The relationship between the religious orientation and anxiety and depression of students

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Abstract

**Background:** The main purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the religious orientation and anxiety and depression of university students. **Materials and Methods:** The main method in this study was descriptive-analytic. The subject was 347 students in University of Tehran, who were chosen randomly. The participants, were 135 male and 212 female students. They answered to the researcher-made questionnaire, Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), religious attitude scale and Spilberger State-Trait Inventory (STAI). Data were analyzed through SPSS software with descriptive-deductive base, ANOVA and Pearson’s correlation. **Results:** Data analysis indicated the high negative correlation between the religious orientation and anxiety and depression of university students. With the increase of the student’s religious orientation, their depression and anxiety decreased (P< 0.01). **Conclusion:** The study indicates the close relationship between the religious orientation and anxiety and depression of university students. Reinforcement and assimilation of religious values in students can lead them toward increased mental health.

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Keywords: Religious orientation, Anxiety, Depression, Student;

1. Introduction

Depression is important psychological disorder from which 330 million people suffer world-wide. This disorder leads to 800,000 suicides each year.(Koeing, McCullough, Larson,2001). Anxiety and depression are considered the psychological disorders of modern times. Yet it can be traced back in the entire history of humanity. On the other hand, it is believed that religiosity (or religious inclination) has been equally a part of human history, as evidenced by archeological and historical findings (SadeghiJahanbaniyan,NajmAraghi,1998; Jalali,1999). Psychologists, however, have often contradictory ideas about psychology of religion (Maltby 2000). For example, Freud and Ellis express a negative view about the role of religion in the psychological wellness or well-being of humans. Yet others such as Yung, Adler, and Fromm, believe that religion can have a positive effect on the overall health of human psychological behavior (Moatamedi, Azadfallah, Kyamanesh,2005). Experimental studies also, often lead to opposing ideas about the role of religion and religious belief and inclination in the psychological well being of

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people. For example Ellis (1980) believes that religious beliefs and inclinations can lead to psychological disorder, while Bergin (1983) provides evidence that religion and religious inclination do not cause any psychological disorder. Many recent studies, as well, provide strong evidence on the net positive effect of religion on the psychological healthiness or well-being of humans (Kaldestad, 1996; Thoresen, Harris, 2002; Khodayarifard M, Ghabaribonab B, Shokohiyekta, 2000; Francis & et al, 2004; Shehni Yeylagh M, Movahhed A, Shokrkon, 2002). At the same time O’conner and coworkers state that they have not been able to provide any solid evidence on the positive effect of religion on psychological well-being (O’Conner, Cobb, O’Connar, 2003). Meanwhile, Baker and Groush (1982) have shown that introspective religion can have a negative effect, while extrospective religion can have a net positive effect on reducing physiological disorders particularly depression and anxiety. Parker and coworkers and many other investigators such as Mcullough (2003, Smith (2000) and Pool (2003), have shown that depression cases among religious persons is about 50% less than the cases among non-religious people. Investigations by Smith, McColedge and Pall, also agree with this finding and show that religion and depression have a negative correlations. At the same time Hertz Guard and Light (Shehni Yeylagh, Movahhed, Shokrkon, 2002) have shown that psychological anxiety is distinctly high among Catholic girls (when compared to non religious girls in the same population) (Petersen, 1985; Shreve-Neiger, Edelstein, 2004). Considering that studies and investigations on correlation of relation psychological disorder, have so far lead to contradictory conclusions, this paper attempts to conduct a study on the effect of religion on psychological disorder in a Moslem community.

2. Method & materials

2.1. Participant:
The study sample consists of a total of 347 students (135 males and 212 females) from Tehran university (years 2008 to 2009 H).

2.2. Instruments:
2.2.1. The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI); this inventory was develop by beck & et al (1961) consisting of 21 items. Beck, Steer, Garbin (1988) have shown Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was from 0.62 to 0.73.

2.2.2. Stat-treat anxiety inventory (STAI); this inventory was develop by Spiel Berger (1999). Alpha and test-retest coefficient in Pasha Sharifi’s (1999) study were 0.62 & 0.68 respectively.

2.2.3. Religious orientation scale; this 45 items scale was developed by bahrami (2000) Cronbach’s Alpha for subscales of the scale was from 0.85 to 0.93. also spit-half coefficient was 0.88.

3. Results
Based on the values of “mean” and “standard deviation”, the degree of religious inclination of the samples students was classified into three groups of “low”, “medium” and “high”. Then, based on the study of variances (ANOVA), levels of anxiety and depression among students were compared.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Low OR M</th>
<th>Low OR SD</th>
<th>Median OR M</th>
<th>Median OR SD</th>
<th>High OR M</th>
<th>High OR SD</th>
<th>F(3,44)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>24/47</td>
<td>10/56</td>
<td>16/04</td>
<td>9/83</td>
<td>9/54</td>
<td>6/07</td>
<td>21/33</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>51/67</td>
<td>12/09</td>
<td>42/94</td>
<td>10/83</td>
<td>35/55</td>
<td>13/80</td>
<td>54/70</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results are given in Table 1. Post-hoc results for the three groups are given in table 2.
The results of the studies clearly show that the mean value of depression and anxiety among students with high religious inclination is significantly lower, when compared to the mean values for those with low and medium religious inclinations.

### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study indicate that there is a significant negative correlation between religiosity (or religious inclination) and depression and anxiety. The results of this study concur with the finding of many other investigators such as: Koeing, McCullough, Larson, 2001; Kaldestad, 1996; Thoresen, Harris, 2002; Khodayarifard, M, Ghobaribonab, B, Shokohiyekta, 2000; Francis & et al, 2004; Shehni Yeylagh, M, Movahhed, A, Shokrkon, 2002; Zimmeran, McDermut, Mattia, 2000. On the other hand, our results do not agree with the finding of Ellis, O’Conner and coworkers (Shreve-Neiger, Edelstein, 2004; O’Conner, Cobb, O’Conner, 2003).

This study, therefore provide evidence that religious inclination (at least in a Moslem community) can have a net positive effect on reducing the level of depression and anxiety among students. The presented data is significant and cannot be ignored. Believing in God as a source of power and hope can be the main reason for the low level of depression and anxiety among more religious students.

Considering that depression and anxiety is an important psychological disorder among students world-wide (as discussed in the introduction), it is recommended to include religious teachings in the students’ educational curriculum.

This study has nevertheless many shortcomings and limitations. Larger study samples from different student populations are needed to confirm the findings of this study in a more general way. Also longitudinal studies are needed to cast light on the effect of other time-varying parameters.

### References


