



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The relationship between religious beliefs, social support and optimism in students of Golestan university of medical sciences

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Abstract

Introduction: Strengthening the spirit of religiosity and developing the financial resources of students increase their optimism, which is followed by an improvement in their performance and promotion of the educational system of the country. The current research was performed to determine the correlation of optimism with religious beliefs and social support among students.

Materials and Methods: This descriptive-analytical study was conducted at Golestan University of Medical Sciences in 2014. The study sample was selected through convenience sampling and determined to be 327 students by Morgan formula. The data were collected by religiosity measure, social support and optimism scales, and analyzed by independent t-test and Pearson correlation coefficient.

Results: The results showed a significance level for all the research questions ($P < 0.05$) at 95% confidence level and 5% measurement error with $DF = 325$. There was a significantly positive correlation between religious beliefs and social support, and optimism among students. Since the correlation coefficient between research variables was $r = 0.783$, it showed a positively high correlation between variables. Moreover, the findings of regression analysis showed that religious beliefs, with $\beta = 0.532$, had the maximum level of correlation with optimism in students.

Conclusion: The findings indicated that with a rise in religious beliefs and social support, optimism was increased in students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences. Furthermore, religious beliefs had a more predictive ability in optimism than social support.

Keywords: Religious beliefs, social support, optimism, student.

Introduction

Resorting to the divine power has been one of the ways that humans have used in the past. Religious beliefs and practices have been found to have a positive role in giving meaning to life [1]. Behaviors such as trust in God, worship, pilgrimage, etc. can bring about an inner peace in the people by creating hope and encouraging positive attitudes. Setting goals in life and having a sense of belonging to a divine source, believing in God's help in difficult life situations, benefiting from social and spiritual support, etc. are the methods through which religious people can protect themselves against stressful events of life [2].

Religion is the manifestation of the will of human spirit and religious beliefs form and build the same truth and manifestation that are present in the depth of human risks. Religion is a set of beliefs, emotions and personal or collective practices that are organized around the concept of ultimate truth or sacred act [3]. Religious beliefs provide

the human with peace, generate security, reinforce ethical, emotional and spiritual gaps in the person or communities, and supply a strong base for human against problems and deprivations of life [4]. Durkheim believes that ethical rules reduce contradictions and tensions and ensure cooperation and friendship through determining the duties of people, teaching law and order and following the aspirations. Security and predictability of this society provide conditions for trust that seem to be the result of the following ethical norms [5]. Therefore, it seems that religiosity and religious spirit are part of personality traits whose relationships with other psychological constructs should be analyzed [6]. One of the consequences of religious works is enjoyment of social support. Social support, according to Mose (1973), is a mental sense of belonging, being accepted, and being loved and needed for the sake of the person and what he/she can do. Social support involves understanding the availability of support, a behavior that occurs over time and that whether

support has been useful or not [7]. Decker (2007) considers social support a mechanism of interpersonal communications that protect the people against the negative effects of stress [8].

As it is known, students, as a special group of society, experience a particular condition at university, which can influence their mental health and life quality [9]. However, it should be noted that increased stress and behavioral problems are the negative outcomes of dissatisfaction, which may result in reduced social participation, integration and social trust in students [10] and consequently decrease their optimism toward life and future. Optimism refers to the generalized result of expectations that good things will happen more than bad things [10].

Most of the studies conducted on the correlation between religion and psychological constructs have been performed in the religions other than Islam, and since Islam, as an ideology, presents the most complete and healthiest lifestyle for the mankind and whose laws involve a wide range of personal and social morality, interpersonal communications, sanitary and mental health domains [11], this study was carried out to evaluate the relationship among religious beliefs, social support and optimism among students.

Methods

This descriptive-analytical study was carried out at Golestan University of Medical Sciences in 2014. The study population comprised of the students studying in the first semester. The sample size, selected through convenience sampling, was calculated to be 327 students according to Morgan and Krejcie (1970), at confidence interval 95% and measurement error $\alpha=5\%$. The inclusion criterion consisted of being an Iranian student and the exclusion criterion comprised of being a guest or transferred student during the study period.

The study data were collected via religious orientation, social support and life orientation (optimism) scales. Also, the students' demographic and academic information, including age, gender, term and major were analyzed.

The reliability of Allport religious orientation scale was measured to be 0.719 by Cronbach's alpha. To evaluate the validity of this scale in Iran, it has been translated into Persian and different experts have revised it several times to be adaptable to the cultural and religious context of Iran. This scale is scored based on a four-point Likert scale, from 1 to 4.

The social support scale was developed by Wax et al. in 1986 to measure subjective evaluation. It has 23 items in three domains of family (8 items), friends (7 items) and others (8 items), scored from 1 to 5 based on a five-point

Likert scale (completely disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and completely agree). The minimum and maximum scores are 23 and 115, respectively, and a higher score shows higher social support and a lower score indicates lower social support. The reliability of this scale was calculated to be $r = 0.776$ by Cronbach's alpha. The validity of the given scale, however, was confirmed by several expert teachers in the field. Moreover, the life orientation (optimism) scale (Scheier & Carver, 1985) has 10 items, scored from 0 to 4 based on a five-point Likert scale (completely disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and completely agree).

