

Happiness among Traditional Fisher Families: Moral Economy, Psychological Resilience, and Religious Faith in Coastal North Sumatra, Indonesia

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Abstract:

This study examines how traditional fisher families in Dahari Indah Village, Talawi Subdistrict, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra, understand and produce happiness amid the structural economic uncertainty of the fisheries sector. Departing from a critique of welfare approaches that reduce happiness to material indicators, this research argues that fisher family happiness cannot be understood linearly as a function of income stability. Instead, it emerges from a complex configuration of economic adaptation, family relational dynamics, and religious faith. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, involving ten fisher families through field observation and in-depth interviews. The findings show that income fluctuations resulting from limited fishing equipment and environmental conditions are perceived as part of the rhythm of everyday life rather than as crises that automatically negate happiness. Families instead produce happiness through practices of economic simplicity in household management, supportive family relationships, and the ability to interpret life pressures through patience, acceptance, and gratitude. Religious practices—such as daily prayers, Quranic study gatherings, and supplication—function as everyday routines that regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and cultivate inner calm amid economic uncertainty, while simultaneously strengthening psychological resilience and the stability of domestic relationships. Theoretically, these findings demonstrate that happiness in coastal communities constitutes a relational, contextual, and religious practice of everyday life. This study enriches the understanding of happiness as an ethical-spiritual condition, resonating with Al-Farabi's concept of *sa'adah* and aligning with the psychological well-being perspective, which emphasizes self-acceptance, positive relationships, and meaningful life orientation under structural constraints. Practically, this article underscores the importance of coastal development policies that extend beyond income enhancement to include family strengthening, mental health support, and community-based religious practices.

Keywords: Happiness, Fisher Families, Moral Economy, Psychological Resilience, Religious Faith, Coastal Well-being.

Abstrak:

Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana kebahagiaan dimaknai dan diproduksi dalam kehidupan keluarga nelayan tradisional di Desa Dahari Indah, Kecamatan Talawi, Kabupaten Batu Bara, Sumatera Utara, di tengah ketidakpastian ekonomi struktural sektor perikanan. Berangkat dari kritik terhadap pendekatan kesejahteraan yang mereduksi

kebahagiaan pada indikator material, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa kebahagiaan keluarga nelayan tidak dapat dipahami secara linear sebagai fungsi stabilitas pendapatan, melainkan sebagai hasil konfigurasi kompleks antara adaptasi ekonomi, relasi keluarga, dan keimanan religius. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis dengan melibatkan sepuluh keluarga nelayan melalui observasi lapangan dan wawancara mendalam. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa fluktuasi pendapatan akibat keterbatasan alat tangkap dan kondisi alam dipahami sebagai bagian dari ritme kehidupan sehari-hari, bukan sebagai krisis yang secara otomatis meniadakan kebahagiaan. Kebahagiaan justru diproduksi melalui praktik kesederhanaan dalam pengelolaan ekonomi rumah tangga, relasi keluarga yang suportif, serta kemampuan memaknai tekanan hidup melalui kesabaran, penerimaan, dan rasa syukur. Praktik keagamaan—seperti salat, pengajian, dan doa—berfungsi sebagai rutinitas keseharian yang menata emosi, meredam kecemasan, dan membangun ketenangan batin di tengah ketidakpastian ekonomi, sekaligus memperkuat ketahanan psikologis dan stabilitas relasi domestik. Secara teoretis, temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kebahagiaan dalam masyarakat pesisir merupakan praktik hidup yang relasional, kontekstual, dan religius. Penelitian ini memperkaya pemahaman tentang kebahagiaan sebagai kondisi etis-spiritual, sejalan dengan gagasan sa'ādah Al-Farabi dan perspektif psychological well-being yang menekankan penerimaan diri, relasi positif, dan orientasi hidup bermakna. Secara praktis, artikel ini menegaskan pentingnya kebijakan pembangunan pesisir yang tidak hanya berfokus pada peningkatan pendapatan, tetapi juga pada penguatan keluarga, kesehatan mental, dan praktik keagamaan berbasis komunitas.

Kata Kunci: *Kebahagiaan, Keluarga Nelayan, Ekonomi Moral, Ketahanan Psikologis, Keimanan, Kesejahteraan Pesisir.*

INTRODUCTION

The family constitutes the most basic social unit and the primary space in which well-being, values, and meanings of life are produced and sustained (Martela, 2024; Pukowiec-Kurda, 2022; Sun et al., 2024). In the sociology of the family, scholars do not view the family merely as an economic unit but also as a relational arena in which emotions, morality, and experiences of well-being take shape through everyday interactions (Awaru, 2020; Cheal, 2002; Gilding, 2010; Gillies, 2011; Morgan, 2014). Accordingly, family happiness cannot be reduced to an individual psychological condition alone; instead, it must be understood as a social phenomenon intertwined with economic structures, social relations, and surrounding value systems (Connidis & McMullin, 2002).

Nevertheless, in policy practice and much of the welfare literature, researchers and policymakers often narrow happiness to material indicators such as income, consumption, and asset ownership (D'Ambrosio et al., 2020; Landiyanto et al., 2010; Patria, 2022; Rahayu & Harmadi, 2016; Suarwoto, 2021). This approach becomes problematic when applied to social groups living under conditions of economic instability, such as coastal communities and traditional fisher families. In Indonesia, coastal populations constitute one of the most vulnerable groups within the national poverty structure. Data from the Indonesian Traditional Fishers Association (KNTI, 2023) show that extreme poverty in coastal areas reaches 4.19 percent, with approximately 1.3 million people from the national poor population residing in coastal regions. At the same time, the fisheries sector that sustains millions of fishers faces high dependence on seasons, weather conditions, market prices, and limited fishing technology (Kobi & Hendra, 2020).

