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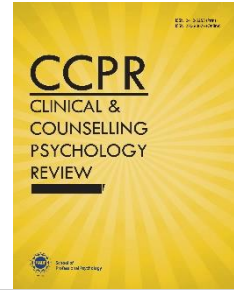
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Author (s): Shahzad Hussain¹, Ziasma Haneef Khan¹, Rahila Amin¹, Uzma Kanwal²


Affiliation (s): ¹University of Karachi, Pakistan
²DHQ Hospital Jhelum, Pakistan

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Spiritual Intelligence, Resilience, and Mental Health: A Comparative Study among University Students with Different Academic Degrees

Shahzad Hussain^{1*}, Ziasma Haneef Khan¹, Rahila Amin², and Uzma Kanwal³

¹Department of Psychology, University of Karachi, Pakistan

²Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Karachi, Pakistan

³Department of Psychiatry, DHQ Hospital Jhelum, Pakistan

Abstract

The present study aimed to compare the spiritual intelligence, resilience, and mental health of university students majoring in Islamic studies with those who are not majoring in Islamic studies. The sample consisted of 200 university students enrolled using purposive sampling (100 Major in Islamic studies & 100 Non-majors in Islamic studies) with age ranging between 20 - 25 years ($M = 22.59$; $SD = 2.56$). The study participants were selected from various departments of a public university in Karachi, Pakistan. To collect data from the participants a demographic form and three standardized instruments including Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI -24), Brief Resilience Scale (BRS-6), and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21) were used. Descriptive statistics and t -test were applied to analyze the collected data. Results showed a significant difference on spiritual intelligence between those having Islamic studies as major and non – majors, with a higher mean score for the group majoring in Islamic studies. The group with non-major in Islamic Studies showed a higher mean score on depression, anxiety, and stress. However, no significant group differences were observed based on resilience. In conclusion, study suggested that a comprehensive curriculum based on Islamic teachings have a positive influence on the spiritual intelligence and mental health of the students. The results hold significant implications for curriculum development and support services to enhance overall wellbeing of university students.

Keywords: mental health, resilience, spiritual intelligence

Introduction

To understand the construct of spiritual intelligence many researchers have conducted intensive work. The term spiritual intelligence is defined as a mean to attain internal peace of mind and soul, find answers to our

*Corresponding Author: shahzaadhussain@hotmail.com

existence, and develop insight at various levels of consciousness (Vaughan, [2002](#)).

Spiritual intelligence is an experience-based ability to understand the world and ourselves through God-centeredness, to realize and know God, to recognize and choose the way towards Him in all circumstances, as well as to detect self-centeredness and manifestations of the ego in various situations to adapt the life accordingly. (Ronel, [2008](#), p. 105)

While some scholars have emphasized God- entered aspect, others adopted a more secular perspective and defined it as the highest form of intelligence. This provokes characteristics and capabilities of true self that are expressed in terms of wisdom, compassion, integrity creativity and peace (Griffiths, [2017](#)).

Emmons ([2000](#)) has outlined five characteristics of a spiritually intelligent individual, which include being virtuous, the ability to transcend, entering into heightened spiritual states of consciousness, devoting everyday activities, events, and relationships with heightened power, and the capacity to utilize spiritual resources to solve everyday problems. To elaborate on this, some researchers have divided spiritual intelligence in various components (King & DeCicco, [2009](#)) and dimensions (Amram, [2007](#)). For instance, King ([2008](#)) described spiritual intelligence as a set of four adoptive mental abilities: Critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness and conscious state expansion. According to King ([2008](#)), people higher in spiritual intelligence demonstrate a higher degree of resilience which gives them an internal strength to cope with stressors. Likewise, it may help an individual to cope with difficulties of life, pain, despair (Peerzadah et al., [2018](#)), and serve as a coping mechanism during negative life circumstances (Lazarus & Folkman, [1995](#)). Emmons ([2000](#)) reported that spiritual intelligence consists of integrated abilities which are helpful in adaptability, problem-solving, coping, finding meaning as well as internal and external peace. Mishra and Vashist ([2014](#)), study concluded significant role of spiritual intelligence in success and quality of life of adolescence in twenty first century. Darvishzadeh & Bozorgi, ([2016](#)), explored the relationship between spiritual intelligence, Hardiness and resilience among 200 female students They concluded that spiritual intelligence and resilience are significantly positively correlated, which

helps individuals to cope with hardships after a serious loss. It appears that spiritual intelligence provides one with an optimistic view of life which makes them more flexible, tolerant, hopeful, and resilient in the face of difficulties (Srivastava, [2016](#)).

