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The Relationship between Self-Alienation, Spiritual Well-Being, Economic Situation and Satisfaction of life: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Objective: We mainly sought to understand the relationship among college students' spiritual well-being, life satisfaction, economic status, and alienation.

Methods: A sample of 292 undergraduate students (187 females and 105 males) between the ages of 18 and 26 years were selected using the cluster sampling method. Then, they completed measurement questionnaires of alienation, satisfaction with life and spiritual well-being scales.

Results: Correlation coefficient indicted that each subtype of spiritual well-being (religious and feeling meaning and purpose in life) were inversely related to alienation. Life satisfaction had positive correlation with spiritual well-being, but had negative correlation with alienation. On the other hand, home and family income level was associated negatively with alienation and positively with spiritual well-being and life satisfaction.

Conclusion: In conclusion, use of Structural equation modeling (SEM) method showed that meaning and purpose in life and alienation were more related to life satisfaction than to the spiritual well-being. It is also demonstrated that SEM is a feasible technique for modeling the relation between spirituality, life satisfaction and alienation.

Introduction

Youths constitute a significant great segment of the working-age population in Iran. The importance of this age to current and future healthcare workforce development, and is undeniable. Life satisfaction in this group must become the crucial priority of clinicians, medical practitioners and policy makers. Theorists have suggested that enhancing the quality of life (or life satisfaction) of individuals is the base of health promotion, which leads to improvement of their overall health and well-being [1]. Consequently, identifying the effective factors on students' life satisfaction has become the interest of many researchers in recent years [2,3].

The effectiveness of group play therapy in children's GAD has been evaluated in reviews and meta-analysis. The aim of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of group play therapy in reducing GAD symptoms in a group of Iranian children.

Subjective well-being (SWB) is useful to distinguish an affective and a cognitive component of people's life. The affective component is an individual's (actual or perceived) hedonic balance (i.e., the balance between pleasant affect and unpleasant affect). The cognitive component is an individual's life satisfaction [4]. This study mostly focuses on perceived overall life satisfaction as one aspect of positive Subjective well-being among college students. Diener and Lucas [5] define SWB as a ''judgmental process, in which individuals assess the quality of their lives as a whole based on their own unique criteria''.

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Previous studies have investigated the partial importance of different correlates of life-satisfaction. For example, adolescents' global life-satisfaction reports are related to a variety of variables, including environmental variables (6), intrapersonal (e.g., internal locus of control, self-efficacy) and interpersonal variables (7,8), demographic variables and personality and temperament variables (7,9). Specifically, low levels of life satisfaction are similarly predictive of a variety of negative outcomes, including mental and physical health problems (10). On the other hand, high level of life satisfaction is related to positive outcomes in intrapersonal, interpersonal, vocational, health, and educational arenas (11). Relatively few studies have explored the relationship between spiritual well-being and the satisfaction of life of youths. Utsey and his colleagues (12) found the culture specific coping and spiritual well-being as significant predictors of quality of life. Tate and Forchheimer (13) showed that spirituality is associated with both quality of life and life satisfaction. Paloutzian (14) has also argued that spiritual well-being does play a significant and positive role in subjective well-being. Murray and Ciarrocchi (15) concluded in a related study that life satisfaction correlates with greater congregational support, along with decreased congregational conflict and spiritual struggles. However, these studies have been mostly contributed to western cultures and generalization of findings in other cultures remains unknown. Indeed, there is a general need for psychosocial investigations on influencing factors on youths' life satisfaction of communities like Iran. We expected that spiritual well-being would account for variation satisfaction of life in Iranian culture.