This structural uncertainty directly shapes the lives of fisher families. Income fluctuations, occupational risks at sea, and limited access to capital, infrastructure, and social services affect not only material needs but also family relationships, emotional stability, and long-term life orientations (D'Ambrosio et al., 2020; Patria, 2022; Suarwoto, 2021). In this context, scholars cannot understand fisher family happiness solely as an income-based "level of life satisfaction," but rather as an adaptive process continuously negotiated amid chronic economic vulnerability.

Dahari Indah Village in Talawi Subdistrict, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra Province, concretely represents these conditions. Most fishers in this area still rely on simple fishing gear and operate in small groups with fishing patterns that strongly depend on tidal cycles (Desa Dahari Indah, 2024b; Mandailing, 2019). Fisher household income remains unstable, following seasonal patterns and fluctuating market prices for catches (Rosni, 2017). This uncertainty often affects the fulfillment of basic needs, children's education, and family health. Under such circumstances, welfare approaches that measure happiness solely through economic indicators prove inadequate for explaining how fisher families interpret and sustain happiness in their daily lives.

Previous studies on fishers and coastal families have tended to position economic issues as the primary focus in understanding well-being. Several studies show that fisher poverty relates to low education levels, limited skills, and restricted access to marine economic development (Diedrich et al., 2019; Obie, 2024; Stacey et al., 2021; Stanford et al., 2013; Yusuf et al., 2022). Meanwhile, research on coastal families has largely examined internal

household dynamics—such as parenting patterns and family social relations—without explicitly linking them to lived experiences of happiness under conditions of uncertainty (Tuwo et al., 2019). Studies on subjective well-being among fishers also commonly emphasize a relatively linear relationship between income, consumption, education level, and family well-being (Prayetno & Rosyadi, 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2024).

A similar tendency appears in social policy, particularly within income-based welfare approaches that conceptualize well-being as the outcome of income growth, the effectiveness of cash assistance, and statistically measured poverty reduction (Agustanta et al., 2024; Hapsari et al., 2021; Inayati et al., 2025; Nugroho et al., 2021; Taruno, 2019; Wagmiller et al., 2020). Although these approaches play an important role in capturing the structural dimensions of poverty and economic vulnerability, they implicitly reproduce the assumption that economic uncertainty represents a deviant condition that must be “corrected.” As a result, analysts often reduce the lived experiences of fisher families to material indicators, while giving limited analytical attention to how families navigate, negotiate, and assign meaning to everyday life amid constraints.

This tendency also appears in studies of coastal working-class families and marginalized communities in Indonesia, which emphasize structural vulnerability, multidimensional poverty, and environmental pressures caused by climate change and coastal ecosystem degradation (Dewi et al., 2025; Khairunnisa et al., 2025; Niko, 2025; Taufik et al., 2025). Without dismissing the importance of these dimensions, an excessive focus on structural vulnerability often treats internal family dynamics as a background condition rather than as an active arena mediating life pressures. In everyday life, survival strategies such as extreme frugality, kinship-based debt, and side jobs do not operate solely as economic responses; they intertwine with communication practices, shared decision-making, and emotional management within the family.

This gap defines the core contribution of this article. Existing studies have not sufficiently positioned fisher family happiness as a lived practice shaped by the interaction of economic adaptation, family relational dynamics, and religious faith. Researchers have often treated happiness as a derivative variable of economic conditions rather than as a socio-religious construction with its own internal logic. This article addresses that gap by demonstrating that, in the lives of traditional fisher families, material constraints do not automatically negate happiness. Instead, families produce happiness through relational labor within the household, acceptance of uncertainty, and religious practices that organize emotions and life orientations. In doing so, this study offers an alternative reading of fisher well-being—not merely as a matter of material deficit, but as a contextual, relational, and religious practice of everyday life.

To bridge this gap, the study draws on Al-Farabi’s concept of happiness (*sa’ādah*) as its primary theoretical framework. Al-Farabi understands happiness as the highest goal of human life, achieved not through material fulfillment alone but through a balance between reason, moral conduct, and spiritual orientation (Al-Farabi, 1981; Pramono & Maulidia, 2022; Putri, 2018; Sajjadi, 2025). In Al-Farabi’s view, happiness does not represent an escape from worldly life; rather, it emerges from a meaningful, ethical, and God-oriented way of living. Attitudes of gratitude, patience, and acceptance of life experiences form the foundation of inner tranquility that allows individuals to remain happy amid limitations (Yunita, 2019).

The study brings this framework into dialogue with psychological well-being theory, which emphasizes that well-being arises through self-acceptance, life purpose, positive relationships, and effective environmental management (Ryff & Singer, 1996). In the context of fisher families, religiosity functions not only as an expression of faith but also as a psychosocial strategy for managing anxiety, uncertainty, and life pressures. Religious practices such as daily prayers, Quranic study gatherings, and expressions of gratitude operate as mechanisms of emotional regulation while strengthening family cohesion and community ties.

Accordingly, this article argues that the happiness of traditional fisher families does not depend linearly on economic conditions. Rather, happiness emerges from a complex configuration of economic adaptation, family psychological resilience, and religious faith. This study aims to analyze how traditional fisher families in Dahari Indah Village interpret and construct happiness, and how religiosity functions as a moral and psychosocial resource in confronting life uncertainty. The article contributes theoretically to studies of happiness, family sociology, and religious studies by demonstrating that happiness—particularly in coastal societies—constitutes a contextual, relational, and religious practice of life rather than a mere reflection of material sufficiency.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to understand how traditional fisher families interpret and experience happiness in their everyday lives. The unit of analysis consists of traditional fisher families, understood as relational units in which economic, psychological, and religious experiences intersect in daily life. The analysis does not focus on individuals in isolation but examines happiness as a collective experience constructed through husband–wife relations and broader family dynamics. Accordingly, this study treats happiness as a family-based practice of life rather than merely an individual emotional condition.