Resilience concerns the capacity to 'bounce back' at the time of adversities and continuous stressful events (Perkins, & Jones, [2004](#)). It is the compatibility in facing these challenges (Garmezy & Masten, [1991](#); Luthar, [1991](#)), and adapting and recuperating in times of extreme stress (Rutter, [1979](#)). Resilience is multidimensional; an individual may be more resilient in one aspect of his/her life but less resilient in others (Luthar et al., [1993](#)). Recent meta-analysis have identified religious/ spiritual practices to be moderately correlated with resilience (Schwalm et al., [2022](#)). A number of well-conceived studies have shown a positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and resilience (Darvishzadeh & Bozorgi, [2016](#); Ebrahimi et al., [2012](#)). The relationship of spirituality with resilience has been observed as a facilitating agent or a coping mechanism, where it helps to build a strong association that aids social support seeking, guides one's conduct and moral values, and provides opportunities for personal growth and development. Researchers have described spirituality as a protective practice that help in adjustment during crises period and coping with physical and psychological stress (Sharma et al., [2017](#)). Thus, it seems that spiritual intelligence and resilience play a vital role in an individual's life.

Literature Review

Evidence suggest that spiritual intelligence has a positive impact on the mental health of individuals in terms of personal meaning - creation, development of self-awareness, transcendental awareness, and existential thinking as reported by Farahmand et al. ([2014](#)) in their study with employees in Saveh city of Iran. Another study confirmed that spiritual intelligence is significantly associated with psychological well-being and satisfaction with life among nurses (Sahebalzamani et al., [2013](#)). Kalantarkousheh et al. ([2014](#)) also reported that spiritual intelligence is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Although the evidence exist which suggests an association between spiritual well-being and mental health, there are a very few studies which explore this association between correlates of mental health and spirituality (Ebrahimi et al., [2012](#)). Findings from the study have shown that specific spiritual convictions and

practices may be linked to physical and emotional well-being (Salman & Lee, [2019](#)). They found a mediated role of spiritual intelligence for psychological wellbeing, depression and perceived health. (Pant & Srivastava, [2019](#)), study result reveal that there was a significant relationship between mental health and spiritual intelligence among science and arts students enrolled in different colleges in India. Additionally, in the indigenous context, a study by Anwar and Rana ([2023](#)) found a direct association between spiritual intelligence and psychological wellbeing among Pakistani university students.

Role of Spiritual Intelligence and Resilience in Life Stressors

Numerous research studies have supported the fact that spirituality is closely related to mental health, psychological well-being, and resilience (Anwar & Rana, [2023](#); Partovi & Boland, [2016](#)). In terms of psychological disturbance, spirituality has been reported to decrease psychological distress and increase resilience in the face of distressing life events (Khosravi & Nikmanesh, [2014](#)). Similarly, findings indicate that higher spiritual intelligence led to lower anxiety and depression among students (Karimzadeh et al., [2021](#)).

Scope of Present Research

In the discipline of spirituality, the betterment of human living and seeking the meaning of life has always been of major interest. Furthermore, spiritual intelligence has a prominent impact on an individual's vision of dealing with life challenges and sufferings as well as finding ways to ameliorate distress which indirectly influence their coping and resilience. Until now, there appear to be numerous reasons to explore spirituality and resilience within the area of psychology. Keeping in view the importance of spirituality and resilience in the context of mental health, the existing indigenous studies, though limited in number, only report the association between spirituality, resilience, and mental health. Additionally, in the Pakistani context, lack of evidence exists that specifically address spiritual intelligence and resilience in the context of mental health of individuals which encourages research in this area. Furthermore, considering the role of religion, it seems compelling that the differences may exist among those who are with or without in a closer connection to the religion or religious teachings. Considering the nature of comparison, the students specializing in religion focused and non-

