Spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among university students

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among the university students in Jordan. A cross-sectional descriptive-correlation design was used to carry out on a convenience sample of 919 students at the University of Jordan. University students reported moderate levels of both spiritual well-being and perceived social support, and they were slightly satisfied with their lives. Significant positive correlation was found between spiritual well-being with perceived social support and life satisfaction ($r = .49, .53, p < .001$) respectively, and positive correlation was found between perceived social support and life satisfaction ($r = .46, p < .001$). Both domains of spiritual well-being had significant positive correlation with all sources of perceived social support. The relationships between spiritual well-being and perceived social support should be considered in university health programs. Study implications and recommendations were discussed.

Introduction

Background

Spiritual well-being is one of a core human component that provides driving force to give person stability, meaning, fulfillment in life, faith in self (Rovers & Kocum, 2010). It was defined according to Moberg (2002) as a sense of transcendence beyond one's circumstances, and other dimensions such as the purpose of life, reliance on inner resources, and sense of within-person integration or connectedness. Moreover, spiritual well-being has two dimensions; horizontal (existential) dimension refers to the sense of purpose in life, peace and life satisfaction, and vertical (religious) dimension refers to the sense of well-being in relation to God or higher power (Moberg, 2002). In recent years, literature showed explicit interest about spiritual well-being, and its influences on physical, social, and psychological aspects of person's life (Rovers & Kocum, 2010).

Spiritual well-being among university students was investigated in various studies, Musa (2015) showed that university students reported relatively high means of spiritual well-being among both males and females. Moreover, spiritual well-being was associated with better college adjustment (Kneipp, Kelly, & Cyphers, 2009), stronger engagement in health-promoting behaviors (Hsiao, Chien, Wu, Chiang, & Huang, 2010), better quality of life and higher levels of happiness (Abdel-Khalek, 2010), and higher levels of social support (Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, & Dodd, 2009).
The literature had supported the relationships between spiritual well-being and perceived social support among university students (Weber & Cummings, 2003). The perceived social support was defined according to Wang (2014) as a help or care provided by other people that the persons can notice or feel, it includes emotional concern, reassurance, direction, and giving information or motivation. In Jordan, University students reported the moderate perception of perceived social support, Female students had higher perceived social support than male students (Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008). While, the perceived social support provided by families was higher than the provided by friends (Zaitawi, 1999).

University students’ life filled with various social and cultural challenges such as living within a new environment or overwhelmed with academic or economic demands (Hamdan-Mansour, Halabi, & Dawani, 2008). Although some students may overcome these challenges well, while others may experience high level of stress and low life satisfaction as a negative responses for these challenges, therefore, perceived social support provided by families, friends or significant others playing a vital role in adjusting university students life (Rahat & İlhan, 2016), and enhancing the life's satisfaction (Putra & Fauzi, 2015).

Life satisfaction was defined as an evaluation of persons life's as a whole, rather than the emotions or feelings that are experienced in the moment (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), in recent years, life satisfaction extends not only to which basic needs are met but also to which the desired goals are achieved (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004). However, it refers to a subjective judgmental process about how persons evaluate their quality of life, and what is the persons’ perceptions about the appropriate standard (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008).

Life satisfaction was measured among university students at various public and private universities in Jordan, the results showed that 75% of students had moderate to high levels of life satisfaction (Hamdan-Mansour, Dardas, Nawafleh, & Abu-Asba, 2012). In addition, life satisfaction was correlated with more positive attitude toward life, which encourages university students to be involved in a religious activity and to enhance their quality of life (Anye, Gallien, Bian, & Moulton, 2013).

Unfortunately, there are no studies that had been conducted about the relationships of spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among the university students in Jordan. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to describe the levels of spiritual well-being and perceived social support among the students at the University of Jordan, and to explain the correlation between the domains of spiritual well-being (meaning/peace and faith), perceived social support provided from different sources such as (families, friends or significant others), and life satisfaction. While specific research questions were:

1. What are the levels of spiritual well-being and perceived social support among the students at the University of Jordan?
2. What are the relationships of the different domains of spiritual well-being (meaning/peace and faith), perceived social support provided from families, friends or significant others, and life satisfaction among the students at the University of Jordan?
3. Is there differences in the means of spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction in relation to gender, student's major, and academic year?

