



## The predictive role of psychological capital, psychological hardiness and spiritual intelligence in students' psychological well-being

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### Abstract

The psychological well-being refers to the experienced quality of life and reflects the favorable psychological performance and experience. People evaluate their life as good or bad; the evaluation provides people with a sense of achieving the full potential of personal psychology results in psychological well-being. This study was conducted to examine the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence as predictors of students' psychological well-being. The samples included 377 students. In this regard, three colleges were selected from each university as clusters, and then, a scale was given to 50 students of each college. The data were collected using Ryff's psychological well-being scale, Lutanz's psychological capital questionnaire, Kobassa's personal views survey questionnaire, and King's spiritual intelligence self-report inventory. The data were analyzed using simultaneous multivariable regression analysis. The results showed that the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence predicted 58.8% of changes in students' psychological well-being. The psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence predicted changes in students' psychological well-being, and psychotherapists can improve students' well-being through manipulating these three factors.

**Keywords:** Psychological, Capital, Spiritual, Intelligence

### Introduction

The psychological well-being has been largely studied in the last two decades, and the scope of studies in this regard has pervaded from personal life to social interactions [1]. The concept was primarily studied in terms of the absence of psychopathology and negative emotional states, such as depression and anxiety. However, the studies gradually oriented toward

psychological growth and health in early 1960s [2]. Definitions of well-being widely refer to the optimum psychological performance and experiences. According to Christopher, well-being is an essential instrument of humans' experience and an ultimate goal of humans' performance [3]. Gurel [4] defines well-being as the ability to work and play actively, make meaningful relationships with others, develop

the sense of autonomy and purposeful life, and experience positive emotions. Kase, et al [5] define the psychological well-being as how to undertake the perceived existential challenges. In this regard, Klinger [6] believes that the proper well-being includes positive emotions; mature personality characteristics such as self-leadership, participation, self-actualization, and life satisfaction, and benefits and powers of personality such as hope, sympathy and courage. Lutanz states that the psychological well-being is primarily influenced by personal factors and emphasizes on the role of psychological capital in this regard [7]. The psychological capital is a positivism psychological index and a positive state of personal growth and is described as 1) trusting (self-efficacy) to commit and attempt to succeed in challenging duties, 2) positive attribution (optimism) to current and future successes, 3) staying with goals and changing the paths toward goals (hope) to succeed, if necessary, and 4) tolerating, being recovered when tired of problems and difficulties, and even going beyond (resiliency) and achieving success [8].

The psychological capital is of medium durability; it is more lasting than volatile states (mood) and more changeable than personality characteristics. The psychological capital is lasting enough to influence the long-term behavior and performance although it tends to interfere and change. The quality of medium durability is a part of the four subcomponents of psychological capital, and generally, evidence shows that optimism, hope, self-efficacy, resiliency, and psychological capital are rather lasting over time [9].

The initial studies on organizational psychology indicate a positive correlation between psychological capital and well-being. Evidence generally shows that people with high psychological capital are more resistant to stress and maintain their physical and mental well-being when exposed to educational stress. In this regard, Staudinger, Dörner, and Meckler revealed that sense of having control over events and high self-efficacy promoted the psychological well-being and life satisfaction [10].

The spiritual intelligence can be generally accompanied with the psychological well-

being [11], and is defined in different ways by researchers. Zohar and Marshall discuss the spiritual intelligence as the ultimate intelligence with which people explore and solve the problems of meaning and value of life, can set their activities and life in a broader, richer, and more meaningful context, and find a course of action or a stage of life more meaningful than others. Moreover, Emmons considers the spiritual intelligence as a framework for detection and organization of skills, and the abilities required for adaptive use of religion. According to Emmons, those abilities include the capacity for transcendence, enhanced consciousness, ability to sanctify daily works, use of religious sources for solving practical problems, and participation in virtuous behaviors, such as forgiveness, gratitude, humility, compassion, and wisdom [12].

