



Review Paper

Investigating a Concept Analysis of Afiyah as Well-being in Shia Islam: A Walker and Avant Approach



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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Afiyah” in Islamic thought represents a comprehensive understanding of well-being that extends beyond conventional health definitions. However, its theoretical foundations and practical implications remain underexplored in the healthcare literature. This study analyzes the concept of Afiyah within Shia Islamic contexts using Walker and Avant’s systematic approach to concept analysis.

Methods: A comprehensive analysis was conducted using Walker and Avant’s eight-step framework. The data were collected from the Quran, authentic Shia Hadith collections, scholarly commentaries, and academic databases. The search encompassed multiple languages (Arabic, Persian, English) and was validated by Islamic scholars.

Results: The analysis revealed Afiyah as a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, spiritual, and divine aspects of well-being. Four defining attributes emerged: Comprehensiveness (“Kafiyah”), divine origin, transformative nature, and holistic integration. The concept uniquely positions well-being as a divine gift that persists independent of physical health status.

Conclusion: This analysis provides a theoretical foundation for understanding Islamic perspectives on well-being, with implications for culturally sensitive healthcare delivery and nursing practice.

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Introduction

The interaction between religious beliefs and health concepts has increasingly emerged as a central theme in healthcare research, particularly as global healthcare systems aim to improve cultural competence in their service delivery. This focus is essential for understanding how patients' spiritual and cultural backgrounds influence their health behaviors and treatment preferences, thereby enhancing the quality of care provided to diverse populations [1-4]. Within this framework, the Islamic concept of "Afiyah" offers a distinctive and comprehensive understanding of well-being that transcends the traditional Western biomedical model of health. Although several studies have investigated Islamic perspectives on health and wellness, there exists a significant gap in the systematic exploration of specific concepts within the Shia Islamic tradition that could inform contemporary healthcare practices [5-9].

Afiyah, which is deeply embedded in Shia Islamic teachings and traditions, encompasses a holistic view of well-being that integrates physical, spiritual, and social dimensions; however, the precise definition, characteristics, and practical implications of Afiyah for healthcare delivery remain inadequately understood in the current healthcare landscape [10-16]. In their study, Sادات Hoseini et al. have described health as intellectual health [5]. Ismail et al. defined health as full physical, mental, social, and spiritual health [8]. Pourabbasi et al. described health by using the phrase extremity of life [9]. Researchers have not reached a common ground in determining the concept of health based on Islamic texts. Therefore, it is desirable to address the various aspects of health definition based on Islamic texts. Conceptualization of words close to health is necessary to clarify their meaning in the medical sciences; some of them are mentioned in Islamic literature, and some are even used instead of health. This knowledge gap is particularly pertinent in light of the expanding global Muslim population and the increasing demand for culturally sensitive healthcare approaches.

This study conducts a comprehensive concept analysis of Afiyah as understood within Shia Islam, utilizing Walker and Avant's framework. Hence, the analysis aims to 1) Clarify the defining attributes of Afiyah, 2) Explore its theoretical and practical implications for healthcare delivery and 3) Contribute to the expanding body of knowledge on culturally informed approaches to health and well-being. Gaining insight into this concept

is essential for healthcare providers serving Muslim populations and for the formulation of culturally sensitive healthcare practices that align with Islamic principles of well-being.

Methods

This study employed Walker and Avant's systematic method of concept analysis to explore and clarify the concept of Afiyah within Shia Islamic contexts [17]. This approach was selected for its systematic rigor and ability to elucidate complex concepts, particularly when examining terms with cultural and spiritual significance in healthcare contexts. Walker and Avant's framework consists of eight sequential steps as follows: 1) Selecting a concept, 2) Determining the aims of analysis, 3) Identifying all possible uses of the concept, 4) Determining defining attributes, 5) Constructing a model case, 6) Developing additional cases, 7) Identifying antecedents and consequences, and 8) Defining empirical referents.

