

Research Article

A study of the relationship between daily spiritual experiences and happiness in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences

**Farkhonde Hayati¹, Mohammad Mahboubi²,
Atefeh Zahedi³, Babak Rastegari Mehr^{4*},
and Mohsen Mohammadi⁵**

¹Abadan School of Medical Sciences, Abadan, Iran

²Abadan School of Medical Sciences, Abadan, Iran

³Abadan School of Medical Sciences, Abadan, Iran

^{4*}Corresponding Author: Abadan School of Medical Sciences, Abadan, Iran

⁵Student Research Committee, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences,
Kermanshah, Iran

ABSTRACT

Introduction:“Spirituality” refers to human inclinations for exploring the concept of life by a need for connecting with something beyond self or by developing one’s “self”. The feeling of happiness is a human need that has significant impact on life in a way that it can be considered as the main factor in the health of the family and the society.

Method: this study was of analytical cross-sectional type that explored the relationship between daily spiritual experiences and happiness in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences. The population of the study was consisted of all students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences and the sampling method was census. The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) and Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) were used for data collection. The data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS ver.19. Findings: 320 students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences were studied. The participants’ mean age was 20.78±1.56 with the age range of 18-27 years. Most of the participant (51.6%) were female. Happiness had a significant relationship with sex (p-value=0.03), field of study (p-value=0.04), academic year (p-value=0.01), and satisfaction with field of study (p-value=0.02). The relationship of spiritual experience with the variables sex (p-value=0.002), satisfaction with the city (p-value=0.009), housing (p-value=0.000), hours of sleep (p-value=0.03), field of study (p-value=0.003) and satisfaction with the city (p-value=0.008) was significant. A significant relationship between happiness and spiritual experiences was seen (p-value=0.000).

Discussion and conclusion: The results of the data analysis indicates that daily spiritual experiences and happiness are not only related to each other, but also related to variables such as sex, field of study, academic year and.... The female students who were satisfied with their fields of study and had more daily experiences expressed more happiness feeling, compared with males. Therefore, the necessity of employing guidance and counseling before selecting field of study and place of study is clearly felt. The universities’ management authorities are recommended to help the improvement of spirituality and feeling of happiness in students by planning and implementing educational workshop, creating low-stress learning environments and providing recreational opportunities and facilities.

INTRODUCTION

“Spirituality” refers to human inclinations for exploring the concept of life by a need for

connecting with something beyond self or by developing one’s “self” (1). According to different

studies the divine feeling of spirituality or worldly experiences on competition and sublimation can have a positive role in mental health of individuals (2). Also, spirituality is a set of actions and characteristics that create an intense desire and attraction, that are right and logical, to drive them towards the Creator of the universe (3). The studies by Bartlet et al indicate that spirituality has the ability to make the individual adapt and be flexible by the experience of positive feelings and subsequently satisfaction and happiness in life. In fact, the truth of the spirituality helps the individual, like a counselor, to find meaning in difficult situations in order to cope with life stresses, get free from depression and achieve happiness (4).

The feeling of happiness is a human need that has significant impact on life in a way that it can be considered as the main factor in the health of the family and the society (3). Happiness refers to the individual's personal satisfaction in life which is based on cognitive and affective judgements. Different factors such as inheritance, personality, age, physician health, good social relationships (extroversion), internal control, love, satisfaction with family and marriage, religious beliefs and the like are related and associated with happiness in life (5). Argyle considers happiness as the absence of depression, being happy and having other positive emotions and being satisfied with life (6). World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized happiness as an element of individuals' health (7). It has been determined in different studies that spirituality is a major predictor of happiness and ability; individuals who had a high level of spirituality showed a higher level of happiness and the feeling of ability. Also, the relationship of mental health with happiness and meaning-seeking feeling is positive and significant. And the feeling of meaning-seeking is related to the reduction of depression and mental disorders and increase of mental health. Overall, experts believe that individuals who are happier have feeling of security more and thus, they easily participate in decision-makings and are more satisfied with group activities (4, 8, 9).