The obtained data were analyzed by SPSS software using descriptive statistics (frequency tables, graphs, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, independent t-test and multiple regression analysis).

In all stages of the research, ethical considerations, including getting the approval of university ethical committee, taking permission and a letter of introduction from the university deputy of research and technology, taking informed consent from students to complete the questionnaires and ensuring the confidentiality of data were taken into account.

Results

Of all participants, 56.9% were female and 58% were aged 20 - 25 years old. More than 70% of students were undergraduate and half of them were married and lived in their personal dwellings. The total mean scores of students in religious beliefs, social support and optimism were 2.604 ± 0.16 , 3.421 ± 0.219 and 2.686 ± 0.333 , respectively [Table 1].

Table 1. Means of religious beliefs, social support and optimism among students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences.

Variables	Components	Mean	SD
Religious beliefs		2.604	0.16
		3.474	0.303
Social support	Family support	3.621	0.436
	Friends' support	2.783	0.249
	Others' support	3.421	0.219
Optimism		2.686	0.333

As for the correlation of optimism with religious beliefs and social support among students, all correlation coefficients between research variables were found to be significant ($P=0.01$) [Table 2]. The correlation coefficients between optimism and religious beliefs and between optimism and social support were reported to be 0.687 and 0.609, respectively, which were indicative of a significantly

positive correlation of optimism with religious beliefs and social support.

Table 2. Correlation of optimism with religious beliefs and social support among students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences.

Variables	Number	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
Religious beliefs Optimism	327	0.678	0.000
Social support Optimism	327	0.609	0.000

The results of Pearson correlation coefficient showed a significant correlation between religious beliefs, social support and optimism.

To respond the main research question “whether there is a relationship between optimism and religious beliefs and social support among students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences”, the results of Table 3 showed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.783$ and squared correlation of $r^2 = 0.611$ among the research variables, and 0.611 of the variance of optimism was explained by religious beliefs and social support. Further, the correlation coefficient between research variables indicated a positively high correlation.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis for correlation among

Table 4. Coefficients of regression model for the maximum correlation among religious beliefs, social support and optimism among students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences

Variable	Non-standard coefficients		Standard coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	-2.308	0.221		-10.446	0.000
Religious beliefs	1.104	0.077	0.532	14.259	0.000
Social support	0.62	0.57	0.407	10.91	0.000

According to the regression model, it can be concluded that religious beliefs, with $\beta = 0.532$, had the highest correlation with optimism among students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed a significantly positive correlation of optimism with religious beliefs and social support among students of Golestan University of Medical Sciences. The students with more perception of social support enjoyed higher levels of optimism. From among the components of social support, friends’ support was more important than the family and others’ support, and the support provided by others was the least important.

Moreover, the findings indicated a significantly positive correlation between social support and optimism. One of the characteristics of optimistic people is that they have a positive attitude toward others and the events around them, which provides them with a strong connection with others and more reception of financial and emotional support.

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Correlation coefficient (r)	Squared correlation (r ²)	Adjusted coefficient of determination (R ²)	Standard error of estimate
0.783	0.613	0.611	0.207

The correlation coefficient indicated that 0.611 of the variation of optimism was explained by religious beliefs and social support, demonstrating a positively high correlation between variables.

As shown in [Table 4], the correlation of all variables at 95% confidence level and 5% measurement error was found to be significant ($P < 0.05$). Thus, the assumption of equality of regression coefficients to zero was rejected for all variables, i.e. independent variables (religious beliefs and social support) had a significantly positive effect on the dependent variable (optimism). Moreover, based on the regression model, it can be concluded that religious beliefs, with $\beta = 0.532$, had the maximum level of correlation with optimism among students. According to the output of regression model, the linear equation was as follows:

$$\text{Optimism} = -2.308 + 1.104 (\text{religious beliefs}) + 0.62 (\text{social support}).$$

This is in line with the results of Asgari [1]. To explain this finding, it can be argued that when the people are supported by supportive sources, they will have a more optimistic view toward future and life.

In the present study, a significantly positive relationship was found between religious beliefs and optimism, i.e. the students’ optimism was increased with a rise in religious beliefs. This is in agreement with the findings of Almeida, Mays, Seligman et al [12, 13, 14]. It can be said that religious beliefs provide the people with this confidence that there is always a strong power that support them. These people deal with the events more easily by relying on their belief and are more hopeful and optimistic toward future.

Finally, the results of the current study with regard to the correlation of gender with religious beliefs, social support and optimism showed that religious beliefs was more strong in women than in men, which is in line with the findings of Ghamari and in contrast with the results of Esmaeiltabar [15, 16].

Conclusion

The results indicated the positive correlation of optimism with religious beliefs and social support. Thus, the educational authorities and higher education managers are suggested to reinforce the religiosity spirit and develop support resources among students to enhance optimism and improve their performance.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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