A comprehensive search was conducted from January to June 2023, utilizing both traditional Islamic texts and electronic databases. The primary sources included the Holy Quran (complete review of all 114 chapters), authentic Shia Hadith collections, and major Shia scholarly commentaries ("Tafsir"). Electronic databases were searched including Islamic-specific databases ("Hawzeh.net," "Noormag," "Jaame-al-Hadith," "Jaame-Ottafasir," "Ahlebit Library"), Iranian academic databases ("Magiran," "SID," "IranMedex"), and international databases (PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science). Search terms included "Afiyah," "عافيه" (Arabic/Persian), "well-being," "health," "wellness," "Salamati (سلامتی)," and their combinations with "Shia Islam" and "Islamic well-being." Documents in Arabic, Persian, or English from authenticated Shia Islamic sources and peer-reviewed academic publications were included; Islamic texts were included without temporal restrictions, while academic publications were limited to texts published from 2000-2023.

The analysis process involved systematic screening, full-text review, manual extraction of concept-related content, and thematic organization of findings. To ensure methodological rigor and theological accuracy, two independent Islamic scholars reviewed and validated the findings, and all included documents were verified by recognized Islamic centers in Iran. Regular consultation with nursing scholars experienced in concept analysis was maintained throughout the process. While the study acknowledges potential limitations in language restrictions and cultural context (primarily Shia perspective),

efforts were made to maintain comprehensive coverage and accurate representation of the concept. Ethical considerations included ensuring accurate representation of religious texts, proper attribution of sources, and maintaining academic integrity in the interpretation of theological concepts.

Results

The concept analysis of “Afiyah” revealed several key dimensions through the systematic examination of Islamic texts and scholarly sources. The findings are presented according to Walker and Avant’s framework.

Step 1: Concept selection

The concept of health is universal; however, its interpretation varies across languages and cultural traditions, necessitating a nuanced understanding for healthcare professionals. In Islamic texts, there are many terms to express the concept of health, such as “Sehhah (الصحة),” and “Salamah (السلامة).” One of these words is “Afiyah (عافيه),” which has been used in some cases instead of health [10-16].

The etymological analysis revealed that “Afiyah (عافيه)” is an Arabic gerund with rich semantic implications. Classical Arabic and Persian lexicons, including Amid, Dehkhoda, and Moein dictionaries, consistently define Afiyah as encompassing wellness, safety, and comprehensive health. Al-Mu’jam al-Wasit specifically emphasizes its dual nature, incorporating both physical and spiritual well-being. Unlike related terms, such as “Sehhah (الصحة)” and “Salamah (السلامة),” Afiyah uniquely represents a more holistic state of well-being [10-16].

Step 2: Determining the objective of the analysis

The primary objective of this analysis is to clarify the meaning of Afiyah as a holistic state of well-being in Shia Islam. Specifically, the analysis seeks to develop an operational definition of “Afiyah,” distinguishing between its ordinary and scientific uses, and highlighting its unique characteristics in comparison to related terms, such as “Sehhah” and “Salamah.” By exploring the comprehensive nature of “Afiyah,” which encompasses both physical and spiritual dimensions, this study provides a foundation for further research and practical applications in health and spiritual well-being, emphasizing the importance of Afiyah as a divine gift that transcends mere physical health.

The primary objective of this study was to elucidate the concept of Afiyah as presented in Islamic texts, particularly from a Shia perspective. To achieve this, a comprehensive review of relevant Islamic texts, including the Qur’an, its commentaries, Hadith, and scholarly articles, was conducted. The Qur’an, regarded as the sacred scripture of Islam, is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him [PBUH]) over 23 years, with its verses meticulously recorded by his companions under his supervision [18]. Hadith, or “Riwaya (Arabic: رواية),” refers to the sayings and actions of the Prophet and the Imams, serving as a critical source of Islamic teachings [19].

