

Original Article

The relationship between spiritual intelligence, optimism and happiness in university students

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(Received: 30 July 2016; Revised: 20 Augst 2016; Accepted: 24 Oct 2016)

Abstract

Introduction : The Spiritual intelligence represents a different set of skills and abilities, each of which forms appear different in social and historical contexts. And it maybe used to promote optimism and happiness. The present study was designed to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence, optimism and happiness on Iranian university students.

Methods: One hundred and fifty students (89 men and 61 women) were selected using cluster sampling and were asked to complete Scheirer and Carver's Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), King's Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Scale (SISRI) and Argyle, Martin, and Crossland's Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). Data were analyzed using t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficients and regression analysis.

Results: Results of the current study provide additional evidence that based on spiritual intelligence can predict happiness and optimism. There was a significant relationship found between total spiritual intelligence scores and optimism ($r = 0.219$ $p > 0.05$). Also, Stepwise regression showed that when happiness and spiritual intelligence were entered in the equation, coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.26. This means that happiness alone explains 26% of the total variance for spiritual intelligence.

Conclusion: Results of the current study provide additional evidence for the role of spiritual intelligence between students. In the other words, the findings of the present study supports the role of spiritual intelligence in anticipation of optimism and happiness in students. On the other hand, by holding workshops to increase students' spiritual intelligence, can promote two behavioral features of happiness and optimism in them as well.

Declaration of Interest: None

Key words: Happiness, optimism, spiritual intelligence .

Introduction

Spirituality has been considered as an important aspect of human development, which has a significant relationship with mental health and well-being (1). It is not surprising that in its definition of mental health, the World Health Organization has recently included spirituality as the "fourth dimension" of human existence alongside physical, psychological and social dimensions. Several researchers (2,4) have pointed out that during the past decade, spiritual intelligence has remained a forerunner among different kinds

of intelligence proposed originally by Gardner in 1993. Spiritual intelligence is defined as a set of mental capacities, which contribute to the awareness, integration, and adaptive application of the nonmaterial and transcendent aspects of one's existence, leading to such outcomes as deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent self, and mastery of spiritual states. Four core components are proposed to comprise spiritual intelligence: 1- critical existential thinking, 2- personal meaning production, 3- transcendental awareness, and 4- conscious state expansion (6). Spiritual

intelligence is the set of abilities that individuals use to apply, manifest and embody spiritual resources, values and qualities in ways that enhances their daily functioning and well-being (4).

Spiritual intelligence assists in finding the deepest and most inner resource from an individual from which the capacity to care, the power to tolerate and adapt is obtained. It also aids in the development of a clear and stable sense of identity among individuals especially in the context of workplace relationships (7).

Optimism or positive thinking tends to be the most hopeful, and to a pre-emotional preparation and the cognition refers to the fact that good things are more important than bad things, which itself requires that a person assess and predict the outcomes and consequences of life (9) (7).

Optimism, the generalized expectancy for good rather than bad to happen in the future, is associated with a broad range of positive outcomes, including better performance, higher likelihood of goal attainment, better mental health, and better physical (8).

Optimism is seen as a relatively stable personality characteristic (a “trait” rather than a “state”) that is associated with general assumptions about positive future outcomes. (9).

Optimism is so closely related to happiness that the two can practically be equated. And guess what: optimism is a teachable skill. Hope, faith and optimism are all positive emotions about the future (10). Some people can learn optimism, which can then contribute to happier and more satisfying lifestyle (11).

Happiness is a variation of joy (12). Also it has been argued that spirituality maybe considered to be one of the main predictors of happiness (13). Research on happiness has exploded in the past decade. Initially investigated by psychologists, who pioneered the field of positive psychology, and European economists, who reported that happiness is not critically linked to increased consumer consumption. Today, it seems that many are interested in what factors shape happiness. In authentic happiness, Seligman outlines what he believes are the underlying conditions of happiness. Focusing on positive emotions

(contentment, happiness, hope), character traits (love, courage, compassion, curiosity, integrity, moderation, to mention a few) and institutions (justice, responsibility, parenting), positive psychologists literally aim to make the world a happier place (14). Happy people tend to be optimists: they exaggerate the positive impact of positive events and propel their thinking into best-case scenarios. For example, optimists get an invitation to a date and then their mind starts to generate positive thoughts (15). Carr, believes that happiness can be understood by studying relevant positive hedonistic feelings such as joy and contentment(16).

