The Investigation of Relationship between Religious Attitude (Intrinsic and Extrinsic) with depression in the university students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between religion attitude and depression among university students. 387 students in engineers and humanity colleges entered to study by using the stratified sampling. the instruments were Alports, Internal and External Religious Attitude Scale and Beck's depression test. To analyze the data we used the variance analytic regression and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The study showed that there is a significant relationship between religious attitude and depression. The higher religious attitude score the lower depression score will be. There is no specific relationship between religious attitude and sex or field of study.

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1. Introduction

In the daily routine of modern days we witness stressful experiences more than any other time, the experiences which endanger people’s mental health and hygiene and cause the appearance of psychological problems. In these circumstances some factors can support people from loss under the heavy burden of problems.

Many studies have been carried out on the relationship of religion and mental health. Some of the studies have found evidences that support the existence of a positive correlation between the two variables, whereas some others showed a negative correlation and some could not find any meaningful relationship between the two (Lewis et al., 1962).

Intrinsic and extrinsic orientations are described as types of belief, motivation and tendency (James, 1897). People with intrinsic orientation toward religion are described as the individuals who are totally committed to their religious beliefs and the effect of religion is evident in every aspect of their lives. Whereas extrinsic religiosity is limited to a more utilitarian form of religion in order to gain different privileges.

The results of a study conducted by Young et al. (1897) on 303 graduates in psychological fields indicated that spirituality as a variable has significant role on psychological adjustment and can assist medical workers in their clinical treatments. In a research carried out on 160 male and 283 female students in one of the Canadian universities.

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proved that there is a very high correlation between religious commitment and adjustment among male and female students (Schloderman et al., 1988).

The objective of the present research is determining the relationship between university students’ religious orientation and their depression. In fact mental health of the young is one of the important issues that needs to be taken care of, with depression in the top priority of the list. The focus of the present study is on the rate and intensity of depression as well as its relationship with religious attitudes. The major hypothesis of this research is: the analysis of the relationship between religious orientation and depression of university students based on their age, gender and field of study.

There is no doubt that among the concepts discussed in the domain of psychological pathology, depression has a particular position. The findings of studies in epidemiology prove that anxiety and depression have either the highest frequency or the highest statistical rate in the general population (Sodoc et al., 2009).

One of the adjusting variables which influences depression and anxiety is religious orientation. Allport believed that religion only when originated intrinsically and not extrinsically improves mental health and thus emphasized on the significance of the relationship between intrinsic religion and mental health (Allport et al., 1967).

Distinguishing intrinsic religion from extrinsic religion has solely made the greatest contribution to empirical studies (Wicklin, 1990). Allport suggests that the best short-cut to classify religion is to assume that an individual who is intrigued extrinsically makes use of his religion, while an intrinsically motivated person lives with his religion. A person with intrinsic religious orientation finds his motives in religion itself. Religion and personality unify in this person. In contrast people who are extrinsically oriented to religion seek other objectives. In other words they walk toward God without turning their back to themselves (Allport et al., 1967).

Religious orientation can be applied as a useful experimental model for finding out the relationship of the sincerity of faith with personality and mental health (Watson et al., 1994). In the present paper the role of religious orientation (intrinsic, extrinsic) is examined as an adjusting variable in depression and anxiety. The results’s study on 121 students showed that religious mentality is significantly related to mental health and adjustment (Steward and Joe, 1998). Having analyzed the data derived from 351 subjects, Watson et al concluded that people with intrinsic religious orientation are cognitively more logical, adjust themselves better and are mentally healthier.

2. Method

The present study is an applied research by which the researcher is seeking to find the answers to some questions and clarify ambiguities regarding the relationship between (intrinsic – extrinsic) religious orientations and depression. Different hypotheses are also presented in this regard in order to examine the relationship between religious orientation with gender, age and field of study. Correlation test is pursued in order to reach the above-mentioned objectives.

The statistical population consisted of all the students (male and female) of all the fields studying in the second semester of (2009-2010) academic year in Shahid Rajaee University. Based on the Kogaran formula the size of sample group was calculated as 387. Sampling was done by cluster randomization. There were 138 female and 249 male students in the research sample.

Variables such as gender and field of study made the categories. Their ratio in the population was taken into account. Ultimately the data based on 384 questionnaires were applicable for analysis. The following tools were used in the present study:

2.1. Questionnaire on personal details

The subjects had to provide some details about their identity, field of study...
2.2. Allport’s extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation scale

Based on theoretical efforts of growth, Allport attempted to develop a scale to measure religious orientations. He made a scale with 20 items, 11 of which referring to extrinsic religious orientation and 9 to intrinsic orientation. Allport’s study indicated that the correlation between the items of intrinsic orientation to those of extrinsic orientation was (-0.21). In some other studies such as those conducted by Phegin the correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic orientations was (-0.2) very close to the correlation calculated by Allport (1967).

