



Investigating the Relationship between Will Power and Spiritual Well-Being among Students: A Structural Equation Model

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Abstract

Background: Spiritual health is one of the important health dimensions, which helps stabilizing the person's internal characteristics and improves the individuals' quality of life. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between will-power and spiritual well-being of students in Shahroud university of medical sciences.

Methods: 431 students were evaluated by distributing the Paloutzian and Ellison Spiritual well-being questionnaire and Iranian Will-Power Inventory. Spiritual health as a dependent variable, and power of will and the variables of gender, age, marital status, field of study, place of residence, and being native or non-native were measured.

Results: Regression results of structural equations showed that the demographic factors such as gender, marital status, educational level, and will-power variables predict the spiritual health score belonged to the students. The results also indicated that the will-power is associated with an increase in the spiritual health score of the students ($\beta = 0.61$, P value = 0.001).

Conclusions: Based on the findings, it seems that through the educational interventions and presentation of educational packages, strengthening of will-power is necessary for promoting the spiritual health of the students.

Keywords: Spiritual well-being, Will-Power, Students, Structural equation model.

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Introduction

According to the world health organization, spiritual health is defined as one of the four dimensions of health along with physical, social, and psychological health.¹ To achieve the best level of quality of life, paying attention to the spiritual well-being is of great importance.² Spiritual health contributes to the stability of the individual's intrinsic qualities, such as feeling close relationships with oneself, with God, others and society, as well as having peace and stability in life and the integration between different dimensions of health.^{3,4} Spiritual health involves both existential and religious dimensions. Accordingly, the result of religious health is the understanding of people of health when they are associated with higher power and existential health, that is, the individual's compatibility with oneself, others, and society.⁵ One of the spiritual factors associated with spiritual well-being is praying. Pray is defined as having connection with God.⁵ Spirituality is a pivotal factor

in confronting difficulty and brings mental and spiritual relaxation.¹ The results of various studies showed that the higher the spiritual health of the students, the lower the symptoms of physical illnesses, depression, sleep disturbance, and anxiety^{6,7} and is also associated with happiness among students.⁸ Spiritual health and spirituality increase the positive attitude toward the surrounding world and reduce worries and negative feelings, and ultimately increase the power of will and independency amongst the individual^{6,9} and in other word, there is a relationship between faith and mood states.⁹

According to the psychology, will is the ability of a person in exercising the self-control that can produce targeted behaviors.¹⁰ Also, based on the religious texts, human beings, with the help of will, can exercise all their activities in order to fulfill the most important goal of the creation of man, which is closeness to God. Therefore, will power can play an effective role in the humans' spiritual well-being. According to the studies, most theologians and philosophers consider the existence of will in humans to be innate, obvious, and unnecessary to be proved, and they believe that this is one of the most certain things identified by human beings.¹¹ Basically, educating humans from the viewpoints of some people such as Muhammad Hussein Tabatabai, at first, need to accept free will¹² However, theologians like Fakhr Razi believed that human beings have no independency in their actions and the subject is forced to do.¹³ Many believe that religious beliefs have an effect on the spiritual health of individuals, which can be effective in the health and prevention from mental and physical illnesses.^{1,14}

A review of the research conducted in the field of spiritual health showed that in most studies, the mental health statuses of the patients suffering from multiple sclerosis,⁴ heart disease¹⁵ or cancer,³ or its relation with psychological characteristics such as happiness, anxiety, stress, or depression have been investigated. In another study done by Kashfi et al.¹ on the students of Shiraz university of medical sciences, the relationship between religious attitude and spiritual well-being was investigated.

Since the power of will has direct and indirect relationship with many social norms and abnormalities (such as some physical, mental and sexual illnesses, health, work ethic, addictive behaviors, planning works, individual and social performances), it can play an effective role in choosing a lifestyle, and subsequently improving the individual quality of life. In such a way that it can produce productive behaviors in human, and lead him in a way that is intellectually intelligent,

and his behavior is a symbol of acceptance of responsibility, and also his free will in decision-making, and finally shaping the path to his personal and social life. In this study, the relationship between will- power and spiritual well-being among students has been studied.