In addition, among the variables that potentially contribute to satisfaction of life, alienation appears to be an important one. Alienation refers to a sense of social estrangement; lack a sense of belonging, to feel cut-off from family, friends, or school and an absence of social support or meaningful social connection (16,17). Seeman (18) conceptualized alienation and distinguished among six basic meanings of alienation based on how they had been used empirically and theoretically. In this area, research attention has been directed to five dimensions: powerlessness (a sense of low control over personal affairs or social events), meaninglessness (a sense of incomprehensibility about personal and social affairs), social isolation (a sense of exclusion or rejection, as opposed to social acceptance), self-estrangement (a discrepancy between actual and idealized self that was manifested in adolescents as low self-esteem and feel bored with life) and normlessness (attraction to socially unapproved means for achievement of goals (19).

Studies have pointed out that alienation leads to different problems including drug abuse, identified aggression, gang activity, violence, vandalism, absenteeism. It also leads to other forms of deviant behavior as low political participation, high staff turnover, and litany of other social deviations, alcohol use, crime, truancy, suicide, psychosomatic symptoms and other psychological and emotional problems (19,20-22). Particularly, alienated students experience inability to cope with unfulfilled social and learning expectations. In addition, alienation may be seen as a strategy of self-preservation in a situation where few active coping mechanisms are available (23).

Finally, the relationship between low income, life satisfaction and alienation among college students in Iran deserve special attention because of the growing income discrepancy between poor and wealthy families. Econometric analysis suggests a positive correlation of the overall satisfaction-with-life variable with factors such as expenditure per capita, equality of incomes, youth, working status, non-agricultural employment, non-metropolitan living, and better education (24). Besides, some studies have argued that family income influences college students' subjective well-being (25,26).

This study examines a simple psychosocial model of life satisfactions which is presented in figure1. Furthermore, we examined relationship between life satisfaction and alienation spiritual well-being separately by race and gender.
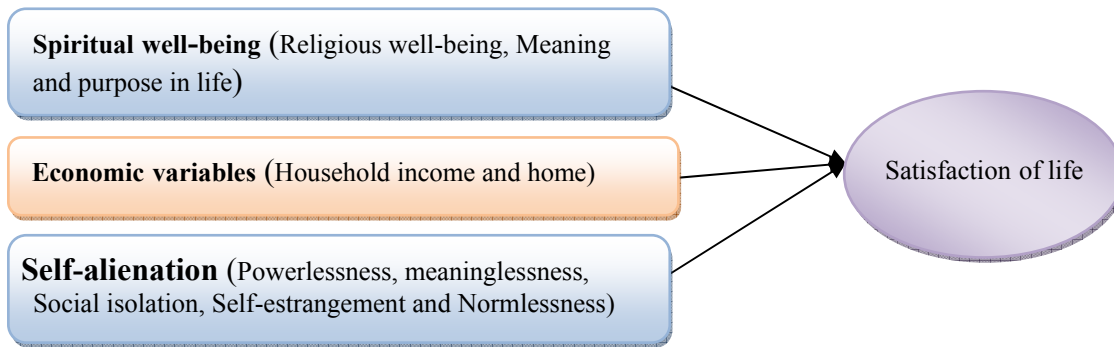
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the model of life satisfaction

Materials and Methods

Two hundred ninety two undergraduate students from University of Tabriz, Iran participated in this study. These students were selected using the cluster sampling method. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 26 (Mean= 20.59 years, SD = 1.59 years). Participants completed a questionnaire package contained a series of self-report questionnaires including 1) Spiritual Well-Being Scale, 2) Satisfaction with Life Scale, and 3) General Alienation Scale. The standard forward-backward procedure was applied to translate the mentioned questionnaires from English into Persian language. The authors translated the items, and provided a provisional version. Subsequently, two English experts translated them back into English and checked to confirm the similarity of the translated items to the original questionnaire. To verify weak items, we carried out a pilot study. For this purpose, students were asked individually to explain the meaning of each item to make certain that this age range could clearly understand and correctly interpret the items.

Demographic questionnaire: Questions regarding age, sex, manse and family income levels were asked. Income is based on monthly household income categorized in nine clusters: 1=1 million rails (100$) or less, to six=more than 10 million rails (1000$).

Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) (27,28): The SWBS consists of twenty items evenly divided to comprise two subscales of religious well-being (RWB) and Existential well-being (EWB). In this study the items with meaning and purpose in life were used. The SWBS is in Likert-type format, ranging from one to six,

with a higher number representing greater well-being. The SWBS has been used with different populations and has demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability and validity (29). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this study was calculated to be 0.81 for both existential and religious well-being.

General Alienation Scale (GAS) (30): This scale consists of 33 items, and responses are made on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 5= strongly agree to1= strongly disagree. A high score on this measure suggests high alienation. In order to examine the internal consistency of the 32 item inventory, total Cronbach's alpha reliability was found 0.81.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (31): Based on previous researches, we used SWLS, which is a valid and reliable measure of life satisfaction among different populations (31-35). The five items of this scale were rated on a five-point Likert-type format (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency as an estimate of reliability has been shown to be consistently high, and generally exceeds values of around 0.80 (36). The internal consistency of the SWLS, in this sample, was 0.66.

This research was conducted in the winter semester of 2008-2009 academic years under direct authorization of the relevant head of students' department. Participants completed questionnaires on their own and handed the completed questionnaires directly to the researchers.

Structural equation modeling

Structural equation modeling techniques specifying the *causal* relationships, like the

one shown in Figure 1, represents the data (e.g., whether spiritual well-being, economic situation and alienation influences student' life satisfaction). The maximum likelihood method of parameter estimation was used and the model converged in 11 iterations. We first tested the initial model shown in Figure 1. After evaluating the fit of this initial model, we conducted further analyses to identify the most significant and meaningful modifications. We examined modification indexes and paths that were most likely to improve the fit of the model and which made theoretical sense. To evaluate the fit of the models, we focused on a variety of different types of fit indexes including the Normed fit index (NFI), the Comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Incremental fit index (IFI). NFI, CFI, IFI and TLI values greater than 0.90, and a value of RMSEA between 0.05 and 0.08 were judged as providing a reasonable fit to the data following convention models (37). The χ^2/ df ratio is a frequently used measure, and a value of less than 2 is considered to show a very good fit (38).

Statistical Analyses

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis. All statistical calculations including estimating fit indices, errors, and model parameters were performed using the program Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS 18.0) (39). Descriptive, bivariate correlation, reliability, and missing data analysis were executed using PASW Statistics 18.

Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviations) for each variable by gender scores and it also shows the bivariate correlations for the spiritual well-being, life satisfaction, demographic variables and alienation measures. An independent sample T-test was run to determine the effects of gender on alienation. Results of the evaluation of normality, homogeneity of variance, and linearity were also satisfactory.

Table 1 presents the means, and standard deviations for all variables. The independent-samples T-test revealed significant differences relative to gender regarding the dependent measures by gender, t=2.029, df=218.77, p=0.04.

Table 1. Mean (SD) for spiritual well-being, alienation, life satisfaction and demographic information

Variables	Female (n=105)	Male (n=187)
Spiritual well-being		
Religious well-being	45.65 (6.59)	42.05 (8.74)
Purpose in life	41.70 (7.48)	39.99 (7.73)
Life satisfaction	14.43 (3.91)	13.47 (3.84)
Demographic information		
Family income level	3.32 (0.76)	3.28 (0.74)
Age	20.35 (1.56)	21.01 (1.57)
Income level	3.94 (1.10)	1.28 (0.12)
Manse	3.98 (0.69)	3.79 (0.87)
General alienation		
Cynicism	9.22 (1.87)	8.92 (2.11)
Powerless	24.33 (4.47)	24.33 (5.03)
Dissatisfaction	20.64 (4.65)	21.90 (4.59)
Isolation	37.82 (6.23)	7.29 (0.61)
Normless	17.64 (4.78)	18.03 (4.68)

As shown in table 2, religious well-being, purpose in life, and life satisfaction were negatively correlated with alienation. On the other hand, religious well-being and purpose in life were positively correlated with life satisfaction. In addition, manse was associated negatively with alienation and positively with life satisfaction.