religion focused disciplines seem subjects of interest. Moreover, it has been already established that spiritual teachings promote resilience among students (Bagheri, [2015](#)). Therefore, this study enrolled students from religion focused and non-religion focused disciplines and look for any difference between these groups in terms of their spiritual intelligence and its impact on their resilience and mental health. The study aims to provide valuable insight that can help understand spiritual intelligence in the context of the Pakistani population and ways to modify teaching methodologies in a manner that enhances students' spiritual intelligence, thereby promoting resilience and mental health of the students.

Hypotheses

There would be a significant difference in group of students with or without majors in Islamic studies in terms of spiritual intelligence, resilience and mental health.

Method

Sample

In the present study, the sample comprised 200 university students. Among 200 students, 137 (68%) were women and 63 (32%) were men. The age of the participants ranged between 20-25 years ($M = 22.59$; $SD = 2.56$). The sample was selected using the purposive sampling method where 100 students with majors in Islamic studies (Islamic Learning, Islamic History, & Usool-ud-Din) and 100 non-majors in Islamic studies (Social Work, Computer Sciences, Biological Sciences, English Literature, Criminology, Urdu, Educational Studies, Business Studies), were selected from the University of Karachi. Most of these students were in their final year of bachelor and belonged middle socio-economic class.

Assessment Measures

Personal Information Form

Personal information form focused on the background information that comprised of participant's age, gender, education and socio-economic status.

The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI -24, King, [2008](#); King & DeCicco, [2009](#))

The SISRI is a 24-items measure of spiritual intelligence. Its components include existential thinking; personal meaning production; transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. The sum of all item responses ranges from 0 to 96. A high score represents higher levels of spiritual intelligence. The SISRI has shown adequate reliability of .89 (King, [2008](#)). For the present study, the Urdu translated version of the scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92, and for its subscales, the reliability values were: .73 = Critical Existential Thinking; .65 = Personal Meaning; .65 = Transcendental Thinking, and .75 = Conscious State Expansion.

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS-6, Smith et al., [2008](#))

The BRS is a 6-items scale which was developed to assess a unitary construct of "bounce back" after a stressful situation. Its items are responded on a Likert scale with response options ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The scale has been recommended as the best measure of resilience (Windle et al., [2011](#)). It has shown good internal consistency (Smith, et al., [2008](#)). For the present study, the Urdu translated version of the scale demonstrated Cronbach's alpha reliability value of .64.

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21, Lovibond & Lovibond, [1995](#))

The DASS is used to assess symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Depression sub scale consists of items that capture symptoms of dysphonia and hopelessness. Anxiety scale assesses symptoms of personal arousal, agitation, fears, and panic, while Stress scale deals with signs and symptoms tension and over reactivity. The Chronbach's alpha values for the scales are reported to be ranged between .87- .94 (Antony et al., [1998](#)). For the current study, the Chronbach alpha reliability values for the scales of the Urdu version of DASS-21 were as Depression = .86; Anxiety= .86, and Stress= .83.

Procedure

For data collection, permission was sought from the concerned departments. After getting permission, students were approached in classroom settings during the designated timeslots. They were explained

with the objectives of the study and their role and rights as research participants. In order to ensure their voluntary participation, they also filled in an informed consent form before their participation in the study. In addition, they were thoroughly instructed to fill the questionnaire to ensure they understood the process and the assessment measures.

Statistical Analysis

All analyses were carried out using SPSS version 16.0 to explore the variables across the groups. The analyses included descriptive statistics, (mean, standard deviation, range) and *t*-test.

Results

The results obtained from the sample data are given below. Table 1 provides an overview of descriptive statistics.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties of Studied Variables (N=200)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Spiritual Intelligence	53.62	16.58	.90
Critical Existential Thinking	15.99	5.64	.73
Personal Meaning Production	11.40	4.08	.65
Transcendental Awareness	14.68	5.05	.67
Conscious State Expansion	11.56	4.05	.75
Resilience	18.64	3.26	.64
Depression	5.59	4.83	.86
Anxiety	4.92	4.74	.86
Stress	7.56	4.70	.83

The results in above Table 1 revealed that all the scales showed acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha reliability.

