiness. Meanwhile, for the madrasah school variable, around 94.16 percent of people who had studied at madrasah schools felt happy, and around 91.94 percent of people who had never studied at madrasah schools felt happy. If compared, the difference between the two is negligible. However, it can be assumed that the madrasa school variable encourages happiness. In this context, the probability of religious factors encouraging happiness is quite large. Meanwhile, the  $\ln\_upah$  variable averages around 12.64 with a standard deviation 1.45. Meanwhile, the age variable has a mean of around 37 years with a standard deviation of 14.62.

Before carrying out logit estimation, bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the direct influence of determinants on happy events. In this context, variables that can be included in multivariate analysis (logistic regression) are based on the chi-square test results, which have a p-value  $\leq 0.05$ . The results of this test can be shown in Table 3.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Distribution (%)		
Happiness	Unhappy	7,85		
	Happy	92,15		
Independent Variable	Distribution of Total Sample (%)	Variable Distribution of Happiness Categories		
			Unhappy (%)	Happy (%)
Obedience	Disobedient	24,11	9,35	90,65
	Obedient	75,89	7,37	92,63
Madrasa School	Never	90,42	8,06	91,94
	Ever	9,58	5,84	94,16
Ln_wage*	Average	12,65		
	Std. Dev	1,45		
Usia*	Average	37,05		
	Std. Dev	14,63		

Note: \*) is a numeric variable using average and std deviation as a description

**Table 3.** Chi-Square Test

Variable	Pr	Result
Obedience	0,000	Passed as a candidate variable in the logistic regression model
Madrasa School	0,001	
Ln_wage	0,033	
Age	0,000	
Age2	0,000	

Based on the summary results of the chi-square test, all variables proposed as determinants of happiness have a p-value less than 0.05. Each proposed variable can act as an independent variable in explaining happy events. Thus, logit estimation using these explanatory variables can be carried out. Table 4 shows the logit estimation results, which help know the factors influencing happiness.

Based on statistical results, it can be seen that the Prob  $\chi^2$  value is less than 0.05. It means that each variable has a value not equal to 0, or the coefficient of each variable has a different value. Meanwhile, the Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> value shows 0.0476, meaning that the five independent variables' ability to explain happy events (Y=1) is around 4.76 percent. Other variables outside the model explain the remaining 95.24 percent. The variables that can influence happiness are obedience, wages, age, and age2. These four variables have an error value (p-value) of less than 10%. However, the direction of the relationship between the four variables and happy events is different. Obedience, wages, and age variables tend to make Indonesian NU Muslims happy. Meanwhile, the age variable has a negative sign, which can be interpreted as meaning that increasing age tends to make respondents

**Table 4.** Logit Estimation Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z	P $\geq  z $
Obedience	0,6947*	0,3865	1,80	0,072
Madrasa School	0,1119	0,7667	0,15	0,884
Ln_wage	0,1816*	0,1026	1,77	0,077
Age	-0,1802*	0,0936	-1,93	0,054
Age2	0,0015*	0,0008	1,70	0,089
Constant	4,5126	2,7907	1,62	0,106
Number of Observation			481	
Prob more than chi2			0,0186	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>			0,0476	

Notes: \*\*\* significant at the 1 percent level; \*\* significant at the 5 percent level; \* significant at the 10 percent level

unhappy. Linked to the age2 variable, which has a positive sign, it can be interpreted that increasing age will initially make the respondent unhappy, but at a certain point, a turning point occurs. So, after passing that point, increasing age will make respondents happier. Meanwhile, the Islamic school variable has no impact on happiness. By paying attention to the variance value of the sample, the independent variable with the most significant influence on happy events is obedience because it has the most prominent z statistic, namely 1.80. Meanwhile, the odds ratio for each variable can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Odds Ration Value for Each Independent Variable

Variable	Odds Ratio	
Obedience	2,003	*
Madrasa School	1,118	
Ln_wage	1,199	*
Age	0,835	*
Age2	1,001	*

Notes: \*\*\* significant at the 1 percent level; \*\* significant at the 5 percent level; \* significant at the 10 percent level

Based on Table 5, the obedience odds ratio is 2.003, which means that respondents who are devout in practicing their religion have 2 times the chance of being happy compared to respondents who are not obedient in practicing their religion. Wages have an odds ratio value of 1.19, which means that when wages increase by 1 percent, the chance of being happy increases to 1.19 times, assuming other variables are constant. Age has an odds ratio of 0.83, indicating that as respondents mature, the chance of being happier is 0.83 times, assuming other variables are constant. Meanwhile, the odds ratio for age2 is 1.001, which means that in old age, the chances of happiness are greater (odds ratio value for age2 more than age). Meanwhile, the odds ratio value for the madrasa school variable is 0 because the p-value is more than 10 percent. So, there is no difference in happiness for respondents who have and have never studied at a madrasah school.

