

Original Article

The Intermediary Role of Marital Satisfaction, Social Support, and Resilience in the Relationship between Spiritual Experiences and Happiness of the Married Students

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Abstract

Background: Happiness and vitality are enumerated as the primary and necessary natural needs of human beings and they can be envisioned as the most important factors of family-society health. The present study aimed to investigate the intermediary role of marital satisfaction, social support, and resilience in the relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness of the married students of Kermanshah.

Methods: The present study was a descriptive research of the correlation type and it was specifically based on the structural equations model. The statistical population included married students of Kermanshah in 2018. A total of 356 married students was selected as the sample using the Morgan table. The research instrument included the Spiritual Experience Scale, ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. The data were analyzed using path analysis and SPSS 18 and AMOS 21 software packages.

Results: The results showed that there was a direct and positive relationship between spiritual experiences with social support, resilience, marital satisfaction, and happiness ($P = 0.0001$). Based on the results, there was a positive and significant relationship between social support and happiness ($P = 0.008$). There was also a positive and significant relationship between resilience and marital satisfaction with happiness in married students ($P = 0.001$).

Conclusion: High spiritual experiences cause elevation of marital satisfaction via bringing about a shift in students' attitudes and creating a positive value system and the high marital satisfaction subsequently makes the university students optimistic towards life.

Keywords: Happiness; Mysticism; Personal satisfaction; Resilience, Psychological; Social support.

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Introduction

The positive psychology perspective is among the psychological approaches with a positive attitude toward humans. Happiness constitutes a fundamental concept of this approach, which, itself, is subsumed under modern psychology (1). Happiness is essential to life and is the ultimate goal for all individuals in human communities (2). Happiness is associated with individuals' assessment of their lives (3), and it includes a jolly state with positive emotions, satisfaction with life, and absence of stress and anxiety (negative affectivity); happiness reduces tension and boosts performance (4).

Spiritual experiences or inner feelings and spiritual awareness form an integral part of humans' spiritual and religious life. In a daily spiritual experience, a human seeks out meaning in his or her life, which consists of the appreciation of the life meaning, a positive experience in life, happiness, and satisfaction with life (5). Spiritual experiences may play a key role in positive psychological outcomes such as happiness (6); these experiences are in a significant relationship with greater happiness and lower depression (7). Spirituality affects life quality and is related to stress reduction, mental health, well-being, and mental happiness through coping strategies, attribution styles, communication with surroundings, and a sense of meaning in life (8). Researchers found that, when facing traumas, individuals would respond better to their situation, deal with the stressor effectively, and gain greater health and resilience if equipped with spiritual experiences (9, 10).

An individual receives social support from his or her family and friends, organizations, or other individuals. Interaction with family and support from surroundings and others affect an individual positively and enhance his or her psychological dynamism; they also assist in emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects (11). By receiving positive

social support, an individual will be less depressed and happier and develop a sense of psychological well-being (12). Studies show that individuals who receive proper social support cope with problems effectively and possess a greater degree of psychological adjustment (13).

Resilience refers to a positive, dynamic process where an individual adapts to bad experiences well. Resilience also embraces skills and abilities that enable an individual to adjust to difficulties, hardships, and challenges (14). Individuals with a strong self-concept, family and social support, mental health, and effective communication with others, display greater resilience. Resilient behaviors show themselves in various forms; for instance, empathy and voluntary activities occur frequently in social communications, especially in regard to interpersonal, inter-group, and community exchanges (15).

Marital satisfaction is an important aspect of marriage (16), and it refers to the contentment, satisfaction, and pure joy a man or woman experiences. A successful marital relationship engenders happiness and good temperament in individuals. Couples with high perceived satisfaction are in total harmony with each other, enjoy their spare time immensely, and manage their time and money perfectly. In addition, these couples experience a greater degree of positive emotion, recall more positive events about others and themselves, and assess their environment favorably and find it pleasant (17). Therefore, based on the issues outlined above, the main objective of the current study was to investigate the intermediary role of marital satisfaction, social support, and resilience in the relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness of the married students.