The study employs a phenomenological approach because it aims to explore the lived experience of fisher families as they confront economic uncertainty and high occupational risk, and as they interpret happiness amid such constraints. Phenomenology, as articulated by Schutz (1970), enables researchers to examine the meanings that research participants assign to their own experiences rather than measuring those experiences through externally imposed indicators. This approach aligns closely with the research objective of capturing the essence of happiness from the perspective of fisher families as they experience and reflect upon it in everyday life.

The research took place in Dahari Indah Village, Talawi Subdistrict, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra Province. The study selected this site because the majority of residents work as traditional fishers whose livelihoods remain highly dependent on seasons, tidal cycles, and simple fishing equipment (Desa Dahari Indah, 2024b). This socio-economic context makes the village particularly relevant for examining family happiness under conditions of structural economic uncertainty. The study involved ten traditional fisher families, with husbands serving as primary informants and wives as supporting informants. The researcher selected informants purposively based on the following criteria: active engagement as traditional fishers, 20–40 years of fishing experience, intact family structures (husband, wife, and children living in the same household), and regular involvement in everyday religious practices. The limited number of informants allowed for intensive data exploration, consistent with the depth-oriented nature of qualitative phenomenological research.

The study draws on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. The in-depth interviews explored informants' subjective experiences related to the meaning of happiness, survival strategies, family relational dynamics, and the role of religiosity in coping with economic pressure. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with husbands and wives separately to provide space for more open and reflective responses. With informants' consent, the researcher audio-recorded all interview sessions and transcribed them verbatim. The researcher also conducted non-participant observations to capture the everyday context of fisher family life, including work routines, family interactions, and religious practices, thereby enriching interview data with direct observation. The observation period spanned January to June 2025. Secondary data were obtained from documents, reports, and academic literature relevant to fishers, families, happiness, and religiosity (Sugiyono, 2017).

The researcher analyzed the data thematically using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (2013), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and coded interview transcripts and observation notes based on themes related to happiness, economic adaptation, psychological resilience, and religious faith. The researcher then organized the reduced data into thematic matrices to facilitate the identification of relationships across themes. In the subsequent stage, the researcher verified and interpreted the findings by examining thematic linkages and relating them to the theoretical framework, particularly Al-Farabi's concept of happiness and psychological well-being theory.

To ensure data trustworthiness, the researcher applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from husbands, wives, and field observations. The researcher also conducted member checking by confirming preliminary findings with informants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their intended experiences. Through these procedures, the study aims to present a valid and in-depth understanding of traditional fisher family happiness as a lived practice shaped by the interaction of economic conditions, psychological dynamics, and religious values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Happiness in the Shadow of Economic Uncertainty: Life Narratives of Fisher Families

The economic lives of traditional fisher families in Dahari Indah Village unfold within rhythms that are unstable and difficult to predict. Fishing activities, which constitute the primary source of livelihood, depend entirely on seasons, weather conditions, and daily catches. In everyday practice, fishers go to sea following tidal cycles, hoping to secure sufficient catches to meet family needs. Yet these hopes frequently confront changing realities. At times,

fishers return with relatively abundant catches; at other times, they come back with minimal yields or almost nothing at all.

These conditions intersect with the broader occupational structure of the local community. Based on administrative data from Dahari Indah Village (total population: 2,937), the category of fishers/fisheries workers includes 107 individuals (3.64 percent), all of whom are men, while the category of fisheries laborers consists of 31 individuals (1.06 percent), also all men. Outside the fisheries sector, the largest proportion of residents falls into the category of unemployed/not working, totaling 1,180 individuals (40.18 percent), followed by those managing households at 646 individuals (22.00 percent) and self-employed workers at 266 individuals (9.06 percent). Daily casual laborers account for 116 individuals (3.95 percent) (Desa Dahari Indah, 2024b). This composition provides important context, showing that fishing activities coexist with relatively fragile and informal employment categories, making dependence on marine resources a central feature of family economic life.

All fisher families participating in this study experience income fluctuations. J, who has worked as a fisher for approximately forty years, described income uncertainty as a long-standing part of everyday life. In his account, income is “unpredictable,” entirely shaped by weather and seasonal conditions. When waves are high and marine yields are low, income declines automatically; conversely, during certain seasons, catches increase, although they never become fully predictable from day to day (Interview, May 15, 2024).

This income uncertainty directly affects household needs management. When catches decline, families must adjust their expenditures. They prioritize certain needs while postponing others until conditions improve. In some situations, insufficient income prompts families to seek assistance from close relatives. S, who has worked as a fisher for twenty years, explained that when catches decrease, borrowing money from relatives becomes a practical option to ensure that basic family needs—especially daily necessities and children’s education costs—remain covered (Interview, May 17, 2024).

Families do not perceive borrowing money as an extraordinary act, but rather as part of a broader survival strategy under uncertain economic conditions. Within these family narratives, income uncertainty emerges not only as an economic issue but also as a form of pressure affecting fundamental household needs. Children’s education and daily household expenses become persistent sources of concern, particularly when low catches extend over longer periods.