Table 2. Pearson inter-correlations among alienation, spiritual well-being (religious well-being and meaning and purpose in life), and demographic variables (Income level and Manse)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Religious well-being	1										
2. Purpose	0.48**	1									
3. Cynicism	-0.13*	-0.17**	1								
4. Powerless	-0.18**	-0.45**	0.29**	1							
5. Dissatisfaction	-0.23**	-0.12*	0.30**	0.36**	1						
6. Isolation	-0.28**	-0.40**	0.33**	0.46**	0.46**	1					
7- Normless	-0.16**	-0.37**	0.32**	0.46**	0.14*	0.31**	1				
8. Self-alienation-total	-0.30**	-0.46**	0.51**	0.76**	0.66**	0.82**	0.63**	1			
9. Satisfaction of life	0.18**	-0.53**	-0.22**	-0.30**	-0.14*	-0.42**	-0.27**	-0.41**	1		
10. Income level	-0.14**	0.06	-0.05	-0.06	0.03	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	0.18**	1	
11. Manse	-0.03	0.11	-0.11	-0.09	-0.07	-0.10	-0.13*	-0.14*	0.23**	0.38**	1

Table 3 summarizes the results of the initial and final path models. As can be seen in the left half of this table, the fit indices indicate that the initial models are reasonable, but not highly fits to the data (i.e., NFI and TLI<0.90, IFI and CFI=0.91 and RMSEA=0.54). Accordingly, we modified the model by eliminating indexes that their

regression coefficient was not statistically significant (dissatisfaction, genes, and age). The final path diagram is shown in Figure 2. Each diagram displays the standardized regression coefficients for the relevant paths in the model that were all statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The statistical results for goodness-of-fit indices indicate that the final model fits well ($\chi2/df$ = 1.66, IFI=0.95, CFI=0.95, Tucker-Lewis=0.993, RMSEA=0.04).

Table 3. Fit indices for structural model

Fit Measure	Initial	Final
$\chi^2/$ df	1.86	1.66
NFI	0.82	0.88
IFI	0.91	0.95
CFI	0.90	0.95
TLI	0.88	0.93
RMSEA	0.05	0.04

Normed fit index (NFI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Incremental fit index (IFI)\

In addition, There is no near-zero standard errors for the factor loadings and path coefficients for the mentioned model, and except for religious well-being on Quality of life, the rest variables are significantly different from zero (Table 4). Of great interest in the analysis are the path coefficients that constitute the structural portion of the model. The path coefficients for the path from subscales of well-being, self-alienation, and economic status to satisfaction of life are all significant.