A religious person believes in a transcendental source (God). If religious behavior is internal, religious people trust the power of God and know that God is powerful and governs their actions. Hence, the religious person may believe that there is greater possibility of positive events occurring (17). Thus, he maybe more optimistic compared to a non-religious individual. It has been argued that through faith and worship, the religiously oriented person, may be able to experience greater harmony between biopsychosocial dimensions of life and hence move closer towards self actualization and spiritual fulfillment (18).

Seligman suggests that optimism could be learned by experiencing success and failure in situations throughout life (19). Morgenstern, Sánchez , Skolarus, Garcia, Risser, Wing., Smith, Zahuranec & Lisabeth explored the relationship between fatalism, optimism, spirituality, depressive symptoms, and stroke outcome (20). They showed that depressive symptoms altered the fatalism-mortality association such that the association of fatalism and mortality was more pronounced for patients reporting no depressive symptoms. Neither spirituality nor optimism conferred a significant effect on stroke severity, recurrence, or mortality. Psychologists such as Maslow have stressed the fact that when a person strives to find meaning in life, she will have to pay attention to values outside the realm of her own self and this may open new doors to understanding the beauty and integrity of life, leading to what is called sustainable happiness (21).

According to positive psychology, happiness is associated with a variety of factors. Positive excitement, satisfaction with life, and the lack of negative emotions are components of happiness. In fact, happiness leads to a positive and optimistic interpretation of everyday life events. Happiness has emotional, emotional, social and cognitive dimensions, the cognitive component of happiness makes the people happily interpret and interpret everyday events that lead to their optimism (24).

There seems to be a relationship between happiness and spiritual intelligence. For example, the belief that there is a great power and destiny in the world can add happiness to people. Happy people have thoughts and behaviors that are consistent and helpful, they have a clear vision of affairs, pray and prayer, and they are working directly on their own affairs (22).

Hence, spirituality is considered to be one of the core needs of humans and some experts have reiterated the fact that it may constitute one of the highest levels of moral-cognitive development. Also, it has been argued that spiritual intelligence together with other positive traits such as happiness and optimism may play a salient role in promoting and maintaining subjective as well as physical well-being and health. Therefore, it is hypothesised that scores of spiritual intelligence will correlate significantly and positively with scores of both happiness and optimism. Yet research has not been done to study spiritual intelligence, happiness and optimism together. Research about spiritual intelligence can help the students have a good spirit and more mental health (24).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between spiritual intelligence, happiness and optimism. We hypothesise that both happiness and optimism will significantly predict scores of spiritual intelligence (22).

Methods

This is a descriptive correlational research study which, a group of students that they were One hundred and fifty postgraduates students (89 men and 61 women) in Tehran were chosen via multiple cluster sampling and

were asked to participate in the present study. By cluster sampling, the entire faculty was considered. First the university was considered, then a few colleges were randomly selected, and after coordination with the professor in class, also among students Questionnaires were distributed.

The sample group of students age from 18 to 35 years old, with a mean of 24.5 years, with a mean of 24.5 years. The sample size was determined based on the Morgan table. Also, university faculties that questionnaire was distributed among them was social science and technical-engineering. Participants were verbally briefed regarding the purpose of the study. Those who agreed to participate completed the questionnaire package in a large classroom containing 20-30 individuals in the presence of a researcher. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete all questionnaires. They were returned to the researcher and the participants were thanked and debriefed. Also in the research entry criteria, average age, was 18 to 35 years old. In addition, some students were tired of the long questionnaires and incomplete questionnaires were filled. As a result, we had to distribute our questionnaires among other students. It should be noted that all ethical considerations were considered such as confidentiality and student hypothesis naives and optionally being and satisfaction hypothesis naives.

