

Influence of Religious Beliefs on Mental Health of Students in University of Zabol, Iran

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Abstract-Findings show that religious beliefs not only cure mental diseases but also are useful and effective in tranquilizing physical pains. So the present research was done with the purpose of evaluating relationship between religious beliefs with mental health of the students. Those who took part in this study were 223 people (136 females and 87 males) of Zabol University students who were sampled by accidental categorical method. For evaluating the amount of religious beliefs Mahmood Golzari's 25 component religious believing scale (1378) and for evaluating mental health of students Goldberg and Hilers 28 questions general health questionnaire (1979) were used. Results showed that there is a converse and meaningful relationship between females religious believing and small scales of physical signs and anxiety signs and in males there is a converse and meaningful relationship between religious believing and small scale social function and anxiety signs. In general findings show that there is a negative correlation between religious beliefs and mental health. Because in mental health questionnaire high mark is the sign of higher religious believing. These results show that those people who have higher religious beliefs have a better mental health.

Keywords- *Religious beliefs, mental health, students*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's seemingly modern civilized world where human has achieved a wide range of scientific and technological advances, there are still many problems on the way of humans in terms of education and especially real education [1]. Inattention to divine and spiritual values, mental education, and human inclinations can be observed not only in advanced countries but also somewhat in Islamic ones [2]. This ignorance has posed so many emotional problems for humankind. One of the main innate desires of human is the desire to worship. Human has many needs as the most complete creature. They need to be entirely created and their whole life revolves around this need. Religion, as the deepest source in which whole entity of human is developed and all cases including the unity of man with God is dependent on, can

help humans to meet their needs [3]. One of these factors is relevant to human metaphysical beliefs which is discussed under the title of religion [4]. Carl Gustav Jung believes that religion meets many needs of people and also fills many of their entity gaps. According to Verse 124 of Surah Taha where God says, "but whosoever turns away from my remembrance, his life shall be narrow and on the day of resurrection we shall raise him blind", it can be concluded that religion is a strong barrier against problems of human life [5]. Mathew and Hunt also believe that religious beliefs are considered a major driving force in human life. Humans do not follow misconceptions and old beliefs unless they have less religious commitment [4]. Skyrocketing of many mental-social problems throughout the world and limited efficiency of existing treatment patterns necessitate search and development of new models based on comprehensive views and spirituality [5]. Sadok points out that religion is a Godsend for humans which helps them to give meaning to life and find its philosophy, enlightens the human mind, and realizes their basic spiritual needs, especially the needs to love and immortality.

Human life history indicates that religiosity has a long history, religion has been an integral part of human life at all ages, and humans have not been devoid of religious beliefs [6]. Eric Fromm (1950) believes that the need for an orientation framework and an object of veneration is one of the psychological needs of humans. He says, "The need for religion means the need for an orientation pattern and a reference for faith and belief, and no one could be found without this need [6]. Nowadays a lot of attention is being paid to spirituality in physical and social sciences. This consideration reflects public interest in spiritual issues and the role that spirituality can play in mental and physical problems (Piedmont, 2004). Moreover, the importance of spirituality and spiritual development in humans has increasingly attracted the attention of psychologists and mental health professionals over the past few decades. The issue discussing in most new approaches is that spirituality is an essential component of human and their willingness to find a meaning in the fact that humans are mortal is rooted in their brain anatomical structures, and so spirituality is a universal experience [7]. Many studies have confirmed the link between mental health and religious beliefs [8-13]. Hence, the present paper aims to

study the effect of religious beliefs on some important variables affecting mental health.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Statistical population included all students studying in various majors in Zabol University during the academic year 1390-1391. 223 students (136 girls and 87 boys) were randomly selected and stratified random sampling method was used for data collection. Also, a 25-component religiosity scale developed by Mahmud Golzari [14], was used in order to measure religious belief. This test contains 25 items that measure the extent to which religious beliefs are observed. Each question has five options grading from zero to four. Therefore, the lowest total score (0) and the highest total score (100), respectively, mean not observing any of religious beliefs and observing all religious beliefs. Religiosity test was administered to 894 students and 53 young inmates. Reliability of this test was determined 76.0, 91.0, and 94.0 using retest, two halves, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, respectively. This test also had a high content validity (formal and logical). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this test was obtained 909.0. Goldberg and Hiller 28-item general health questionnaire was used in order to measure students' mental health. This questionnaire has four subscales including physical symptoms, anxiety symptoms, symptoms of disorder in social functions, and depression symptoms. Scoring was done based on Likert scale from very low (1) to very high (4). Validity of this questionnaire is relatively acceptable (0.83) and it has been also reported about 0.78 through correlation with other tools such as Symptom Check List-90 (SCL90) questionnaire. Data analysis was done using independent t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient, and univariate regression.

III. RESULTS

The results showed that there is a significant inverse relationship between religiosity of girls and subscales of physical symptoms and anxiety symptoms. There is also a significant inverse relationship between religiosity of boys and subscales of social function anxiety symptoms. Overall, the findings suggest that there is a negative correlation between religious beliefs and mental health, because low score implies health in mental health questionnaire and means higher religiosity in religious beliefs questionnaire. This shows that those who are more religious enjoy higher levels of mental health. This also suggests that religiosity decreases physical symptoms, anxiety symptoms, insomnia, social crimes, and depression symptoms in university students.