Step 3: Identifying all uses of the concept

According to the Amid dictionary, Afiyah is an Arabic gerund that signifies wellness, safety, and health [20]. Other reputable Persian dictionaries, such as Dehkhoda and Moein, also define Afiyah as health and wellness [21, 22]. Notably, Dehkhoda describes Afiyah as complete health, while al-Mu’jam al-Wasit, a respected Arabic dictionary, interprets it as encompassing physical and spiritual health [23]. The term is specifically applied to humans, contrasting with illness. In the context of Islamic teachings, Afiyah is viewed as a divine gift, representing absolute health and the removal of all afflictions [10, 24, 25]. It encompasses both worldly and spiritual dimensions, with worldly Afiyah referring to freedom from physical and financial hardships, while heavenly Afiyah pertains to liberation from spiritual poverty and sin [10].

Step 4: Determining the defining attributes of the concept

In the book Jami’ al-tamthil, it is reported that Luqman Al-Hakim advised his son to ask God for “Afiyah,” considering this request the best form of supplication. He introduced Afiyah in four dimensions: passion, religion, this world, and the hereafter, each with its levels and instances [26]. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the significance of Afiyah in his prayers, saying, “O Allah! I ask You for all Afiyah and absolute health.” He further explained that absolute health and Afiyah mean entering paradise and being saved from hellfire [14]. The Prophet advised others to seek Afiyah from Allah, stating that after certainty (“Yaqeen”), Afiyah is the greatest blessing and the most common request [11]. On another occasion, he said, “You should seek from your Lord Afiyah and exemptions in this world and the hereafter, as it is the cause of salvation.” According to the Prophet, factors contributing to Afiyah include being mindful of

one's speech, maintaining confidentiality, sending salutations ("Salawat") to the Prophet and his household, performing good deeds, desiring health for others, and avoiding excessive desires [25].

Imam al-Sajjad (a), in the 23rd supplication of "Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya," also known as the supplication of Afiyah, elaborates on the broad meaning of "Afiyah," highlighting its status as a great divine blessing. He likens Afiyah to a protective garment, symbolizing its role in safeguarding against harm. Imam al-Sajjad describes Afiyah as a safe and soothing haven, a source of dignity, self-sufficiency, charity, divine grace, and a means of reform. Like the Prophet, he considers Afiyah as a path to salvation and happiness. In this supplication, Imam al-Sajjad introduces the defining attributes of "Afiyah," asking God for Afiyah that is comprehensive ("Kafiyah"), healing ("Shafiyah"), and growth-promoting ("Namiyah"), bringing health and comfort to both body and soul and ensuring well-being in this world and the hereafter [9].

The texts emphasize that Afiyah can only be granted by God Almighty and requires a spiritual, religious, and divine perspective. It is not attainable without divine vision and is a unique concept for those who bear a spiritual burden. Afiyah encompasses both physical and non-physical aspects of human existence, influencing all dimensions of life, spiritual, religious, worldly, and in the hereafter. Without a divine origin, Afiyah cannot be achieved even in its initial stages. The ultimate result of Afiyah is reaching Paradise, which is only possible through divine satisfaction. To attain "Afiyah," individuals must develop honorable characteristics ("Makarem al-Akhlaq"), maintain a strong relationship with God, have good intentions for others, avoid excessive desires, and steer clear of foolishness, focusing instead on wisdom.

Afiyah is a permanent and ever-upward state, influencing all aspects of human life. When a person has "Afiyah," they are considered perfect and do not need anything else. It is a concept exclusive to humans, highly valued by the Imams (a), and must be sought from God. Afiyah has various degrees, with its perfection leading to Paradise, achieved through divine satisfaction. Therefore, seeking Afiyah is about physical health and also mental, social, and spiritual well-being. Such a person surrenders to the orders of God and His messengers. Gratitude for Afiyah is essential, as the Imams (a) have highlighted numerous ways to gain it. Achieving Afiyah leads to positive outcomes such as health, comfort, prosperity, and salvation. In summary, a person should con-

tinuously seek and thank God for "Afiyah," which, at its highest level, brings about comprehensive well-being and divine favor (Figure 1).

