

A Study of the Relationship Between Daily Spiritual Experiences and Happiness in Students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences

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Abstract: “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. 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. About 320 students at Abadan School of Medical Sciences were studied. The participant’s mean age was 20.78±1.56 with the age range of 18-27 year. Most of the participant (51.6%) were female. Happiness had a significant relationship with sex ($p = 0.03$), field of study ($p = 0.04$), academic year ($p = 0.01$) and satisfaction with field of study ($p = 0.02$). The relationship of spiritual experience with the variables sex ($p = 0.002$), satisfaction with the city ($p = 0.009$), housing ($p = 0.000$), hours of sleep ($p = 0.03$), field of study ($p = 0.003$) and satisfaction with the city ($p = 0.008$) was significant. A significant relationship between happiness and spiritual experiences was seen ($p = 0.000$). 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.

Key words: Spirituality, analytical, medical science, experiences scale, recreational opportunities, implementing

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” (Thomson, 2009). 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 (Taghvi and Amiri, 2010). 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. The studies by Bartlet and colleagues 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 (Najafi and Erfan, 2012).

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. 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 (Kaplan and Sadock, 1988). Argyle considers happiness as the absence of depression, being happy and having

other positive emotions and being satisfied with life (Safari, 2010). World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized happiness as an element of individual's health.

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 (Najafi and Erfan, 2012; Molavi *et al.*, 2010).

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.

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.

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 (Agha *et al.*, 2011). 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 (1-6) 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 77-96 is very strong in terms of spirituality (Thomson, 2009).

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 (Amiri and Zarimoghdam, 2010). Happiness is low in scores below 22, average in scores between 22 and 44, high in scores between 44-68 and very high in scores between 68 and 87.

After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS ver.19 and by descriptive statistical tests (frequency, mean, standard deviation) and the inferential test chi-square as the variables were qualitative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 320 students at Abadan University of Medical Sciences were studied. The participant's 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. About 63.7% of the individuals were satisfied with the university, 59.4% were satisfied with the city, 90.3% were satisfied with the field of study and 94.1% of the individuals were satisfied with their life. Most of the individuals had a high level of spiritual experience (50.9%) and happiness (67.2%). 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

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

Variables	Frequency (%)
Marital status	
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	
1st	134 (41.9)
2nd	85 (26.6)
3rd and 4th	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	
Eats	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)

had a significant relationship with the demographic variables sex ($p = 0.03$), field of study year ($p = 0.01$) and satisfaction with field of study ($p = 0.02$) (Table 2). The relationship of spiritual experience with the demographic variables sex ($p = 0.002$), satisfaction with the city ($p = 0.009$), housing ($p = 0.000$), hours of sleep ($p = 0.03$), field of study ($p = 0.003$) and satisfaction with the city ($p = 0.008$) 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 ($p = 0.000$) (Table 4).

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 (Table 2): spirituality and happiness were significantly related to sex of the individuals ($p = 0.002$ and $p = 0.03$).

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

Variables	Happiness			df	p-values
	Average	High	Very high		
Age					
≥20	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	8 (8.2)	66 (68)	23 (23.7)	4	0.82
5-6	14 (11)	89 (70.1)	24 (18.9)		
≤7	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 (h)					
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)	5 (41.7)	10	0.04
Medicine	5 (5.3)	75 (79.8)	36 (26.7)		
Operation room	4 (12.1)	23 (69.7)	14 (14.9)		
Medical laboratory sciences	5 (15.6)	21 (65.6)	6 (18.2)		
Health	2 (25)	3 (37.5)	6 (18.8)		
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					
1st	20 (15.2)	90 (68.2)	22 (16.7)	4	0.01
2nd	7 (8.5)	53 (64.6)	22 (26.8)		
3rd and 4th	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	12 (6.9)	126 (72)	37 (21.1)	4	0.16
Average	14 (11.5)	80 (65.6)	28 (23)		
Good excellen	4 (23.5)	9 (52.9)	4 (23.5)		

Female students had more spiritual experiences and feeling of happiness and these findings are also verified in the studies by Najafi and Erfan (2012), Safari (2010) and Montazeri *et al.* (2011). 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

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

Variables	Spiritual experience			df	p-values
	Average	Good	High		
Age					
≥20	38 (26.6)	77 (53.8)	28 (19.6)	2	0.410
>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	0.520
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	0.730
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	0.490
No	20 (26.3)	44 (57.9)	12 (15.8)		
Sleep (h)					
6-8	51 (20.9)	133 (54.5)	60 (24.6)	2	0.030
≤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	0.050
No	12 (41.4)	13 (44.8)	4 (13.8)		
Academic year					
1st	30 (22.7)	70 (53)	32 (24.2)	4	0.630
2nd	22 (26.5)	42 (50.6)	19 (22.9)		
3rd and 4th	22 (21.8)	61 (60.4)	18 (17.8)		
Satisfied with the university					
Yes	45 (22.2)	106 (52.2)	52 (25.6)	2	0.090
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	0.100
No	7 (41.2)	9 (52.9)	1 (5.9)		
Economic status					
Average	45 (25.6)	97 (55.1)	34 (19.3)	4	0.590
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

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

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 ($p = 0.84$). No significant relationship between these two variables was seen in the study by Safari (2010). 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 (Safari, 2010). 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 the 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 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 (Sanchez *et al.*, 2010). 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, Master's and PhD level).

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