







Original Article

The spiritual experiences of students of Iran University of Medical Sciences in 2020

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Abstract

Background: Psychologists consider the acceptance of spirituality as a cultural reality and by acknowledging the positive effects of spirituality on mental health, the World Health Organization also considers the spiritual dimension as the physical, social and emotional dimensions of human existence. Spirituality is a genuine and inner experience that It lies in the nature of every human being. The purpose of this study was to investigate the spiritual experiences of students of Iran University of Medical Sciences in 2020.

Methods: The present study was descriptive-analytical. The sample size of 500 students of Iran University of Medical Sciences in 2020 was estimated. For sampling, a list of students was prepared from the faculty education and the sample was selected by regular random sampling method through random number generation software. The data collection tool was a questionnaire with demographic questions and spiritual experiences. The collected data were analyzed after completion with SPSS 20 software. A significance level of 0.05 was considered.

Results: The mean score of the meaning-finding component in life was obtained at 57.98. There was a significant relationship between spiritual experiences and gender, age and educational level of students, while no significant relationship was found between spiritual experiences and marital status and residence.

Conclusion: In order to ensure the spiritual health of students, it is necessary to plan properly to create a meaningful atmosphere in universities for different age and gender groups.

Keywords: Health; Iran; Mysticism; Social Determinants of Health; Students.

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Introduction

The World Health Organization considers the spiritual dimension as the physical, social -and emotional

dimensions among the human existence dimensions (1). Spiritual needs usually manifest when faced with problems, challenges, and crises (2). One of the ways

in which human beings can feel meaning is tolerating the loss, purposefulness, spirituality and religion (3). These experiences help the person to cope with life issues. Spiritual experiences are an external, internal and transpersonal experience that society and their individual experiences form them. Spirituality is composed of external elements, and supernatural social groups (4). They include an inner connection with the transcendental and almighty God (5).

Spirituality has a multidimensional structure including the spiritual or transcendental dimension, meaning and purpose in life, having a mission in life and altruism (6) and experiences including the feeling of the presence of a particular being, a lively and cheerful presence, the feeling of a person's spiritual presence (7). Spirituality has been associated with reduced pain and improved quality of life in cancer patients (8). People with high tendency for spirituality have more unity and harmony in their personal and professional lives (9). Studies have shown that spiritual experiences have been effective in increasing health (5). Creating a spiritual connection with infinite power gives the person the assurance that a strong force will always support him or her. Relying on their faith and belief, these individuals are less anxious and have more hopeful and optimistic expectations for the future (10). Spirituality is a self-belief that has a higher purpose (11).

Spiritual experiences usually strengthen family relationships and those around us and enhance our commitment to environmental sustainability to provide a better world for future generations (12). In many students, their spiritual themes may be strengthened and promoted during the course of education and somehow be institutionalized in them forever (13). Achieving the structure of spirituality experience in students helps us to pursue and strengthen spiritual education and training activities with more awareness

(14). Given the importance of this issue in students and their prominent role as the future managers and builders and developers of any society, the present study was conducted to investigate the spiritual experiences of students of Iran University of Medical Sciences in 2020. We hope that the results of this study will provide a basis for planning to improve the spiritual atmosphere in educational centers by the officials.

Methods

The present study was cross-sectional descriptive-analytical research conducted with the aim of investigating the spiritual experiences of students of Iran University of Medical Sciences. The statistical population of this study consisted of all students of Iran University of Medical Sciences who were studying in the academic year of 2020. To determine the sample size, considering alpha of 0.05 and accuracy (d) of 0.4 and standard deviation of 6, sample size was determined at 484 people, which increased the to 500 to increase the research credibility.

$$n = \frac{(z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}} \cdot \sigma)^2}{d^2}$$

For sampling, a complete list of students from the faculty was prepared. Then, the samples were determined based on the random number table and the samples were selected by regular random sampling through random number generation software.

Data were collected by a questionnaire. This questionnaire included two sections. The first section was the researcher-made demographic information and the second section was the scale of investigation of spiritual experiences of Ghabari et al., (15). The researcher-made demographic information included information about gender, marital status, employment status, level of education, faculty and residence.

Ghabari et al., Spiritual Experience Questionnaire also has 75 items and six components, including finding meaning in life, the effect of relationship with God, actualization of spiritual activity, transcendent mystical experiences, spiritual experience deprivation, and social and religious activities. The Spiritual Experience Questionnaire was developed on a seven-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Some questions were scored directly and others in reverse (15).