Obedience has a positive influence on the happiness of NU Muslims in Indonesia. In Islam, it is believed that piety will provide sustenance from an unexpected direction. It is explained in one of the verses, namely QS. At Thalaq [65]: 3.

Based on Tafsir al-Mukhtasar, this verse can be interpreted as "And gives him sustenance from a direction that is not detected in his heart and is not in his calculations. Whoever relies on Allah in all his affairs, Allah will provide for his needs. Indeed, Allah carries out His affairs, is not weak to do something, and nothing escapes Him. Allah has set a limit for everything that will be completed at the limit. Sorrow and pleasure have a limit, and each is impermanent to humans.

Anyone who wants to do good deeds and has faith in Allah SWT, Allah has promised to reward him in the form of a good life in this world and a reward in the hereafter that is better than what he has done. A good life can be interpreted as safe, comfortable, peaceful, serene, with broad provisions, and free from its various burdens and difficulties. Apart from that, in another verse, the relationship between piety and welfare can also be seen in QS. An Nahl [16]: 97.

Based on Quraish Shihab's interpretation, this verse can be interpreted as "Whoever does good deeds in the world, both men and women, driven by the power of faith in everything that must be believed, then We will certainly give them a good life in the world, a life that knows no misery, full of relief, willingness, patience in accepting life's trials and filled with gratitude for God's blessings. Furthermore, in the Hereafter, We will repay them as a good reward multiplied for their deeds"

The second interpretation of QS. At Thalaq [65]: 3 and QS. A Nahl [16]: 97 emphasizes that good faith in the form of obedience and piety will make a person prosperous. Welfare is relative and subjective. Prosperity is not only measured by material things alone but also by feelings of security, comfort, and serenity.

Obedience shows a positive relationship to happiness. Other studies show that obedience is also related to subjective well-being, such as research conducted by Tiliouine and Davern, 2009 and Mayasari, 2014. Obedience offers prosperity or happiness that leads to a meaningful life. Even though it is subjective in meaning, obedience to practicing religion will encourage the creation of positive feelings for humans.

Tiliouine and Davern, 2009 showed a link between Islamic religiosity and life satisfaction in the Algerian population. The results of this study show that religiosity has a positive and robust relationship pattern with subjective well-being. Mayasari, 2014 research shows a significant relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being. It means the higher a person's religiosity, the more psychological well-being will increase. Islamic religiosity directs the creation of a person's happiness because it guides optimizing one's potential, independence, and good relationships with others.

Individuals' expression of religion is known as religiosity. Religion is a socially transmitted system of beliefs, rites, organizational structures, moral guidelines, and feelings toward divinity. The positive relationship between religiosity and cognitive subjective well-being that has been consistently found at the individual level (Domínguez and López-Noval, 2020). Research on the connection between strict practice and life fulfillment generally focuses on a positive affiliation, with the congregation's spiritual and social networks being viewed as significant factors interfering with the relationship. Rojas and Watkins-Fassler, 2022 showed that the primary connection between strict practice and life fulfillment happens through the monetary space, trailed by life's profound and

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family areas. The companionship, occupation, and well-being spaces have a minor yet measurably colossal job.

Domínguez and López-Noval, 2020 showed These variations are explained by religiosity, measured by how frequently people attend religious services on average. This relationship had not previously been documented using a global sample. Their outcomes recommend that this relationship was recently covered by the sort of strict guideline hidden in recognizing religion. Hence, in a standard relapse model including just proportions of both the social and the individual elements of legalism, they get the typical zero-connection result. Notwithstanding, when we moreover control for the degree of strict introjection, as estimated by the extent of people thinking strict confidence is a quality kid should be urged to advance at home and the extent of people that trust in heck, they get a positive and significant connection between's the social component of legalism and standard life fulfillment. The relationship between the intermediary for strict introjection concerning the training of the kids and typical life fulfillment is assessed as unfavorable and significant.

