



Effects of Religious Commitment and Life Satisfaction on Mental Well-Being among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The current research aimed at examining the effect of religious commitment and life satisfaction on mental well-being among Pakistani university students. Quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design was used for the examination of the relationship among the variables considered. The sample size comprised 800 university students from public and private universities of Punjab, Pakistan and purposeful sampling method was adopted for the selection of sample. For the collection of data, Friedman Well-Being Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Religious Commitment Inventory-10 were used. Data analysis involved statistical analysis such as descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and ANOVA using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 24. The results showed a strong positive relationship between religiosity, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Students who were highly religious and highly satisfied with their life were psychologically well-adjusted and emotionally stable and happy, with good self-satisfaction. It was found through regression analysis that religious commitment and life satisfaction have a significant effect on the dependent variable of the study and that the effect of life satisfaction is more significant than that of religious commitment. It can be concluded that religious commitment and life satisfaction have an important role in achieving positive mental well-being among university students.

1. Introduction

The university years have been found to be one of the crucial developmental periods when the individual is exposed to many stressors psychologically speaking. These stressors include the stress related to academics, financial difficulties, social changes, and identity issues. All these increase the possibility of negative psychological consequences as there is evidence showing an increased prevalence rate of depression and anxiety amongst university students in various countries (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Auerbach et al., 2018). This is particularly important in a country like Pakistan where a lot of pressure is put on the young adults regarding education, family, and socially.

Mental wellness is said to be the positive state of psychological functioning which transcends mere absence of mental disorders. The definition of mental health offered by the World Health Organization (2004) is stated as "the optimal realization of an individual's potentialities, capacities, skills, effective functioning and making contributions to his or her community." According to the academic literature there are two different but complimentary definitions of mental wellness which are based on the hedonic and eudaimonic definitions of mental wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Life satisfaction, as one of the most

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essential parts of subjective well-being, is perceived as an evaluation by people of their own life quality using personal standards (Diener et al., 1985). Studies have shown that people who show life satisfaction use coping mechanisms effectively and are resilient to stress (Pavot & Diener, 1993). It can be presumed that life satisfaction is one of those psychological resources that are necessary for college students.

Religious commitment, which is the extent to which religious beliefs, values, and rituals are incorporated into one's identity and functioning (Worthington et al., 2003), is increasingly recognized as a powerful predictor of psychological well-being in various cultural and religious settings. In Pakistan, where religion goes beyond being a personal creed to become an overarching framework for ethics, social life, and culture, religious commitment plays a very important role in the psychological lives of college students. The Islamic religion has its rituals such as daily prayer (Salah), recitation of the Quran, and tawakkul (reliance on God) that have been linked to psychological well-being and coping (Koenig et al., 2012; Pargament, 1997).

Numerous empirical studies have shown a direct and positive correlation between religiosity and mental well-being. The results of Koenig et al.'s (2012) exhaustive review of over three thousand empirical studies on the topic show that higher levels of religiosity are associated with a decrease in levels of depression, anxiety and flourishing psychologically regardless of the type of religion or culture. According to Smith et al. (2003), in their meta-analysis of 147 studies, religiosity was found to be negatively associated with levels of depression with intrinsic religious orientation being the strongest predictor of positive outcomes. However, among college student samples, religiously committed individuals showed fewer signs of depressive symptoms and better psychological resilience than less religious people (Abdel-Khalek, 2012). In studies carried out in Egypt, Kuwait, and Malaysia with predominantly Muslim populations, Islamic religiosity, which includes praying regularly, studying the Quran, and following moral guidelines of Islam, has been associated with high emotional stability and well-being and life satisfaction (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2012). This demonstrates the important cultural aspect of religious commitment as a factor of mental strength especially for collectivist cultures like Pakistan where identity and well-being are directly related to religious affiliation.

One of the most consistent conclusions drawn within the paradigm of positive psychology is the link between life satisfaction and good mental health. Life satisfaction was identified as an element of subjective well-being by Diener et al. (1999), and its connection with good psychological functioning was found to be quite substantial. In a longitudinal study, Koivumaa-Honkanen et al. (2001) concluded that life dissatisfaction was connected with higher chances of developing depression, suicide attempts, and poor psychological functioning 20 years later. Life satisfaction of college students was related to their engagement in studying, social adaptation, emotional stability, and lower probability of dropping out (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). The scientific research carried out among university students in Pakistan and South Asia revealed that factors influencing students' life satisfaction include relations with family members, academic achievements, and compatibility of personal aspirations with cultural needs (Abid et al., 2017).

