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Title: Prediction of Fear of COVID-19 Based on Spiritual Well-being and Self efficacy in Iranian Students: Emphasizing on Mediating Role of Mindfulness

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Abstract

Background: Given the significance of consequences of Covid-19, as well as the health of students, this study aimed to predict the fear of Covid-19 based on spiritual well-being and self-efficacy among Iranian students: focus on the mediating role of mindfulness.

Methods: This study was a descriptive correlational study. An online sampling method was used, and the sample included 396 students in Tehran. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), Fear of Covid-19 scale, and Paloutzian & Ellison's Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS) were used for data collection. An independent t-test, Pearson correlation, and regression test were used to analyze the data.

Results: The results show that the overall effects of religious well-being ($\beta = -0.192$, $P=0.001$), existential well-being ($\beta = -0.227$, $P=.001$), and self-efficacy ($\beta=-0.093$, $P=.013$) were significant. The indirect effects of religious well-being ($\beta = -0.026$, $P=0.001$), existential well-being ($\beta = -0.013$, $P=0.016$), and self-efficacy ($\beta=-0.04$, $P=0.001$) were significant. The direct effects of religious well-being ($\beta=-0.253$, $P=0.001$), existential well-being ($\beta = -0.205$, $P=0.016$), and self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.133$, $P=0.013$) were significant.

Conclusion: This study discovered that spiritual well-being, self-efficacy, and mindfulness are associated with a reduction in perceived fear of Covid 19 in Iranian students and also expanded our knowledge of mediating roles of mindfulness.

Keywords: Fear of Covid-19, Spiritual Well-being, Self-efficacy, Student, Mindfulness

Introduction

One of the widespread challenges in the last two years is coping with Covid-19. In December 2019, a high-risk virus with wide-spreading power was announced in about all countries. Prevalent signs included tiredness, fever, myalgia, and dyspnea (Nooripour et al., 2021). The high mortality rate from this epidemic and its educational, economic and social consequences have caused more concern and fear among people around the world (Wu et al., 2020).

It has been scientifically proven that the epidemic nature of this virus has led to anxiety and fear of its spread, and concern about the stigma of this disease makes people more susceptible to infection (Ahorsu et al., 2020). Fear of Covid-19 drives people to be on high alert to protect themselves and their loved ones leading to fear and panic in society. The unique nature of Covid-19 and uncertainty regarding the disease's future are likely to feed the fear of Covid-19. Fear can weaken the immune system and make people vulnerable to diseases such as Covid-19 (Tsang, Avery, & Duncan, 2021).

During the turbulent Covid-19 period, several studies have been conducted to examine the predictive components for the likelihood of fear and stress of Covid-19 (Bakioğlu, Korkmaz, & Ercan, 2020).

(Bufford, Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1991) defined spiritual well-being as the combination of existential and theological components of spirituality. Apart from any particular religious reference, existential well-being refers to the horizontal (Davidson, 2000) or "this-worldly" component of spirituality that encompasses the experience of life's meaning and fulfillment. According to previous studies, spirituality increases psychological well-being - as one of the basic pillars of mental health - by strengthening the sense of belonging. In sensitive and stressful situations, well-being can be considered as an important predictor of coping with Covid-19 (Bakioğlu et al., 2020).

In addition to spiritual well-being, other authors have examined components such as self-efficacy as important variables during Covid-19 (Nooripour et al., 2021; Tsang et al., 2021). A person's self-efficacy refers to their belief in taking the necessary steps to achieve specific performance goals. Self-efficacy refers to one's belief in one's ability to exert control over one's motivation, behavior, and social environment (Blanco et al., 2020). Self-efficacy could thus be a protective element in the prevention of mental and physical disorders such as

fear. Self-efficacy, tension, and fear are thought to be negatively related, and recent research on fear of Covid -19 unanimously supports these findings(Satinsky et al., 2021).