At the same time, not all families respond to income fluctuations in identical ways. MN’s family, who has engaged in fishing for thirty years, described a slightly different experience. Although they face similar uncertainties, this family chooses to adjust spending patterns and maintain a consistently simple lifestyle. In his account, income is described as “unstable,” yet accompanied by a belief that sustenance always exists, even if its amount varies. Sometimes catches are plentiful; at other times they are limited, but they are never entirely absent (Interview, May 18, 2024).

In everyday life, this family treats expenditure adjustment as a routine practice. When catches are low, they restrict spending to what they consider the most essential needs. They pursue a simple way of living consistently, not as a temporary response. The phrase “as long as it is enough” frequently appears in conversation, reflecting how the family defines sufficiency not as abundance but as the ability to meet basic necessities.

Income fluctuations also shape families’ sense of security and emotional calm. Several informants expressed worry when thinking about ongoing needs while income remains uncertain (MN, S, SR, Interviews, May 2025). Such concerns intensify particularly when children’s educational expenses increase or when family members experience health problems. Under these circumstances, economic uncertainty becomes a burden shared collectively by all family members.

These experiences occur within a context of limited external material support. Data on social assistance recipients in Dahari Indah Village show that only 31 families (3.93 percent) receive social assistance, consisting of 17 families receiving Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) (2.16 percent) and 14 families receiving assistance for Economically Vulnerable Women (PRSE) (1.78 percent). In contrast, 758 families (96.19 percent) are not registered as recipients of such assistance (Desa Dahari Indah, 2024a). This composition indicates that most fisher families manage their daily lives without regular support from social programs, making internal household management and kinship-based support their primary resources for coping with economic uncertainty.

The uncertainty experienced by fisher families in Dahari Indah Village aligns with broader national trends indicating a decline in fisher welfare in recent years. The Indonesian Traditional Fishers Association (KNTI) reports that the *Nilai Tukar Nelayan*—an indicator comparing fishers’ income from catches with consumption and

production costs—has shown a downward trend since 2022. Data from the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) indicate that the index stood at 106.45 in 2022, declined to 105.4 in 2023 and 101.76 in 2024, and then slightly improved to 103.45 in 2025. This decline indicates that fishers' incomes have failed to keep pace with rising living and operational costs, resulting in weakened purchasing power and real welfare (Putra, 2025).

This situation becomes even more problematic when considered alongside fishers' strategic role in national food security. Fishers supply more than half of Indonesia's animal protein needs, yet this contribution does not correspond to their level of welfare. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show that poverty in coastal areas reached 17.74 percent in 2022, or approximately 3.9 million people—well above the national average. KNTI argues that these conditions reflect the failure of marine-sector development to address the root economic problems faced by small-scale fishers, which are further exacerbated by high operational costs, limited access to subsidized fuel, fluctuating fish prices, and the impacts of climate change on catches (Putra, 2025). Under such conditions, many fishers are forced to borrow from middlemen or reduce fishing frequency because they cannot afford production costs. These data underscore that the economic uncertainty experienced by fisher families at the local level is not anomalous but rather part of a broader structural welfare crisis among Indonesian fishers amid the paradox of a maritime nation.

Nevertheless, long-term experience as fishers shapes distinctive ways of responding to this uncertainty. Informants reported that they have become accustomed to income fluctuations since the early years of entering the profession (J, MN, S, SR, Interviews, May 2025). This habituation fosters a more realistic outlook on income, in which sufficiency does not equate to abundance but to the ability to endure and meet basic family needs.

At the household level, economic uncertainty prompts adjustments in roles and more careful financial management. Wives play a crucial role in managing daily expenditures, ensuring that available income is used as efficiently as possible. In several families, small decisions—such as postponing purchases, reducing certain expenses, or seeking assistance from relatives—become routine strategies for navigating unstable economic conditions (SA, Interview, May 15, 2024).

Taken together, these narratives show that the lives of fisher families in Dahari Indah Village unfold under the constant shadow of economic uncertainty. Income dependent on seasons, weather, and daily catches shapes a fluctuating rhythm of life that affects daily needs, children's education, and families' sense of security. Within these conditions, fisher families narrate their lives through ongoing efforts to endure, adapt, and manage a sense of "enough" in circumstances that rarely offer certainty.

Psychological Resilience and Survival Strategies: The Role of Family in Coping with Life Pressures

Economic uncertainty accompanying the lives of traditional fishers does not stop at income fluctuations or difficulties in meeting material needs; it permeates the emotional rhythms and everyday relationships within the family. When fishing yields remain uncertain while household needs continue, the family becomes the primary space where life pressures are both experienced and processed. In Dahari Indah Village, this experience does not appear as an extraordinary event but as a recurring feature of daily life, particularly during seasons of unfavorable weather and declining catches.

For J's family, economic pressure often coincides with anxiety about household needs and children's futures. In an interview conducted in May 2025, he described this condition as a situation in which his mind feels "full" and finds it difficult to rest, especially when pressing needs arise alongside minimal fishing yields. He does not face these feelings of dizziness and confusion alone. In daily life, he regularly talks with his wife when pressure begins to feel overwhelming. According to his account, simple conversations at home help calm his emotions and prevent these feelings from developing into anger or despair. He emphasized that his wife plays a crucial role in maintaining a calm household atmosphere, particularly by reminding him not to sink into hopelessness and to continue believing that "there will always be a way for sustenance."