Descriptive indicators and correlations coefficient between variables are presented in Table 1.

TABLE I. DESCRIPTIVE INDICATORS AND CORRELATIONS COEFFICIENT BETWEEN VARIABLES

Social	Anxiety	3 Physical health	2 General health	1 Religious beliefs	SD	M	Variable
.	.	.	.	.	19/5	M/10 880/10	1-Religiosity
.	.	.	.	-.36	14/7	29	2- Health
.	.	.	.79	-.34	4/3	7/32	Physical
.	.	.69	.83	-.25	4/46	7/2	Anxiety
.	.43	.40	.72	-.35	4/4	8/3	Social
.46	.56	-.46	.80	-.24	5/1	6/1	Depression

As shown in Table 1, the correlation coefficients obtained between religious beliefs and mental health are significant. This inverse relationship means that students' score is decreased by increase in their religious beliefs. Since lower scores in general health questionnaire indicate higher levels of mental health, the more the religious beliefs of young people, the less their psychological disorders and the higher the level of their mental health. This equation was also -0.349 , -0.253 , $=-0.351$, and -0.248 for each of the indicators of general health.

Descriptive indicators and correlation coefficients between variables for each gender are shown in Table 2 (girl students) and Table 3 (boy students), respectively.

TABLE II. DESCRIPTIVE INDICATORS AND CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN VARIABLES FOR GIRL STUDENTS

Depression	Social	Anxiety	Physical	General health	Religiosity	Variable
6/06	8/34	7/60	7/39	29/38	88/85	M
5/520	3/04	4/394	3/842	13/08	16/060	SD
.82	.60	-.50	-.69	-.86	.	1
.823	.62	.833	.761	.	.	2
.467	.28	.761	.	.	.	3
.501	.38	.	.	.	.	4
.415	.	.	.	.	.	5

As it can be observed, the correlation coefficient obtained between religious beliefs and general health for girl students was -0.086 which is significant at an alpha level of 0.05. Also, this equation was also obtained -0.069 , -0.050 , -0.060 , and -0.082 for each of the indicators of general health.

TABLE III. DESCRIPTIVE INDICATORS AND CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN VARIABLES FOR BOY STUDENTS

Depression	Social	Anxiety	Physical	General health	Religiosity	Variable
6/16	8/38	6/63	7/22	28/39	86/94	M
4/918	6/36	4/457	5/17	17/14	20/172	SD
-.488	-.46	-.523	-.618	-.628	.	1
.821	.818	.864	.805	.	.	2
.484	.49	.736	.	.	.	3
.678	.52	.	.	.	.	4
.583	.	.	.	.	.	5

According to the above table, the correlation coefficient obtained between religious beliefs and general health for boy students was -0.628 which is significant at an alpha level of 0.01. As previously mentioned, negativity of correlation means that the more the religious beliefs of people, the less their score in mental health questionnaire, indicating higher levels of mental health.

This equation was also obtained -0.618, -0.523, -0.461, and -0.488 for each of the indicators of general health.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the findings of this study is a negative relationship between depression and religious beliefs. It can be concluded from this finding that someone who has strong spiritual beliefs will not feel worthless, hopeless, and despaired and have a high self-esteem. Such a person is optimistic about the future and the surrounding environment and is less vulnerable to be suffered from depression. Findings of the present paper are consistent with the fundamentals and principles of monotheistic religions and especially Islam. "Those who believe, and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Is it not with the remembrance of Allah," God says in the Holly Quran, Surah Al-Rad (The Thunder). Numerous studies conducted on the impact of religion on mental health suggest a positive relationship between these two, so that among 50 studies on this issue, 36 of them (72%) have reported a positive relationship between these two variables [13, 15] The results revealed that as the observance of religious beliefs increases, the score of general health decreases (indicating higher levels of mental health) which is consistent with findings of Huck and Wertington, Davids, Jennings, Gartner, and Huck (2010). Rahimi and Kamranpour (1386) showed that the strength of religious beliefs of students has a positive relationship with their mental health which is manifested in some cases such as optimism, meaningful life, coping with stresses, self-acceptance, positive attitude to life, and low anxiety. This issue has also been studied in other religions and similar results have been obtained. For instance, Leslie Francis

(2008) conducted a study on 330 youth Hindu living in London and found a significant relationship positive Hindu thoughts and lower scores of Psychotics. Allport (1967) believes that religion is one of the important potential factors for mental health. Religion can be helpful for mental health as a unifying principle and a huge force. Faith itself is considered as a transcendental value and a motivational commitment not a means to achieve other objectives (Allport, 1967). Yung believes that religion comes from unconscious mind which reinforce confidence, hope, and strength of a person and deepen their moral and spiritual qualities. In his idea, religion meets many human needs, fills entity gaps, and creates a strong base against problems, passions, and exclusions. Cindy M. Biyali concluded that people with higher level of mental health can better understand the function of religion in achieving mental health [11]. Findings of the present study back the results of other studies which have reported a positive and significant relationship between religiosity and higher levels of mental health. Religious beliefs and practices, respectively, play an important role in preventing and reducing mental and emotional problems of students. It is recommended that student counseling centers take into account religious concepts and beliefs affecting students' mental health in evaluations, treatments, and religious consultation. In addition to enriching the quality of indigenous psychology of Iran, this prevents the use of inappropriate methods of consultation.

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