In addition to self-efficacy, it is believed that mindfulness techniques such as focusing on one task at a time, walking meditation, stopping what you are doing; putting things down for a minute, taking a breath, observing thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and moving on to something that will help at the moment can promote coping styles with excellent conditions such as fear of Covid-19. These techniques, based on some metaphors, help to reduce stress and fear (Joie-La Marle et al., 2021). Also, people with self-efficacy have higher mindfulness in their daily activities, and during Covid-19, people with high self-efficacy and mindfulness skills reported less fear of Covid-19(Xiong, Yi, & Lin, 2020).

The pandemic Covid-19 also has evident and accurate points for students. Students announced that they would behave more negatively in their academic assignments when faced with the above challenges because of the widespread effects of Covid-19(Blanco et al., 2020, p. 19). Some studies found that mindfulness predicts self-efficacy and spiritual well-being (Ando et al., 2009; Oman, Richards, Hedberg, & Thoresen, 2008). Mindfulness is a significant source of well-being, particularly in non-Western civilizations such as Iranian culture (Christopher, 2018).

Considering the effective role of spiritual well-being, self-efficacy and mindfulness, as well as the negative effects of fear of Covid-19 on students' mental health, and considering the important role of students as a prominent group in society, scientific study of these cases is necessary. To our knowledge, the relationship between these variables has not been studied simultaneously. Predicting fear of Covid-19 based on self-efficacy and spiritual well-being seems to open a new avenue in the Covid-19 literature. As a result of these interpretations, the current study seeks to predict fear of Covid-19 among Iranian students based on spiritual well-being and self-efficacy, with mindfulness as a mediator.

Method

The present study in terms of method, It is a descriptive correlation. Three hundred ninety-six university students from an Iranian university in Tehran are participants in this study. In the present sample, 163 (41.2 percent) were male, and 233 (52.8 percent) were female. The present study was correlational, and the components of spiritual well-being (RWB and EWB) and self-efficacy were considered predictors (independent variable), mindfulness as a mediator variable, and fear of Covid -19 as a dependent variable. Participants completed

these questionnaires in the university setting. Afterward, the researcher assured the participants that they were confident of their answers. In order to clarify any potential conflicts and questions participants may have, four trained research assistants were present during the completion of the questionnaire.

Measures

- **Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS):** The measure was introduced by Brown and Ryan in 2003. It includes 15-item with a six-point Likert scale from (nearly always) to (nearly never). The scale gives an overall score for mindfulness ranging from 15 to 90, while a higher score indicates high mindfulness. The internal consistency of test questions was reported based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient from 0.80 to 0.87 (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). In Iran, Cronbach's alphas were reported 0.90 for the general population (Ghorbani, Watson, & Weathington, 2009). In the current research, its Cronbach's alpha was 0.81.
- **General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE):** The scale was developed in 1979 by Schwarzer & Jerusalem and revised in 1981 into ten items. The score has been based on a four-point Likert ranging from one to four, with scores from ten to 20 as low self-efficacy, scores between 21 and 30 as mild self-efficacy, and scores above 30 as high self-efficacy. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale has been reported 0.82 (Chang, Crogan, & Wung, 2007) and reliability coefficient was reposted 0.69 in German population (Schwarzer, Bäßler, Kwiatek, Schröder, & Zhang, 1997). In Iran, 0.81 was obtained as Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale (Moeini et al., 2008). In the current research, its Cronbach's alpha was 0.78.
- **Paloutzian & Ellison's Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (SWBS).** This was developed in 1982. This scale has 20 items, 10 of which measure existential well-being and ten items measure religious Well-Being. The range of scores for spiritual and existential well-being is from 10 to 60. The range for these items is in the form of a six-point Likert-type; "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Cronbach's alpha of the present study was 0.82 for existential well-being and 0.80 for Religious Well-Being.
- **The Fear of COVID-19 Scale.** This seven-item scale was established in 2020 by Ahorsu et al to assess fear of Covid-19. Scores on a 5-point Likert scale range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The minimum score is 7 and the maximum score is 35. A higher

score indicates more fear than Covid-19. The Cronbach's alpha of the present study was 0.84.