Similar experiences emerge in S's family. When children's educational needs increase while fishing yields decline, emotional pressure intensifies. In a May 2025 interview, he explained that feelings of stress and fatigue often arise when he thinks about school expenses and ongoing household needs. Rather than suppressing these emotions, he chooses to discuss them with his family and seeks calm through daily routines that have become habitual. Attending religious study gatherings and setting aside time for prayer serve as ways to regulate his emotions and remain calm. These activities function not merely as rituals but as efforts to maintain emotional balance when economic pressure accumulates. In this experience, the family serves as a space for sharing emotional burdens, while shared routines foster a sense of comfort amid uncertainty (Connidis & McMullin, 2002).

MN's family, meanwhile, displays a slightly different pattern of experience. Economic pressure remains present, particularly when fishing yields fail to meet household needs. However, in a May 2025 interview, he emphasized the importance of mutual encouragement among family members and acceptance of their current circumstances. He described how feelings of heaviness persist but are counterbalanced by efforts to maintain togetherness at home. Conversations among family members and mutual understanding help preserve a calm household atmosphere. In his narrative, recalling that "everything has already been arranged" enables him and his family to remain calm and avoid excessive worry.

Life pressures experienced by fisher families also manifest strongly in affective and bodily dimensions, especially at particular moments in daily rhythms. Several informants described economic pressure not only as rational worry but also as a physical sensation. JA's family, for example, reported that on nights following poor catches, the body struggles to rest while the mind continuously revolves around the following day's needs. In a May 2024 interview, he stated that his chest often feels "tight," and his sleep becomes fragmented, particularly when he thinks about school fees and unavoidable household expenses. These feelings gradually subside when he talks with his wife before sleeping or after performing night prayers. In this experience, calm does not emerge spontaneously but results from a gradual process of emotional regulation within the family space.

Temporal dimensions also play a crucial role in shaping fisher families' psychological resilience. Economic pressure does not distribute evenly over time but follows seasonal rhythms, day-night cycles, and fishing work patterns. DD's and RS's families reported that anxiety tends to peak during periods of unfavorable weather, when fishing frequency declines and income becomes increasingly uncertain (Interviews, May 21, 2024). During such periods, mornings often begin with feelings of heaviness and doubt, while evenings become moments of reflection laden with worry. Over time, however, families develop habits of "adjusting themselves" to these conditions. They explained that after several days or weeks of living under constraints, anxiety gradually transforms into an attitude of acceptance, even though fatigue and hope for better conditions never fully disappear. This shift demonstrates that psychological resilience does not remain static but forms through emotional adaptation processes unfolding over time.

In the experiences of UU's and DR's families, life pressures also generate a distinct emotional ambivalence. On one hand, they emphasized the importance of resignation and acceptance as integral to fisher life. On the other hand, fatigue and a desire for greater stability persist in daily life. DR's family, in a May 2024 interview, described the feeling of being "tired but having to stay strong" as an expression that frequently arises when household needs continue amid unstable income. Acceptance does not eliminate the desire for stability; instead, it functions as a way to maintain inner calm so that the family can continue to function harmoniously. In this context, psychological resilience does not imply the absence of pressure but the capacity to coexist with pressure without allowing it to damage family relationships.

These reflections indicate that for fisher families in Dahari Indah Village, happiness and inner calm do not represent ideal conditions free from problems but rather the ability to continue family life with a sense of *cukup* and without losing direction. Several informants stated that a good life does not necessarily mean material sufficiency but a life that can still be lived together, with sustained communication and mutual understanding among family members. In this experience, the family functions as the primary space where economic pressure is processed emotionally and morally, as well as a psychological resource that enables fishers and their families to endure persistent uncertainty in everyday life.

Beyond emotional responses, life pressures experienced by fisher families also generate practical and contextual survival strategies. When fishing yields fall short, several families seek additional work to compensate for income shortages. Small-scale farming in home yards, gardening, or working as construction laborers become temporary options. Families do not view these activities as long-term solutions but as ways to "keep the kitchen running" and ensure daily household needs remain met.

Borrowing money from relatives or close neighbors also emerges as a frequent strategy when urgent expenses cannot be postponed, particularly for children's education or health needs. In informants' experiences, borrowing involves mixed feelings of compulsion and hope for repayment once conditions improve (JA, Interview, May 20, 2024). Kinship ties and close community relationships enable this practice to occur without formal procedures, yet it still leaves an emotional burden on the families involved. At the same time, mutual assistance and solidarity among community members form part of everyday life, whether through small loans, sharing food supplies, or substituting labor when one family faces hardship.

Extreme frugality also constitutes an important component of fisher families' survival strategies. Families tightly adjust expenditures, reduce consumption, and postpone non-essential needs. In daily conversations, families often state that they "make do with what is available." One wife, in a May 2025 interview, described how she carefully manages household finances to ensure that children's needs remain fulfilled. She emphasized the importance of communicating with her husband when feelings of sadness or fatigue arise, believing that open dialogue and mutual understanding can prevent economic pressure from escalating into household conflict (TA, Interview, May 21, 2024).

Table 1. Survival Strategies of Traditional Fisher Families in Coping with Economic Pressure

Strategy Category	Forms of Practice	Purpose	Meaning for the Family
Livelihood Diversification	Small-scale farming, home gardening, working as construction laborers	To compensate for income shortages when fishing yields decline	A pragmatic way to sustain family livelihood; understood as a temporary strategy rather than an ideal choice
Kinship-Based Debt	Borrowing money from relatives or close neighbors	To meet urgent needs (children's education, health expenses, daily necessities)	A survival strategy grounded in social relations; entails emotional burden and a moral drive to repay promptly
Community Mutual Aid	Small loans, sharing food supplies, substituting labor	To reduce individual burdens through social solidarity	Strengthens a sense of togetherness and interdependence among community members
Extreme Frugality	Reducing consumption, postponing non-essential needs	To maintain household financial stability	Understood as a practice of <i>cukup</i> —"making do with what is available"—and a form of family discipline
Family Communication	Open discussions between spouses about financial conditions	To prevent household conflict arising from economic pressure	An emotional strategy to preserve harmony and domestic calm

Despite facing relatively similar pressures, families' experiences do not fully converge. Some families rely more frequently on debt when income declines, while others tighten expenditures and seek supplementary work. Some emphasize open communication between spouses, whereas others foreground resignation and acceptance as ways to maintain household calm. These differences indicate that survival strategies take shape through lived experience, family relationships, and everyday habits that develop uniquely within each household.