Materials and Methods

In this cross-sectional study, a total of 431 students from Shahroud university of medical sciences were evaluated from July 2018 to March 2019, by distributing the questionnaires. The ethics protocol of this research has been reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Shahroud university of medical sciences (with the code of ethics IR.SHMU.REC.1397.022). Students were randomly selected using a multi-stage sampling method. At the first stage, according to the total number of the students who were enrolled in the university, it was decided that 25% of the students in each faculty would be selected as the samples of the study. In the next step, according to the number of semesters and fields of study in each faculty, 25% of them were randomly selected, and all the students in that semester-field were requested to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire of this study was comprised of three sections: demographic information, will power questionnaire, and spiritual well-being questionnaire. Incomplete and misleading questionnaires were excluded from the study process. The questionnaires were completed after explaining the goals of the study for the participants, and after obtaining the written informed consent of the students by themselves.

Paloutzian and Ellison Spiritual well-being questionnaire and Iranian will power inventory were used as the research instruments in this study. Iranian will- power inventory had 38 questions based on the Islamic-Iranian culture, which was compiled using descriptive and content analysis research methods. Content validity of this questionnaire was verified by a group of professors in Islamic sciences and psychology. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire items were confirmed by 400 students from Tehran university, Tehran university of medical sciences, and Payame Noor university of Tehran. They were selected using random cluster sampling method.¹⁰

Paloutzian and Ellison Spiritual well-being questionnaire (1982) was used to assess the students' spiritual well-being, in which 10 questions assessed religious health and 10 other questions assessed the existential health of the individuals. The

spiritual health score was the sum of these two subgroups, which ranged from 20 to 120. The answers to these questions were on Likert scales ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. In questions 4, 3, 20, 19, 17, 15, 14, 11, 10, 8, and 7 completely disagree got the score 1 and in questions 18, 16, 13, 12, 9, 6, 5, 2, and 1 completely disagree got the score of 6. At the end, the spiritual health of the people was divided into three groups: low (20-40), moderate (41-99) and high (100-120).¹⁵⁻¹⁸ The Persian version of this questionnaire has a good validity and reliability in Iran.^{4,15}

In this study, spiritual well-being was measured as a dependent variable and power of will, and variables such as age, gender, marital status, field of study, residence and being native and non-native were measured as independent variables.

Data was analyzed using STATA software. Quantitative data were presented using mean and standard deviation, and qualitative data were presented using frequency and percentage. Relationship between hidden variables and independent variables were investigated using structural equation regression model (SEM). The significant level was set at 0.05.

Results

In this study, 431 medical students with average age of 21.6 years old and standard deviation of 2.7, were studied. Most of the studied subjects were female students (267 people, 62%). Gender characteristics of the students under study are presented in table 1. The results of univariate analysis using t-test showed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of spiritual health and self-control in male and female students (table 1).

In Spiritual Well-Being questionnaire, 118 students (27.4%) had high spiritual well-being and the rest of them had moderate spiritual health. There was no significant difference between males and females. In this study, using a structural equation regression model, the relationship between variables of will-power, age, gender, education level, residence, residence in the dormitory, and spiritual well-being of the students as hidden variables with 20 items were investigated. The will power was also introduced as an independent hidden variable with 6 index variables. The model is presented in figure 1. The results of the final model showed that the item variables for the hidden variable of will-power including motivation, worship, cognitive, metacognitive, emotional, and

Table 1. Comparison of means of self-control, spiritual health, and demographic characteristics in term of sex

Variables	Male (n = 164)		Female (n = 267)		Test	Pvalue
	(Mean ± SD)	No (%)	(Mean ± SD)	No (%)		
Age	21.4 ± 3.0	--	21.7 ± 2.4	--	-1.04	0.29
Residency (nonnative)	--	112 (68.3)	--	173 (64.8)	0.55	0.46
Dormitory residency (yes)	---	83 (50.6)	---	172 (62.4)	8.00	0.01
Marital status	--	--	--	--		
-- Single	--	154 (93.9)	--	231 (86.5)		
-- Married	--	10 (6.1)	--	36 (13.5)	5.80	0.02
Education level						
-- Bachelor	---	100 (61.0)	--	213 (79.8)		
-- Medical doctor or master of sciences	---	64.0 (39.0)	---	54 (20.2)	18.10	<0.001
Spiritual health	86.6 ± 17.5	--	89.4 ± 16.1	--	-1.68	0.09
Self- control	155.7 ± 25.4	--	154.0 ± 27.8	--	0.60	0.55