After obtaining permission from the Research Deputy, the researcher referred to the research environment in the faculty and after introducing himself and informing students about the content and objectives of the research, they were invited to cooperate if they met the inclusion criteria. Questionnaires were provided to students and before starting, people were given enough information on the way of completing the questionnaire with the help of pre-trained colleagues. The students participated in the study with their consent and were assured that their information would be kept confidential, the results would be reported in general, and would be used merely for scientific research.

The questionnaire was completed by research samples in the presence of the researcher and in non-class hours so as not to interfere in the teaching process. After completing and collecting the questionnaires, the data were entered into SPSS statistical software and analyzed by appropriate tests. Accordingly, the obtained data were reported in the form of absolute frequency and frequency of percentage, mean, standard deviation. Pearson correlation test and one-way analysis of variance were used to determine the relationship between variables.

Results

The results of the present study showed that the mean age of participants was 23 years with a standard deviation of 4.06. Also,

Table 1. Frequency distribution of participants based on demographic variables

Variable	n	%	
Gender	Female	201	40.21
	Male	291	58.2
	total	492	98.41%
Marital status	Single	421	84.2
	Married	75	15
	Total	496	99.2%
Residence	University's dormitory	297	59.4
	Self-governing dormitory	23	4.6
	Personal house	158	31.6
	Other	9	1.8
	Total	487	97.4%
	Level of education	Bachelor	156
Master		141	28.2
General PhD		169	33.8
Specialized Doctor		18	3.6
Subspecialized PhD		1	0.2
Total		485	97%

40.21% of participants were female and 58.2% were male.

The demographic information showed in table1, based on table 1, most of the participants in phase one were male. In terms of level of education, had Bachelor 156 (31.2%) and had Master 141 (28.2%) had General PhD degree169(33.8%), had Specialized Doctor18(3.6%), had Subspecialized PhD1 (0.2%).

The results showed that the highest mean was for component of finding meaning in life (57.98) and the lowest mean was for social and religious activities (11.65) among the students Table 2.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of different components of students' spiritual experience

Component	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Finding meaning in life	57.98	8.92	32	82
The effect of relationship with God	45.31	9.26	23	71
Actualization of spiritual activity	20.60	3.64	10	31
Transcendent mystical experiences	44.54	8.74	24	73
Spiritual experience deprivation	46.51	9.29	25	73
Social and religious activities	11.56	4.27	5	24

Table 3. Relationship between the components of spiritual experience and age

Row	Finding meaning in life	The effect of relationship with God	Actualization of spiritual activity	Transcendent mystical experiences	Spiritual experience deprivation	Social and religious activities
Age	r=0.090 P=0.049	r=0.067 P=0.142	r=0.001 P=0.979	r=0.044 P=0.340	r=0.041 P=0.374	r=0.030 P=0.510

Based on the correlation test, there was a significant and positive relationship between age and the component of finding meaning in life (= 0.049) Table 3.

The results in table4 showed the relationship between spiritual experience components and demographic variables (gender, marital status, level of education and residence) about Finding meaning in life, the effect of relationship with God, actualization of spiritual activity, transcendent mystical experiences, spiritual experience deprivation, social and religious activities.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the spiritual experiences of Iran University students. There was a significant relationship between spiritual experiences and gender, age and educational level of

students, while no significant relationship was found between spiritual experiences and marital status and residence.

The results showed that the mean component of finding meaning in life is 57.98 (SD8.92) and the mean of social and religious activities is 11.65(SD4.27) among students. In the present study, the students' daily spiritual experience was optimal. The results of the present study are consistent with the results of similar studies conducted in Iran (16-19) and a study conducted in Saudi Arabia (20). Spiritual experiences bring mental health for people and are considered as a fact of spiritual and religious life. It includes hope, finding meaning in life, the ability to forgive the mistakes of others, moral beliefs and values, spiritual care, having a good relationship with others, believing in God,

Table 4. Relationship between spiritual experience components and demographic variables