Overall, the narratives of fisher families in Dahari Indah Village show that life pressures stemming from economic uncertainty unfold within family spaces saturated with emotion, negotiation, and efforts to endure. Fear, fatigue, and anxiety coexist with resignation, calm, and an ongoing pursuit of a sense of *cukup*. In this context, the family functions not merely as an economic unit but as the primary arena where pressure is processed, shared, and collectively confronted in everyday life under the persistent shadow of uncertainty.

Faith as a Source of Calm: Religious Practices in the Lives of Fisher Families

In the lives of fisher families in Dahari Indah Village, religious practices form part of everyday routines that intertwine with work rhythms and household dynamics. Religious activities do not stand apart from economic activities; instead, they run alongside them and often accompany families as they confront uncertainty in fishing yields. *Salat*, prayers, *pengajian*, and expressions of gratitude appear not merely as formal obligations but as habits repeatedly practiced in daily family life.

For J's family, religious practice has long constituted a routine that begins even before going to sea. He explained that every time he prepares to fish, he starts with prayer and *salat*, believing that fishing outcomes lie entirely beyond human control. In conversation, he described how, when catches remain small or weather conditions turn unfavorable, he seeks to accept the situation with an attitude of *pasrah* while remaining grateful for the health and safety still granted to his family. The phrase "if the catch is small, we still give thanks" frequently

appeared in his narrative, especially when he compared difficult fishing days with the fact that his family remains intact and healthy.

This experience shows that gratitude does not emerge only when catches are abundant but instead becomes tested and practiced precisely when income declines. During periods of failed harvests or when high waves reduce catches, prayer and *salat* serve as ways to calm the mind and keep the household atmosphere stable. The wife in this family practices similar habits by reminding family members to remain patient and avoid excessive complaints. In daily life, expressions that sustenance (*rezeki*) has been “already arranged” frequently surface as shared reminders when household needs increase.

Religious practice also appears strongly in S’s family life. He recounted that *pengajian*, *wirid*, and congregational *salat* at the mosque form an important part of his family’s routine, particularly when they face economic pressure. When fishing yields fail to meet children’s educational expenses or other household needs, he chooses to draw closer to religious activities. He practices these activities regularly, not only during difficult times but as habits continuously maintained.

In this family’s experience, *pengajian* and *wirid* function not only as acts of worship but also as spaces for calming the heart. S explained that after attending *pengajian* or performing congregational *salat*, the anxiety he previously felt becomes lighter. He noted that these activities teach him to accept circumstances more calmly and to avoid becoming easily provoked by frustration when facing economic constraints. Within the family context, this habit also shapes how they address minor household conflicts, as discussions unfold with greater patience and without haste.

MN’s family, meanwhile, demonstrates a relatively consistent pattern of religious practice integrated into the simple lifestyle they maintain. Congregational *salat* and routine *pengajian* form part of their weekly activities. He emphasized that these practices help him keep his emotions steady, especially when income falls short of household needs. Expressions such as “living simply” and “being content with what is available” frequently appear when he describes his family’s daily life.

In this family, religious practice also serves as a buffer during moments of household tension. When differences of opinion arise or fatigue emerges due to economic pressure, prayer and mutual reminders to remain patient become integral to conflict resolution. MN explained that recalling shared worship habits helps restore household calm without prolonging disputes.

Field observations indicate that religious practices do not operate uniformly but display overlapping patterns across the three families. Congregational *salat*, prayers before going to sea, *pengajian*, and expressions of gratitude recur in informants’ narratives. Families practice these activities in various situations: before fishing as requests for safety, when catches decline as means of acceptance, and when family conflicts arise as tools for easing tension.

Table 2. Religious Practices in the Everyday Lives of Fisher Families

Life Situation	Religious Practices Performed	Experienced Effects
Before going to sea	Prayer, <i>salat</i>	Feeling calmer and resigned
When catches are low	Gratitude, prayer	Accepting the situation, reduced complaints
Pressure from household needs	Congregational <i>salat</i> , <i>pengajian</i>	A lighter state of mind
Family tension	Prayer, mutual reminders	Conflicts subside quickly

In the experiences of fisher families in Dahari Indah Village, religious practice does not end as a routine of worship; rather, it operates as a way of life that regulates emotions, provides direction and meaning, and restores inner calm amid recurring uncertainty. Several informants described how, when economic pressure peaks—especially during periods of bad weather or minimal catches—prayer and *salat* become the first spaces to “take a breath” from mental burdens. JA’s family, for example, reported that on nights when income fails to cover the next day’s needs, he often wakes with feelings of restlessness. In such moments, night *salat* and prayer function not merely as obligations but as means to soothe a heavy heart. In a May 2024 interview, he explained that after praying his mind feels lighter, as if a burden has been “entrusted,” allowing him to return to sleep with greater calm.