behavioral with a gain of 0.85, 0.74, 0.79, 0.75, 0.80, and 0.81, respectively, all have a significant correlation with the hidden variable of will power. Regression coefficients and the relationship between predictive variables and students' spiritual well-being score is given in table 2 and figure 1, respectively. Regression results of structural equations showed that gender, marital status, educational level, and power of will variables predict the

spiritual health scores of the students. Among the demographic factors, married people, female gender, studying in the field of medicine, and being a postgraduate student were associated with an increase in the students' spiritual health scores, compared to that of the undergraduate students. The results also indicated that the will power is associated with an increase in the spiritual health score (beta = 0.61, Pvalue = 0.001).

Table 2. Standardized coefficients of relationship between variables with spiritual health using structural equation regression model

	Coef.	Std. Err	z	Pvalue	[95% Conf. Interval]
Spiritual health with					
Sex	.125	.041	3.04	0.002	.044 .205
Age	-.028	.044	-0.65	0.515	-.114 .057
Educational level	.108	.041	2.60	0.009	.027 .185
Marital status	.099	.044	2.24	0.025	.012 .185
Self-control	.614	.034	18.00	0.000	.548 .681

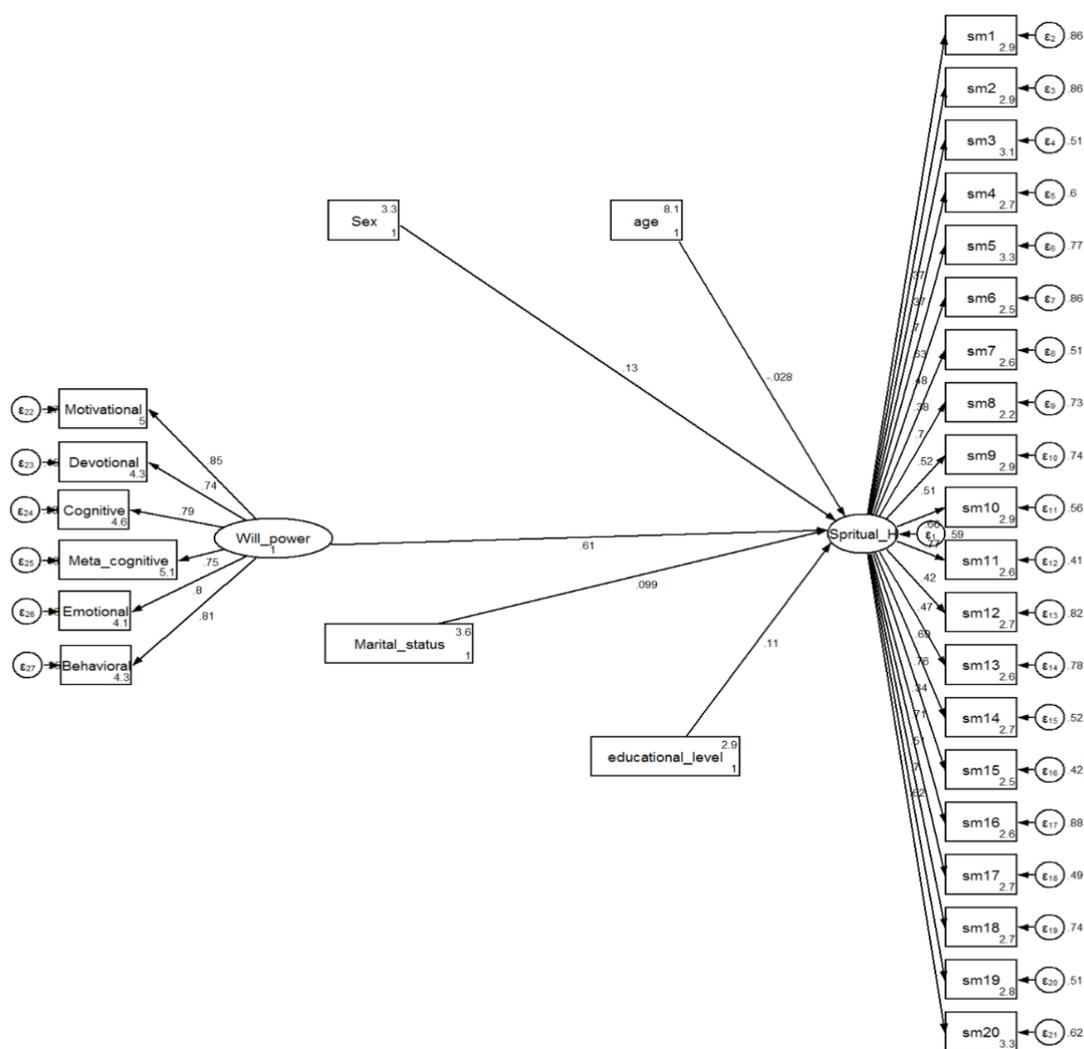


Figure 1. Relationship between variables with spiritual health using structural equation regression model

Discussion

In spite of the age of religious beliefs, experts in the field of religion psychology have discussed controversial views on the effects of religious beliefs on human mental health.¹⁹ In a study, a significant relationship was found between religious beliefs and self-efficacy.²⁰ In a review conducted on the relationship between religion and spiritual health, the results showed that in different studies, there was a positive relationship between these two variables (47%). 23% of these studies showed a negative relationship between religion and spiritual well-being and in 30% of them, there was no relationship between these two variables.²¹ However, due to the religious context of Iran society, the results of this research can be effective in explaining the role of religious attitudes on the strengthening of spiritual health.¹

Regression results of structural equations in this study showed that gender, marital status, educational level, and power of will serve as predictor variables for the students' spiritual health scores. Also, they have a significant relationship with the spiritual health. In this study, married people and students with higher educational level had higher spiritual health scores as well as female students. The results of this study showed that the score of will power is associated with an increase in the score of spiritual well-being. Also, the results of this study showed that different dimensions of will power including motivational, cognitive, worshipping, metacognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors had high correlation coefficients with will power, which were in agreement with the results of the study done by Niksefat.