Step 5: Model case

The narrative of Prophet Ayoub (PBUH) emerged as the quintessential model case, demonstrating all defining attributes of "Afiyah." Despite experiencing severe physical affliction and material loss for 18 years, his maintenance of spiritual well-being and ultimate restoration exemplifies the comprehensive nature of "Afiyah," transcending mere physical health. When his wife told him, "Do you still believe in God?" he said, "As I have accepted His goodness and mercy, I must accept the hardship and affliction of the Lord Almighty" [26-29]. He was always in contact with God and sought blessings from him. He did not affiliate with the world. There was no change in his Afiyah on all occasions of his life (prosperity, illness, and renewed prosperity). His Afiyah was permanent and growing and caused him to go upwards. He, himself, believed that he supported with certainty.

Step 6: Contrary case

The story of Qaroon serves as a contrary case, illustrating the absence of true Afiyah despite material prosperity. His trajectory from spiritual devotion to materialistic pride demonstrates how external wellness without internal balance fails to constitute genuine "Afiyah." Qaroon is the one who was first known as a virtuous pious that no one equaled him except Moses (a), in such a way that he always worshiped God and read the Torah. He had a great wealth of gold and silver [28] and this wealth made him arrogant and made him far from his previous situation. He was connected neither with God nor with people. He was attached to his wealth and always worried about losing it. Considering the features that counted for "Afiyah," Qaroon was deprived of this divine blessing because he did not wholly believe in God. It did not cause him to grow and was not permanent and constant.

Step 7: Identifying the antecedents and consequences of the concept

In the opinion of Shia Imams (a), some virtues lead to gaining Afiyah; correspondingly, antecedents of Afiyah are piety, silence except to praise God, not attending gatherings of ignorant people and reciting Salawat (peace be upon Prophet Muhammad) [14]. If a person has Afiyah, many good consequences will be provided for him including protective clothing, safe haven, peace, human dignity, self-sufficiency, charity and divine grace,

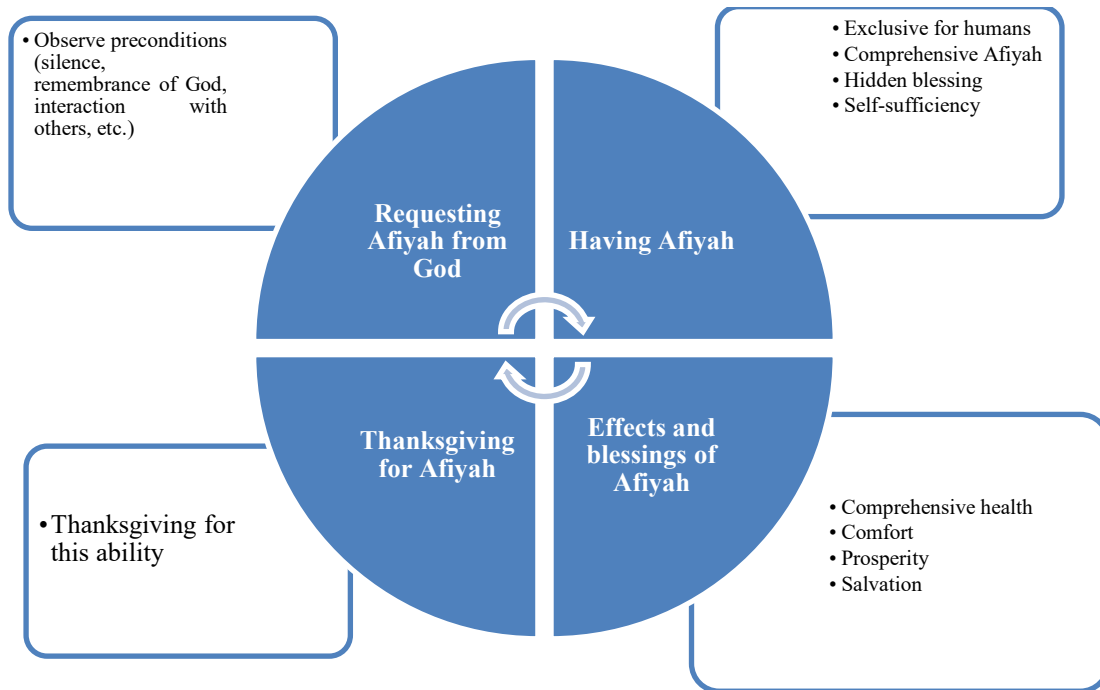


Figure 1. Reaching Afiyah and keep it

human improvement, and salvation in this world and the hereafter, antecedents, attributes, and the consequences of Afiyah presented in Figure 2.

