The relationship between spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction with psychological well-being in mothers with special-needs children

Original Article

Leila Ansari Ardali [1]
Behnam Makvandi [2*]
Parviz Asgari [3]
Alireza Heidari [3]

1.Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran.
ORCID ID orcid.org/0000-0002-9426-0094
2.Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran.
ORCID ID orcid.org/0000-0003-0223-5033
3.Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran.

∗ Correspondence:

Behnam Makvandi, Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, 61349-37333, I.R. Iran.

E-mail: makvandi_b@yahoo.com
Tel: +98 6133348421
Fax: +98 6133329200

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Abstract

Background: Psychological well-being plays a critical role in treating mental disorders in mothers with special-needs children by providing healthy and normal living conditions. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction with psychological well-being in mothers with special-needs children.

Methods: The study was a descriptive correlational. The statistical population consisted of all mothers with special-needs children in Bojnourd city in 2019. The sample consisted of 210 mothers with special-needs children who were selected by purposive sampling and based on Cochran's formula. The research instrument included Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB), Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire, and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression.

Results: The research findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction with psychological well-being ($p<0.01$). Spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction predicted 46% of the variance in the concerned mothers' psychological well-being, and marital satisfaction had a greater contribution to the psychosocial well-being of mothers with special-needs children.

Conclusions: The findings of this study revealed that the existence of spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction could be effective in promoting the mothers' well-being.

Keywords: Child, Health, Satisfaction, Spirituality, Intelligence

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Introduction

Special-needs children account for about two percent of the total population in each country. The presence of these children imposes a heavy emotional burden on families and their family members [1]. Compared to fathers, mothers with special-needs children are exposed to higher psychological stress and distress since they spend more time taking caring of their children, who have special cognitive, social, and emotional conditions as well as responsibilities. Such conditions can in turn influence these mothers' psychological well-being [2]. Psychological well-being is an effective factor to cope with depression and diseases, provides the grounds for appropriate interaction with children and spouses, and generally helps to preserve the family balance and mental health [3]. Psychological well-being is optimal psychological functioning [4].

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Psychological well-being contains six components including self-acceptance, autonomy, positive communication with others, purposefulness in life, dominance on the environment and personal growth [5]. According to positivist psychologists describing well-being in mothers with special-needs children, these mothers finally get along with their children's stress and conditions since they ultimately accept and adapt to the condition [6]. In this regard, some of these mothers consider the condition of their special-needs children as a source of love and joy and life meaningfulness, and this promotes their tolerance, family cohesion and understanding [7]. Previous studies have indicated that the debilitating effects of the presence of a special-needs child on family members, especially mothers, depend on various factors such as the child's gender, type and severity of the problem or disability, available support and coping strategies [8].

Spiritual intelligence refers to connection with a superior power, God. Existential-spiritual intelligence is a psychosocial element representing an individual's sense of who he/she is, what he/she is doing, and where he/she belongs [9]. Bussing et al [10]. Defined spiritual intelligence as the awareness of spirituality as a ground for existence or as a creative life force of evolution and a set of adaptation potentials in mind based on non-physical and transcendent aspects of reality [11].

Different relationships have been observed between spirituality, psychological well-being and adaptability; however, the relationships are indirect and mediated by spiritual intelligence. In this regard, a more significant correlation between levels of spiritual intelligence and adaptability is more likely. The relationship between spiritual intelligence and psychosocial well-being has been confirmed in a large number of studies, and the findings of some studies have indicated that spiritual intelligence is a critical factor promoting psychosocial well-being [12, 13, 14, 15].

From another perspective, the promotion of psychological well-being in mothers with special-needs children is also affected by marital relations and marital satisfaction. As Thomas et al [16]. noted, marital satisfaction refers to couples' satisfaction with different aspects of their marital relations and reflects low levels of conflict. It also includes satisfaction with marriage and compatibility with one's spouse [17]. Marital satisfaction in families with special-needs children is highly affected by the presence of the child with disabilities as the parents of such children experience high levels of anger and shame, blame themselves and others, and suffer from depression and stress. All these factors affect their psychological well-being and marital happiness as well as the child-parent relationship [18].

The problems with special-needs children such as learning difficulties, lack of proper response to environmental demands, non-adaptation to the environment, and imposed costs to take care and educate these children would also have negative effects on their parents' marital satisfaction [19]. Moreover, previous studies have documented the impact of special-needs children on the marital satisfaction and well-being of their parents, especially mothers [17, 20, 21, 22]. Similarly, Babaei et al [23]. revealed that girls with Down syndrome would negatively affect their parents' mental health and marital satisfaction. In two studies of Oosterhouse et al [20]. and Mas et al [18]. it was suggested that the existence of children with special needs reduced their parents' marital satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Regarding the critical and fundamental role of mothers in preserving their families' psychological and social balance and considering various problems posed to mothers with special-needs children, planning is of paramount importance to solve their problems. Accordingly, the present study aimed to predict psychosocial well-being with regard to the roles of spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction in mothers with special-needs children in Bojnourd, Iran.

