



# The Relationship Between Mental Health and Spiritual Intelligence Among Primary School Teachers

Karim Shateri<sup>1</sup>, Ali Asghar Hayat<sup>2,\*</sup> and Hamdollah Jayervand<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Primary Education, Ilam Branch (Abdanan Center), Islamic Azad University, Ilam, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Clinical Education Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran

\*Corresponding author: Clinical Education Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran. E-mail: ali.hayat63@gmail.com

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## Abstract

**Background:** Teaching is a highly stressful occupation and teachers suffer from more mental health problems than other professions.

**Objectives:** The current research was aimed to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and mental health among primary school teachers.

**Methods:** A descriptive correlation design was applied in this study. The statistical population consisted of all teachers working in primary schools of Darreshahr in Ilam province during 2016 - 2017 academic year (N = 430), from whom 203 people were selected randomly as a sample, applying Cochran's sample size formula. Data were collected through spiritual intelligence self-report inventory-24 (SISRI-24) and general health questionnaire (GHQ). The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis.

**Results:** The results showed that the mean and standard deviation of mental health was  $17.37 \pm 9.32$ . In addition, findings indicated that the mean and standard deviation of spiritual intelligence and its components including critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion were  $59.35 \pm 12.88$ ,  $17.12 \pm 4.22$ ,  $12.79 \pm 3.50$ ,  $18.16 \pm 4.98$ , and  $11.26 \pm 2.66$ , respectively. Furthermore, findings showed that there is a significant negative relationship between spiritual intelligence and mental health ( $-0.43$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). The results of the regression analysis showed that among the spiritual intelligence components, transcendental awareness ( $\beta = -0.281$ ,  $P < .001$ ) and personal meaning production ( $\beta = -0.244$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ) are better predictors for the teachers' mental health.

**Conclusions:** According to the results of the present study, a higher level of spiritual intelligence leads to higher level of teachers' mental health. Therefore, it is recommended that education officials develop programs for training and enhancing teachers' spiritual intelligence that, in turn, can lead to the improvement of the teachers' mental health.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Intelligence, Mental Health, Primary School, Teachers

## 1. Background

Teaching is a highly stressful occupation and teachers suffer from more mental health problems than other professions (1). Today, many countries are struggling with teachers' mental ill health problems (2-7). Teachers are, more than ever, responsible not only for the academic progress of their students, but also their personal development as well (8). On the other hand, parents' expectations have risen and teachers are often blamed for children's poor performance (8). Teachers must also develop and maintain an effective working relationship with their colleagues and supervisors for purposes of social support and assistance in administrative involvement (9). Factors such as class size, student misbehavior (10-13), high work-

load, changes in education system, low occupational image, and lack of support from colleagues and school heads can put teachers' mental health at risk and can have negative effects on the teachers' work performance and psychological well-being.

According to Bauer et al. (6), to be a teacher is hard work and requires coping of considerable amount of adverse events. They reported that nearly 30% of teachers suffer from significant mental health problems. It is reported that an estimate of up to 40% of novice teachers are leaving the profession after just five years of teaching and 9.3% are leaving within the first year (14). Another study demonstrated that the incidence of neurological diseases among teachers was 55% (15). In the study of Kiafar (1998),

the prevalence of mental disorders among teachers was reported as 28.5%. Moreover, in another study it was showed that 18.9% of teachers in the Golestan province were suspected of psychiatric symptoms (16).

A great deal of attention has been paid to mental health problems at the workplace by employers and policymakers due to the fact that it is related to job turnover, absenteeism, and rising costs of social security services (17). Mental health is defined as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (18).

Given the importance of mental health, researchers have increasingly investigated the factors influencing it. Recently, some researchers have shown that spiritual intelligence is relevant to and affects individuals' mental health (19-22). Nasel defines spiritual intelligence as the ability to distinguish, search for meaning, and solve spiritual issues (23). King defined it as a set of mental capacities that is based on immaterial and transcendent aspects of existence such as understanding the self, deep existential thought, and development of meaning (24). Spiritual intelligence is defined as “the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path is more meaningful than another” (25). It is the ability to apply and use the spiritual features and capabilities, which increase our mental health and well-being (26) and help individuals recognize what are the most suitable at the specified time (27).

Previous researches conducted in different contexts indicate that mental health is influenced by spiritual intelligence (19-22, 28-30). For example, Akbarizadeh et al. (20), indicated that there is a positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and mental health and hardiness among nurses. Furthermore, Mohammadi et al. (21), demonstrated that training spiritual intelligence can improve the mental health of male high school students.

Teachers' personality and psychological balance are more important than other professionals. Teachers are frontline professionals who are daily in close contact with children and are therefore, most likely to have the biggest effect on their students as a role model (31). On the other hand, due to its nature and due to the great expectation that goes out of the teachers, teaching is a stressful job. Identifying factors affecting teachers' mental health is of great importance due to its effect on student learning and fostering. In other words, if the mental health of teachers is taken into consideration, teaching-learning process

is accomplished with more quality, which in turn will improve students' academic performance.