Similar experiences appear in the accounts of DD's and RS's families. Both emphasized that practices of gratitude and patience (*sabar*) serve as key resources for maintaining inner calm. In their narratives, gratitude does not signify an expression offered after abundant yields; instead, it represents an attitude continually cultivated precisely when income declines. RS's family explained that when catches are low, he and his wife consciously recall blessings that remain, such as health, safety at sea, and family togetherness. The phrase "still given life and health" often closes conversations when discussing economic hardship (Interview, May 21, 2024). In this experience, gratitude functions as a cognitive and emotional mechanism that shifts attention from deprivation to what remains available, preventing sadness and anxiety from developing into despair.

The concept of patience (*sabar*) also appears consistently across fisher families' experiences. However, patience does not denote passivity or surrender; rather, it reflects the capacity to restrain oneself, regulate emotions, and continue fulfilling family responsibilities without releasing anger or frustration. UU's family, in a May 2024 interview, described how rising needs alongside declining catches often trigger feelings of anger and fatigue. In such situations, recalling religious teachings on patience helps him contain his emotions and avoid transferring economic pressure into domestic conflict. He explained that practicing patience creates a calmer household atmosphere and enables problems to be discussed without mutual blame.

For DR's family, religious practice also functions as a temporal marker that structures everyday life. The five daily *salat*, weekly *pengajian*, and prayers before going to sea establish stable patterns within an economically unstable life. He emphasized that worship routines help his family avoid becoming "too carried away" by anxiety about the future. When income remains uncertain, these practices generate a sense of order and symbolic certainty that brings calm. In this experience, religion does not promise immediate material abundance; instead, it offers inner tranquility that allows families to continue functioning and to feel *cukup* despite living with limitations.

From a phenomenological perspective, the happiness experienced by fisher families does not emerge as a condition free from problems but as an inner state shaped through repeatedly enacted spiritual processes (Schutz, 1970). Gratitude and patience constitute key concepts that families genuinely believe to be effective "remedies" for emotional distress. Through gratitude, families learn to accept life as it is without abandoning hope; through patience, they endure pressure while maintaining harmonious family relations. In this context, happiness does not derive from the absence of scarcity but from the capacity to live calmly, preserve family togetherness, and experience meaning amid constraint. Islamic faith practices thus function not only as religious expressions but also as psychological and moral resources that shape happiness as a lived practice, tangibly experienced in the everyday lives of fisher families.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that the happiness of traditional fisher families in Dahari Indah Village does not arise from economic stability or income certainty, but from their capacity to organize everyday life under structurally embedded uncertainty. Income fluctuations driven by seasons, weather, and fishing yields do not register as crises that disrupt life order; instead, families understand them as part of a daily rhythm long recognized and continuously negotiated. In this context, economic uncertainty does not automatically appear as a threat to happiness but as a lived reality that families accept and manage through repeated social practices. From the outset, these findings challenge the dominant assumption in welfare studies that positions material stability as the primary prerequisite for happiness.

The existing literature on fishers and coastal families continues to reproduce material-based welfare approaches. Several studies frame fisher poverty as a consequence of low education, limited skills, and inadequate access to marine economic development (Diedrich et al., 2019; Obie, 2024; Stacey et al., 2021; Stanford et al., 2013; Yusuf et al., 2022), while others link subjective well-being linearly to income, consumption, and educational attainment (Prayetno & Rosyadi, 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2024). In policy domains, income-based welfare approaches similarly define well-being as the outcome of increased earnings and effective cash transfers (Agustanta et al., 2024; Hapsari et al., 2021; Inayati et al., 2025; Nugroho et al., 2021; Taruno, 2019; Wagmiller et al., 2020). Although these approaches remain important for reading the structural dimensions of poverty, they tend to oversimplify the lived experiences of fisher families by treating uncertainty as a problem that must be "corrected." The findings of this study reveal the limits of such perspectives in capturing how well-being is actually lived and interpreted in everyday life.

Among fisher families in Dahari Indah Village, well-being appears more accurately understood as a relational process unfolding within the household. When economic uncertainty generates fatigue, anxiety, and fear regarding the fulfillment of basic needs, the family becomes the primary arena for managing life pressures. Communication between spouses, the division of domestic roles, frugality, collective decisions to seek supplementary work, and

kinship support together form everyday mechanisms that preserve household calm. The sense of *cukup* reported by informants does not stem from economic certainty but from sustained relationships and the ability to live collectively within constraints. In this sense, the family does not merely represent a unit affected by poverty and vulnerability; it functions as an active arena for producing well-being through banal yet decisive relational practices.

This reading complements studies of coastal working-class families and marginal communities in Indonesia that emphasize structural vulnerability, multidimensional poverty, and environmental pressure (Dewi et al., 2025; Khairunnisa et al., 2025; Niko, 2025; Taufik et al., 2025). Without denying the importance of these dimensions, this study demonstrates that internal family dynamics play a central role in mediating structural pressures. Survival strategies such as extreme frugality, kinship-based debt, and supplementary work do not operate merely as economic responses; they intertwine with communication practices and collective decision-making. In this regard, families build well-being through quiet, repetitive relational labor rather than primarily through external interventions.

Beyond the family sphere, religious practices emerge as a crucial element in organizing everyday life among fisher families. *Salat*, prayer, *pengajian*, and expressions of gratitude function as routines integrated into fishing rhythms, household management, and family relations. These practices do not arise as episodic responses to economic crises; instead, they operate as habits that structure time, calm emotions, and domesticate anxiety generated by uncertain catches. In this context, religion functions as an everyday infrastructure that sustains inner stability and domestic continuity.