Halama and Seasons [13] examined other descriptions and views about spiritual intelligence. For instance, Sintar introduced spiritual intelligence as thoughts induced to the overall context of creativity. McHawk emphasizes on the intercultural context of spiritual intelligence and introduces it as a general sign of personality. Emmons [14] believes that the spiritual intelligence consists of specific abilities contributing to adaptive problem-solving. Emmons introduces five characteristics showing the spiritual intelligence: 1) the ability to excel, 2) the attitude of reaching states of spiritual consciousness, 3) penetration of sacredness in daily performance, 4) use of spirituality as a problem-solving source, and 5) inherent and behavioral piety.

Increasing evidence supports the assumption that religion and spirituality associate with the improved psychological well-being. Some researchers suggest that the religious orientation associates with the psychological well-being [12]. Almar [15] reviewed the studies on the impact of spirituality on well-being and found that spirituality was effective in reducing the rate of diseases and increasing longevity. When facing with harms, people with religious orientation seem to respond to the interventions better, cope with harms more favorably, and be

less depressed [14 & 16].

Besides the psychological capital and spiritual intelligence, hardiness can be also associated with psychological well-being. The hardiness concept emerged from an existential theory and was developed by Kobasa in 1979 [17]. The characteristic state known as hardiness describes a general style of performance determined with a strong sense of commitment (the ability to perceive world as interesting and meaningful), control (the belief that people's ability influences the events), and challenge (taking new experiences as new opportunities for personal growth) [18]. Hardiness is a system of personality characteristics and acts as a source of resiliency when facing with stressful events in life [19]. There is a lot of evidence that hardiness associates with physical and mental health positively and reduces health negative results caused by stress. Florian, Mikaliker, and Tubman concluded that the available evidence associate hardiness to high levels of physical and mental health [20]. It has been shown that hardiness had a negative correlation with self-report and objective scales and a positive correlation with psychological well-being and acted as a shield against the spread of anxiety or depression. Hardiness among war captives made them less vulnerable to negative psychological changes and was accompanied with high levels of positive changes [17]. The studies conducted on the effects of hardiness on health-related results show that hardiness in people with high levels of stress is negatively accompanied with physical syndrome and associate with less probability for emergence of the syndrome in future. Studies also show that despite various stressful processes, hardiness contributes to keep and increase the performance, leadership, spirit, and well-being [21]. Neria *et al.* indicated that the total score of hardiness and its components (commitment and control) significantly correlated with scores of mental health, anxiety, and psychiatric semiotics [22]. Moreover, it has been shown that hardiness played an important role in psychological well-being of army personnel and reduced anxiety and depression [17]. In their study, Maddi *et al.* compared hardiness and religiosity in correlation

with depression and anger in American army personnel. Results of their study revealed that the daring arising from hardiness, positive expectations arising from optimism, or spiritual hopes arising from religiosity facilitated positive coping efforts and protected personnel from negative emotions [23]. Kimia [24] found that spiritual well-being and hardiness were predictors of students' well-being and self-confidence for social activities.

Studies show that the psychological well-being has been widely examined, while, there is no a study examining the predictive value of the three variables in students' psychological well-being simultaneously. As students comprise a major part of Iran's young population, and identifying their health status can promote health in this group in specific and in the society in general, this study was conducted to predict students' psychological well-being based on psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence.

### **Method**

This study was conducted on a sample from all 50,000 students in Khwarizmi, Islamic Azad, and Payam-e Noor universities in Karaj, Iran, in 2012-2013. The sample size was determined as 381 students based on Morgan's table. The samples were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. In this regard, three colleges were randomly selected from each university, and a scale was given to 50 students selected through convenience sampling from each college. Totally, 450 scales were given to the students. However, the scales that were filled out incompletely, or incorrectly were excluded from the study, and finally, 377 samples remained and were analyzed. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient, and analytical statistics including simultaneous multivariate regression analysis. The data analysis was performed in SPSS-18 software.