The Optimism-Pessimism Inventory. By Scheier et al. (23). The items on a five-point Likert scale (from 0= strongly disagree, to 4=strongly agree). Its Cronbach's Alpha was 0.92 and its validity 0.84 through halving. In Iran, was achieved by Khodabakhshi. Results obtained by Cronbach's alpha was reliability above. Concurrent validity coefficient between optimism and depression scale and self mastery 64.0 and 70.0 was obtained.

The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory. It was made by King and De Cicco (6). It measures 42 items. It provides a total score for four subscale critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. Its Cronbach's Alpha was 0.95 and its validity 0.88 through halving. In Iran Agha

Babai reported the measurement of the questionnaire, with a reliability of 88.0 (37).

The Oxford Happiness Inventory: It was developed by Argyle, Martin & Crossland. The questionnaire is comprised of 29 items measuring subjective happiness. Each item is scored on a scale of 0 to 3, which yields a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 87. Pearson correlation coefficient is -0.73 (24). In Iran Alipour and nurbala has reported Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91 and mean score of 42.07 (38).

Results

Data was analyzed using SPSS (version 17.0). Descriptive and inferential statistics (Pearson correlations) were performed.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations

Variable	M	D
1-Critical existential thinking	14.32	4.34
2-Personal meaning production	16.02	4.17
3-Transcendental awareness	18.00	4.34
4-Conscious state expansion	12.10	3.148
Total Spiritual intelligence score	60.44	13.53
Total Happiness score	42.52	12.86
Total Optimism score	7.88	2.11

Table 3. Male and Female students in spiritual intelligence, happiness and optimism.

Variables	Male (N=89) M & SD	Female (N=61) M & SD	t	p
Spiritual intelligence	62.977 (13.681)	56.754 (12.538)	-2.830	0.001
Happiness	43.730 (14.924)	40.7705(14.926)	-1.389	0.023
Optimism	7.629 (2.322)	8.245 (1.719)	1.768	0.018

**Significant level $p < 0.01$ (N=150)

As can be seen, male students have reported significantly more spiritual intelligence and happiness compared to female students. However, female students have reported significantly more optimism than males. Stepwise regression (Table 4) showed that when happiness and spiritual intelligence were entered in the equation, coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.26. This means that happiness alone explains 26% of the total variance for spiritual intelligence. Since

As can be seen, there are significant correlations between scores of happiness and all the subscales of the spiritual intelligence scale, reiterating the fact that as scores on spiritual intelligence increase do does scores of happiness.

Table 2. Correlation between optimism, spiritual intelligence and its subscales

Optimism		Variables
Sig	Correlation coefficient	
0.25	0.066	Critical existential thinking
0.001	0.027**	Personal meaning production
0.001	0.41**	Transcendental awareness
0.001	0.34**	Conscious state expansion

As can be seen from the above table, a significant relationship was found between three subscales spiritual intelligence scores and optimism (** $p > 0.05$). Also, among the four subscales of spiritual intelligence, only critical existential thinking did not correlate significantly with optimism.

In order to compare difference male and female collage students, independent t-tests were used (Table 3).

optimism had very little predictive value, it was not entered in to the equation.

Table 4. regression model for predicting Spiritual intelligence

Correlation Coefficient	R ²	F	P	B	T	P
0.51	0.26	52.26	0.001	0.51	7.23	0.01

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence, optimism and happiness. Results

of this study indicated that spiritual intelligence is related to optimism and happiness and that scores of the latter two variables are significant predictors of spiritual intelligence. These results are consistent with findings reported by Philips as well as Bagheri, Akbarizadeh & Hatami (11,25). It is interesting to note that in one study (26) concerned with investigating the possible relationship between religious affiliation and happiness in different countries, it was found that people living in multi cultural / religious societies and communities not only report more spiritual enriching experiences but also more happiness and subjective well being.