Variable	Group	Finding meaning in life	The effect of relationship with God	Actualization of spiritual activity	Transcendent mystical experiences	Spiritual experience deprivation	Social and religious activities
Gender	Male	58.40±9.25	44.40±8.7	20.61±3.7	45.54±9.3	47.86±9.5	12.28±4.5
	Female	57.45±8.54	46.71±9.6	20.67±3.4	43.20±7.6	44.53±8.6	10.73±3.6
p		0.255	0.006	0.8584	0.003	0.000	0.000
Marital status	single	57.94±9	45.20±9.2	20.56±3.6	44.63±8.7	46.52±9.3	11.59±4.2
	Married	58.16±8.4	46.13±8.6	20.93±3.6	44.05±8.5	46.54±9.1	12.01±4.3
p		0.854	0.424	0.418	0.597	0.983	0.438
Level of education	Bachelor	58.87±8.1	44.48±9.4	21.01±3.5	46.60±8.9	48.24±9.1	12.35±4.3
	Master	56.37±9.8	45.01±9.5	20.43±3.7	42.39±8.4	44.73±9.5	11.05±3.7
	General PhD	58.33±9.0	45.43±8.4	20.28±3.6	44.47±8.8	47.17±9.0	11.71±4.5
	Specialized Doctor	57.72±8.0	52/05±9.0	20.50±3.3	42.50±5.3	42.50±8.3	10.11±3.2
	Subspecialized PhD	57	48	22	44	39	10
p		0.184	0.025	0.451	0.001	0.004	0.049
Residence	University's dormitory	58.06±9	45.522±9.3	20.70±3.7	44.85±8.9	46.84±9.8	11.63±4.2
	Self-governing dormitory	59.47±10.2	45.56±10.7	19.91±3.0	41.82±6.6	46.34±6.9	11.04±3.2
	Personal house	57.87±8.5	45.64±8.6	20.64±3.5	44.28±8.5	46.46±8.3	11.68±4.3
	Other	60.11±9.1	39.44±6.8	19.33±3.2	49.0±10.7	47.44±8.1	14.77±5.9
p		0.776	0.268	0.542	0.170	0.986	0.157

being moral, and being creative (21). In religious societies, spiritual beliefs, especially tendency to spiritual practices such as prayer and relationship with God have led to the growth of students' daily spiritual experiences.

The results of studies suggest that daily spiritual experiences through worship, mystery and need, a sincere relationship and friendship with God and a person's belief in feeling God's attention to him and understanding a positive feeling of relationship with God lead to the growth and promotion of students' mental health (22, 23). Students are at the center of growth and development of the educational space of the country. When students have a spiritual relationship with God, they feel very relaxed and can alleviate the worries and anxieties of work pressure through this relationship and achieve self-confidence and peace of mind. Thus, they will transfer this peace and confidence to their society. Results revealed a significant and positive relationship between age and the finding meaning in life. Consistent with these results, the results of the study conducted by Soltani et al., also revealed a positive and significant relationship between age and spiritual experiences (24). With increasing age, people approach the final stages of their spiritual and psychological development and have a clearer and more meaningful view of their lives. Also, cultural and religious context in Iran is such that older people have a broader spiritual and religious perspective (25).

There was a significant difference between the two genders in terms of the effect of relationship with God, transcendent mystical experiences, spiritual experience deprivation, and social and religious activities. In other studies, such as the study conducted by Loghmanpour Zarini et al., no significant difference was found between spiritual experiences of two genders (26). Also, there was a significant difference among the students with different level of education in terms of the components of the

effect of relationship with God, transcendent mystical experiences, spiritual experience deprivation and social and religious activities. The results of a study conducted by Plante et al. are consistent with the results of the present study (27).

Recommendations

It is recommended for university administrators and officials pay attention to the issue of spiritual health, especially the daily spiritual experiences of all students in all levels and disciplines and improve students' spiritual health with proper planning and creating spiritual interventions appropriate to their age and gender.

Conclusion

Since students are the human capital and future developers and futurists of the country, paying attention to spirituality and spiritual education in the university environment is crucial. The present study showed that spiritual experiences are significantly different between the two genders and at different ages and at different levels of education. Thus, proper planning is required to create a meaningful atmosphere in universities for different age and gender groups to ensure the spiritual health of students.

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Author's contribution

Nasibeh Zerangian and Abbas Rohani and Mahboobeh Khosravani developed the study concept and design. Neda Khalili Samani and Marzieh Heydari acquired the data. Zahra Rahimi Khalifeh Kandi and Morteza Mansourian analyzed and interpreted the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed

to the intellectual content, manuscript editing and read and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethical considerations

This project was approved with the code of ethics of IR.IUMS.REC.1399.339 by the Research Ethics Committee of Iran University of Medical Sciences. To conduct this research, the necessary permission was obtained from the Research Deputy of the university. Participants were assured that the questionnaires were anonymous and the collected information would remain confidential.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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