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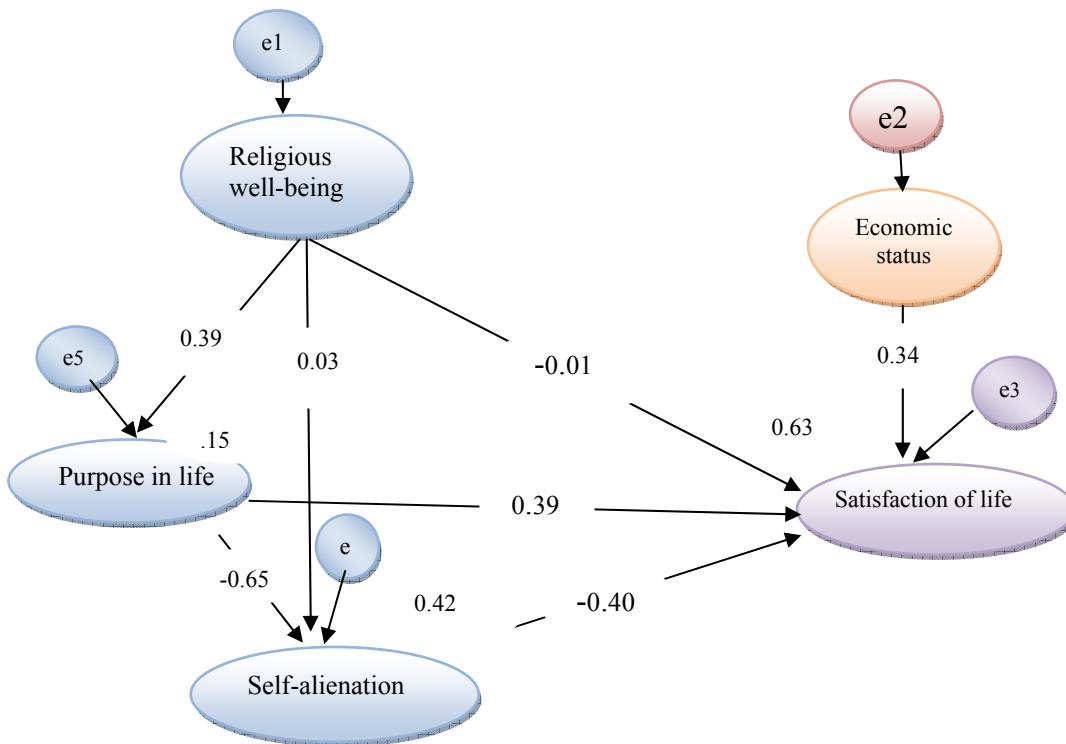

Figure 2. Final structural model for spiritual well-being, alienation and economic variables for life satisfaction.

Table 4. Regression coefficients in the Model

Variable			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Existential well-being	<---	Religious well-being	0.42	0.08	5.33	0.001
Self alienation	<---	Existential well-being	-2.45	0.33	-7.37	0.001
Quality of life	<---	Existential well-being	0.50	0.13	3.75	0.001
Quality of life	<---	Self alienation	-0.14	0.04	-3.82	0.001
Quality of life	<---	Economic	0.52	0.15	3.37	0.001
Quality of life	<---	Religious well-being	-0.02	0.09	-0.22	0.827
Cynicism	<---	Self alienation	0.24	0.04	6.13	0.001
Powerless	<---	Self alienation	1			
Isolation	<---	Self alienation	1.32	0.15	8.72	0.001
Normless	<---	Self alienation	0.81	0.10	8.10	0.001
Manse	<---	Economic	0.61	0.19	3.25	0.001
Income	<---	Economic	1			

Discussion

The present study investigates the correlates and predictors of life satisfaction for Iranian adolescents. We also proposed a structural model for accommodating these variables. Our findings have indicated that there were negatively significant relationship between alienation and life satisfaction. The part of our results replicated past findings in that we found close associations between meaning and purpose in life, religious well-being and life satisfaction. Most importantly, the estimation of the model provided strong support for our hypotheses that the latent constructs, meaning and purpose in life, and religious well-being are interrelated with each other, and that they both have direct effects on life satisfaction. The final structural model summarized the pattern of relationship between the two variables with over half of the variance (63%) in the life satisfaction construct explained by purpose in life and self-alienation. Other studies typically found correlations of 0.50 to 0.75 between meaning in life and well-being. Zika and Chamberlain (40) investigated the correlation between three different meaning in life scales and the three components of well-being. Their samples were from New Zealand and included 194 mothers, 150 elders, 160 students, and 120 randomly selected community adults. The majority of the various correlations between meaning in life and well-being components were in the range of 0.50 to 0.75. Harlow et al (41) studied the purpose in life test and a factor consisting of positive affect, negative affect, impaired motivation, and impaired relationship 722 young adults. They found correlations of 0.64 for women and 0.65 for men. In general, these studies found that meaning in life has a higher correlation with life satisfaction. Furthermore, students who are identified with higher levels of spirituality and religious engagement indicate that they are more frequently at peace and are able to find meaning in difficult circumstances. Researchers have also illustrated that religious beliefs enhance psychological well-being and help individuals cope with stress (42,43).