## 2. Objectives

Due to the importance of primary education and the key role of teachers in developing the potential talent of the students, this research aimed to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and primary school teachers' mental health.

## 3. Methods

The present study adopted a descriptive-correlative research design to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and teachers' mental health. The statistical population consisted of all teachers working in primary schools of Darreshahr in Ilam province during the 2016 - 2017 academic year (N = 430). Based on Cochran's sample size formula, 203 teachers were selected randomly by applying random numbers table. After preparing a complete list of teachers, each one of them was assigned a number from 1 to 430. Then, 203 people were determined by selecting the numbers randomly. Data were collected using two questionnaires: The spiritual intelligence self-report inventory (SISRI-24) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28).

### 3.1. Self-Report Spiritual Intelligence Inventory (SISRI-24)

To measure teachers' level of spiritual intelligence, Self-report spiritual intelligence inventory (SISRI-24) constructed by King (24), was used. This scale includes four components, namely critical existential thinking (7 items), personal meaning production (5 items), transcendental awareness (7 items), and conscious state expansion (5 items). The items are rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from the response of (0) not at all true of me to (4) completely true of me. Higher scores indicate higher levels of spiritual intelligence. The Persian version of King spiritual intelligence questionnaire demonstrated appropriate validity and reliability (32, 33). In the present research, the internal reliability of the full scale (as estimated by Cronbach's alpha) was found to be 0.95. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha for its four subscales was found to be 0.91, 0.87, 0.93, and 0.78, respectively for critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion components, which indicates that the SISRI-24 has good reliability. In addition, this scale has been extensively used in contemporary studies (24, 34, 35), and its validity and reliability have been verified.

### 3.2. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28)

To measure teachers' mental health, General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) was adapted (36). The measure yields overall health scores (ranging from 0 to 84) and is composed of four subscales named as somatic symptoms (7 items), anxiety and insomnia (7 items), social dysfunction (7 items), and depression (7 items). The items are rated on a Likert scale ranging from the response (0) not at all to (3) much more than usual. High score on this scale represent poor general health. This scale has been extensively applied in contemporary studies (37, 38) and its validity and reliability have been confirmed. This inventory has been normalized in Iran (39). In the current research, the internal reliability of the full scale (as estimated by Cronbach's alpha) was found to be 0.94. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha for the four subscales was found to be 0.94, 0.79, 0.89, and 0.77, respectively for somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression, which indicates that the GHQ-28 has an acceptable level of internal consistency.

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics such as percentage, mean, and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression were used. The SPSS software (version 22) was applied to analyze the data.

## 4. Results

In terms of demographic findings, 62.56% of the respondents were males and the remaining (37.44%) were females. Furthermore, in terms of age, 8.37% were between 20 - 30 years, 19.21% were between 31 - 40, 45.82% were between 41 - 50 years, and 26.60% were above 50 years. In terms of the years of experience, 21.2 % employees had a job experience lower than 11 years, 43.3% from 11 to 20 years, and 35.5% more than 20 years.

The results of descriptive analyses showed that the mean and standard deviation of spiritual intelligence was  $59.35 \pm 12.88$ . In addition, findings indicated that the mean and standard deviation of critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion were  $17.12 \pm 4.22$ ,  $12.79 \pm 3.50$ ,  $18.16 \pm 4.98$ , and  $11.26 \pm 2.66$ , respectively. In addition, the mean and standard deviation of mental health was reported as  $17.37 \pm 9.32$  (Table 1).

As discussed earlier, the primary goal of this investigation was to assess the relationship between spiritual intelligence and mental health. As it is shown in Table 2, there was a negative and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and its components with mental health.

Considering that the high scores in the GHQ indicates lower mental health, the negative relationship between

these two variables shows that with increasing the spiritual intelligence scores, the scores of the GHQ have decreased, this suggests better mental health in people with higher levels of spiritual intelligence (40). In other words, it is true that the relationship between the two variables is negative, however, this relationship should be interpreted as a positive relationship (Table 1).

Considering the highly significant correlations, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the contribution of each independent variable in predicting the dependent variable. The result of the regression test showed that among the spiritual intelligence components, transcendental awareness ( $\beta = -0.28$ ) and personal meaning production ( $\beta = -0.24$ ) are better predictors for the teachers' mental health (Table 2). It is worth noting that in regression model the entry and the removal alpha were 0.05 and 0.10, respectively.