Methods

This correlational research was a descriptive-analytical study, and the study population encompassed all mothers with special-needs children residing in Bojnourd, Iran, in 2019. After receiving the letter of introduction from Bojnourd Department of Education, explaining the significance of the study to the principals of the exceptional schools in Bojnourd, and making appointments with the mothers of special-needs children, those having written consent forms and meeting the inclusion criteria were selected. The sample size was determined using Morgan's sample size table. The sample was selected based on stratified random sampling. To collect the required data, 250 questionnaires based on the research variables were provided to the participants. In this study, it took 60 to 90 minutes for mothers to complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed with the help of the first author in Bojnourd Exceptional Children's School. A total of 210 questionnaires were analyzed following the elimination of incomplete questionnaires. The

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inclusion criteria were: having a child with special needs including hearing and vision disorders, physical and motor disabilities, mental retardation as well as communication and learning disorders, being at the age range of 24-48 years, having at least secondary education and suffering from no mental disorder. Exclusion criteria were not answering all the questions and unwillingness to continue cooperation. Willingness to participate in the research, information confidentiality (confidentiality principle) and observance of participants' rights were the ethical considerations of the research.

Instruments

Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB): The scale measures 6 factors of self-determination, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive communication with others, purposefulness in life and self-acceptance. The test is a self-assessing instrument that is responded in a 6-degree continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree (one to six) [24]. The total score for this scale ranges from 18 to 108 [25]. Shokri et al. [26] reported alpha Cronbach coefficient of 0.76 for the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.84 in the present study.

The Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire: In Iran, this questionnaire was developed by Abdollahzadeh et al. [27] with regard to cultural characteristics. This questionnaire contained 29 items and two sub-variables (namely, understanding and communication with the source of existence and spiritual life). The scoring scale ranged from 'I strongly disagree' [1] to 'I strongly agree' [7] with minimum and maximum scores of 29 and 203, respectively. To confirm the validity of this questionnaire, in addition to the content validity approved by experts, factor analysis was also used. In Varimax rotation, two main factors were extracted: understanding and communication with the source of existence with 12 items and spiritual life or reliance on an inner source with 17 items. The correlations between the first and second factors of this questionnaire and Emamgholian et al.'s [28] comprehensive 83-item spiritual intelligence scale were estimated to be 0.76 and 0.71, respectively; thus, the convergent validity of the questionnaire was confirmed. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86 for the questionnaire.

The Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire: The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was designed by Olson et al. [29]. The questionnaire includes 12 subscales, namely contract response, marital satisfaction, character issues, marital communication, conflict resolution, financial oversight, leisure activities, sex, marriage and children, relatives and friends, egalitarian roles and ideological direction decision. The questionnaire is scored on a five-point Likert scale, consisting of strongly agree=5, agree=4, neither agree nor disagree=3, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1, respectively. Scores less than 30 indicated severe dissatisfaction with marital relations, scores of 30-40 indicated dissatisfaction, 40-60=relative and moderate satisfaction, 60-70=high satisfaction, and above 70 demonstrated very high satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.73 for all questions [30]. Azadbakht & Vakili [31] reported alpha Cronbach coefficient of 0.88 for the questionnaire. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82 the questionnaire.

Statistical analyses

Data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean and standard deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to determine reliability and validity.

Results

According to the descriptive statistics, the participants were at the age range of 24-31 years (17%), 32-39 years (26%) and 40-48 years (57%). Considering the level of education, the participants had secondary education (59%), high-school education (27%), bachelor's degree (12%), and master's degree (2%). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation and Pearson correlation coefficients among key study variables.

According to the study results, a positive and significant relationship existed between spiritual intelligence (r=0.164) and marital satisfaction (r=0.470) with psychological well-being. Moreover, stepwise regression analysis was used to determine the more effective variable in predicting psychological well-being. To this end, spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction as the predictor variables and psychosocial well-being as the criterion variable were included in the equation. The results are presented in table 2.