Procedure

Due to the limitations of Covid -19 when collecting data (November 2020 to April 2021) and the impossibility of collecting data in person, the online method (through convenient sampling) was used to collect data. A list of male and female students who were studying in Tehran universities in the academic year 2020-2011 was prepared. The list included undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students who were studying at 15 universities in Tehran. Then the link of the questionnaires was sent to these students through social networks (Telegram, WhatsApp, SMS and university email). After clicking on the link, students will be notified of the consent promise page, which has already been read and agreed upon. Students could only access the questionnaire if they had completed informed consent. The informed consent page contains information such as the objectives of the research as well as the confidentiality of the research. Communication with the students in this study was done through their native language.

Statistical Analysis

T-tests and correlations were calculated to examine possible differences and correlations between the different scales of men and women. We used the bootstrapping procedure for mediators to examine whether mindfulness plays a mediator in the relationship between spiritual well-being and self-efficacy and fear of Covid-19. We used the macro AMOS to test the indirect effects of spiritual well-being and self-efficacy on the potential mediating variable of fear of Covid-19.

Ethical approval

The human research processes concerned the National Research Committee's ethical values, the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, subsequent modifications. When they returned the survey, all participants signed an informed consent form, and the scales were completed anonymously. The authors state that they do not have any competing interests.

Results

In the sample, 163 (41.2 %) were male, and 233 (52.8 %) were female. The age range of the participants was between 19 to 40 years old (age: $M=21.55$ years, $SD=5.47$). 260 (65.6%) were bachelor's student, 84 (21.2 %) were master's student, 34 (8.5 %) were PhD students

and 18 (4.5 %) did not answer this question.195 (42.2%) subjects were married, 153(38.6%) of participants were single and 48 (12.1%) were not responding to this question.

TABLE 1. Relationship between fear of Covid-19 with socio-demographic

	N	%	M	SD	F (df)	p
<i>Gender Status</i>					3.34 (394)	0.001
male	163	41.2	14.18	4.76		
Female	233	52.8	15.84	4.92		
<i>Physical diseases</i>					1.21 (394)	0.23
Yes	10	97.5	13.30	3.74		
No	386	2.5	15.21	4.94		
<i>Covid-19 in Family & friends</i>					1.70	0.04
Yes	41	10.4	16.32	6.03		
No	355	89.6	15.02	4.76		

Bold values indicate the significance at 5% level

Table 2 shows the correlations between the different variables considered. The results show that there was a significant relationship between all the variables with Fear of Covid-19; the correlation between Fear of Covid-19 with Mindfulness ($r = -0.32$, $p < .001$), Spirituality Wellbeing Total Score ($r = -0.376$, $p < .001$), Religious Well-Being ($r = -0.368$, $p < .001$), Existential Well-Being ($r = -0.476$, $p < .001$), and Self-Efficacy ($r = -0.28$, $p < .001$).

TABLE 2. Matrix Correlations

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Fear of Covid -19	15.15(4.92)	1					
2 Mindfulness	60.79(13.88)	-.326**	1				
3 spirituality well-being	32.40(5.45)	-.376**	.247**	1			
4 Religious Well-Being	39.15(6.72)	-.368**	.185**	.208**	1		
5 Existential Well-Being	71.55(9.49)	-.476**	.273**	.721**	.828**	1	
6 Self-efficacy	29.78(6.18)	-.278**	.337**	.221**	.175**	.251**	1

* $P \leq 0.05$; ** $P \leq 0.01$

The Mediating Role of mindfulness

The results of Table 3 show that the overall effects of Religious Well-Being ($\beta = -0.192$, $P = 0.001$), Existential Well-Being ($\beta = -0.227$, $P = 0.001$), and self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.093$, $P = 0.013$) were significant. The indirect effects of Religious Well-Being ($\beta = -0.026$, $P = 0.001$), Existential Well-Being ($\beta = -0.013$, $P = 0.016$), and self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.04$, $P = 0.001$) were significant. The direct effects of Religious Well-Being ($\beta = -0.253$, $P = 0.001$), Existential Well-Being ($\beta = -0.205$, $P = 0.016$), and self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.133$, $P = 0.013$) were significant.