Afiyah is an exclusive feature for humans that could be given to him after he gains Yaqeen (certainty) and asks

Afiyah from God. Afiyah covers all dimensions of humankind; it is permanent and inexhaustible, and always upwards. The one who gains Afiyah feels self-sufficiency to others but knows God as the owner of everything. If such a person receives a disease or difficulty in his life, he would never cut his connection with God. He always

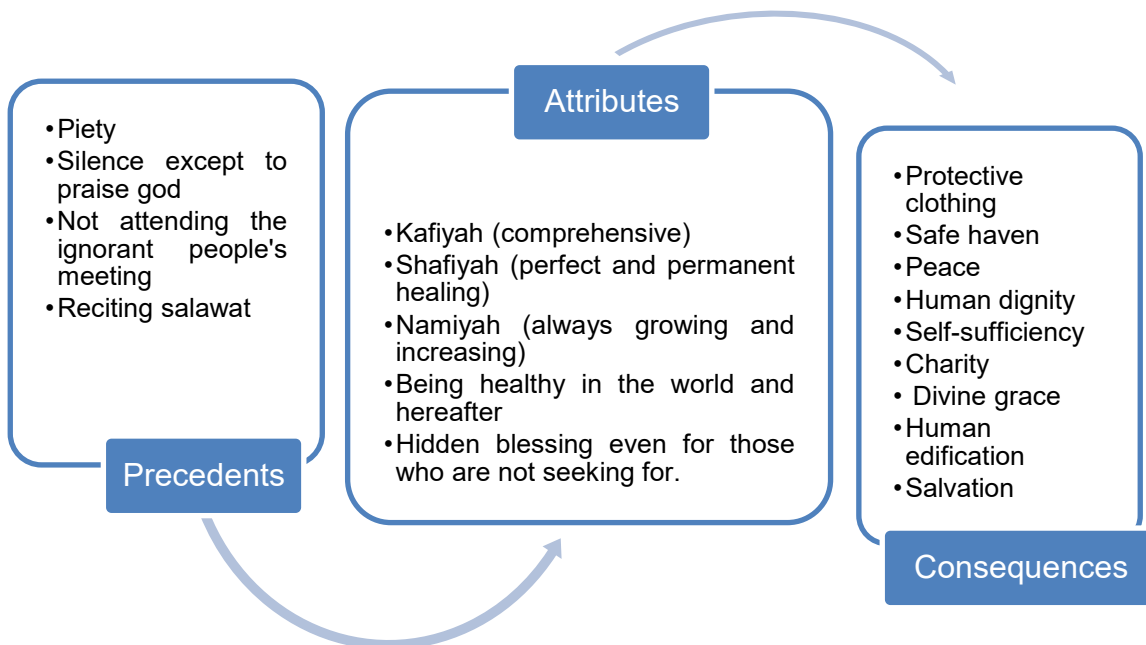


Figure 2. The antecedents, attributes, and consequences of Afiyah

feels relaxed, is grateful to God, and can achieve happiness in this world and salvation in the hereafter. Afiyah is a blessing, the holder of which must always be thankful for having that. Therefore, Afiyah is something immaterial. Although material dimensions evolve, they are not the prerequisite for Afiyah. So, according to supplication 23 of al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, Afiyah is a characteristic that once one achieves it, not only will he never lose it, and it diminished, but also it is continuously increasing. Therefore, Afiyah is a gradated concept, and each person could hold a level of it.

Discussion

According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), health is defined as “the state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” [30]. This definition emphasizes that a healthy individual must possess not only physical wellness but also psychological and social well-being. In contrast, the concept of Afiyah, as explored in this study, incorporates a divine dimension that is absent from the [WHO](#) definition. While both definitions acknowledge the importance of physical, psychological, and social aspects of health, Afiyah emphasizes a spiritual connection with God and the certainty of His existence, which is crucial for achieving true health.

