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Spiritual well-being and mental health in university students

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Abstract

The present study investigates the relationship between spiritual well-being and mental health in university students. The research sample consisted of 223 university students (110 males and 113 females), who took Spiritual Well-Being Scale and General Health Questionnaire. The results of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between spiritual well-being and mental health. Nevertheless, there was no significant relationship between spiritual well-being and somatic symptoms, anxiety, social dysfunction and depression. The results of the regression analysis showed that religious and existential well-being significantly anticipated mental health. As well, another finding was that spiritual and existential well-being in females was significantly higher than in males. There was no sex-related difference in mental health scores.

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Keywords: spiritual well-being; existential well-being; religious well-being; mental health.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the specialized literatures relating to the spirituality and religion are developing ever increasingly (Simpson, 2007). On this basis, researchers have widely studied the effect of religion and spirituality in psychological adaptation and mental health in various researches. These efforts have created a wide range of research literature relating to this field and indicated that religious and spiritual beliefs have relation significantly with a range of mental health indicators such as decrease of anxiety, depression, increase of self-esteem, tolerance and self-control (Bergin, 1991).

Thus, the spiritual well-being can be defined as a feeling of communicating with the others, having meaning and goal in life and having belief and relation with an exalted power (Hawks, et al. 1995). Ellison (1983) states that spiritual well-being includes a psycho-social and also a religious element. Religious well-being which is a religious...
element indicates a relation with a superior power i.e. God. Existential well-being is a psychosocial element and indicates feeling of a person of who he/she is, what he/she does and why and where he/she belongs to. Both religious and Existential well-being includes sublimit and movement beyond self. There are various researchers in supporting this theory that spiritual well-being can reinforce psychological function and adaptation. The significant correlations have been reported between of spiritual well-being and variables such as religious deeds (Bassett, et al. 1991), depression, self-esteem and internal religious orientation (Genia., 2001) emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Kim, 2000) emotional instability and mood disorders (Leach, & Lark, 2004) and stress (Woodbury, 1992). Since the psychological discomfort usually occurs in the whole life it can be said that creating and keeping sense of spiritual well-being has a vital role in adaptation to the stress. Researches indicates that the spiritual well-being has a positive influence in promoting individual mental health and decrease mental disorders and threatening factors of individual mental health field.

According to the importance of spiritual well-being factor and its role in promoting the mental health and according to the fact that research hasn't carried out which considers the relation between spiritual well-being and mental health in Iran, Carrying out such a research is of high importance between students which constitute a relatively large class of people in society and is a step toward identifying the effective factors on the mental health and decreasing mental disorders. According to the aforementioned goal and research records of test case in this field, the present research seeks for studying the relation between "spiritual well-being" and "mental health".

2. Method

2.1 Population and sample
The statistical population of the present research includes all students of Allame Tabatabaei University of Tehran which had been educating in 2008 academic year. From this population, sample of 223 people were chosen by using cluster random sampling method which consisted of 110 males and 113 females. The age range of subjects between 18 to 29 years old was the mean of 22/07 and standard deviation of 2/38.

2.2 Data collection instruments
Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB). The SWB (Ellison, 1983) has two subscales, Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB), each of which has 10 items. The scales are rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The RWB and EWB subscale scores can range from 0 to 60. Scores for the study sample ranged from 15 to 60 for RWB and 18 to 60 for EWB. The RWB subscale assesses the relationship with god, whereas the EWB subscale assesses meaning and purpose. The Cronbach’s alphas, calculated for the subscales and total scale: RWB alpha = 0.91 and EWB alpha = 0.91 and SWB=0.93 (Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1982). Test retest reliability reported by Ellison was 0.93, SWB; 0.96, RWB; and 0.86, EWB. In addition, Ellison reports face validity and SWB scale theoretical correlation with other scales purported to measure spirituality.

GHQ-28: In the GHQ-28 (Goldberg, 1972), the respondent is asked to compare her recent psychological state with her usual state. All items have a four-point scoring system using Likert scoring (0–1–2–3). The GHQ-28 has a four-factor structure (items 1–7: somatic symptoms, items 8–14: anxiety/insomnia, items 15–22: social dysfunction, and items 22–28: depression) (Aderibigbe, & et al., 1996). A previous study demonstrated that the best cut-off point was a score of 7–8 for the GHQ-28; a score of 8 or higher indicated psychological problems (Revilla , Alvarez, & Castillo, 2004). Psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of this scale has approved by previous researches (Goldberg, 1972; Aderibigbe, & et al., 1996; Revilla , Alvarez, & Castillo, 2004;).

2.3 Data analysis
The obtained data were evaluated by using SPSS 15.00 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). In the analysis of data, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to study correlation between spiritual well-being and mental health. Step by step regression analysis method was used in order to consider that how much scores of religious and existential well-being can predict the scores of mental health, Multivariate and Univariate analysis of variance test to compare the spiritual well-being and mental health of male and female students and to compare the religious and existential well-being and the scores of mental health of male and female students.

3. Results
Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used by scores of mental health in order to consider the relation between spiritual well-being and its fields (religious and existential well-being). Table 1 is the correlation matrix between research variables.

