Relation between image of God with paranoid ideation in college students

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Abstract

The aim of the current research was to investigate the relationship between image of God and Paranoid Ideation in Tehran and Iranian Medical Sciences Universities. In this study 469 students were selected by means of proportional sampling procedure. The Image of God inventory and the scale of Paranoid Ideation in Symptom Checklist-90-Revised were administered on them. Analysis of data revealed that the magnitude of Paranoid Ideation can be predicted from the quality of student's images of God. Moreover, data revealed that students who had a positive and accepting image of God were lower in Paranoid Ideation.

Keywords: Image of God; Mental Health; Paranoid Ideation; Medical Sciences; University Students; Iran

1. Introduction

Image of God is individuals' internal experience in relation to God that presents itself as a mental representation. Image of God is related to individuals' psychological characteristics. Individuals with mental disorders hold a negative and a distorted image of God (Schaap-Jonker et al., 2002). In fact psychological symptom including anxiety and depression are higher in individuals with negative images of God (Schaap-Jonker et al. 2008).

Individuals, who had a sound relation with their primary care givers, perceive God accessible, and available to themselves, whereas Individuals with a problematic relations with their primary care givers may have difficulties in connecting to others, and establishing a trustful relationship with God. Considering pathological object- relations of children, individuals with problematic relations with their primary caregiver may experience low self-esteem, and a negative image of God. Some studies have supported these propositions. To the extent that individuals experience psychological distress, and pathological symptoms, their image of God become distorted, perceiving God punitive, and angry (Flannelly et al, 2009). Psychotic patient's images of God are more negative than other individuals; they perceive God inaccessible and unavailable for themselves. Research findings indicate that to the extent hospitalization of individuals in psychiatric hospitals are extended, their images of God became distorted as well, and they felt God inaccessible for themselves (Tisdale, 1997).

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Researchers have studied the relation between the quality of God image and psychopathological symptoms in individuals, and they have found that psychological symptoms were higher in individuals with negative images of God. 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 relation between 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 assonates (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 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 inversely related to variety of psychological symptoms; among these symptoms they mentioned paranoid ideation 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 paranoid ideation 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) have a cold distant, and unproductive image of God.

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 469 college students were between 18-25 years were selected. 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 to 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 good cooperation. In general 469 individuals completed the questionnaires.
2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Paranoid Ideation Scale 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 checklist-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 paranoid-ideation scale was 0.77.

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 was 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 paranoid ideation

<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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. SCL-90R-Paranoid Ideation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. IOG-Influence</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. IOG-Providence</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. IOG-Presence</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. IOG-Challenge</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. IOG-Acceptance</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. IOG-Benevolence</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05  ** P < 0.01

Table 1 shows that image of God is associated with paranoid ideation. Individuals who show an accepting image of God, were lower in paranoid ideation, and had a higher health status.

Table 2. multiple regression analysis method to predict paranoid ideation 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>R²</th>
<th>Adj.R²</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>365.45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>182.73</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>5852.75</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>24.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6218.21</td>
<td>243</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in table 2 about 6% of variation in paranoid ideation was accounted by variations in the quality of participant's image of God. This amount of variation was significant at alpha 0.05 (R²= 6%, F (2, 241) = 7.52, P<0.001). This data indicates that paranoid ideation in individuals can be explained by one or more categories of image of God. The following table shows Beta coefficients indicating that both “Providence” and “Acceptance” dimensions of the image of God can explain and predict paranoid ideation in the college students.

Table 3. Beta coefficients predicting paranoid ideation from the quality of image 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>11.47</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-3.86</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that paranoid ideation can be predicted from the accepting image, and providence of God.
4. Discussion

In the current study relation between image of God and paranoid ideation in college students has been investigated. Results of multiple regression analysis indicated that paranoid ideation in college students can be predicted by their image of God. Individuals, who hold a positive image of God, are lower in paranoid ideation in compare to others, and individuals who had a challenging image of God, were higher in paranoid ideation. The results of the current study were 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 was paranoid ideation. Bowman and associates (1987) explored images of God in woman with multiple personality disorders and concluded that these individuals had conflicting, and inconsistent images of God.

Schapp-Jonker and associates (2002) have discovered that individuals with borderline personality and paranoid ideation had a negative image of God. These researchers also discovered that individuals with a paranoid ideation had negative image of God. These researchers also discovered that individuals with paranoid ideation 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, inferring a causal relationship 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 deity in individuals and study its consequences in development or escalation of psychological distress.

Review of literature show that magnitude of paranoid ideation is associated with a 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 of their health status.

References