The positive effect of religiosity on life satisfaction has been shown consistently in various samples and approaches. In fact, Ellison (1991) was one of the first researchers to empirically identify this connection by using nationally representative samples, where religiosity has proven to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction independent of socio-demographic factors. Lim and Putnam (2010) have shown that the positive effect of religion on life satisfaction is realized largely due to the quality of relationships established during active participation in religious communities, highlighting the role of the social aspect of religious commitment.

Among Muslim samples, research has shown that Islamic religiosity predicts life satisfaction in Pakistani, Kuwaiti, and Malaysian university students (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2012; Francis et al., 2008). According to Steger and Frazier (2005), the reason behind this link is the meaning that religious commitment brings into the lives of religious people, which leads to higher life satisfaction among religious individuals. Despite the vast body of international literature on the effects of religious commitment and life satisfaction from a psychological perspective, there is a lack of research exploring their joint effects on mental well-being among Pakistani university students.

1.1. Aim of the study

The goal of this research is to explore the effects of religious commitment and life satisfaction on the psychological well-being of university students in Pakistan. In this respect, the objective is to test the ability of religious commitment and life satisfaction to predict the psychological well-being of university students both separately and together and to establish relationships between the two variables in the context of Pakistani culture. Moreover, the purpose of this research is to identify if there is any difference in terms of psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and religious commitment among university students studying in various faculties of the universities and to see if spirituality and life satisfaction can assist the students in coping with the psychological challenges of the university environment.

2. Methods

The correlational cross-sectional design was used in current study. The design is ideal for collecting and analyzing information regarding different variables without performing any manipulations, making it an appropriate research design for psychology research due to its ease of execution and cost-effectiveness.

2.1. Participants of the Study

A Purposive sampling method was used to obtain a sample of 800 university students studying at both public and private universities situated in Punjab, Pakistan. In the sample there were 506 (63.3%) females and 294 (36.8%) males with the age range of 17 – 33 years ($M = 20.1$ years). The majority of students were BS degree students (84.4%) while the rest were either MS/MSc students (8.3%) or pursuing other degrees (7.4%). Students were from Natural Sciences (7.6%), Social Sciences (20.3%) and other departments (72.1%). The majority of the sample consisted of single individuals (85.9%) with middle class background (77.5%).

2.2. Measures

Friedman Well-Being Scale (FWBS) developed by Friedman (1994). The FWBS is composed of ten items, using the bipolar adjectival scale (i.e., Angry – Calm; Joyless – Joyful) on a scale of 1 to 11. Four subscale scores are computed: Emotional Stability, Self-Confidence, Joyfulness, and Happiness. Higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological well-being. Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$.

Scale for Satisfaction with Life (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985). It consists of five items and uses a 7-point Likert scale. Possible range of the score on this test is from 5 to 35. The higher the score is, the more satisfied with life the individual is. Cronbach's $\alpha = .61$.

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) created by Worthington et al. (2003). It comprises ten items and uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of religious commitment. Score ranges on this test are from 10 to 50. The higher scores indicate the higher religious commitment. Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$.

2.3. Procedure

With the approval of the institutional ethics board and permission from the administration of the respective institutions of the participants, recruitment was done either individually or in small groups during class time as well as in common places on campus. The aim of the research was shared with all the prospective participants before any participation. Those who consented to participate in the study in writing filled the set of questionnaires consisting of the consent form, demographic information, and the three psychometric scales in 15 to 20 minutes; an online version of the questionnaires was also provided. Questionnaire packs with more than 10% missing responses or inconsistencies were excluded from the study. The data was then coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance and letters of permission were secured before conducting the research. Participants gave written consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and withdrawal without any negative consequences were guaranteed to all participants. Purpose of the study was conveyed to participants in advance, and all the procedures followed the ethics guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2017).

3. Results

3.1. Reliability Analysis

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for Study Scales (N = 800).

Scale	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α
Friedman Well-Being Scale (FWBS)	61.96	19.68	0-100	.84
Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)	20.32	5.68	5-35	.61
Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)	36.10	7.58	10-50	.78

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha.