Wages have a positive relationship to the happiness of NU Muslims in Indonesia. This finding differs from the study by Easterlin et al., 2010. So, it can be interpreted that the Easterlin Paradox, a condition where an increase in happiness does not accompany an increase in income, does not occur in NU Muslims in Indonesia. Economic growth in nations means increasing individual income, which accompanies rising happiness Veenhoven and Vergunst, 2014.

This finding also aligns with Aryogi, 2016, Nandini and Afiatno, 2020, and Smith and Wesselbaum, 2023. In general, wages as a measure of economic factors are still a factor of happiness. Agus, 2017 explains that to achieve prosperity, people must meet three levels of needs. The first needs are basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, health access, and education. The second level of needs is the need for recognition from others, ten called esteem.

Meanwhile, the third level of needs is freedom of choice. Based on this concept, it seems that the measure of the welfare of NU Muslims in Indonesia is still at the first level; thus, income is needed. Income can be used to purchase market goods and services.

Pontarollo, Orellana, and Segovia, 2019 showed that the relationship between income and subjective well-being was found to be highly significant. Furthermore, Sacks and W, 2023 survey the proof to evaluate the significance of outright and relative pay in deciding prosperity. They assert that national comparisons offer little evidence to support theories of relative income and that absolute income plays a significant role in determining well-being. The study found that income correlates with well-being. As indicated by *ibid.*, more extravagant individuals report higher prosperity than less fortunate individuals, that, on average, people in wealthier countries are happier than people in poorer countries, and a clear connection exists between economic growth and well-being growth. Besides, the information shows no proof for a satiation point above which pay and prosperity are not generally related.

The connection between age and satisfaction has been the subject of various examinations. It is still up for debate whether or not the relationship is U-shaped, with happiness declining in youth and rising in old age. In this study, age shows a "U" shaped relationship to happiness among NU Muslims in Indonesia. These findings are different from those of Aryogi, 2016. On the other hand, these findings support the findings of Rahayu,

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2016, Frey and Stutzer, 2002, and Nandini and Afiatno, 2020. However, age appears to have a U-shaped effect on well-being, as evidenced by the related literature (Beja, 2017; Pontarollo, Orellana, and Segovia, 2019; Bittmann, 2020; Toshkov, 2021).

Bittmann, 2020 shows three bigger groups that show particular practical relations between age and life fulfillment (direct downfall, U-shape, decline with a steady advanced age period). Using data from the European Social Survey, Toshkov, 2021 demonstrated that, depending on relative income, the relationship between age and happiness varies significantly. Individuals in the most reduced decile of the pay dispersion experience a 'hockey stick': a significant drop in self-reported happiness between the ages of 50 and 55, followed by a brief recovery in old age. The exemplary U-bend is generally found in the center pay positions. Ordinary joy does not differ much with age for individuals at the highest point of the pay circulation. These outcomes show the significant job of pay in directing the connection between age and satisfaction.

Meanwhile, madrasa schools do not affect the happiness of NU Muslims in Indonesia. It is because there is no difference between non-madrasah schools and madrasah schools. In this context, the material taught in madrasah schools is still relatively the same as in non-madrasah schools, especially for non-religious subjects. Even the measure of success for madrasa students is still determined by understanding non-religious subjects. So, it is suspected that madrasa schools do not directly impact happy events. However, education is crucial in increasing happiness (Pontarollo, Orellana, and Segovia, 2019). Directly or indirectly, higher education will influence happiness.

#### 4. Conclusions

Religious obedience empirically influences the happiness of NU Muslims in Indonesia. It is following the word in QS. At Thalaq [65]: 3 and QS. An Nahl [16]: 97. Obedience in practicing religion directs the creation of one's happiness because it leads to optimizing one's potential, being independent, and having good relationships with other people. Meanwhile, other variables like wages and age also affect happiness. Economic factors are still the primary determinant in encouraging Muslim happiness. Meanwhile, age and happiness form a "U" pattern. Apart from that, whether or not the respondent has attended a madrasah has no impact on happiness.

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