As shown in table 2, marital satisfaction in the first model played the most critical role in predicting psychological well-being. The correlation coefficient of this variable with psychological well-being was 0.61; thus, this variable could predict 37% of the variation in

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this variable. In the second model, spiritual intelligence was included in the equation, following the marital satisfaction. The correlation coefficient of these two variables with psychological well-being was 0.68, and these two variables could predict about 46% of the variation in this variable. The inclusion of spiritual intelligence enhanced the predictive power by 9%. Considering the order of the variables introduced into the equation, the marital satisfaction with standard β=0.511 had the greatest contribution to predicting the variations of psychological well-being, followed by spiritual intelligence with standard β =0.312.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation (SD) and Pearson correlation coefficients among key study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1- Psychological well-being	65.14	27.28	1		
2- Spiritual intelligence	121.40	47.24	0.164*	1	
3- Marital satisfaction	135.26	45.29	0.470*	0.160*	1

* p<0.01

Table 2. The result of stepwise regression analysis to investigate the effects of variables in predicting psychological well-being

Model	Predictor variable	R	R2	β	SE	Beta	t	P
First	Marital satisfaction	0.610	0.372	0.057	0.012	0.511	4.05	0.001
Second	Marital satisfaction - Spiritual intelligence	0.684	0.467	0.027	0.010	0.312	2.02	0.003

SE: Standard error

Discussion:

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction with psychological well-being in mothers with special-needs children. In the current study, spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction were positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being in mothers with special-needs children. In this regard, spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction could predict 46% of variations in mothers' psychosocial well-being. As the first finding of the present study, spiritual intelligence has a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being in mothers having special-needs children. Karimi et al. [32] claim that spiritual intelligence is a critical factor in the relationship between spiritual intelligence with marital adjustment and mental health in mothers with mentally-retarded children. According to Pant & Srivastava [14], spiritual intelligence promotes students' psychological well-being. Khurana & Joshi [15] reported that couples' high spiritual intelligence promotes marital satisfaction and adjustment. In this regard, it can be stated that spiritual intelligence plays a significant role in psychological well-being.

From an intrapersonal perspective, religious beliefs and practices help a person cognitively, emotionally and physiologically to overcome his/her problems and stress, accept the responsibility of his/her behaviors in conflicts and struggles, and spare his/her efforts to change them [33]. From an intrapersonal perspective, a lifestyle provides the grounds for individuals to pay attention to God and ask for his help at the time of conflicts and difficulties; thus, they would tackle with problems more calmly to resolve them. Since spiritual intelligence enhances the potentials to communicate with God and allows parents to control the environment and communicate effectively with others, it, in turn, makes them feel closer to God under difficult conditions and thus relieves the burden of stress posed by special-needs children. This would make them better control their emotions and reduce the tensions in marital relations.

Marital satisfaction had a positive and significant relationship with the psychological well-being of mothers with special-needs children. Oosterhouse et al. [20] and Mas et al. [18] suggested that the existence of children with special needs reduced their parents' marital satisfaction and psychological well-being. In this regard, it can be stated that marital satisfaction refers to situations when parents face environmental demands and needs beyond their social and personal resources, one of which is the stress of having a special-needs child. Such children impose specific stress on their parents, especially mothers. Accordingly, the major problems for these mothers are as follows: problems with accepting the child's disability, fatigue caused by nursing and care, leisure issues, family's financial problems as well as medical and treatment issues. The parents' higher levels of stress are associated with poor family performance, low marital happiness in addition to poor correlation and cohesion [34]. In contrast, reduced stress is correlated with problem-oriented coping strategies, acceptable family performance and a sense of meaningfulness in life, leading to marital

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satisfaction. Moreover, raising individuals' awareness of their negative feelings and emotions including anxiety and stress would promote their well-being.

Concentration-promoting skills and a focus on parents with special-needs children would help these parents stay calm and avoid stress and its consequences. On the other hand, when individuals can monitor their thoughts with no prejudice or negative reaction, they would achieve peace of mind and reduce levels of stress. This, in turn, enables individuals to be aware of what is happening to them at the present and react to situations posing tension [35]. Raising awareness of positive and negative experiences may have consequences such as improved function of the immune system, reduced stress, promoted coping styles and enhanced psychological well-being.

As one of the limitations of the ongoing study, the sample group encompassed mothers with special-needs children residing in Bojnourd; hence, caution is required to generalize the findings to other groups and communities. Further studies on other samples are recommended to generalize the findings.

In conclusion, the findings of this study revealed that the existence of spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction could be effective in promoting the mothers' well-being. Spiritual intelligence can integrate scattered studies on religion and spirituality. Mothers with higher levels of spirituality are less likely to suffer from disturbed well-being. Marital satisfaction can be converted to a source of positive and negative emotions and thus affect individuals' mental health. Low marital satisfaction would have effects on social relations, daily activities, interpersonal relations and family relations as some factors affecting individuals' well-being. Regarding the role of spiritual intelligence and marital satisfaction in well-being, it is suggested to develop programs and workshops on spirituality and marital relations for mothers with special-needs children to promote their psychological well-being. Moreover, this research disregarded the fathers of such children, and this makes it difficult to generalize the findings to males. To remove this problem, similar studies should deal with fathers with special-needs children.

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Ethical approval: The participants willingly filled out the questionnaires and signed written informed consent. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Branch (code: 950521627).

Conflict of interest

There was no conflict of interest.

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