SPRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF MALAYSIAN YOUTHS


Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the magnitude of and association between measures of spiritual and psychological health in a sample of 358 undergraduate students of International Islamic University Malaysia (Mean age = 22.25 years, SD = 1.87). All the study variables correlated significantly positive with each other. Significant gender difference existed in terms of mean life satisfaction scores only, with females more satisfied than males. Overall, spiritual well-being predicted self-efficacy, self-esteem, and life satisfaction significantly. Surprisingly, existential well-being predicted self-efficacy, self-esteem, and life satisfaction significantly, whereas religious well-being failed to do so. Discussion includes implications of the present findings for counseling practice and guidelines for future research.

Keywords: Spiritual health, psychological health, youth.

Although research results indicate that spirituality is an essential component of an individual’s life, little attention has been given to the spiritual and psychological health of youth (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003; Markstrom, 1999). For instance, Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of six leading developmental psychology journals (Child Development, Developmental Psychology, International Journal of Behavioral Development, Journal of Adolescent Research, Journal of Early Adolescence, and the Journal of Research on Adolescence) to investigate the frequency of citations to religion, religious development, spirituality, or spiritual development. However, only 27 (0.9%) out of 3,123 articles published between 1990 and 2002 referenced one or more of these key words in relation to children or adolescents. In the light of the evidence supporting the association between spiritual well-being and many aspects of health, it is surprising that adequate attention has not been given to the examination of

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spiritual and psychological health among youth particularly university students in Muslim countries. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the magnitude of and associations among measures of spiritual and psychological health in a sample of university students in a large Malaysian university.

The relationship between religious participation and psychological health in youth has received growing attention as researchers have revealed links between religious attachment and indicators of positive psychological development (Bjarnason, 1998; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Frankel & Hewitt, 1994; Hyde, 1990; King, Elder, & Whitbeck, 1997; Resnick et al. 1997; Wagener, Furrow, King, Leffert, & Benson, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). In this quest, religion and spirituality have been identified as cogent sources of developmental influence (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kerestes & Youniss, 2002; King, 2003; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). On the other hand, several studies provide support for religiousness as a buffer against risk behavior and a support for positive attitudes and actions among youth (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Resnick et al., 1997; Wagener, Furrow, King, Leffert, & Benson, 2003).

The findings to date suggest that religious involvement often acts as a source of support, resiliency, encouragement, coping, meaning, values, and behavioral prescriptive (Chamberlain & Zika, 1992; Gorsuch, 1988; Pargament & Park, 1995; Ventis, 1995). Religion has also been found to be associated with wellbeing as defined by morale, life satisfaction, congruence with life goals, positive affect, and prosocial behaviors (Plante & Sharma, 2001). Religious affiliation not only seems to protect adolescents from problem behavior (Donahue & Benson, 1995) and maintain youth in times of stress (Donelson, 1999), but it also enables them to thrive by fostering positive developmental outcomes and prosocial behavior (Wagener et al., 2003).

The current model of human health consists of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Most of the previous studies in this area involved physical, psychological, and social aspects of health. In recent years, however, there has been a virtual explosion of research in the area of spirituality and psychological well-being. The surge of interest in these topics reflects the importance of spirituality for individual’s physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Hawks, Hull, Thalman, and Richins (cited in Hammermeister, Flint, El-Alayli, Richnour, & Peterson, 2005) defined spiritual well-being (SWB) as a sense of relatedness or connectedness to others, a provision for meaning and purpose in life,