Method

The present study was a descriptive research of the correlation type and it was specifically based on the structural

equations model. The study population included all the married university students schooling in various study fields in Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah Branch in 2018. Out of the study population, 420 students were selected based on the random clustering sampling method using Morgan Table and parallel to making up for the possible dropouts considering the fact that the larger the study sample volume the higher the accuracy of the study results. Then, after the study sample volume was selected and the questionnaires were designed, the questionnaires were distributed amongst the married university students based on the study inclusion criteria (voluntary participation) and exclusion criteria (having an experience of a prior marriage) following which the subjects were provided with the required explanations by the researcher in a quiet place regarding the method of completing the questionnaires and confidentiality of the received information. Next, the spiritual experiences, happiness, social support, resilience, and marital satisfaction questionnaires were distributed amongst the participants and they were asked to carefully answer each of the questions. Since there was a possibility of dropout, 420 questionnaires were distributed and collected during a month. In the end, 64 questionnaires were discarded due to being imperfect and flawed and the data were analyzed for 356 individuals.

Instruments

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed by Argyle et al. (18) in 29 items. Each question of the test possesses four choices that scored in a range from 0 to 3. Therefore, the maximum obtainable score in this test is 87 and the minimum obtainable score is zero. The higher scores of the questionnaire indicate happiness and the lower scores indicate depression. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire have been investigated in numerous studies. For example, Argyle et al. (18) evaluated the reliability of the test

using Cronbach's alpha method on 347 subjects and obtained a Cronbach's alpha value equal to 0.90. Alipour & Agah Heris (19) dealt with the validity of the questionnaire in a 369-people study sample volume. All of the 29 items were found highly correlated with the total score of the test. Cronbach's alpha was 91% for the entire list. The convergent and divergent validity of the test was also confirmed.

Spiritual Experiences Scale: The questionnaire was designed by Ghabaribanab et al. (20) for the evaluation of spirituality. The scale consists of 75 items and it evaluates six aspects, namely finding meaning in life, the effect of relationship with God, development and spiritual experiences, sublime theosophical experiences, privative and negative experiences, and social and religious activities. The questionnaire has been constructed on a seven-point scale from completely disagree to completely agree and some questions are scored in a direct manner and some others in an inverse manner. To estimate the validity of the spiritual experiences' test, the exploratory factor analysis was conducted on all 75 items thereof and 19 factors were discovered in a preliminary investigation and eventually, six prominent and important factors were found using rotation and considering the sloped line. These six factors accounted for 42% of the total variance. After the formation of these six factors, the correlation coefficients of the factors were compared with one another and with the total score of the scale and the results indicated that the test enjoys a reliability coefficient equal to 94%. This is while the correlations between the total scores of the scale were as follows: 86% for a relationship with God, 79% for finding meaning in life, 77% for development and spiritual activity, 67% for sublime experiences, 55 % for privative experiences and 43% for social and religious activities (20).

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale: The questionnaire was designed by Fowers and Olson (21) for evaluation of marital satisfaction. ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire has 4 subscales and 35 items. Items 1-5-9-13-17-21-24-27-30-35 are associated with marital satisfaction, items 2-6-10-14-18-22-25-28-31-34 are related to communication, items 3-7-11-15-19-23-26-29-32-33 are associated with conflict resolution, and items 4-8-12-16-20 with idealistic distortion. The scale includes five-point Likert-type items ranging from “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree,” “strongly agree,” which are assigned scores from 1 to 5. Cronbach’s alpha of the subscales was found 0.86 for marital satisfaction, 0.80 for communication, 0.84 for conflict resolution, and 0.83 for idealistic distortion, and the reliability of this scale was found 0.86 for marital satisfaction, 0.80 for communication, 0.84 for conflict resolution, and 0.83 for idealistic distortion (22).