Consistent with the literature on meaning and purpose in life, and religious well-being, our result confirm that people often make attributions to God that enhances life meaning as well as well-being (42). Furthermore, religion and religiosity provide us with meaningful events, which provide a paradigm in which we develop a sense of coherence and predictability about the world. Although this is not directly related to happiness, it somehow reduces our anxiety and worry about daily events and our future. Studies show that general religious beliefs or rituals help people to overcome stressful circumstances, such as the loss of a loved one or a terminal disease. These studies demonstrate the comfort aspect of religion (44).

The present model demonstrated religious well-being has little contribution but meaningful on the life satisfaction of adolescents in comparison to purpose in life. Researchers consistently reported a positive relationship between life satisfaction and religiosity. Ellison et al. (27) argued that religious meaning was more important than religious belongingness for a positive relationship with life satisfaction. Maheshwari and Singh found as well that staunch religious belief was positively associated with satisfaction (45). Some empirical studies in the US and Europe find

that religion accounts for 5-7% of the variance in life satisfaction similar to the impact of physical health magnitude on well-being (46). Furthermore, it seems that culture may influence on life satisfaction. Individualistic cultures emphasize the independence of individuals, freedom of choice and individuals' needs and filling life with many pleasant emotions; whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize the interdependence of individuals, their close relationships with others, fulfillment of personal goals, cultural norms and conformity and harmony in thought, feeling and action (47). As a result, hedonic balance is a weaker predictor of life satisfaction in collectivistic cultures [specifically in an Islamic country] than in individualistic cultures (48).

Consistent with other findings (24), the household economic situation (household income level and manse) has greater influence on quality of life. Research conducted by Fahey and Smyth (49) within thirty-three European societies also identifies linkages between socioeconomic conditions and subjective well-being. They found that populations in the rich parts of Europe had equally high life satisfactions while those in the poorer societies had low and unequal life satisfaction. Social inequalities within rich European countries had little effect on life satisfaction while they had significant effects in poor countries. Moreover, inequalities between European societies had strong effects on well-being. The comparative studies often showed much stronger correlations between subjective well-being measures and a nation's average income. People in wealthier countries are found, on average, to be more satisfied with their lives than people in poorer countries. The correlations are not only positive, but are also strong (0.59 in study of Diener *et al*; 0.51 and 0.59 in Veenhoven's studies) (4,50,51). Even cross-level correlation finds that poor people living in poor countries are less satisfied compared to poor people living in affluent countries (25).

As Shown in figure 2, the path from self-alienation to life satisfaction was significant, as expected. An alienated person feels estranged from the world, from others, or from God; a self-alienated person feels estranged from himself. The estranged self feels enslaved; it has no sense of agency. Work, love, and activity stand as masters of the enslaved self, because they seem meaningless (52). As predicted, Individuals with higher levels of religious well-being and life satisfaction express lower levels of alienation. The more one was alienated, the greater was the amount of negative affect and the less was life satisfaction. A possible explanation is that spirituality addresses existential or transcendent questions. Such questions concern the meaning and purpose of life, conviction that life is meaningful and purposeful, and are essential to spirituality (53). Jackson (54) found that younger adolescents expressed greater self-alienation than older males. Self-alienation reflects conflict and dissatisfaction emerging from identity-role discrepancies during the adolescent stage of psychosocial development, and would decrease with vocational commitment.

Our study was limited to college students. More studies targeting other age ranges is suggested in order to generate more solid relationship among constructs examined in this study. A larger, more representative sample size could increase the generalizability of the results and would increase the study power to assess the possible relationships. An additional inherent limitation was the self-report measures. Some students may have felt that the questionnaire was not applicable to them.

In conclusion, use of Structural equation modeling method showed that meaning and purpose in life, and alienation were more related to life satisfaction than to the spiritual well-being. It is also demonstrated that SEM is a feasible technique for modeling the relation between spirituality, life satisfaction and alienation.

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