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Relation between image of God with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students

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Abstract

The aim of the current research was to investigate the relationship between image of God with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in Tehran and Iranian Medical Sciences Universities. To accomplish the stated goal 467 students were selected by means of proportional sampling procedure. The Image of God inventory and scales of hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in Symptom Checklist-90-Revised were administered on them. Analysis of data revealed that the magnitude of hostility and interpersonal sensitivity can be predicted from the quality of student's images of God.

Keywords: Image of God; Mental Health; Hostility; Interpersonal Sensitivity; Medical Sciences; University Students; Iran

1. Introduction

Problems in interpersonal relations cause solitude and feeling loneliness in individuals (Horowitz and associates, 1988). Incompetencies in establishing a relationship as well as interpersonal problems is associated with social withdrawal, psychological problems and physiological somatization (Ernest & Caccioppo, 1993; Segrin, 1998). Histories of development in a cold and dissatisfactory environment, with unavailable or rejecting figures of attachment cause this psycho-social and physiological problems (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982; Weiss, 1973). These inadequate and unsupporting attachment figures who instigate wide varities of psychological problems can be parents or other significant other adults. Individuals can generalize unavailability of parents in time of need to Gods' unvariability; therefore, they lose their own confidence on God. Interpersonal relations can be damaged by hostility, harsh criticism, and rejections. These psychological and relational conflicts can lead to psychological distress, interpersonal sensitivity, and loss of self-worth in individuals (Feeney, 2006).

Various factors are associated with a hostility and problem in interpersonal sensitivity, among them unavailibility of the attachment figures and negative images of them are of prime importance (Mikulincer, 2007).
Braam and colleagues (2008a) in their study discovered that feeling dissatisfied with God was associated with despair, and depression, in adults. In this research negative image of God (believing in a punitive God) was strongly associated with feeling guilty and having psychiatric symptoms.

Furthermore, data indicated that neuroticism was associated with fearfulness from God, anxiety and dissatisfaction of Him, while the better adjustment was associated with the supporting figure of God (Braam and colleagues, 2008b).

Schaap-Jonker and associates (2002), discovered that there was an association between negative image of God and depression ($r = 0.303$), and a negative image of God and anxiety ($r = 0.442$). In this study there was a significant negative relation between positive image of God, and global index of symptom severity in symptom checklist inventory ($r = -0.395$). Investigators also concluded that image of psychiatric patients in compare to normal people were more negative. These findings indicated that there was a significant association between mental health and image of God. Individuals with a positive image of God were less anxious, and lower in hostility. Individuals with a negative image of God (i.e. perceiving God punitive) were more anxious, and were higher in their aggression toward others. These findings are repeatedly reported by Schaap-Jonker and associates (2008).

Greenway and associates (2003) concluded that individual's self-acceptance was associated with caring image of God. Individuals who believed that God was caring and nourishing them had a positive sense of themselves. They also reported that negative sense of self and perceiving a personal inadequacy was associated with a depressive mood and a negative image of God. Individuals who perceive God a punitive figure, they have a low self-esteem, and they perceive themselves inadequate. Bradshaw and associates (2008) reported that a positive image of God was inversely related to variety of psychological symptoms; among these symptoms they mentioned hostility and interpersonal Sensitivity that was higher in individuals with a negative image of God.

Flannelly and associates (2009) also investigated the relation between psychological disorders and image of God in the adult populations. They concluded that individuals with a positive image of God (i.e. individuals who perceive God closer to themselves who forgives their shortcomings) were lower in psychological symptoms and distresses. These researchers also found that in these individuals' hostility and interpersonal sensitivity were lower, than others. Newton and McIntosh (2010), who explored the relation between image of God and style of coping in parents of exceptional children, reported that positive image of God in these individuals were associated with more effective coping styles. Individuals with a positive image of God evaluated situations more positively.

Schaap-Jonker and associates (2002) discovered that individuals with a borderline personalities and a paranoid ideation hold a negative image of God. They also reported that individuals with the overwhelming characters in cluster "A" (paranoid-schizoid) had a cold distant, and unproductive image of God. When individuals neglect their own spiritual actualizations, continually ignore Gods' influence in their life, and commit sins during their life, their health deteriorates, and their interpersonal relation becomes dissatisfactory (Parker, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 2005).