Methods

Design and sample

A descriptive correlational design was used at the University of Jordan; which is the largest public university in Jordan, located in Amman, and includes more than thirty thousand students in all faculties (University of Jordan facts and figures, 2012). The students were invited for participation during the academic class in various university's faculties. The researcher explained to students the study purposes, required time to fill the questionnaire, and directions about how to obtain and return the questionnaire packages. The interested students in participation were gotten a package of three self-reported
questionnaires with a cover page presenting the study aims, significance, data collection instructions, contact information for the researcher, and a statement informing the participants that their privacy would be protected and they had the right to withdraw at any time without any penalty, and they did not face any potential risks or current benefits. A total of one thousand questionnaire packages were distributed to students. Nine hundred and thirty-two university students completed and returned their questionnaires, with a response rate of 93%. After data screening, 919 questionnaires were eligible for analysis. The other questionnaires were rejected because of 50% or more of missing values. Prior to data collection, the ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board (IRB) in the Faculty of Education and Deanship of Academic Research at the University of Jordan. To protect the individuals’ identity, subject’s identification number was assigned to each participant at the beginning of the study. All participants’ information was kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher office.

**Measures**

Self-reported questionnaires were used to collect the data from the participants, which includes two parts: part one the author-developed demographic profile. Part two consists the Arabic version of valid and reliable scales to measure spiritual well-being, perceived social support and life satisfaction.

**The Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy-Spiritual well-being-non-illness (FACIT-SP-non-illness)**

Spiritual well-being was measured using the Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy-Spiritual well-being-non-illness (FACIT-SP-non-illness). It was used to measure peace, meanings of life, and faith related to activities, attempted, attitudes, and feelings experienced in the last week (Peterman, Fitchett, Brady, Hernandez, & Cella, 2002). It includes 12 items, each item has a 5-point scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'very much'. The higher score indicated better spiritual well-being. The FACIT-SP-non-illness scale was translated to the Arabic language, the psychometric properties results showed that the scale had sufficient concurrent validity, and high reliability with internal consistency value of .72 (Lazenby, Khatib, Al-Khair, & Neamat, 2013). In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

**Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MPSSS)**

The MPSSS scale developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) to measure the perceived social support from three sources (families, friends, and significant others). It includes 12 items, four items to measure each source of social support. Each item has seven points Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The total score for MPSSS ranges from 12 to 84; (12–48) low acuity, (49–68) moderate acuity, (69–84) high acuity of perceived social support. The MPSSS was reviewed by Eker, Arker, and Yaldiz (2001). The reliability study showed that the scale had high internal consistency value of .89. In the current study, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was .87.

**Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)**

The SWLS is an instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of a person's satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985). It includes 5 items, each item has seven points Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The total score for SWLS ranges from 5 to 35; (5–9) extremely dissatisfied, (10–14) dissatisfied, (15–19) slightly dissatisfied, (20) natural, (21–25) slightly satisfied, (26–30) satisfied, (31–35) extremely satisfied. The SWLS was translated to the Arabic language, the psychometric properties results showed that the scale had adequate test–retest reliability with internal consistency value of .83, and it is suitable for use in research among university students (Taisir, 1998). In the current study, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was .82.
**Potential covariates**

The demographic characteristics for the participants were obtained from an investigator-developed data profile which include age, gender, students’ major, and university academic year.

**Data analysis**

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Science, Version 20). According to the level of measurement, frequencies or percentages statistics were used to describe the demographic variables. Descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation) were used to describe and summarize the main study variables (spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction). Reliability analysis was used to calculate internal consistency values for the measures. Independent sample t-test was used to evaluate spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction in relation to demographic variables. Pearson (r) correlation coefficient test was used to assess the correlation between spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction. Prior applying these tests, the assumptions such as normality and linearity were tested using skewness, kurtosis, and p-p plot.

**Results**

**Demographic data**

The sample consisted of 919 students at the University of Jordan. As showed in Table 1. Thirty-three and a half percent (n = 308) of the students were males and 66.5% (n = 611) were females. Almost 36.7% (n = 337) of the students were in their first academic year, while 13.3% (n = 122) were in their second academic year, 27.2% (n = 250) were in their third academic year and 22.8% (n = 210) were in their fourth academic year or more. Forty-one percent (n = 378) of the students enrolled in humanistic faculties, while 29.6% (n = 272) and 29.3% (n = 269) were enrolled in scientific and health faculties, respectively.