The results in Table (2) showed a significant difference in spiritual intelligence of the students having majors in Islamic studies and those with non-majors in Islamic studies. The data showed that the student group with majors in Islamic studies scored higher on the all the dimensions of spiritual intelligence. However, on resilience, there were no observable differences. Similarly, on the depression, anxiety, and stress

scales the mean scored remained higher for those with non-major in Islamic studies as compared to the group with majors in Islamic studies.

Table 2

Independent Sample t-test Used for Comparison between Islamic Studies and Non-Islamic Academic for all variables (N=200)

Variable	Major in- Islamic Studies (n = 100)		Non-Major in Islamic Studies (n = 100)		t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Spiritual Intelligence	60.13	14.18	47.12	16.30	6.021	.000	.852
Critical Existential Thinking	18.22	4.74	13.76	5.61	6.074	.000	.859
Personal Meaning Production	12.62	3.68	10.17	4.11	4.446	.000	.628
Transcendental Awareness	16.26	4.44	13.09	5.15	4.663	.000	.659
Conscious State Expansion	13.03	3.49	10.10	4.05	5.478	.000	.775
Resilience	18.48	3.65	18.89	2.84	-0.727	.470	.125
Depression	4.39	3.79	6.79	5.44	-3.618	.000	.512
Anxiety	3.80	3.91	6.05	5.22	-3.448	.000	.488
Stress	6.52	4.44	8.59	4.75	-3.182	.000	.450

Discussion

The current study sought to compare two group of students who are with or without majors in Islamic studies in terms of examine spiritual intelligence, resilience, and mental health. Overall, the findings indicate that differences exist in the spiritual intelligence and mental health between two groups. However, study data could not find any significant difference in level of resilience between two academic majors.

Evidence from the present findings showed that spiritual intelligence was higher among students with majors in Islamic studies. The participants displayed spiritual intelligence in terms of critical existential patterns of thinking, personal meaning, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. These results verify the proposed hypothesis where Islamic studies participants appeared to be extensively involved in reading and comprehending religious teachings, as compared to those from non-Islamic academic disciplines wherein in teachings are usually

based on specific disciplines. This is in line with the existing literature which states that studying in a specific discipline affects overall thinking pattern where students integrate these thoughts in their daily functions. In contradiction to the present study, Agrawal and Khan (2015) reported, while investigating differences in the spiritual intelligence between arts and science students, no significant difference between the arts and science group. However, the mean score was higher for the art group. They concluded that the differences may be due to the overall religious environment and prevailing religious teaching in the two groups.

The findings of the study can be explained in terms of the thinking and experiences of the students as the students from the religion focused disciplines are likely to engage in critical thinking, thoughtful understanding of the meaning of their existence and origin of life and death, the creation of the universe, and other similar issues. Through their experience and knowledge, they may remain centered around reading literature on existential topics through their designed academic curriculum like Islamic philosophy, mysticism, Quran's tafseer (Rusdi, 2019). Another possible explanation can be the association between spiritual intelligence and religion as it has been suggested that religious beliefs and teaching may answer to the "why" question of existence (Anastoos, 1998; Vaughan, 2002). So, it seems that academic disciplines based on Islamic teachings such as of Holy Quran may enhance their spiritual intelligence by promoting their critical thinking that integrate in their character building and in evaluating fundamental reason of existence (Khan et al., 2018).

Similarly, Abdullah (2012) states that one's emotional spiritual quotient builds on the framework of islām, imān, and ilsān. This suggests that the students from Islamic majors, through Islamic teachings, may develop a strong understanding of their purpose in life. As mentioned earlier, religion builds a sense of meaning among its followers (Hood et. al., 1996) which is reported to be significantly associated with an individual's religious inclination (Huta, 2013; Sillick & Cathcart, 2014). Krause (2010), in his longitudinal study revealed that a strong sense of God-mediated control is associated with meaning in an individual's life.