TABLE 3. Mindfulness as mediators between components of spirituality well-being and self-efficacy with Fear of Covid -19

	Total Effect	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	
Religious Well-Being	-0.192 (***)	-0.026 (***)	-0.253 (***)	Partial Mediation
Existential Well-Being	-0.227 (***)	-0.013 (0.016)	-0.205 (***)	Partial Mediation
Self-efficacy	-0.093 (0.013)	-0.040 (***)	-0.133 (.013)	Partial Mediation

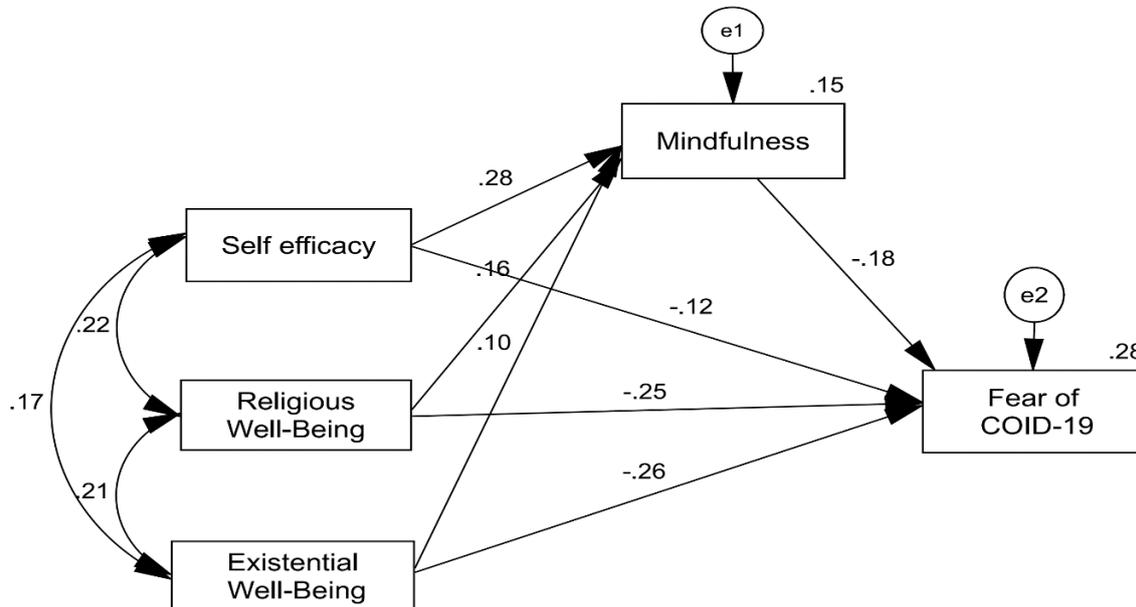


FIGURE 1. Prediction of fear of Covid-19 based on spiritual well-being(RWB &EWB) and self-efficacy in Iranian students: emphasizing on mediating role of mindfulness

TABLE 4. The mediator role of gender in effects among variables

	Male		Female		z-score
	Estimate	P	Estimate	P	
Self- efficacy -->MF	0.724	0.000	0.567	0.000	-0.728
RWB -->MF	0.369	0.037	0.517	0.003	0.593
EWB -->MF	0.142	0.383	0.259	0.036	0.573
Self- efficacy -->Fear	-0.109	0.037	-0.078	0.125	0.436
RWB -->Fear	-0.219	0.000	-0.208	0.000	0.130
EWB -->Fear	-0.193	0.000	-0.184	0.000	0.125
Mindfulness-->Fear	-0.037	0.134	-0.084	0.000	-1.929*

Note; ** p-value < 0.01; * p-value < 0.05; RWB= Religious Well-Being; EWB= Existential Well-Being; MF=Mindfulness; Fear= Fear of Covid -19

The results showed: in men, self-efficacy, and RWB on mindfulness were significant, while the effect of EWB on mindfulness was not significant. The effect of self-efficacy, RWB, EWB, and mindfulness on fear of Covid-19 was significant, while the effect of mindfulness on fear of Covid-19 was not significant. For females, the effect of self-efficacy, RWB, and EWB on mindfulness was significant. The effect of RWB, EWB, and mindfulness on fear of Covid-19 was significant, while self-efficacy's effect on fear of Covid-19 was insignificant. Comparison

of the effects in male and female groups showed a significant difference ($Z=-1.929$, $P 0.05$) in the effects of mindfulness on fear of Covid-19 between gender groups (Table 4).