**Spiritual well-being**

The results showed that the mean total score for FACIT-SP-non-illness scale was 35.77 out of 48 (SD = 7.5). The mean score for meaning/peace subscale was 22.61 out of 32 (SD = 5.37), while the mean score for the faith subscale was 13.2 out of 16 (SD = 3.2). However, the highest score of spiritual well-being scale indicates the best spiritual well-being. Studying the differences in the mean scores of spiritual well-being regarding demographic variables. The results showed that female students had higher spiritual well-being (mean = 36.41, SD = 7.5) than male students (mean = 34.5, SD = 7.3), t (917) = −3.65, p = .000. While there are no significant differences in the mean scores of spiritual well-being regarding students’ major or their academic years.

| Variables             | N (%) | M (SD)       |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|
| Age                   |       | 20.5 years (SD = 2.14) |
| Gender                |       |              |
| Male                  | 308 (33.5%) |              |
| Female                | 611 (66.5%) |              |
| Academic year         |       |              |
| First year            | 337 (36.7%) |              |
| Second year           | 122 (13.3%) |              |
| Third year            | 250 (27.2%) |              |
| Fourth year           | 210 (22.8%) |              |
| Students’ faculty     |       |              |
| Humanistic faculties  | 378 (41%) |              |
| Scientific faculties  | 272 (29.6%) |              |
| Health faculties      | 269 (29.3%) |              |
**Perceived social support**

The results showed that the mean score for MPSSS was 62.2 out of 84 (SD = 12.9), which indicated to the moderate acuity of perceived social support. The mean score for the perceived social support provided from the families was 21.3 out of 28 (SD = 5.1), the mean score for the perceived social support provided from friends was 19.8 (SD = 5.0), while the mean score for the perceived social support provided from significant others was 21.0 (SD = 5.4). Studying the differences in the mean scores of perceived social support regarding demographic variables. The results showed that female students had higher levels of perceived social support (mean = 63.2, SD = 12.7) than male students (mean = 60.3, SD = 13), t(917) = −3.18, p = .002. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the mean scores of perceived social support regarding students’ major or their academic years.

**Life satisfaction**

The results showed that the mean score for the SWLS was 23.4 out of 35 (SD = 6.7), which reported that the students at the university of Jordan had slightly satisfaction of their lives. Studying the differences in the mean scores of SWLS regarding demographic variables. The results showed that female students had higher levels of life satisfaction (mean = 23.8, SD = 6.6) than male students (mean = 22.6, SD = 6.9), t(917) = −2.62, p = .009. Moreover, students enrolled in scientific faculties had lower levels of life satisfaction (mean = 22.7, SD = 7) than other students enrolled in humanistic (mean = 23.2, SD = 6.5), or health faculties (mean = 24.4, SD = 6.4), F(2,916) = 4.9, p = .008. There are no significant differences in the mean scores of life satisfaction regarding students’ academic years.

**The relationships between spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction**

The Pearson correlation coefficient test showed that spiritual well-being was positively correlated with perceived social support ($r = .494$, $p < .001$), and life satisfaction ($r = .537$, $p < .001$). However, high levels of spiritual well-being were associated with high levels of perceived social support and high levels of life satisfaction among the students at the University of Jordan. In addition, the perceived social support had significant positive correlation with life satisfaction ($r = .463$, $p < .001$), the students who reported high scores of perceived social support are more likely to report high levels of life satisfaction. Moreover, both dimensions of spiritual well-being (meaning/peace, faith) were positively correlated with the perceived social support provided from different sources (families, friends, and significant others). Lastly, the life satisfaction had significant positive correlation with both dimensions of spiritual well-being and all sources of perceived social support. Table 2 presents the associations between the subscales of spiritual well-being (meaning/peace and faith), the subscales of perceived social support (families, friends, and significant others), and life satisfaction.

**Discussion**

This study described the levels of spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among the students at the university of Jordan, and investigated the relationships between the domains of spiritual well-being (meaning/peace, and faith), perceived social support provided from different

| Perceived social support from families | Perceived social support from friends | Perceived social support from significant others | Life satisfaction |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Meaning/peace                         | .473**                               | .290**                                        | .412**           |
| Faith                                 | .357**                               | .213**                                        | .326**           |
| Life satisfaction                      | .473**                               | .285**                                        | .396**           |

**Table 2.** Pearson correlation coefficient values between the subscales of perceived social support, the subscales of spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction.