Considering the significance of spirituality and happiness in individual and social life and considering the aforementioned elements in medical students who have an important role in providing health and medical services in the future, the present study was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between daily spiritual experiences and happiness in students at Abadan University of Medical Sciences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was of analytical cross-sectional type that explored the relationship between daily spiritual experiences and happiness in students at Abadan University of Medical Sciences. The population of the study was consisted of all students at Abadan University of Medical Sciences and the sampling method was census. The following questionnaires were used for data collection:

1. Demographic characteristics questionnaire: this questionnaire was created by the researcher which, considering the objectives of the study, measured age, sex, marital status, field of study, number of family members and housing status.
2. Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES): DSES is a multidimensional tool of spirituality that is used in health-related studies. This scale measures the individual's perception of a superior power in daily life and his perception of interaction with it. The validity and reliability of this tool have been calculated in similar studies (10). The main scale has 16 items that measure concepts such as comfort, joy, power, communication, feeling of sublimation, calmness, the Creator's help, God's guidance, reception of love from Creator, feeling of amazement, kindness and sympathy and the feeling of closeness with the Creator. The direction of scoring is reversed to facilitate the interpretation of the results in a way that higher scores indicate more spiritual experiences. Likert-style scoring (1 to 6) is used in this scale. The maximum score is 96 and the minimum score is 16 and the scores are

interpreted as follows: a score of 16-36 is relatively weak, 37-56 is average, 57-76 is high and 77 to 96 is very strong in terms of spirituality (1).

3. The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI): OIH was also used for data collection. This inventory had 29 items. Each item had 4 options and the terms (options) were created in a way that each term indicated a higher level of happiness, compared with its previous term. The option that indicated the highest level of happiness received the score 3 and the option that indicated the lack of happiness received the score 0. Therefore, 87 was the maximum test score. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been explored in different studies (12). Happiness is low in scores below 22, average in scores between 22 and 44, high in scores between 44 to 44, and very high in scores between 87 and 68.
4. After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSSver.19 and by descriptive statistical tests (frequency, mean, standard deviation) and the inferential test chi-square as the variables were qualitative.

FINDINGS

320 students at Abadan University of Medical Sciences were studied. The participants' mean age was 20.78 ± 1.56 with the age range of 18-27 years. Most of the participant (51.6%) were female.

Satisfaction with university, the city in which the university is located, field of study and life was explored. 63.7 percent of the individuals were satisfied with the university, 59.4 percent were satisfied with the city, 90.3 percent were satisfied with the field of study and 94.1 percent of the individuals were satisfied with their life. Most of the individuals had a high level of spiritual experience (50.9 percent) and happiness (67.2 percent). It should be noted that happiness was categorized into four categories: low, average, high and very high and no participant was in the low category (table 1). Happiness had a significant relationship with the demographic variables sex (p-value=0.03), field of study (p-value=0.04), academic year (p-value=0.01), and satisfaction with field of study (p-value=0.02) (table 2). The relationship of spiritual experience with the demographic variables sex (p-value=0.002), satisfaction with the city (p-value=0.009), housing (p-value=0.000), hours of sleep (p-value=0.03), field of study (p-value=0.003) and satisfaction with the city (p-value=0.008) was significant. However, spiritual experience had no significant relationship with other variables in the study such as marital status, economic status, eating breakfast, number of family members, satisfaction with life and satisfaction with the university (table 3). The relationship between happiness and spiritual experiences was also significant (p-value=0.000).

Table 1. The frequency distribution of demographic variables, happiness and spiritual experience in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences

| Variable | Frequency (percent) |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Married | 18(5.6) |
| Single | 302(94.4) |
| Economic status | |
| weak | 14(4.4) |
| Average | 165(51.6) |
| good | 124(38.8) |
| excellent | 17(5.3) |
| Place of residence | |
| Dormitory | 284(88.8) |
| Rented place | 7(2.2) |
| Personal place | 29(9.1) |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Academic year | |
| First year | 134(41.9) |
| Second year | 85(26.6) |
| Third and fourth years | 101(31.6) |
| Field of study | |
| Nursing | 137(42.8) |
| Medicine | 97(30.3) |
| Operation room | 33(10.3) |
| Medical laboratory sciences | 33(10.3) |
| General health | 8(2.5) |
| Anesthesiology | 12(3.8) |
| breakfast | |
| eat | 239(74.7) |
| Does not eat | 79(24.7) |
| Spiritual experience | |
| weak | 5(1.6) |
| average | 61(19.8) |
| high | 163(52.9) |
| Very high | 79(25.6) |
| Happiness | |
| low | 0(0) |
| Average | 30(9.8) |
| high | 215(70.3) |
| Very high | 61(19.9) |