Although research findings show that quality of image of God is related to individuals personal characteristics and their mental health status, most of these investigations have been conducted in the United States and European countries. Since people in Iran are different from Americans and European countries in terms of their cultural and religious backgrounds investigating the relation of these constructs in individuals who live in Iran is necessary. This study fills the existing gap in the area.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Population in the current study was consisted of college students in Tehran and Iran Medical Sciences Universities. A proportional sampling procedure was utilized in this study and 467 college students between 18-25 years were selected as a sample. In this study 53% of the participants were female, and 47% of them were male, 89% were single, 64% were Shia Muslim, 56% were residing in Tehran (the capital city), and 26% were from other major cities. After preparation of assessment devices, questionnaires were administered on college student by a trained research assistant. Permission of instructors was sought to distribute questionnaires at the end of their
classes. All instructors that we contacted had a good cooperation. In general 467 individuals completed the questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Hostility and Interpersonal Sensitivity Scales of Symptom Checklist-90R (SCL-90R, Deragotis et al., 1973)

This symptom checklist is consisted of 90 items in which each item requires responding in degree of symptom intensity (from 1-5) in which he/she have experienced during the past week. This scale-consisted of nine subscale (dimensions) including somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorders, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. In order to calculate the internal consistency of the scale cronbach alpha coefficient has been used, and the results indicated that internal consistency for all subscales were at a satisfactory level. The maximum alpha coefficient was 0.90 for depression, and the minimum value was for psychoticism (α = 0.77). Stability coefficient that was computed for test-retest reliability in the interval of one week was between 0.87 and 0.90. In the current investigation alpha coefficient for the hostility and interpersonal sensitivity scales was 0.81 and 0.81.

2.2.2. The Image of God Inventory (IOG, Lawrence, 1997)

The Image of God Inventory was used to measure individual's quality of image of God. This inventory also consisted of 72 items and six factors: influence, providence, presence, challenge, acceptance, and benevolence. This inventory measures individual's images of God in a Likert type scale. The alpha coefficient for each Scale was 0.92, 0.92, 0.94, 0.86, 0.90, and 0.91 respectively.

3. Results

The results have been presented in the following tables:

Table 1. Matrix of correlation between "image of God" and hostility and interpersonal sensitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></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>1. SCL-90R-Hostility</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SCL-90R-Interpersonal Sensitivity</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. IOG-Influence</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. IOG-Providence</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. IOG-Presence</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. IOG-Challenge</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. IOG-Acceptance</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. IOG-Benevolence</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05  
** P < 0.01

Table 1 Shows that image of God is associated with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity. Individuals who show an accepting image of God, were lower in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity, and had a higher health status.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis method to predict hostility from student's image of God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Ms</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R^2</th>
<th>Adj.R^2</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>264.07</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>132.04</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>3558.42</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>15.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3822.49</td>
<td>239</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in table 2 about 7% of variation in hostility is accounted by variations in the quality of participant's image of God. This amount of variation is significant at alpha 0.01 (R^2=7 %, F_{(2, 237)} = 8.80, P<0.001). This data indicates that hostility in individuals can be explained by one or more categories of image of God. The
following table shows Beta coefficients indicating that both "Challenge" and "Acceptance" dimensions of the image of God can explain and predict hostility in the college students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-4.19</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that hostility can be predicted from the accepting image, and providence of God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>13.37</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>-5.17</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion

In the current study relation between image of God and hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students has been investigated. Results of multiple regression analysis indicated that hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students can be predicted by their image of God. Individuals, who hold a positive image of God, are lower in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in compare to others, and individuals who had a challenging image of God, were higher in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity. The results of the current study are consistent with some other investigation (e.g., Flannelly et al. 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Bowman, et al.,1987; Schapp-Jonker et al., 2002; Tisdale et al., 1997).

Flannelly and associates (2009) studied the relation between mental disorders and image of God in adults in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity. They concluded that individuals with a positive image of God (i.e. individuals who perceive God closer to themselves who forgives their shortcomings) were lower in psychological symptoms and distresses. These researchers also found that in these individuals' hostility and interpersonal sensitivity were lower, than others.

Schapp-Jonker and associates (2002) discovered that individuals with borderline personality and hostility and interpersonal sensitivity had negative image of God. These researchers also discovered that individuals with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity had negative image of God. These researchers also discovered that individuals with
hostility and interpersonal sensitivity and schizotypal personality hold a cold, unsupportive, image of God. These findings are consistent with result of the current study. Since the current study was an expost facto research developing a causal relation between image of God and psychological distress was not possible. Investigators in the future can design an experimental design in which environmental prompting instigate the image of supportive, caring, and punitive God in individuals, and study their consequence in development or escalation of psychological distress.

Review of literature show that magnitude of hostility and interpersonal sensitivity is associated with negative images of God. Current study has implications for prevention, and interventions of psychological problems in individuals. Improvement of individuals' image of God yields to enhancement in their health status.

References