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate prediction of fear of Covid-19 based on spiritual well-being and self-efficacy in Iranian students emphasizing on mediating role of mindfulness. Through the mediating role of mindfulness, our findings showed relationship between self-efficacy and components of spiritual well-being, such as religious well-being and existential well-being, and fear of Covid-19.

The findings confirmed relationship between self-efficacy and fear of COVID-19. This result is consistent with previous related research (Chudzicka-Czupała & Zalewska-Łunkiewicz, 2020) and inconsistent with (Mistry, Ali, Akther, Yadav, & Harris, 2021). We hypothesized that a feeling of self-efficacy would help deal with the Covid-19 epidemic. One possible explanation is that students with a high sense of self-efficacy are less likely to have psychological issues. Students with severe mental distress symptoms were four times more likely to report low self-efficacy and twice as likely to report delayed academic achievement as students with mild or moderate psychological distress symptoms (Kodden, van Ingen, & Langeweg, 2020). As a result, students with high self-efficacy are less likely to experience mental health issues, such as a variety of mental disorders and fear of Covid-19, based on their current situation. It should be remembered that self-efficacy enables one to accurately assess circumstances and pursue practical coping methods with problems and obstacles experienced (Chudzicka-Czupała & Zalewska-Łunkiewicz, 2020).

Meanwhile, people with high levels of self-efficacy can maintain relatively stable feelings even in dire circumstances. Another interpretation is that self-efficacy promotes attention and self-management (Przepiórka, Błachnio, & Siu, 2019). As a result, low levels of self-efficacy are related to anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. On the other hand, high levels of self-efficacy are associated with increased levels of positive emotions, which lead one to pursue challenges with zeal, set goals, and achieve success in accomplishing those goals (Ouweneel, Le Blanc, & Schaufeli, 2013). Furthermore, self-efficacy and fear of Covid-19 are not directly related (Mistry et al., 2021)s. In other words, the reported correlations may be due to the role of underlying cognitive variables rather than the construct of self-efficacy. Thus, the reported correlation in our study could also be due to the role of cognitive variables.

Considering the correlation between the total spiritual well-being score, religious well-being score, existential well-being score, and fear of Covid-19, some interpretations could be explained based on previous theoretical and scientific findings. In the current study, spiritual well-being was another significant predictor of the dependent variable (fear of COVID -9). From previous studies, students' well-being can be viewed critically during the Covid-19 course, potentially negatively affecting students' psychological outcomes (Deniz, 2021). Literature suggests that a considerable amount of meaning-based coping and spiritual well-being mediated the unpleasant influences of fear of Covid-19 (Özmen, Özkan, Özer, & Yanardağ, 2021).

On the other hand, people with high levels of well-being show great satisfaction with their lives, a pleasant mental state, happiness, contentment, and joy. In contrast, people with low levels of spiritual well-being are dissatisfied with their lives and report repeated negative emotions, anger, hopelessness, sadness, and anxiety (Diener et al., 2010). Thus, studies show that spiritual well-being is negatively correlated with lower mental health problems such as stress, mood disorders, and psychological distress and positively associated with improved psychosocial skills such as self-efficacy, social interactions, optimism, appropriate emotion regulation, adaptive coping styles, and self-efficacy (Sekely, Xie, Makani, Brown, & Zakzanis, 2020). Thus, it suggests that spiritual well-being contributes to and influences how people evaluate their lives, extreme events, illnesses, and the experience of positive and negative emotions (Habersaat et al., 2020). Some authors indicated that mindfulness could decrease fear, stress, and depression, but other results showed that mindfulness could also increase risk factors. In particular, Covid-19 showed that self-awareness of religious beliefs and norms in the context of concern for one's health and responsibility for the health of others could be considered a "booster" for the use of appropriate coping strategies, leading to lower tension and higher well-being. Some authors believed that in the fear of Covid-19, religiously induced fear could trigger students' adaptive strategies by encouraging them to evaluate the Covid-19 situation in terms of fear and threat, loss or challenge, and to conceptualize their previous approaches about Covid-19 through a religious perspective (Schachter & Ben Hur, 2019). Another time, this finding highlights a beneficial effect of spiritual well-being in preventing and reducing natural and health disasters. People facing potentially stressful or dangerous disasters invoke it to reduce fear. Alternatively, fear of