Table 2. The relationship between happiness and the variables explored in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences

| Variable | Happiness | | | df | p-value |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|---------|
| | Average | High | Very high | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| 20 \geq | 18(12.8) | 90(63.8) | 33(23.4) | 2 | 0.14 |
| >21 | 12(6.9) | 125(72.3) | 36(20.8) | | |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Female | 18(11) | 101(62) | 44(27) | 2 | 0.03 |
| Male | 12(7.9) | 114(75.5) | 25(16.6) | | |
| Marital status | | | | | |
| Married | 2(11.1) | 13(72.2) | 3(16.7) | 2 | 0.84 |
| Single | 28(9.5) | 202(68.2) | 66(22.3) | | |
| Number of family members | | | | | |
| 4 \geq | 8(8.2) | 66(68) | 23(23.7) | 4 | 0.82 |
| 5-6 | 14(11) | 89(70.1) | 24(18.9) | | |
| 7 \leq | 8(8.9) | 60(66.7) | 22(24.4) | | |
| Breakfast | | | | | |
| Eats | 22(9.4) | 162(69.2) | 50(21.4) | 4 | 0.85 |
| Does not eat | 8(10.3) | 51(65.4) | 19(24.4) | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----|-------|
| Sleep (hours) | | | | | |
| 6-8 | 23(9.5) | 170(70.5) | 48(19.9) | 2 | 0.26 |
| 9≤ | 7(9.6) | 45(61.6) | 21(28.8) | | |
| Housing | | | | | |
| Dormitory | 25(9) | 188(67.6) | 65(23.4) | 2 | 0.19 |
| Personal and rented | 5(13.9) | 27(75) | 4(11.1) | | |
| Field of study | | | | | |
| Nursing | 11(8.1) | 88(65.2) | 36(26.7) | 10 | 0.04 |
| medicine | 5(5.3) | 75(79.8) | 14(14.9) | | |
| Operation room | 4(12.1) | 23(69.7) | 6(18.2) | | |
| Medical laboratory sciences | 5(15.6) | 21(65.6) | 6(18.8) | | |
| Health | 2(25) | 3(37.5) | 3(37.5) | | |
| Anesthesiology | 3(25) | 5(41.7) | 4(33.3) | | |
| Satisfied with field of study | | | | | |
| Yes | 29(10.2) | 200(70.4) | 55(19.4) | 2 | 0.002 |
| No | 1(3.3) | 15(50) | 14(46.7) | | |
| Academic year | | | | | |
| First year | 20(15.2) | 90(68.2) | 22(16.7) | 4 | 0.01 |
| Second year | 7(8.5) | 53(64.6) | 22(26.8) | | |
| Third and fourth years | 3(3) | 72(72) | 25(25) | | |
| Satisfied with the university | | | | | |
| Yes | 23(11.5) | 140(70) | 37(18.5) | 2 | 0.06 |
| No | 7(6.1) | 75(65.8) | 32(28.1) | | |
| Satisfied with the city | | | | | |
| Yes | 20(10.8) | 131(70.4) | 35(18.8) | 2 | 0.22 |
| No | 10(7.8) | 84(65.6) | 34(26.6) | | |
| Satisfied with life | | | | | |
| Yes | 30(10.1) | 204(68.5) | 64(21.5) | 2 | 0.32 |
| No | 0 | 11(68.8) | 5(31.3) | | |
| Economic status | | | | | |
| Average | 12(6.9) | 126(72) | 37(21.1) | 4 | 0.16 |
| Good | 14(11.5) | 80(65.6) | 28(23) | | |
| Excellent | 4(23.5) | 9(52.9) | 4(23.5) | | |

Table 3. The relationship between spiritual experience and the variables explored in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences

| Variable | Spiritual experience | | | d | p-value |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------|---|---------|
| | Average | good | high | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| 20≥ | 38(26.6) | 77(53.8) | 28(19.6) | 2 | 0.41 |
| >21 | 36(20.8) | 96(55.5) | 41(23.7) | | |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Female | 42(25.5) | 100(60.6) | 23(13.9) | 2 | 0.002 |
| Male | 32(21.2) | 73(48.3) | 48(30.5) | | |
| Marital status | | | | | |
| Married | 5(27.8) | 11(61.1) | 2(11.1) | 2 | 0.52 |
| Single | 69(23.2) | 162(54.4) | 67(22.5) | | |
| Number of family members | | | | | |
| 4≥ | 22(22.7) | 57(58.8) | 18(18.6) | 4 | 0.73 |
| 5-6 | 28(21.9) | 68(53.1) | 32(25) | | |
| 7≤ | 24(26.4) | 48(52.7) | 19(20.9) | | |
| Eating breakfast | | | | | |
| Yes | 53(22.3) | 128(53.8) | 57(23.9) | 4 | 0.49 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----|-------|
| No | 20(26.3) | 44(57.9) | 12(15.8) | | |
| Sleep (hours) | | | | | |
| 6-8 | 51(20.9) | 133(54.5) | 60(24.6) | 2 | 0.03 |
| 9≤ | 23(31.9) | 40(55.6) | 9(12.5) | | |
| Housing | | | | | |
| Dormitory | 70(25) | 158(56.4) | 52(18.6) | 2 | 0.000 |
| Rented and personal | 4(5.4) | 15(41.7) | 17(47.2) | | |
| Field of study | | | | | |
| Nursing | 39(28.7) | 79(58.1) | 18(13.2) | 10 | 0.003 |
| Medicine | 16(16.8) | 43(45.3) | 36(37.9) | | |
| Operation room | 6(18.8) | 19(59.4) | 7(21.9) | | |
| Medical laboratory sciences | 6(18.2) | 22(66.7) | 5(15.2) | | |
| Health | 2(25) | 4(50) | 2(25) | | |
| Anesthesiology | 5(41.7) | 6(50) | 1(8.3) | | |
| Satisfied with field of study | | | | | |
| Yes | 62(21.6) | 160(55.7) | 65(22.6) | 2 | 0.05 |
| No | 12(41.4) | 13(44.8) | 4(13.8) | | |
| Academic year | | | | | |
| First year | 30(22.7) | 70(53) | 32(24.2) | 4 | 0.63 |
| Second year | 22(26.5) | 42(50.6) | 19(22.9) | | |
| Third and fourth years | 22(21.8) | 61(60.4) | 18(17.8) | | |
| Satisfied with the university | | | | | |
| Yes | 45(22.2) | 106(52.2) | 52(25.6) | 2 | 0.09 |
| No | 29(25.7) | 67(59.3) | 17(15) | | |
| Satisfied with the city | | | | | |
| Yes | 36(19.1) | 101(53.7) | 51(27.1) | 2 | 0.008 |
| No | 38(29.7) | 72(56.3) | 18(14.1) | | |
| Satisfied with life | | | | | |
| Yes | 67(22.4) | 164(54.8) | 68(22.7) | 2 | 0.10 |
| No | 7(41.2) | 9(52.9) | 1(5.9) | | |
| Economic status | | | | | |
| Average | 45(25.6) | 97(55.1) | 34(19.3) | 4 | 0.59 |
| Good | 25(20.2) | 69(55.6) | 30(24.2) | | |
| Excellent | 4(25) | 7(43.8) | 5(31.3) | | |

Table 4. The relationship between happiness and spiritual experiences in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences

| Variable | Happiness | | | p-value |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| | Average | High | Very high | |
| Spiritual Experience | | | | 0.000 |
| Average | 4(13.3) | 35(16.4) | 34(50) | |
| High | 14(46.7) | 126(59.2) | 30(44.1) | |
| Very high | 12(40) | 52(24.4) | 4(5.9) | |

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between daily spiritual experiences and happiness in students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences. The results of the study indicated that spirituality and happiness were significantly related to sex of the

individuals (P-value=0.002 and P-value=0.03). Female students had more spiritual experiences and feeling of happiness and these findings are also verified in the studies by Najafi and Erfan, Safari and Montazeri et al. Therefore, individuals who experience spirituality during the day have more feeling of happiness and this feeling is more

in female students, compared with male students. In fact, it can be said that students with daily spiritual experiences have feeling of happiness more. It seems that female students act better than male students in terms of expressing their feelings and express more positive feelings.

In addition, the findings of this study did not indicate a significant relationship between marital status and the level of happiness (p -value=0.84). No significant relationship between these two variables was seen in the study by Safari either (6). In the study by Inglehart it was found that married individuals were happier than the singles on average and this finding is not consistent with the findings of the present study (6). Of course, Inglehart suggests that the difference is highly insignificant and it can be ignored and it can be said that the feeling of happiness is not different between single and married individuals.

Other findings of the present study indicated that there is a significant statistical relationship of daily spiritual experiences and field of study, satisfaction with city and housing status on a way that the nursing students and students who were satisfied with the city they lived and the dormitory life had more spiritual experiences. Therefore, individuals are recommended to choose their field of study and place of study with more interest and attention, before enrolling in a university.

