




# The Relationship Between Spiritual Development and Life Satisfaction Among Students of Qom University of Medical Sciences

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## Abstract

Having a spiritual perspective on life can have an effect on the optimism and individuals level of life satisfaction, and it is a protective factor against self-harm in life. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction in students of Qom University of Medical Sciences, Iran. This cross-sectional study is part of study that was performed in Qom University of Medical Sciences, Iran, from February 2015 to July 2016 which accommodates 250 medical and paramedical students that were selected through systematic random sampling. Data collection tools were demographic, spiritual attitude and ability questionnaire and Diener's satisfaction with life scale. Data were analyzed using frequency, percent, Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis in SPSS 20 software. The Pearson correlation coefficient between spiritual attitude and life satisfaction ( $R=0.37$ ) at the level of  $p<0.001$  and between spiritual ability and addiction ( $R=0.34$ ) at the level of  $p<0.001$  was direct and meaningful. The relationships between spiritual development and life satisfaction should be considered in university programs for the development of spirituality in the life of students in order to increase the life satisfaction.

**Keywords** Spiritual development · Spiritual attitude · Spiritual ability · Satisfaction · Students

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## Introduction

Today, the subject of life satisfaction has attracted the attention and interest of many scholars and psychologists, so that it is the basis of many researches around the world and is of particular importance among various topics and studies, because in spite of scientific advances in various fields, still people in their life face with situations and events that can disrupt the satisfaction of life (Arabzadeh et al. 2017). Life satisfaction is a philosophy that a person chooses for his own life consciously and has it in his mind subconsciously, and in fact, life satisfaction is the cognitive assessment from the quality of personal life (Hazrati 2017). Each person's level of satisfaction depends on the satisfaction of different aspects of life, such as family, health, communication with others and leisure time (Schnettler et al. 2017). The subject of life satisfaction has been studied in several groups. Fergusson et al. (2015) in their study on people aged 18 to 35 years found that life satisfaction is correlated with high mental health, and with the higher level of life satisfaction, the person experiences more positive feelings and emotions, while the lack of life satisfaction is correlated with the poorer situation of health, depression symptoms, personality problems, inappropriate health behaviors and poor social status. The results of Bao et al. (2013) also confirmed the association between the life satisfaction and mental disorders in young people. This study focuses on the student population. In the university environment, most students face personal, social, economic and academic stresses that affect the level of life satisfaction (Schnettler et al. 2017). Many studies have confirmed the effect of these stresses on the life satisfaction among students (Civitci 2015; Alleyne et al. 2010). But there are also contradictory results that do not show a link between spirituality and life satisfaction (Anand et al. 2015). However, stress management in student life is done with the help of thoughts, feelings, planning and changing the way to deal with them (Yadav and Khanna 2014); but spirituality is one of the most important factors in coping with stressful situations, and in situations that are out of person control it is a useful strategy (Sangelaji et al. 2016). Spirituality and spiritual attitude preserve and enhance self-esteem, creating a sense of purposefulness and meaningfulness of life, and increase mental comfort and hope (Jacobsson and Lexell 2016). Religious and spiritual beliefs are common throughout the world, as the results of studies show that at least 90% of the world's population are in some way entangled with religious and spiritual beliefs, which play a significant role in many aspects of life, especially mental health. In general, people with more religious and spiritual beliefs experience less depression, anxiety and stress in life (Moreira-Almeida et al. 2014). The importance of spirituality as an essential component of man in the daily life of individuals and its impact on the physical, psychological and social dimensions of life has been considered in many studies (Puchalski et al. 2014). Spirituality is a personal and unique feature that establishes a relationship between the individual with the world and others (Gonçalves et al. 2015), while Pargament has defined spirituality as trying to find out what is beyond of a person (Deb et al. 2016). In recent decades, spirituality and spiritual attitudes have also been a matter of