In this study, the data were collected using the following instruments:

Ryff's psychological well-being scale

(PWBS): The psychological well-being refers to the experienced quality of life and reflects the favorable psychological performance and experience. The scale was introduced by Carol Ryff in 1989 and consists of 84 items and 6 factors. The participants answered the items within a 6-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). To determine the validity of the scale, its correlation with other scales, such as Bradburn's affect balance, Neugarten's life satisfaction index, and Rosenberg's self-esteem was examined. The Ryff's scale had an acceptable correlation with above scales and construct validity. In Ryff's study, the Cronbach's alpha reported for the subscales, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth comprised 0.93, 0.91, 0.86, 0.9, 0.9, and 0.87, respectively. A study conducted in Iran measured the internal consistency of the scale using Cronbach's alpha. Results of the study for the subscales, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, self-acceptance, autonomy, and total score comprised 0.69, 0.74, 0.65, 0.73, 0.65, 0.6, and 0.9, respectively [25]. In this study, the internal consistency of the scale was obtained as 0.92 using Cronbach's alpha.

Lutanz's psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ): The psychological capital is defined as characteristics, such as individuals' belief in their abilities to become successful, diligence in following goals, making positive attributions about themselves, and tolerating difficulties [7]. The questionnaire consists of 24 items, 6 items for each subscale, with a 6-point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 6). The confirmatory factor analysis showed that the questionnaire enjoyed the factors and constructs intended by developers of the questionnaire and confirmed the construct validity of the questionnaire. Bahadori Khosrowshahi et al. [26] obtained the reliability of the questionnaire as 0.85 using Cronbach's alpha. The present study determined the Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale as 0.79.

Kobasa's personal views survey questionnaire (PVSQ): Hardiness is considered as a lifestyle

integrating individuals' self-concept, world view, and fundamental state of reviewing life's situations [27]. The questionnaire was developed by Kobasa, Maddi, and Barton and consists of 50 statements. The participants should determine the extent to which the statements are true or false within a 4-point scale from zero (absolutely false) to three (absolutely true). The higher score of the questionnaire indicate the participant's higher psychological hardiness. The questionnaire consists of three subscales including challenge, commitment, and control, which had favorable reliability and internal consistency; and the confirmatory factor analysis showed that these three subscales were interrelated. On the validity of the questionnaire, Nakhoda and Yarali examined the validity of the questionnaire using different scales. Nakhoda obtained the validity coefficients of 0.53, 0.48, 0.35, and 0.38 respectively for the total scale of hardiness and subscales of commitment, control, and challenge. Yarali's study also reported the validity coefficients of 0.6, 0.73, 0.51 and 0.27 respectively for the above variables [28]. The present study determined the Cronbach's alpha for the entire questionnaire as 0.87.

King's spiritual intelligence self-report inventory (SISRI-24): The spiritual intelligence is known as multiple methods of understanding and integration of inner life (mental and spiritual) and outer life in the world. The inventory consists of 24 items in four subscales including the critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. The participants ranked their answer to each item on a continuum (No idea = 0 to absolutely true = 4). The score of the inventory might be between 0 and 96, as the higher score indicated the participant's high level of psychological intelligence. The reliability of the inventory in King's studies on 619 students in 2007 using Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.95, the Cronbach's alpha for the subscales, the critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion comprised 0.88,

0.87, 0.89, and 0.94, respectively. To validate the inventory, King compared the inventory with some valid inventories including the metapersonal self-construal scale, mysticism scale, and intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity scale, and obtained the correlation coefficients of 0.67, 0.63, and 0.78, respectively. Raghieb *et al.*'s study also reported the Cronbach's alpha 0.88 for the inventory [29]. This study determined the Cronbach's alpha for the entire inventory as 0.91.

## Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive data of the studied variables. According to the table, participants aged 18-39 years with mean and standard deviation of 21.94 and 2.75, respectively. Mean score of psychological well-being, psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence comprised 339.78, 96.54, 91.67, and 56.27, respectively. The high score for the each of the above variables indicated the participant's higher level of that variable.

**Table 1** Descriptive data for research variables (n=377)

	M	SD	Min	Max
Psychological well-being	339.78	46.40	238	436
Psychological capital	54.96	12.5	60	128
Psychological hardiness	91.67	17.66	52	134
Spiritual intelligence	56.27	15.45	0	96
Age	21.94	2.75	18	39

The predictive variables had a positive significant correlation with psychological well-being, which showed that the high scores and low scores of the variables associated with increased and decreased

well-being, respectively. Among the variables, the psychological capital had the highest correlation (0.631) with the psychological well-being (Table 2).