These findings align with the lived religion approach, which understands religion as a social practice embedded in daily life rather than as an abstract doctrinal system (Ammerman, 2007; Orsi, 2003). Within the framework of everyday Islam, religious practices constitute ways of life that shape orientations of action, emotion, and social relations in concrete contexts (Schielke, 2022). As seen in fisher family life, religion does not operate as a moralizing instrument or merely as an ideological buffer; instead, it enables families to recalibrate expectations, accept limitations, and maintain calm without waiting for material conditions to change.

Moreover, a growing body of scholarship shows that religion functions not only as a normative guide for behavior but also as a source of deep emotional experience, including happiness. In Islamic traditions, happiness does not signify hedonistic pleasure or momentary satisfaction; rather, it denotes an inner state cultivated through a balance of faith, moral conduct, and meaningful life orientation (Abde & Salih, 2015; Joshanloo, 2013). Islamic conceptions of happiness emphasize spiritual and ethical dimensions, where values such as gratitude, patience, and *tawakkal* operate as emotional regulation mechanisms that allow individuals to experience calm amid limitation and suffering (Fadl, 2014). Empirical studies further show that Islamic spirituality significantly enhances Muslim psychological well-being, particularly through routine and reflective practices such as *salat*, prayer, and remembrance, which reduce anxiety and reinforce a sense of meaning in life (Amiruddin et al., 2021; Omais & dos Santos, 2022). From this perspective, happiness does not result solely from material fulfillment but grows from one's relationship with God and the ability to interpret life spiritually (Omais, 2025). This framework resonates with the findings of this study, which demonstrate that among traditional fisher families, Islamic faith practices—especially the internalization of gratitude and patience—serve as sources of emotional calm and as foundations of tangible, lived happiness under structural economic uncertainty.

This interpretation gains additional conceptual depth when placed in dialogue with Al-Farabi's notion of *sa'ādah*. In classical Islamic philosophy, happiness does not derive from material accumulation but from inner tranquility achieved through a meaningful life guided by the balance of reason, moral conduct, and spiritual orientation (Al-Farabi, 1981). The findings of this study strongly resonate with this view. The sense of sufficiency, patience, acceptance of limitation, and inner calm expressed by fisher families does not appear as passive resignation but as a realistic way of living under conditions that remain only partially controllable. Happiness, in this context, emerges not from meeting specific material benchmarks but from possessing a life orientation that frees families from excessive expectations.

The psychological well-being framework helps translate these experiences into analytical language without reducing them to normative metrics (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Self-acceptance appears in the ways fisher families acknowledge their living conditions without constant comparison to external welfare standards. Positive relations emerge in the family's role as a space for emotional regulation and domestic stability. Meanwhile, everyday life purpose manifests not in abstract aspirations but in modest orientations to keep families intact, calm, and capable of living day by day. Within this framework, well-being represents a process of maintaining emotional and relational balance amid uncertainty rather than an outcome of material sufficiency alone.

Accordingly, this article contributes theoretically by expanding understandings of happiness and well-being. The findings show that *sa'adah* and psychological well-being can be read contextually as socio-religious life practices rather than as universally measurable individual conditions. In the lives of traditional fisher families, happiness emerges through adaptation to structural uncertainty, relational labor within the household, and religious practices that organize everyday life. This argument challenges linear assumptions that tie well-being and happiness directly to material conditions and opens space for welfare approaches that remain sensitive to the social and cultural contexts of coastal communities.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the happiness of traditional fisher families in Dahari Indah Village cannot be understood solely through material indicators or economic stability. Income uncertainty arising from seasons, weather conditions, and fishing yields constitutes a structural condition that has long formed part of fishers' lives rather than a deviant situation that automatically negates well-being. In this context, happiness does not emerge from economic certainty; instead, it unfolds as a lived process that families experience and negotiate in everyday life through economic adaptation, family dynamics, and religious practices.

The findings reveal that the family functions as the primary arena for the production of well-being. Through spousal communication, the division of domestic roles, expenditure management, and kinship support, families process and normalize life pressures generated by economic uncertainty without allowing them to escalate into household disorganization. The sense of *cukup* experienced by fisher families does not derive from material abundance but from the maintenance of stable relationships and the capacity to live collectively within constraints. Accordingly, the family does not merely represent a unit affected by structural vulnerability; it acts as an active agent that mediates such pressures through everyday relational labor.

At the same time, religious practices operate as an everyday infrastructure that sustains life tranquility. *Salat*, prayer, *pengajian*, and expressions of gratitude function as routines that organize time, regulate emotions, and orient the life goals of fisher families. In this setting, religion does not operate as a momentary response to economic crises; rather, it works as a social practice integrated into work rhythms, family relations, and emotional management. These findings affirm that the role of religion in the lives of fisher families remains practical and relational rather than merely doctrinal or ideological.

By interpreting the empirical findings through Al-Farabi's concept of *sa'adah* and the psychological well-being framework, this article shows that happiness can be understood as a state of inner tranquility emerging from a meaningful, directed, and balanced life rather than from material certainty. Self-acceptance, positive family relations, and realistic everyday life orientations appear as essential elements in sustaining well-being amid uncertainty. In doing so, this study challenges linear assumptions that equate well-being and happiness with economic sufficiency and expands theoretical understandings of happiness as a contextual socio-religious life practice.

Looking ahead, these findings open avenues for future research on happiness and well-being among other communities living under structural uncertainty, whether in coastal regions or urban informal sectors. Comparative studies across communities, generations, or religious traditions may further enrich understandings of how family practices and religion function as welfare resources beyond material frameworks. Moreover, future research may examine the policy implications of welfare approaches that remain sensitive to the relational and cultural dimensions of everyday life, so that well-being no longer reduces to economic interventions alone but instead becomes understood as a lived process supported by families, communities, and the values embedded in daily life.

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