1. Correlation matrix among variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual well-being</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious well-being</td>
<td>0.91**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential well-being</td>
<td>-0.91**</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>-0.56**</td>
<td>-0.33**</td>
<td>-0.66**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somatic symptoms</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>-0.81**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-0.44**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>-0.51**</td>
<td>-0.82**</td>
<td>-0.65**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social dysfunction</td>
<td>-0.45**</td>
<td>-0.37**</td>
<td>-0.42**</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-0.57**</td>
<td>-0.33**</td>
<td>-0.68**</td>
<td>-0.83**</td>
<td>-0.55**</td>
<td>-0.54**</td>
<td>-0.43**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.01

As it is seen from the table, there’s a significant correlation between spiritual well-being and mental health (r = 0.56, P <0.01). Since higher score in the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) indicates mental disorder, it can be concluded that there’s a significant and negative relation between mental disorder and spiritual well-being. Also the correlation of spiritual well-being is significant by four scale’s scores of mental health.

Step by step regression method was used in order to consider that how much scores of religious and existential well-being can predict the scores of mental health which its results are presented in table 2.

2. Step by step regression analyses for predicting of mental health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>step</th>
<th>Predictive variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Existential well-being</td>
<td>-0.81*</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Existential well-being</td>
<td>-0.92*</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious well-being</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.01

As it is seen from the table, existential well-being is entered into the regression equation in the first step. This variable solely predicts 44 percents of the scores’ variance of mental health.

Also religious well-being is entered into the equation in the second step which the rate of explanation coefficient \( R^2 \) is reached to 0.46 by adding this variable, that is, 0.02 is added to the explanation coefficient. Generally, existential and religious well-being explain 46 percents of the scores' variance of mental health.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used in order to compare the scores of spiritual well-being and mental health of male and female students. The mean and standard deviation of research variables by separating gender in table 3.

The results of multivariate analysis of variance test (Hotelling's T) are presented for comparing total scores of spiritual well-being and mental health of male and female students in table 3.

Multivariate and Univariate analysis of variance test to compare the spiritual well-being and mental health of male and female students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>resource</th>
<th>multivariate</th>
<th>univariate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>7/80**</td>
<td>8/88**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.01
As it is seen from table, the effect of gender is significant on the linear combination of spiritual well-being and mental health variables \[ F(2, 220) = 7.80, P<0.01 \]. Univariate analysis of variance test was used in order to consider that the effect of gender is significant for scores spiritual well-being. \[ F(1, 221) = 8.88, P<0.01 \]. In away that the mean of spiritual well-being scores of females is more than males significantly but the effect of gender is not significant on the score of mental health. \[ F(1, 221) = 0.16, P>0.05 \].

The results of multivariate analysis of variance test are presented for comparing the scores of religious, existential well-being and the scores of mental health scales in table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>resource</th>
<th>multivariate</th>
<th>univariate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious well-being</td>
<td>3/88**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existential well-being</td>
<td>14/19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somatic symptoms</td>
<td>3/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>0/001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social dysfunction</td>
<td>0/02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>depression</td>
<td>0/93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is seen from the table, the effect of gender is significant on linear combination of variables \[ F(6, 216) = 3.88, P<0.01 \]. The results of univariate analysis variance test indicates that the effect of gender is only significant on the scores of religious well-being \[ F(1, 221) = 14.19, P<0.01 \] in a way that the mean of religious well-being scores of females is more than males. There's no difference between male and female students in other variables.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The goal of the present research was to study spiritual well-being and mental health between the students. Research's findings showed that there's a negative and significant between spiritual well-being and mental disorder. Also the religious and existential well-being had a negative and significant correlation with body signs, anxiety, dysfunction in social performance and depression. The results of the research is consistent with the findings of (Ventis, 1995; Koeing, et al.2001; Rippentrop, & Elizabebeth, 2005; Lynn- Rew, & Wrong, 2006).

Spirituality contributes to promote the mental health by providing a framework for describing life's experiences and because of that creating a sense of integrity and existential interconnection. Individuals with spiritual experience and religious beliefs can cope with their stress and psychological problems and the confrontation methods are stronger in them, spirituality creates a power which affects on the physical postures, feelings, thoughts and communications and will be affected by them. Actually, spiritual well-being has a protective effect and acts against stress and leads to gain physical and psychological healthy life and supportive behaviors such less use of cigarette and alcohol, more physical activity, having goal and meaning in life, hopefulness, optimism and improves individual's psychological status (Harvey, 2004).

The other results of this research were that the scores of spiritual and religious well-being of females are more than the mean of males. The finding is consistent with the research's results of Kellums (1995) and Hammermeister, et al. (2005). Higher scores of females in spiritual well-being may be because of being socialized, the roles which are expected of them, different life experiences and coping strategies to men (Hammermeister, et al. 2005). Also in Levin and et al. (1994) opinion, there is possibility that roles, characteristics and behaviors which are attributed to the women socially is more compatible with some religious principles and norms.

It should be mentioned that being a significant relation between spiritual welfare and mental health doesn't mean having cause-effect relations between these variables. There is the possibility that the relation between spiritual well-being and mental health is a bilateral relation or relation between two variables is the effect of other variable and access to the closer relation of these variables require time and related researches in spiritual well-being and mental health field. According to the point that spiritual well-being is involved in factors which has entered into the psychological literature and its role and importance is confirmed in other countries within various researches, it is clear that carrying out a research is not enough on students in spiritual well-being field and its relation with mental health and the results of this finding can not be extended to the other individuals. However, carrying out the other
researches are vital on the normal and clinical populations in different ages and various statistical population. According to the importance of spiritual well-being role in consolidating physical, mental and social aspects of individual, intervention and training is considered a necessary issue in this field and can have an important key role for clinical specialists.

References