The descriptive statistics and reliability estimates of all scales employed in the study are provided in Table 1. The FWBS exhibited high internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$), RCI-10 had a good reliability value ($\alpha = .78$), and SWLS obtained a moderate reliability estimate ($\alpha = .61$), although slightly lower than the accepted criterion (.70).

3.2. Correlation Analysis

Table 2. Correlation of Study Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Mental Well-Being (FWB Total)	—								
2. Emotional Stability	.906**	—							
3. Self-Confidence	.685**	.458**	—						
4. Joyfulness	.757**	.548**	.372**	—					
5. Happiness	.702**	.491**	.431**	.585**	—				
6. Life Satisfaction	.271**	.262**	.207**	.154**	.177**	—			
7. Religious Commitment	.279**	.277**	.144**	.220**	.175**	.394**	—		
8. Intrapersonal RC	.275**	.282**	.144**	.207**	.151**	.361**	.939**	—	
9. Interpersonal RC	.223**	.208**	.111**	.191**	.171**	.353**	.865**	.639**	—

Note. RC = Religious Commitment. Intrapersonal RC and Interpersonal RC are subscales of the RCI-10. All correlations significant at ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Diagonal entries (—) represent self-correlations.

The relationship between mental well-being and life satisfaction as well as religious commitment was positive and significant ($r = .27$, $p < .01$) ($r = .28$, $p < .01$). The relationship between religious commitment and life satisfaction was positive and moderately significant ($r = .39$, $p < .01$) which means that more satisfied individuals were also committed to religion.

3.3. Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis: Religious Commitment and Life Satisfaction Predicting Mental Well-Being.

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95%CI
Constant	29.42	3.43	8.59	< .001	[22.69, 36.15]
Religious Commitment	0.53	0.09	5.62	< .001	[.35, .72]
Life Satisfaction	0.66	0.13	5.23	< .001	[.41, .91]

Note. Dependent variable = FWB Total. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE B = standard error of B; β = standardized regression coefficient, $p < .001$.

Multiple regression analysis has been done using religious commitment and life satisfaction as independent variables for the dependent variable mental well-being. The regression equation was found to be significant overall, $F(2, 797) = 48.51$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 11% of the variance in mental well-being ($R^2 = .11$). All predictors used in the regression were found to be significant: religious commitment ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), and life satisfaction ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$).

3.4. One-Way ANOVA

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA: Study Variables by Academic Department.

Variable	Natural Sciences (n = 61)		Social Sciences (n = 162)		Other (n = 577)		F	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
FWB Total	50.89	15.95	60.14	19.41	63.65	19.71	12.85**	0.04
Emotional Well-Being	24.90	8.86	29.96	10.63	31.15	11.39	8.98**	0.03
Social Well-Being	9.02	3.31	11.42	4.68	12.52	5.27	14.85**	0.04
Joy	11.85	5.19	12.70	5.08	13.17	4.95	2.21	0.01
Happiness	5.11	3.40	6.06	3.30	6.81	3.10	10.15**	0.03
Life Satisfaction	20.74	6.10	20.80	5.50	20.14	5.69	1.04	0.00

Religious Commitment	33.82	8.97	36.25	8.54	36.29	7.09	3.00*	0.01
Intrapersonal Commitment	20.67	5.89	22.52	5.47	22.52	4.64	3.98*	0.01
Interpersonal Commitment	13.15	3.47	13.73	3.68	13.77	3.31	0.94	0.00

Note. NS = Natural Sciences; SS = Social Sciences. η^2 = eta-squared (effect size). Post-hoc comparisons conducted using LSD. Significance indicated by direction of group difference (e.g., NS < SS = Natural Sciences scored lower than Social Sciences). — = no significant post-hoc differences.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

The one-way ANOVA test found that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of mental well-being and religious commitment among various academic departments, with Natural Science department students having significantly lower mental well-being and religious commitment compared to students from other departments. There was no statistical difference in life satisfaction level across academic departments, $F(2, 797) = 1.04$, $p = .355$. The mean life satisfaction level was 4.12 for Natural Science department, 4.23 for Social Sciences and 4.09 for other departments.