According to Myers, there seems to be a high correlation between happiness and spiritual activities (26). Since many joys are temporary and vanish quickly, joy seeking behavior is often reported in sensation seekers and risk takers, whereas spiritually oriented individuals tend to be inclined towards activities such as altruism and compassion which seem to lead to a more sustainable state of happiness (27). A host of similar studies have reiterated the conclusion drawn by Shaw. Abdel-Khalek found a significant difference in the amount of sustained happiness reported by individuals high in religiosity versus those low in religiosity, so that the latter were significantly happier than the former (28). It is argued that low religiosity indicates the existence of spiritual conflict and therefore anxiety about beliefs, which causes sadness and discomfort. Spiritual enriching experiences have been considered a major factor in reducing negative emotions and hence increasing happiness and general life satisfaction. Thus, it has been argued that what is important in reports of happiness is the quality rather than the quantity of spiritual / religious beliefs (29).

Some interesting sex differences were found in the present study. Males reported significantly more spiritual intelligence and happiness than females but females reported significantly more optimism than males. The only similar study conducted in Iran was completed in the city of Hamedan by Yaghobi who reported no statistically significant difference between reported spirituality and happiness between 180 male and 200 female university students

(30). The differences found in the present study must be investigated further using more sensitive research instruments such as interview techniques and possibly qualitative methodology. For example, considering the fact that females report less happiness is it possible that they may experience more anxiety and distress and therefore use optimism as a defense mechanism, rather than a positive ability? Cramer has argued that anxiety may cause the unrealistic use of "optimism" as an immature coping style or even defense mechanism. Further research should address this issue more closely (31).

Likewise, Seligman and Sykzntmyhaly have argued that spiritually inclined individuals tend to interpret events in the light of their beliefs which are in turn bound in transcendental forces (32). Thus, this kind of cognitive processing reduces anxiety and stress which in turn may result in a more optimistic view point.

A significant feature of spiritual intelligence is the goal of trying to reach the meaning of life (6). Asgari, Roshani & Adryany have pointed out that a person who has faith, trust and believes in God is more likely to be more positive and optimistic and will be able to maintain an equilibrium and harmony between physical, mental and social dimensions of his/her existence. To his knowledge the harmony between the dimensions of physical, mental and social being, and the ultimate meaning and purpose in life is achieved.

As early as the 1970's psychologists have been reporting research indicating that optimistic persons tend to be happy and report more enjoyable experiences and perceptions. Happiness seems to reinforce optimism leading to a cycle of happy, hopeful, optimistic persons (32). Frish believes that the experience of stable inner happiness and satisfaction can result in confidence, optimism and self-efficacy as well as positive interpretation of others' behavior (33). Optimists are more likely to pursue and therefore achieve their goals (8). Goal pursuit is an important predictor of happiness and achieving one's goals and gives a sense of accomplishment (34). Carr his groundbreaking book on

positive psychology has convincingly argued that cognitive variables such as internal locus of control, optimism and positive thinking have a significant relationship with happiness (16).

The results of the study indicated that spiritual intelligence is related to optimism and happiness and that students who report higher levels of spiritual intelligence, seem to be happier and more optimistic. Also, optimistic students seem to be happier. Some researchers believe that happiness and optimism may be more effective than simply changing mood or mental well-being. Positive effects on a range of activities and abilities have been reported, ranging from greater job satisfaction and performance to better physical health and well being to higher academic achievement (35,36). Spiritual and religious beliefs enable some individuals to interpret some psychological pressures exerted on them and unwanted events that happen to them positively and give them hope to think about having a peaceful eternal life. These people often have healthier physical and spiritual life that leads them to be faithful to their spouses, love other human beings, and be nutritionally modest and committed to hard work (32).

Spiritual and religious beliefs enable some individuals to interpret some psychological pressures exerted on them and unwanted events that happen to them positively and give them hope to think about having a peaceful eternal life. These people often have healthier physical and spiritual life that leads them to be faithful to their spouses, love other human beings, and be nutritionally modest and committed to hard work. Research on spiritual intelligence can lead to discovering and indentifying the ways, which could promote the level of optimism and happiness of members of society. In addition, research about spiritual intelligence and its components could enrich the theoretical foundations of the subject. Promoting spiritual intelligence of people can help them achieve greater communication skills enabling them to interpret social events more realistically (35). It is suggested to further investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence, optimism and happiness with other variables.

Our study had a limitation, as the number of questions was high in the questionnaire, some students were unable to complete the questionnaires and we had to give the questionnaires to new students.

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