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).**
sources (families, friends, and significant others) and life satisfaction. The results of the current study showed that university students had moderate to high levels of spiritual well-being, which corresponded with previous studies. Anye et al. (2013) reported that 64% of the university students had high levels of spiritual well-being, and 97.9% of university students revealed that spirituality, religiosity, faith, and meaning of life are important to students’ lives (Kneipp et al., 2009). In Jordan, the high levels of spiritual well-being among university students were associated with greater spiritual beliefs and practices (Musa, 2015). However, the majority of the students at the University of Jordan were Arabs, Muslims, and had the same cultural and traditional lifestyles, therefore, their spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g. belief that everything that happened to them returns to God willing) reflect high levels of meaning of life, peace, and faith. In addition, Islamic religion encourages people to offer mercy, kindness, and forgiveness to others which enhance the horizontal dimension of spiritual well-being (relationships between self and others). Furthermore, doing worships to God such as praying, charity, and supplication could enhance the vertical dimension of spiritual well-being (the relationship between self and God) (Musa & Pevalin, 2012). Moreover, the results showed that female students had higher spiritual well-being than male students, these findings may be explained by religious motivation for female students, socialization system, and emotional factors (Rich, 2012).

The current study revealed a significant positive correlation between spiritual well-being with perceived social support and life satisfaction. These results corresponded with the findings of other studies that showed spiritual beliefs and religious attitudes encourage engagement in social support, promote psychological and social health, and enhance satisfaction with self, families, and friends among university students (Sawatzky, Gadermann, & Pesut, 2009). Furthermore, students with high levels of meaning and purpose in their lives reported high levels of life satisfaction and more positive vision of their future (Sawatzky et al., 2009).

The current study showed a moderate perception of perceived social support among the students at the University of Jordan. The results corresponded with previous national and international studies. Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, and Durón (2013) and Zaitawi (1999) revealed that university students had moderate levels of social support provided by families, friends, and significant others. Furthermore, the perceived social support provided from families was higher than the perceived support provided from friends or significant others, which was referred to the Jordanian culture that considered families as an essential support system providing students with closeness, guidance, love, and advices (Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008). In addition, the high levels of perceived social support among female students could be related to the Jordanian culture and social system; which allow female students a privilege of seeking help from friends or others. In contrast, the cultural expectations among male students encourage them to express more autonomy and independent which allow them to defend or deny the need for social support.

Lastly, the perceived social support among the students at the University of Jordan was positively correlated with life satisfaction, this is consistent with the findings of Young (2006) which found that social support has a positive effect on life satisfaction. Therefore, perceived social support provides students with more social comfort, less stress, better interpersonal relationships which lead to increase levels of life satisfaction. In addition, male students or those enrolled scientific faculties reported low levels of life satisfaction compared with others, those students may have more stressful responsibilities or overwhelmed with several academically, financially, or socially duties, which may affect their life satisfaction (Ozben, 2013). Therefore, university administrations should encourage students to promote positive relationships and friendships to enlarge social support networks among university students. Moreover, John, Adekunle, Jamal, and Tashia (2011) reported that overall life satisfaction includes not only the basic needs such as housing, finances, and health but also it includes religious commitment, social incorporation, and social support.
Implications

The findings of this study suggest incorporating dimensions of spiritual well-being in students' lives through developing educational programs to enhance a sense of peace, hope, faith, and comfort which lead to increase levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Some theoretical courses can be modified or developed to discuss spiritual well-being, peace, faith, and religious beliefs and practice. These courses could be elective and available for all university students, and it may encourage students to explore their spiritual resources, maintain their spiritual connections, and enhance their levels of spiritual well-being. Moreover, spiritual well-being could be considered as main part of health in the curricular programs of medical and social sciences. Furthermore, universities may develop extra-curricular activities concentrated on community services such as offering compassion, and caring for weak people, arranging lectures, seminars, or workshops regarding spiritual well-being and its impact on life satisfaction among university students, and providing students with appropriate facilities for religious and spiritual practices such as quiet and private prayer rooms. The role of social workers and psychological counselors in university campuses could be encouraged through conducting a continuous assessment for students with low spiritual well-being and low social support and developing plans to promote their sense of social support and life satisfaction. In addition, engaging students in support groups and activities may be helpful to enhance their sense of social support and self-esteem. However, further studies are needed to explore additional ways that strengthen the social support received from families and friends.

Limitations

The current study was a cross-sectional survey, ignoring the causal relationships between the study variables, therefore, longitudinal and qualitative studies may explain the potential cause-and-effect relationships between variables, and will increase understanding for the association between variables. Another limitation of this study was the participants recruited from the University of Jordan which located in the capital city of Jordan, ignoring the students who studied in less urbanized areas. Lastly, the majority of students followed the Islamic religion and living in an Islamic country, therefore, the current findings may not be generalized to students of other religious groups, or other geographical regions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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