¹⁰ In our study, most students had moderate spiritual health, and only 27.4% of them had a high spiritual health level, which is similar to other reported levels of spiritual well-being among students.^{7,22,23}

Considering the fact that no study has been performed in Iran with the aim of investigating the relationship between will power and spiritual health, this study can be used as a guide and a primary study. There was no significant correlation between mental health scores and religious attitude scores in the study of Kashefi et al.¹ Considering that spiritual health has two aspects of existential and religious, its relation with the mental health status of individuals can indicate the relationship between the individuals' spiritual health and mental health. In the studies performed based on the effect of praying on spiritual well-being in cancer patients, the results show that human-to-God relationship also affects spiritual health.^{3,24} In another study on students of Shiraz city, 89.2% of males and 95.1% of females had a low religious attitude, with no significant relationship between gender and religious attitude.¹ The results of other studies also showed that there is no significant relationship between sex and spiritual well-being.⁸ In Rahimi et al. Study on nursing and midwifery students, the mean score of spiritual health of male students was higher than female students.⁷ Regarding marital status, the present study showed that there is a significant relationship between marital status and spiritual health, which is similar to the results of other conducted studies on students.^{7,8}

In the studies conducted in Iran, the status of spiritual well-being based on the educational level was not significantly different among the students.⁷ However, in the present study,

there is a significant relationship between the educational level and spiritual well-being. Regarding the role of spiritual health in students' health, studying various aspects of it and also investigating the role of religious factors and will power in the spiritual health of students is very important. Other studies could be done to examine the power of will variable in other groups such as patients and the general population. The limited age range and being university students reduced the generalizability of this study results to all population. This study is the first study to examine the will power using an Islamic- Iranian questionnaire.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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