The students with higher scores on transcendent awareness showed that they were able to go beyond the physical world and could search, recognize, become aware, and connect with the divine force referred to as

“transcendent awareness” in their daily life experiences. One method to obtain transcendent awareness is through meditation which is often a part of spiritual orientation (Shapiro, [1992](#)). Wachholtz and Pargament ([2005](#)) in a comparison study of with college students found that between spiritual and non-spiritual transcendental meditation groups (in which no connection is created with the divine force during meditation) spiritual meditation group had greater spiritual experience and reported decreased level of anxiety as compared to non-spiritual. This evidence from literature suggests that students with majors in Islamic studies experience increased transcendental awareness which is a fundamental of Islamic spirituality and is described as *Tafakkur* on God meaning “contemplation”, “spiritual reflection”, or “meditation”, whereas *tadthakkur* is “remembrance” of God, “recollection”, “evocation” or “invocation” of His most Beautiful Names (al-Daghistani, [2018](#)).

The higher score of the students with majors in Islamic studies on the domain of conscious state expansion suggests that these students were able to attain higher spiritual consciousness through reflection, thinking, meditation or prayers. There are many components of conscious state expansion that vary across religions, however, one of the frequently reported aspects is achieving spiritual consciousness through prayer which may furnish an individual’s skills to achieve conscious state expansion. For instance, a study based on the comparison of mystical experience across religious groups including Muslims, Christians, and Hindus showed that Christians and Muslims were higher in mystical experience as compared to Hindus (Anthony et al., [2010](#)). Similarly, a study based on ethnic differences found that Chinese Christians scored higher than non-Chinese on mystical interpretation factors (Chen et al., [2012](#)).

The present study found no significant differences between the groups on the construct of resilience which rejects our hypothesized comparison between student groups. In literature we receive varying evidence in this regard. For instance, Prinyaphol and Chongruksa ([2008](#)) found student from Islamic studies were more resilient because they had a strong religion inclination and adhere to religious practices in the face of challenges e.g., adversities. On the contrary, van der Mijl and Vingerhoets ([2017](#)) found no difference in the resilience score between humanities and psychology students. In present case, where no differences are reported, one possible explanation for this finding can be that resilience dependents

on the number of factors and affected by a number of experiences which inoculate and builds the defenses to resist stressors in life (Meichenbaum, 2007). So when both groups were measured on their ability to bounce back, no differences were found which is probably both groups experienced similar academic load, examination stress, or other challenging circumstances as a part of their student life. Another explanation can be the implementation of Islamic teachings in daily life practices. In a study by Annalakshmi and Abeer (2011), it was found that the individuals scoring low on resilience were not practically implementing the Islamic teachings in their lifestyles in comparison to the more resilient individuals. Lastly, cultural factors may also intervene as evidence has suggested that cultural factors, for instance, availability of social support foster resilience among individuals (Orozco, 2007).

The results also showed significant differences across both groups on the score of depression, anxiety, and stress which also verifies the proposed association. These findings have classical underpinnings as Seligman et al. (2005) assert that individuals who can be described as spiritual usually demonstrate improved physical and social functioning in comparison to other individuals. These results are also in congruence with previous studies based on spiritual intelligence emphasizing its role in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress (Dami et al., 2019). This implies that spiritual and religious beliefs of the individuals help them interpreting and managing through the life situations with an optimistic approach and in turn has a healthy impact on their mental health which is also supported by existing evidence (Darvishzadeh & Bozorgi, 2016).

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the converging body of research showing that studying in a discipline specifically focused on Islamic curriculum have a healthy impact on the spirituality and psychological health of the individuals. The results suggest that Islamic education is holistic in nature as it directs nurtures that way of thinking and living which is productive for both a healthy body and a healthy soul.

Limitations and Suggestions

The study findings cannot be generalized as the sample size was small and limited to academic disciplines based on the students from a single university. There is a possibility of observing different results with

students from other academic disciplines, and universities for instance, medical sciences. So, more research is required in this area with a large sample of students from various academic disciplines.

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