**Table 2** Pearson's correlation coefficient between predictor variables with dependent variable

Variables	Psychological well-being	Self acceptance	Positive communication with others	Self-determination	Environment-command	Purposivism in life	Informal development
Psychological capital	0.631 **	0.47 **	0.34 **	0.39 **	0.56 **	0.64 **	0.55 **
Hope	0.54 **	0.41 **	0.24 **	0.36 **	0.53 **	0.55 **	0.46 **
Resiliency	0.35 **	0.19 **	0.25 **	0.25 **	0.32 **	0.33 **	0.31 **
Optimism	0.43 **	0.4 **	0.21 **	0.18 **	0.37 **	0.49 **	0.36 **
Self- Efficacy	0.5 **	0.38 **	0.28 **	0.31 **	0.46 **	0.48 **	0.46 **
Psychological hardiness	0.598 **	0.42 **	0.44 **	0.29 **	0.51 **	0.58 **	0.56 **
Defiance	0.27 **	0.23 **	0.19 **	0.19 **	0.24 **	0.22 **	0.21 **
Commitment	0.6 **	0.42 **	0.47 **	0.25 **	0.51 **	0.62 **	0.58 **
Control	0.58 **	0.4 **	0.42 **	0.29 **	0.5 **	0.58 **	0.57 **
Spiritual intelligence	0.535 **	0.4 **	0.41 **	0.35 **	0.48 **	0.44 **	0.45 **
Critical existential thinking	0.38 **	0.24 **	0.31 **	0.25 **	0.35 **	0.32 **	0.35 **
Personal meaning production	0.58 **	0.46 **	0.43 **	0.35 **	0.51 **	0.51 **	0.49 **
Transcendental awareness	0.37 **	0.28 **	0.3 **	0.24 **	0.36 **	0.28 **	0.31 **
Conscious state expansion	0.55 **	0.43 **	0.41 **	0.39 **	0.49 **	0.46 **	0.44 **

\*\* P<0.01

The simultaneous multivariate regression analysis was used to examine that to what extent the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence accounted for the distribution of psychological well-being. In this regard,

the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence as independent variables (predictive) and psychological well-being as the criterion variable (dependent) entered to the regression model (Table 3).

**Table 3** Results of enter regression analysis for effectiveness factors on psychological well-being

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. error</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>sig</b>	<b>Tolerance</b>
Psychological capital	1.24	0.12	0.38	10.04	0.001	0.755
Psychological hardiness	0.8	0.08	0.35	9.34	0.001	0.788
Spiritual intelligence	0.66	0.09	0.25	6.85	0.001	0.794

The adjusted coefficient of determination (0.588) indicated that the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence accounted for 58.8% of the well-being variance, as the percentage was significant based on the results provided in the table for analysis of regression variance ( $F = 177.63$  &  $P < 0.0001$ ). The result revealed that more than half of the changes in well-being were caused by the above variables, and these variables were largely effective in predicting the presence or absence of psychological well-being. In this respect, hypothesis of the study was confirmed. Furthermore, B and  $\beta$  values respectively showed the unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients indicating the effectiveness rate of each variable in the regression equation. Regarding the values obtained in t test, the effect of all variables in the regression equation was significant ( $P < 0.0001$ ). The tolerance factor showing multicollinearity of independent variables indicated that the multicollinearity among independent variables was too low to influence the result of regression analysis. Having shown the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence with a, b, and c, respectively, the standard regression equation for psychological well-being was formulated as follows:

$$Y' = 38/0 (a) + 35/0 (b) + 25/0 (c)$$

The above equation shows that every unit of change in the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence increases the psychological well-being by 0.38, 0.35, and 0.25, respectively.