great concern among students, and the link between this essential part of life and various indicators has been measured. In a cross-sectional study conducted by Chaves et al. (2015), the relationship between spirituality and anxiety was studied in 669 students. The results of this study introduced spirituality as a protective factor against anxiety and stated that with the help of spirituality, can be controlled the anxiety and physical impairment associated with it in students. The results of Jafari et al.'s study (2010) on 223 students confirmed the relationship between spiritual attitudes and mental health and stated that the spiritual attitude is predictive of mental health of students. Also, the relationship between these components has been proven with greater happiness, better quality of life (Abdel-Khalek 2010) and more social support (Alorani and Alrdaydeh 2017). Other studies have examined the relationship between spirituality and life satisfaction in different populations; in the study of Sharifi and Moeini (2016) on the elderly with hypertension, the effectiveness of the Islamic spiritual program on the satisfaction of life was confirmed. Also, in the study of Assarroudi et al. (2012) the relationship between spiritual well-being and life satisfaction in nursing staff was checked and verified. But, studies that the relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction in the Iranian student population checked were not found. Some studies showed that students' spiritual health has a positive and significant relationship with their pleasure (Mozafarinia et al. 2014; AliAkbarzadeh Arani et al. 2018a, b; Vahabi et al. 2018); other studies also showed the relationship between spiritual intelligence and life satisfaction in students (Bdyvsfkhanly and Akbari 2015; Malmer et al. 2016), but the relationship between religious attitude and life satisfaction was studied only in Rahimi's study (2014), which, despite the fact that this relationship was positive, was not statistically significant; indicating a contradictory result compared to other studies. Considering the fact that students are a significant part of the population of the country due to their specialty and skills, they have a great influence on the formation of social movements. Students' life satisfaction is the basis for expanding range of their satisfaction into different areas of economic, social, political and cultural (Arabzadeh et al. 2017). Based on the fact that there are various sources of stress in the life of students and these stresses affect their life satisfaction, and due to the link between life satisfaction with mental health and the better functioning of the student at the university, few studies have examined the relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction in the student population in Iran. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction among students of Qom University of Medical Sciences to the results of this, guide the managers and planners of universities and educational institutions.

## Methods

This study is a cross-sectional study with the aim of determining the relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction in students of Qom University of Medical Sciences, Iran, from February 2015 to July 2016. The sampling and

research methodology is mentioned in another article (AliAkbarzadeh Arani et al. 2018a, b). Data collection tool was a demographic questionnaire including age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, nationality, religion, status of residence, economic status, field and grade, mean, employment status, history of participation in religious meetings, spiritual attitude and ability questionnaire and Diener's satisfaction with life scale. The spiritual attitude and ability questionnaire which evaluates spiritual development is described in the previous article (AliAkbarzadeh Arani et al. 2018a, b). The life satisfaction scale, is designed by Diener et al. (1985), to measure the level of individual overall life satisfaction and consists of five questions with 7 Likert options which were "totally disagree," "disagree," "disagree somewhat," "not agree or disagree," "agree somewhat," "agree" and "totally agree." The coefficients of reliability and internal coordination of re-test scores among students have been reported 0.87 and 0.82, respectively. According to a study by Sheikhi et al. (2011) with the aim of studying the psychometric properties of this questionnaire among Iranian students, internal consistency of above 0.84 to 0.85 was confirmed for this tool; also, in the study of the convergent and divergent validity of this scale, its correlation with happiness was 0.73 and with depression was 63.0%. In order to implement, after obtaining necessary permissions and explaining the objectives of the study for the research samples, written informed consent was obtained from them. After the random sampling, the spiritual attitude and ability questionnaire and satisfaction with life scale were completed by students. Data were analyzed by SPSS 20 by distribution and central indicators, Pearson correlation and linear regression. Finally, if research samples agreed, the results of the research were presented to them.

## Result

Demographic characteristics were presented in the previous article (AliAkbarzadeh Arani et al. 2018a, b). According to Table 1, the spiritual attitude and spiritual ability variables had been able to predict life satisfaction, significantly. Given the fact that the coefficients of the predictor variable were positive, it can be stated that whatever the person has a higher spiritual attitude and spiritual ability, the life satisfaction is higher in him and vice versa. Also, the marital status was significant with a positive coefficient and variables in the field of study and economic status with a negative coefficient. Variables such as age, religious background, place of residence

**Table 1** Regression coefficient between life satisfactions with spiritual attitude and spiritual ability

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i> value
Fixed amount	11.090	–	0.001
Spiritual attitude	0.12	0.391	0.001
Spiritual ability	0.1	0.314	0.001
Marital status	2.231	0.149	0.01
Field of study	–0.451	–0.215	0.001
Economic status	–1.883	–0.130	0.025

**Table 2** Pearson correlation test between spiritual attitude and ability and life satisfaction

	Spiritual attitude	Spiritual ability	Life satisfaction
Spiritual attitude	1		
Spiritual ability	0.76	1	
Life satisfaction	0.37	0.34	1

and employment status have been excluded from the model due to their lack of significant relationship with the dependent variable.