Furthermore, Afiyah is characterized as an unchanging state, unlike the [WHO](#) definition, which acknowledges the dynamic nature of health and disease. This distinction highlights the need to compare Afiyah with Islamic definitions of health, as it represents a unique conceptualization that transcends the conventional understanding of health.

In the study by Sadat Hosseini et al. [5], health in Islam is presented as a value encompassing both physical and spiritual dimensions, with a greater emphasis on the latter. Their research aligns with the findings of this study, particularly regarding the significance of spiritual well-being, which can exist independently of physical health. They argue that Afiyah is a specific type of health that is inherent and not diminished by illness. This perspective underscores the notion that Afiyah is synonymous with a state of health devoid of disease, contrasting with the more fluid concept of health that allows for the possibility of illness.

Alimohammadi et al. [6] further elaborate on the Islamic understanding of health, asserting that it encompasses a broader meaning than merely the absence of disease. They emphasize that health relates to the entirety of hu-

man existence, integrating physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Their definition aligns with the [WHO](#)'s perspective but also incorporates altruism and religious aspects, reinforcing the idea that health is a holistic concept. However, their study does not address the importance of seeking Afiyah from God, which is a critical aspect of this research.

Ismael et al. [8] describe health as a divine gift, encompassing complete physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. They emphasize the term “complete,” which suggests that health is an all-encompassing state. In contrast, this study posits that individuals can experience Afiyah even in the presence of illness, highlighting that Afiyah is not contingent upon external conditions but is a constant state of well-being that transcends physical ailments.

Rahman [31] identifies four principles of health in Islam, emphasizing the interdependence of divine, spiritual, psychological, physical, social, and environmental factors. He views illness as a potential blessing that can strengthen faith and lead to forgiveness. This perspective resonates with the findings of this study, which assert that physical challenges should not sever one's connection with God. Rahman also acknowledges the importance of divine attention in healing, which aligns with the notion that a relationship with God is essential for achieving health.

Hassan [32] highlights the strong connection between health and faith in Islam, asserting that true happiness stems from spiritual and internal factors rather than mere external satisfaction. His findings support the idea that trust in God (Tawakkul) is integral to achieving Afiyah, reinforcing the importance of divine obedience as a prerequisite for health.

In summary, Afiyah is defined as a state of health and safety from various adversities in both this world and the hereafter. It encompasses physical, spiritual, and religious dimensions, with the pursuit of Afiyah being one of the most significant prayers one can offer to God [25]. The specificity of Afiyah lies in its emphasis on certainty and a divine perspective on health. Thus, the concept of Afiyah is not only a request for well-being but also a recognition of the importance of a spiritual relationship with the Almighty, underscoring the divine view of health [33].

Conclusion

The concept analysis of Afiyah, conducted through Walker and Avant's systematic framework, reveals a unique Islamic perspective on well-being that transcends conventional health definitions by integrating physical, spiritual, and divine dimensions. Our comprehensive review of Islamic texts and scholarly sources identified Afiyah as a multifaceted concept characterized by four key attributes: comprehensiveness ("Kafiyah"), divine origin, transformative nature, and holistic integration. These findings suggest significant implications for healthcare practice, particularly in culturally sensitive contexts, while challenging contemporary health models to consider spiritual dimensions more deeply. The analysis demonstrates that Afiyah represents more than just physical wellness; it encompasses a state of divine connection and spiritual certainty (Yaqeen) that can persist even during physical illness, as exemplified in the model case of Prophet Ayoub (PBUH). While this study acknowledges limitations in translating religious concepts into practical healthcare applications and the need for appropriate assessment tools, it contributes valuable insights for developing more culturally competent healthcare approaches. Future research should focus on practical applications of Afiyah principles in healthcare settings, the development of assessment tools incorporating spiritual dimensions, and the integration of these concepts into nursing education and practice, ultimately advancing our understanding of holistic healthcare delivery in diverse cultural contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

There were no ethical considerations to be considered in this research.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and drafting of the manuscript. Each author approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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