Edwin et al suggested in their study that daily spiritual experiences had positive significant relationship with satisfaction with life, positive emotion and mental calmness and had negative correlation with anxiety and depression indices (14). In the present study spiritual experience had a significant relationship with sex, satisfaction with city and housing but had no relationship with satisfaction with life. The reason for this difference can be the difference in the populations and tools employed. The questionnaire employed in their study had different aspects and had been distributed and collected among catholic and atheist individuals. However, no categorization has been done in the present study in terms of the

level of religious affiliations and the results are more generalizable.

Finally, the results of the present study indicated that a significant statistical relationship exists between daily spiritual experiences and the feeling of happiness in students and this has not been explored in other studies. And the difference of this study with similar studies is that the present study determined that spiritual experiences in day and night are related to the feeling of happiness.

CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis indicates that daily spiritual experiences and happiness are not only related to each other, but also related to variables such as sex, field of study, academic year and.... Therefore, the necessity of employing guidance and counseling before selecting field of study and place of study is clearly felt and more attention on this issue will result in a higher level of happiness in later stages of individual's life. Another point is that, based on the findings of the present study, male students have a weaker performance in terms of expressing their positive feelings, compared with females. Therefore, it is recommended that individual counseling by the university counselors and educational workshops in this regard be considered. Also, the universities' management authorities are recommended to help the improvement of spirituality and feeling of happiness in students by planning and implementing workshops in the domains of religion, mental health, and happiness culture and by creating low-stress learning environments and providing recreational opportunities and facilities. Finally, the researchers who are interested on this subject are recommended to explore and compare different academic levels (associate level, bachelor's level, master's level and PhD level).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was conducted with the financial support of the Deputy for Education Research and Students of the Abadan School of Medical Sciences and was approved with the moral code

No. IR.ABADANUMS.REC.1394.36. The researchers would like to thank all those who cooperated in conducting the present study, especially the students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences.

REFERENCES

1. Thomson WCC. An Introduction to Positive Psychology. Psychology and Religion. 2009;2(2):189-246.
2. Taghvi M, Amiri H. Psychometric characteristics of daily spiritual experiences. Islamic Education. 2010;5(10):149-65.
3. Mozafarinia F, Amin Shekaroy F, Heydarnia A. The relationship between spiritual health and happiness. HEALTH EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROMOTION. 2013;2.(2)
4. Najafi M, Erfan A. Qualitative and quantitative study of the relationship between spirituality, happiness and professional Capability of faculty members. New Educational Approaches. 2012;7(2):1-22.
5. Kaplan HI, Sadock BJ. Synopsis of psychiatry: Behavioral sciences clinical psychiatry: Williams & Wilkins Co; 1988.
6. safari S. Happiness and Its Relationship with University Students 'Demographic Factors. Journal of Modern Industial/Organizational Psychology. 2010;1(2):79-87.
7. Siegrist J, editor Subjective well-being: new conceptual and methodological developments in health-related social sciences. ESF SCSS Exploratory Workshop on,, Income, Interactions and Subjective Well-Being; 2003.
8. Hoseinian S, Manoochehri K, Alavi Z. Evaluate and compare the relationship between mental health and sense of meaning of dormitory students of undergraduate and postgraduate University,. Student Mental Health; Tehran2004.
9. Molavi H, Khosravi S, Neshat Doost H, Kalantary M. Pluralistic Family on Couples Happiness. Armaghan-e-Danesh. 2010;15(2):125-33.
10. Agha Ali F, Zandipour T, Ahmadi M. The effects of cognitive-behavioral group counseling withan emphasis on spiritual thoughts in increased spirituality and mental health of MS patients in Qom. Ravanshenasi-va- Din. 2011;4(1):37-54.
11. Asadi M, Asad zandi M, ebadi A. The effect of spiritual care based on «GHALBE SALIM» model on spiritual experiences of patients undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery. Cardiovascular Nursing Journal. 2013;2(2):30-9.
12. Amiri Majd M, Zari Moqadam F. The relationship between happiness and marital satisfaction among women Teachers and housewives in Arak city. Science Behavioral. 2010;2(2):9-21.
13. Montazeri A, Omidvari S, Azin A, Aeinparast A, Jahangiri K, Saediqi J, et al. The happiness of the people of Iran and its influencing factors: the view of the Iranian people's health study. Payesh. 2011;11(4):467-75.
14. Sánchez EGM, Arocena FAL, Ceballos JCM. Daily spiritual experience in Basques and Mexicans: A quantitative study. J Transpers Res. 2010;2:10-25.