As has been shown in Table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient between life satisfaction variable and spiritual attitude and spiritual ability ( $R=0.37$ ) at the level of  $p < 0.001$  and ( $R=0.34$ ) at the level of  $p < 0.001$  is direct and meaningful. With increasing spiritual ability and spiritual attitude, life satisfaction increases and vice versa.

## Discussion

In this study, the relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction in students of Qom University of Medical Sciences was determined; it was observed that for one unit increase in the mean score of spiritual attitude, an average mean score of life satisfaction is equal to 0.12 and for one unit of increase in the mean score of spiritual ability, on average, mean score of life satisfaction is 0.1, so that with increasing spiritual ability and spiritual attitude, life satisfaction increases and vice versa. These results did not match with the results of Anand et al. (2015), which was conducted in 2015 with the aim of investigating the relationship between spirituality and well-being and life satisfaction in university students in the UK. In this study, the researcher has reported the little variation present may not have been enough to elicit significant relationships. Kress et al. (2015) confirmed a meaningful relationship between life satisfaction and spiritual well-being and having meaning in life in the student community and stated that these factors are the protective agent versus self-harm in student life. However, the study of Rahimi (2014) reported a positive correlation between religious attitude and life satisfaction, but was not statistically significant correlation. This may be due to the small sample size of this study compared with other studies in this field and the present study.

In this regard, Erich Fromm believes that living with faith means a fruitful life. Considering that the spiritual perspective to life can effect on the optimism and level of satisfaction of people's lives (Malmer et al. 2016), it can be said that the findings from the present research confirm this issue. The results of the study by Sharajabad et al. (2017) showed the importance of spiritual well-being as a modifying variable to improve life satisfaction. Stronger religious and spiritual beliefs, include greater compatibility with living conditions and hopefulness, mental relaxation, proximity to others, proximity to God, self-perfection, comfort, as well as enhancing the ability of individuals to deal with problems. In the

same conditions for other variables, the mean score of life satisfaction in married individuals is 2.23 times higher than single individuals, meaning that married people have higher life satisfaction than single adults. The results of the study by Grover and Helliwell (2017) confirmed that life satisfaction in married people is more than single, divorced and widowed people. Married people who have successful marriage are happier than single adults and have better conditions in response to their needs, such as quietness and quiet, providing psychological and social needs, and health and social security after marriage (Chapman and Guven 2016). In the same conditions, for the other variables, the mean score of life satisfaction in people with a good economic situation rather than those who do not have a good economic situation is  $-1.88$  on average, i.e., those who do not have a good economic situation than those who have a financial situation have a good life satisfaction. Studies show that a good or bad economic situation cannot predict the life satisfaction and should look for factors influencing life satisfaction in other psychological variables (Rezapour et al. 2010). The mean score of life satisfaction for those who are in medicine and dentistry field than those who study in other fields is  $-0.45$ , on average, i.e., those who are studying in other fields have higher life satisfaction. It can be said that because medical students have long period of education and high volume of lessons and specified conditions that are experienced in the studying course, such as night work, and facing the painful group of society and their late employment, there is a difference between them and other fields of study that affects their life satisfaction (Zarghami et al. 2012). The present research is aimed only at students of a university and a similar cultural context from a geographic region, so its results cannot be generalized to non-academic youth and other areas, which are considered as limitations of this research. Another study is suggested with changing the research community.

## Conclusion

In general, the results of this study predict a significant relationship between spiritual development and life satisfaction. Since the promotion of different dimensions of spiritual development and special attention to it can have a beneficial and effective role in the students' satisfaction of life, and since the results of this study are in line with past studies, it is suggested that planning be conducted to promote spiritual development among students in the forms of classes and workshops.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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