## 5. Discussion

The current research was aimed to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and primary teachers' mental health. The results revealed that there is a negative and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and its components with teachers' mental health. Considering that the high scores in the general health questionnaire indicates lower mental health, the negative relationship between these two variables shows that with increasing the spiritual intelligence scores, the scores of the general health questionnaire have decreased. This shows better mental health in teachers with a higher level of spiritual intelligence. In other words, teachers who have higher spiritual intelligence have less symptoms of mental illness. These findings are consistent with previous research findings (19-22, 28-30). Akbarizadeh et al. showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and mental health and hardiness among nurses (20). Furthermore, Goudarzi et al. also found that spiritual intelligence and teaching life skills have an impact on student's mental health (41). In addition, in another study, Mohammadi et al. indicated that training spiritual intelligence can improve the mental health of male high school students (21).

It can be said that spiritual intelligence helps people solve the problem of existential worth and create a meaning for their activities and lives at higher and stronger levels (19). Spiritual intelligence helps individuals apply the spiritual information to solve their ordinary problems, which consequently leads to higher level of adaptability and adjustment, which in turn increase teachers' problem-solving skills and enables them to overcome problems in a better and easier way (42). Vaughan believed

**Table 1.** Relationship Between Spiritual Intelligence and Teachers' Mental Health<sup>a</sup>

Variables	Mean $\pm$ SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mental health	17.37 $\pm$ 9.32	1					
Spiritual intelligence	59.35 $\pm$ 12.88	- 0.43**	1				
Critical existential thinking	17.12 $\pm$ 4.22	- 0.31**	0.84**	1			
Personal meaning production	12.79 $\pm$ 3.50	- 0.41**	0.81**	0.63**	1		
Transcendental awareness	18.16 $\pm$ 4.98	- 0.42**	0.85**	0.51**	0.59**	1	
Conscious state expansion	11.26 $\pm$ 2.66	- 0.25**	0.83**	0.72**	0.49**	0.64**	1

<sup>a</sup>\*P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01

**Table 2.** Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression to Identify the Contribution of Spiritual Intelligence Components in Predicting Organizational Health<sup>a</sup>

Model	Standardized Coefficients $\beta$	t	P-Value	Collinearity Statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
Constant		14.41	< 0.001		
Transcendental awareness	- 0.281	- 3.61	< 0.001	0.643	1.54
Personal meaning production	- 0.244	- 3.13	0.002	0.643	1.54

<sup>a</sup> Dependent variable: Organizational health

that spiritual intelligence unifies the internal/spiritual life and the external/workplace, which can reduce the external and social problems. From his point of view, spiritual intelligence plays a role in the psychological well-being and overall health of mankind. It can be said that spiritual intelligence improves the quality of life and makes it meaningful, which in turn can improve individuals' mental health. Perhaps this is due to the fact that people's feelings of supernatural phenomena can provide psychological support and may also have a spiritual support (27). Spiritual intelligence makes it possible to use spiritual information in solving daily problems (43) that can reduce individuals' mental stress. Furthermore, Elmer et al. by reviewing research that looked at the effect of spirituality on health, showed that spirituality was associated with lower rates of illness and longer life (44).

Moreover, the results of stepwise multiple regression showed that teachers' mental health can be significantly predicted by two components of spiritual intelligence, namely transcendental awareness and personal meaning production. In other words, the R-squared of 0.22 implies that two predictor variables (transcendental awareness and personal meaning production as independent variables) explain about 22% of the variance in the mental health (dependent variable). In other words, 22% of mental health variations are explained by these two variables and the rest are explained by other variables not studied in the present study. This finding is consistent with previous research findings where spiritual intelligence can pre-

dict mental health (38, 45). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that the existence of spiritual intelligence makes people seek to produce the meaning for their lives and, behind every event and difficulty, consider a goal that can make it easier for people to withstand the difficulties of life. Spiritual intelligence involves behavioral and emotional flexibility (which may originate from spiritual experiences), which improves mental health and well-being. In addition, spiritual intelligence has an adaptive function by providing a framework for finding meaning and understanding the meaning of negative experiences. It can be said that spiritual intelligence makes people accept the hard living conditions more satisfactorily and seek more efficiency in their lives, which, in turn, can have a sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and hence better psychological well-being.

Due to the fact that the design of the research is a correlational descriptive field study, no causal inferences can be made about the research results. Moreover, in this study we only used a questionnaire to collect data. However, self-reported data can contain potential sources of bias that you should be alert to and note as limitations.

Since the findings of this study showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and the teachers' mental health, it is recommended that education officials and principals provide the necessary background for improving the teachers' spiritual intelligence with particular emphasis on the components of transcendental awareness and personal meaning

production. It is therefore recommended that when using in-service training courses, education officials provide the necessary conditions for cultivating and reinforcing this intelligence in the teachers. In this case, it can be expected that the teaching-learning process will be done more effectively. Teachers with higher level of spiritual intelligence naturally endure the teaching difficulties and the work environment hardships and can more effectively accomplish learning at their students.

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