COVID-19 might encourage a student to look to religious beliefs for alternatives to interpret and evaluate events as less dangerous(Hardy, Nelson, Moore, & King, 2019).

The results showed that the overall effects of religious well-being, existential well-being, and self-efficacy were significant. The indirect effects of religious well-being, existential well-being, and self-efficacy, and the direct effects of religious well-being, existential well-being, and self-efficacy were also significant. Our findings are consistent with some previous studies(Dolcos, Hohl, Hu, & Dolcos, 2021). Recent studies have shown that mindfulness practice has a wide range of benefits, including improving working memory, improving psychological functioning, and reducing depressive symptoms, including negative affect and rumination(Darvishi, Otaghi, & Mami, 2020). Similarly, mindfulness has been found to help students cope with stress by expanding self-restraint. (van der Riet, Levett-Jones, & Aquino-Russell, 2018) indicated that mindfulness has an important effect on stress management, perception of painful events, the anticipation of positive emotions, reduction of rumination, and promotion of positive affect. These factors increase life satisfaction and self-efficacy. Functioning well, managing stress, and minimizing the impact of circumstances perceived as painful have economic, personal, and social implications. In addition, mindfulness is related to self-efficacy and better coping with painful circumstances(Jalali, Farghadani, & Ejlali-Vardoogh, 2019). In summary, mindfulness is effective on many occasions, such as preventing future burnout(Guidetti, Viotti, Badagliacca, Colombo, & Converso, 2019), moral decision-making(Sutamchai, Rowlands, & Rees, 2020), and improving memory and attentional processing(van den Hout et al., 2011). Mindfulness could control vulnerability to anxiety in dangerous situations(Taylor, Hageman, & Brown, 2016). It is worth highlighting that the functional importance of mindfulness techniques in managing stress and improving self-care has been emphasized.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study adds to the existing literature on fear of Covid-19. The first limitation is that our research was cross-sectional. Because self-efficacy and spiritual well-being were assessed concurrently with fear of Covid-19, we cannot claim with certainty that the two variables above predict fear of Covid-19. Another limitation is that the online sample focuses on the student population, limiting the data's generalizability. In addition, the use of other instruments along with the questionnaires may increase the validity of the results.

Although our exploratory analyses revealed some reasons for the moderating role of mindfulness, we caution that mediation should always be evaluated with a longitudinal design to assess cause-effect relationships. A significant gap in our study is the role of cognitive variables as latent variables that were not examined. Future researchers should consider adopting a longitudinal design, using more valid sampling methods, and focusing on other statistical populations to investigate these findings further. In addition, the present study examined only one dimension of mindfulness (mindful awareness so future studies should therefore consider using other measurement tools to examine additional dimensions of mindfulness. Furthermore, this limitation could be compensated for in future studies using meta-analysis.

Mental health professionals should use online mindfulness practice during the pandemic. Using a variety of mindfulness films and television shows, group-based therapy applications can be created online. Furthermore, smartphone applications could develop and implement a set of culturally responsive mindfulness activities. Furthermore, the findings suggest that mindfulness (relatively adaptable and positive concept) could be used by health promotion practitioners in general and therapists on person basis to mitigate the negative psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, techniques from third wave of cognitive behavioral therapy could be used to help people who are suffering from severe psychological consequences as a result of their fear of Covid-19.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants gave their permission to take part in the study.

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None

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