4. Discussion

In the current study, the impact of religious commitment and life satisfaction on mental well-being has been analyzed amongst 800 Pakistani university students. It has been found out that both religious commitment and life satisfaction were significantly positively related to mental well-being, accounting for 11% of the variance in the latter.

The positive significant correlation between religious commitment and mental well-being can be attributed to the vast amount of international literature which emphasizes the psychological importance of religiosity. According to Koenig et al. (2012) and Smith et al. (2003), there is evidence to suggest that religious involvement leads to low levels of depression and increased positive psychological functioning. In the context of Pakistani culture, religious involvement (Islamic religiosity) has several psychological advantages; these include having a coherent belief system to explain negative events (Park, 2005), positive religious coping strategies like prayer and tawakkul (Pargament, 1997), and an effective community support system to prevent feelings of social isolation. The especially high correlation between religious commitment and emotional stability can be explained by the religious principle of Islam of dhikr (memory of God).

The significant correlation between life satisfaction and psychological well-being is in line with earlier studies in positive psychology demonstrating that having a positive evaluation of one's life experience is a protective factor against psychological distress (Diener et al., 1999; Pavot & Diener, 1993). University students who feel that they have a life which is satisfying from the academic, social, and personal perspectives can possess such a psychological resource that helps them remain psychologically healthy even in the face of student-related stressors.

The medium-sized positive correlation between religious commitment and life satisfaction fits the cross-cultural evidence on the role of religion in providing a path to life satisfaction through meaning, social capital, and goal alignment (Ellison, 1991; Lim & Putnam, 2010; Steger & Frazier, 2005). This connection seems particularly appropriate for the Pakistani context, where students may see their educational endeavor as part of the fulfillment of their religious duty of acquiring knowledge and serving the community.

The regression results showing that both religious commitment and life satisfaction are independent predictors of mental well-being are theoretically consistent. Such results indicate that spiritual commitment and positive evaluation of life work as two separate psychological sources of well-being. Life satisfaction was a slightly better predictor, reflecting the key role played by life cognitive evaluation in studies focused on well-being following the hedonic tradition (Diener et al., 1999). The ANOVA results, confirming that Natural Sciences students have significantly lower levels of mental well-being and religious commitment, should be considered. Such an outcome might be caused by the stressful and competitive atmosphere inherent to Natural Sciences departments in Pakistan that can prevent the students from engaging in religious activities and being satisfied with their lives. However, since there were no differences between the departments in terms of life satisfaction, one can assume that the problem is caused only by the pressure in a particular field of study.

5. Limitations

Cross-sectional design does not allow drawing any causal conclusions concerning the direction of relationships. The selection of participants based on the purposive sampling method in the Punjab Province hinders the external validity of the study since the findings may not be generalized to students at universities in other parts of Pakistan. The use of self-report instruments opens up an opportunity for social desirability response style, which is particularly likely to occur in the cultural setting where religion plays an important role and religiosity is positively evaluated. Moreover, the SWLS showed poor reliability in the sample ($\alpha = .61$).

6. Implications

These results have expanded the scope of positive psychology and religious coping models to be applied in a Muslim majority South Asian context by showing how religious commitment and life satisfaction serve as separate but complementary psychological resources for student psychological well-being. Counseling services at universities must take into account the possibility of introducing culturally appropriate counseling models which do not see Islamic religiosity only from an individual level point of view but can use it as a psychological resource. Interventions such as academic advising and community building activities, aimed at enhancing the students' feelings of goal congruence and life satisfaction, can also bring considerable gains in terms of their psychological well-being, especially those enrolled in the difficult field of Natural Sciences who exhibited relatively low levels of well-being and religiosity.

7. Conclusion

The current study offers an empirical demonstration that religious commitment and life satisfaction are important independent variables that account for 11% of the variance in mental well-being among Pakistani university students. The results validate the significance of spirituality and positive life perception in terms of positive psychological factors in a predominantly Muslim South Asian society. The academic department is shown to have differential impacts on mental well-being and religious commitment, implying the necessity of discipline-specific individualistic interventions in university mental health centers.

8. Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal research designs that would enable tracing changes in religious commitment, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being during college years. More extensive and geographically broader samples from other provinces of Pakistan for higher generalization of results. Use of mixed methodologies for revealing subjective nature of religious commitment and life satisfaction among Pakistani college students. Study of possible mediators and moderators, such as religious coping strategies, social support, and gender.

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