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC): This scale consists of 25 items scored based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging (0= not true at all, 1= rarely true, 2= sometimes true, 3= often true, 4= true nearly all the time) to determine the individuals’ resilience. The total score is obtained by the sum of scores of all the items. The total score ranges from 0 to 100. The higher is the obtained total score, the higher is the participant’s resilience (24). Conner and Davidson (23) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.88 for this questionnaire. Abdi et al. (24) reported the reliability of this questionnaire equal to 0.78 based on Cronbach’s alpha coefficient.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: This scale includes 12 items, and the respondent provides his/her answer based on a 7-option Likert scale from completely disagree (a score of 1) to completely agree (a score of 7) (25). Zimet

et al. (25), reported the reliability of this scale for the component of ‘significant other’ as 0.92, as 0.87 for the component of ‘family’, and as 0.85 for the component of ‘friends’, while they reported reliability of 0.88 for the entire scale. Moreover, the validity of the scale was confirmed based on the correlation between support from family and depression (-0.24) and anxiety (-0.18), and the correlation between support from friends and depression symptoms (-0.24). Wang et al. (26) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.88 for this scale.

Statistical analyses

Data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean and standard deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient, stepwise regression, and path analysis. The skewness and kurtosis were utilized to specify the data normality. to evaluate the fitness of the model, the indices including chi-square (χ^2), the ratio of chi-square to degree of freedom (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used. SPSS Statistics version 18.0 and AMOS version 21.0 were further used for analyzing the data.

Results

According to the study objectives, the relationship between spiritual experiences, social support, and resilience with happiness considering the intermediary role of marital satisfaction has been assessed within the format of the structural equations model. The descriptive findings of the study variables have been given in Table 1.

Since the structural equations model is based on the inter-variable correlations, the correlation matrix results of the interrelationships of the variables can be found in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive findings of variables (n= 356)

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Spiritual experiences	335.99	56.92	-0.23	-0.51
Social support	57.39	10.33	-0.50	0.25
Resilience	79.64	18.63	0.36	-0.91
Marital satisfaction	114.82	11.14	0.004	-0.24
Happiness	53.96	12.56	0.17	-0.51

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficient between variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritual experiences	1.00				
Social support	0.69** P=0.0001	1.00			
Resilience	0.72** P=0.0001	0.54** P=0.0001	1.00		
Marital satisfaction	0.48** P=0.0001	0.41** P=0.001	0.53** P=0.0001	1.00	
Happiness	0.48** P=0.0001	0.62** P=0.0001	0.78** P=0.0001	0.63** P=0.0001	1.00

** : $P < 0.01$

There was a relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness mediated by social support, resilience, and marital satisfaction. Table 3 showed that the general goodness-of-fit indices of the study model were reliable and confirmed the main hypothesis regarding the relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness mediated by social support, resilience, and marital satisfaction.

Table 3. Initial and modified model fit indicators

Fit indicators	χ^2	df	(χ^2/df)	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Initial model	241.31	70	3.44	0.91	0.85	0.92	0.95	0.93	0.08
Modified model	170.73	66	2.58	0.94	0.89	0.95	0.97	0.95	0.06

The data in Tables 4 and 5 demonstrated the direct and indirect effects of the study

variables; the results revealed that all of these effects were significant.

Table 4. Path coefficients of direct effects between research variables

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	β	t	SE	P
Spiritual experiences	Social support	0.87	12.07	0.01	0.0001
Spiritual experiences	Resilience	0.80	14.23	0.07	0.0001
Spiritual experiences	Marital satisfaction	0.74	-8.47	0.01	0.0001
Spiritual experiences	Happiness	0.22	2.22	0.08	0.02
Social support	Happiness	0.13	2.63	0.21	0.008
Resilience	Happiness	0.38	6.84	0.03	0.0001
Marital satisfaction	Happiness	0.24	-3.84	0.37	0.0001

Table 5. Path coefficients of indirect effects between research variables

Predictor variable	Mediator Variable	Criterion variable	β	P
Spiritual experiences	Social support	Happiness	0.66	0.001
Spiritual experiences	Resilience	Happiness	0.78	0.001
Spiritual experiences	Marital satisfaction	Happiness	0.46	0.0001