### Discussion

The results showed that the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence as predictors of psychological well-being accounted for 58.8% of changes in psychological well-being and had a positive correlation with psychological well-being. This result conforms to that in studies conducted by Rioli et al. who stated that students with higher psychological capital enjoyed higher psychological and physical well-being [30]; Abbas et al. who concluded that individuals with high level of psychological capital experienced higher well-being due to their high level of confidence against challenging responsibilities and derivation of their capacity from multiple pathways [31]; Staudinger, Dorner, and Meckler who concluded that self-efficacy and higher control (which were components of the psychological capital) increased the psychological well-being [10]; Richards who showed that religious beliefs correlated with physical and mental health positively [32]; Kimia who concluded that psychological hardiness and spiritual intelligence were predictors of students' psychological well-being [24]; and Florian, Mikaliker, and Tubman, and also Neria et al. found that the psychological hardiness correlated with psychological well-being [20 & 22]. Moreover, results of this study agreed with those of studies performed by Scomorovski and Sadum and Rin Hoot showing a correlation between psychological hardiness and psychological well-being, and Amrom showing a correlation between spiritual intelligence and psychological

well-being [17,33,34]. To account for the correlation between psychological capital and psychological well-being, it should be noted that people with higher psychological capital have higher capacity for group interactions and social participations. Therefore, what connects people together and repeats, continues, and increases interactions is the psychological capital. It seems that people with higher psychological capital have more continuous social interactions and better social life. As the cognitive and behavioral aspects are influenced by themselves, it seems that strategies of self-efficacy, which is a component of psychological capital, can be very influential in selecting objectives and controlling behavior to achieve the objectives and improve the quality of life and psychological well-being [3]. The psychological capital, similar to the psychological well-being, focuses on growth and enhancement of personal abilities instead of reduction or elimination of personal weaknesses [8]. When facing with an environmental stressor, people try to deal with it successfully in order to keep the balance. The success of their attempts depends on their psychological sources [35]. It can be argued that people with higher psychological capital are more successful in controlling the environment and challenging situations due to their high level of confidence against challenging responsibilities and derivation of their capacity from multiple pathways [7].

The correlation between spiritual intelligence and psychological well-being can be explained considering the purpose in life that is one dimension of psychological well-being introduced by Ryff; the spiritual intelligence as humans' ability to ask ultimate questions about the meaning of life and, simultaneously, experience the integrated connection between every human and the world he lives in, and also humans' ability to use, reveal, and include the spiritual sources, values, and qualities to improve daily performance and psychological well-being [34]. Emmons uses Gardner's definition for intelligence and argues that spirituality can be seen as a form of intelligence because it predicts the performance and adaptation and provides people with abilities that empower them to deal

with problems and achieve the objectives. In other words, spirituality is based on abilities that produce valuable outcomes. Using the spiritual intelligence, people can identify problems of meaning and value and solve them through presenting solutions in line with the benefit of everyone. The spiritual intelligence allows people to unite with their nature and coordinate with processes of life. The spiritual intelligence motivates people to seek their integrity, sense of community, a sense of connection, and meaning to create an identity, and people feel authorized when seeking the meaning. This aspect of the spiritual intelligence basically correlates with the aspect of autonomy in psychological well-being [14]. Several mechanisms through which hardiness contributes to the psychological well-being have been proposed to account for the correlation between psychological hardiness and psychological well-being. According to Kobasa, appraisal and coping reduces the effects of hardiness on psychological well-being [19]. Florian et al. also believe that hard people feel more responsible for what they do in life, have more intrinsic control in situations, and perceive the changes and difficulties as challenges not stressors [20]. Hardiness is a factor effective in reacting against calamities positively [17]. Results of Maddi et al.'s study show that hardiness positively associates with problem-oriented strategies, supportive social interactions, and useful self-care efforts. There are results agreeing with the above results and showing that hardiness helps people find the stressful events tolerable and reduce their psychological arousal. In respect of the factors and outcomes of well-being, it is believed that people with promoted hardiness can better use the coping strategies when facing with stress, and find the stress or problems of well-being as a challenge that is a valuable effort. It is also believed that people with high level of hardiness are less distressed when facing with stressful events. Hardiness is assumed as a moderator in stress-disease relationship. Hardiness as an existential courage is a sign of psychological well-being and expands the emphasis of the positive psychology beyond mere happiness [23].

## Conclusion

Results of this study show that the psychological capital, psychological hardiness, and spiritual intelligence are appropriate predictors of psychological well-being, and psychotherapists can improve people's psychological well-being through paying enough attention to these factors.

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## Contributions

Study design: MSH, RD, KZ

Data collection and analysis: MSH, RD, AH

Manuscript preparation: MSH, RD, KZ, AH

## Conflict of interest

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

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