To assess the validity of the test, it was translated to Persian in Iran and the reliability of its translation as well as its compatibility with Iranian religious and cultural context were adjusted based on Likert’s scale by other experts. The validity of the scale has been tested (John Bozorgi, 1999) with a sample of 235 university students in Tehran province with the validity of 0.737 based on Kronbach’s alpha.

2.3. Beck’s Depression Test

Although this test was first used as a criterion for clinical assessments, now its use as a self-report instrument is more common. The validity of the test is high. The general correlation of the topics of the test is reported 31% to 68% and 93% (Ellis, 1980; Spirman, 1994). It’s correlation with other tests of depression measurement has generally been moderately good (r = 93%). Kolics has reported the reliability of the test by retesting with a one – month interval (r = 78%) and a three – month interval (r = 74%). According to Gross – Marnat the reliability of retests are between 48% to 86% depending on the type of statistical population (Groth Marnat, 2001). Green et al (2001) have reported an alpha coefficient of 92%.

3. Results

In this study the university students were analyzed based on the degree of their religious orientation and their depression, with variables such as gender, age, level of education being considered. It also examined the relationship between religious orientation and depression. Mild, moderate and severe depression were consecutively reported as 8.5, 10.9 and 5.7 while 74.2% of students showed no depression. (table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>percentage</th>
<th>Commulative percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence dep</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild dep</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>82.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mod dep</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe dep</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>99.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest percentage of depression is related to moderate type with 10.9%.

The other hypothesis was on the relationship of religious orientation and depression. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was negative indicating a negative relationship between the two variables \( cx = 0.009 \times \) \( r = -1.33 \). In other words with the increase in the amount of religious orientation, depression decreases to some extent.
Table 2. The relationship of religious orientation and depression students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion orientation</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Pearson correlation</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>387</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.133**</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.133**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.009</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The other findings of the study demonstrated no relationship of religious orientation with gender and field of study. (table 2)

4. Discussion

In this study the relationship between religious orientation and the intensity of depression among university students was examined. It was also attempted to minimize the methodology errors by developing a preventive plan, selecting the subjects randomly and controlling intervening variables such as the influence of social pressure by not asking for the subjects’ names in the questionnaires. According to studies carried out in the area of mental health, anxiety and depression are the most prevalent problems among university students.

Major depression disorder is one of the most prevalent causes of the disability of general population (Sodoc et al., 2009). We may even see an increase in the number of people affected by this disorder with the growth of population, industrialization and urbanization. Depression imposes high expenses on society, especially students’ society. Recognizing and applying preventive and adjusting factors can reduce the harms.

Despite the long history of religious beliefs, the experts in the area of religious psychology have theoretically discussed contrasting perceptions on the impacts of religious beliefs on mental health (Baker, 1982). Several studies have been conducted to prove or disprove a meaningful correlation between religious orientation and the intensity of depression. Most of the results show the positive effect of religion on mental health. The main hypothesis of the study, on the relationship of religious orientation with depression, was confirmed by the analysis of data and it was proven that there is a negative meaningful relationship between the two variables (p < 0.009).

The results of the present study are consistent with several other studies such as those conducted by Koenig, Koldstad, Fromtin, Backer, Smith, Lewis, Purk, Harris, Peterson (Baker, 1982; Kaldestad, 1996; Koenig, 1997; Petersen, 1985; Smith, 2003). All the former studies have emphasized the positive role of religious attitudes on the reduction of depression intensity.

Moreover many studies have been done on the relationship between religious orientation and mental health. Burgin et al examined the relationship between religion and mental health through para-analysis of 24 essays (Burgin et al., 1988). They showed that there is a positive relationship between religion and mental health. In other words people with intrinsic religious orientation (i.e. the individuals who believe religion originates from their nature) have a more positive mental health. The results of studies carried out on the impact of religion on mental health demonstrates that religion leaves a positive effect on adjustment, improves mental health, alleviates the symptoms of diseases, reduces sadness and agitation and therefore supports the existence of a positive relationship between religion and mental health.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the intensity of depression among university students showed that 25.1% of them were depressed. 8.5% suffered from minor depression, 10.9% from moderate depression and 5.7% from major depression.
It was proven that using various intervening methods for instance religious methods can help the rehabilitation of depressed people. It is certain that depression can interfere with students’ appropriate performance and make them vulnerable to various behavioral and academic losses. The results of this study did not show any meaningful relationship between religious orientation and field of study, gender and age of the students.

References