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the intermediary role of marital satisfaction, social support, and resilience in the relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness of the married students. The results showed that there was a positive, significant relationship between spiritual experiences and social support. This finding is consistent with the findings of studies carried out by Fatehizadeh et al. (27) and Hosseini Ramaghani et al. (28). A spiritual activity entails a sense of communication with others and the world, and considering the communicative aspect involved, spirituality fosters solidarity among individuals to further their causes. Spiritual experiences guide an individual toward a decent life and secure divine peace and support by establishing a connection to God. Social support includes the

individual's perception of available support and satisfaction with its provision (13). Therefore, regarding the explanation of the relationship between spiritual experiences and social support of married students, it can be said that married students with a great degree of spiritual experiences see their life as meaningful and purposeful and feel a close affinity with a transcendental source. This sensation makes them aware of divine support, and, as a result, this individual starts to feel that he or she is being cared for and loved and is held in high esteem and respect. This kind of connection to God plays an interactive and compensatory role in a marital relationship. Spiritual beliefs and values also enhance cooperation between couples to strive for lofty spiritual values. In sum, couples with spiritual experiences see themselves as a part of a nexus of communications and

social supports and develop greater social support.

There was a positive, significant relationship between spiritual experiences and resilience. This finding is consistent with the findings of studies carried out by Gunnestad and Thwala (29). Resilience is a coping strategy that helps an individual maintain balance in difficulties and defeats. Greater spiritual experiences strengthen stress coping strategies and cause spiritual individuals to incur minimal damage in accidents (stressful situations) and show more resilience against problems. Regarding the relationship between spiritual experiences and resilience in married students, it should be noted that spiritual experiences shed light on the life path and bring solace in harrowing situations. Therefore, if married students have greater spiritual experiences, they will find themselves connected to a supreme power source and can resort to divine assistance in hardships and difficulties. This way, they can enjoy the peace and adapt themselves. Married students with greater spiritual experiences can also apprehend their life's meaning and see the unforeseen less threatening. As a result, they will experience less stress, establish balance in life, and gain adaptation, adjustment, and resilience.

The results indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between spiritual experiences and marital satisfaction. In elaborating the quality of the relationship between the spiritual experiences and marital satisfaction in married university students, it can be stated that high spiritual experiences in the university students cause a shift in attitudes and achievement of a positive and ensuring value system since the spiritual experiences are associated with the individuals' value attitudes and system and the high levels of them cause a framework and a value system of a more positive nature to be created for every individual so the positive value system can provide them with a better

perception of self, others (including the spouse), the environment, events, incidents, and marital relations. Besides, the spouses focus more on their positive aspects in their marital relations and forgive their mistakes and avoid conflicting with one another to the maximum possible extent; they accept the responsibility of their actions upon the occurrence of adverse and painful events in their life and, instead of giving up, try finding their meaning and looking for a proper solution so that they can gain control and finally more positively, more hopefully and more satisfactorily appraise their life and marital relations. Also, the spiritual experiences cause the married university students to consider their marital relations more purposeful and meaningful and know them as valuable, and make efforts to improve them and attain marital satisfaction.

There was a positive, significant relationship between social support and happiness. Social support affects an individual positively, boosts his or her psychological dynamism, and helps him or her in emotional, cognitive, and physical matters. Socially supported individuals also express considerable optimism for life, adapt themselves to problems better, and have a proper amount of psychological adjustment (12). In explaining the relationship between social support and happiness in married students, it can be said that considerable social support fosters optimism in married students and make them more focused on positive events in life; great social support enables married students to solve a problem when they are faced with it. As a result, they will experience fewer adverse outcomes and feel less frustration. These students build greater self-control and self-esteem, as a result, and they become more satisfied with their life.

The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and happiness. Thus, the hypothesis indicating the existence of a

direct relationship between marital satisfaction and happiness is confirmed. The finding was consistent with the research results conducted by Sepehrian-Azar et al. (30). The couples enjoying a high marital satisfaction experience more positive emotions and remember more positive incidents in their own and others' past and more positively appraise their peripheries and describe them more pleasantly. Argyle (18) recounts happiness as stemming from one's judgment and decision about how to spend the life. Based thereon, happiness is based on the individuals' attitudes and perceptions and it implies a state that is pleasant and favorable and originates from positive emotions and life satisfaction.

There was a positive, significant relationship between resilience and happiness. Resilience refers to a positive, dynamic process where an individual adapts to bad experiences well (15). Individuals with great resilience possess features such as social competence, problem-solving skills, prudence, self-management, and self-control. Positive self-concept, autonomy, and high self-esteem, effective communication with others, problem-solving skills, and mental and physical health are among the personality traits of these individuals. In explaining the relationship between resilience and happiness in married students, it is noteworthy that considerable resilience in married students improves their self-concept, autonomy, and self-esteem, which all contribute to greater happiness. Therefore, high resilience in married students engenders a positive outlook in them and enables them to view themselves, others, and their surroundings more flexibly. As a result, they will be more forgiving in the event of mistakes by themselves and others and develop friendlier relationships with others. They also adapt themselves successfully to every event of life, even unpleasant ones, and achieve greater happiness.

There was found a significant and positive relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness through an intermediary role played by marital satisfaction; therefore, the answer to the question raised regarding the existence of an indirect relationship between spiritual experiences and happiness is positive. The finding was consistent with the research results conducted by Sepehrian-Azar et al. (30). Spiritual individuals concentrate in their marital relations on the positive aspects thereof meaning that the spiritual spouses try making an objective and meaning of the current status of their marital life thereby to arrive at adaptability and finally marital satisfaction (9). In elucidating the quality of the relationship between the spiritual experiences and happiness through the intermediary role of marital satisfaction in the married university students, it can be stated that high spiritual experiences cause elevation of marital satisfaction via bringing about a shift in students' attitudes and creating a positive value system and the high marital satisfaction subsequently makes the university students optimistic towards life following which they utilize positive explanation styles in confrontation with all the life events. It is this same attitudinal shift and positive perspective that makes the university students think about the beauties of their lives and suffice to what they have rather than keeping emphasizing on what they do not have as well as their problems and shortcomings by way of which they experience more positive emotions and feel more satisfied with their life hence experiencing more happiness.

According to the abovementioned materials regarding the clarification of the relationship between marital satisfaction and happiness in the married university students, it can be stated that high marital satisfaction in the married university students causes their positive appraisal of their relations and lives and it is this positive appraisal that brings about an

elevation of positive emotions and optimism in them as a result of which the individual becomes inclined to process information towards an optimistic and happy direction meaning that they process the information in such a way that they attribute the failures and unpleasant events to external and unstable factors and ascribe their success and pleasant events to internal and stable factors and this causes hopefulness and eventually happiness in them. According to the results obtained from the present study and considering the importance of the studied variables and based on the fact that it was figured out that spiritual experience, social support, resilience, and marital satisfaction have direct and indirect effects on the enhancement of happiness in the married university students, the experts and specialists must pay more attention to the strengthening of these indicators in the individuals hence it is suggested that solutions should be devised for the elevation of these indicators through holding workshops and educational and practical programs in families, society and educational environments. Moreover, the results of the present study can be utilized for enhancing the awareness of about-to-marry couples as well as in pre-marriage counseling.

Since the only source of information collection in the present study was the questionnaire that is more of a self-report nature, bias might have taken place in the gathered information. On the other hand, because the study was conducted on married university students from Kermanshah, care should be exercised in generalizing the results to the other regions. So, the future wider studies can be carried out in which the findings can be more readily generalized; for example, the research can be undertaken on a vaster sample volume comprised of other communities (other than university students) as well as in other cities and encompassing a larger number of cultures.

To achieve more accurate results, the use of other research methods like the interview is suggested and the researchers are advised to investigate other factors influencing happiness within the format of various structural equations models.

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