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**PREDICTION OF MEANING OF LIFE IN STUDENT BASED ON SPIRITUALITY,  
SELF-ESTEEM, AND POSITIVE AFFECT**

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**Abstract**

Introduction: The meaning of life is one of the important components of purposefulness, mental health, and psychological well-being. Having a meaning in life is effective in the development of a positive feeling towards yourself and the surrounding world as well as targeted direction. Considering the lack of a study related to this field in Iran, the purpose of current study is to predict the meaning of life based on the components of spirituality, self-esteem and positive affect in college students. Method: 462 male and female students of Shahed University were selected by proportional sampling method and answered the tools of current study, such as the LAP-R, SAI, SERS-SF and PANAS. Results: According to the results of current study, the three factors of spirituality, self-esteem and positive affect were able to predict the meaning of life in students. Conclusion: Based on these findings, the tendency toward spirituality, increasing self-esteem and positive affects can increase the meaning of life in student samples.

**Keywords**

Meaning of life – Spirituality – Self-esteem – Positive affect

**Para Citar este Artículo:**

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## Introduction

Human beings have always sought to understand the meaning of life and trying to make their lives more meaningful. Among the various meaningful sources, many of the current evidence suggests that individuals consider their religious and spiritual beliefs and experiences as an important source of meaningful life<sup>1</sup>. When people are questioned about meaningfulness in life, they mostly emphasize religion and spirituality<sup>2</sup>. Often, spirituality and religion are considered to be a meaningful axis in life<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to meaningful resources, Baumeister<sup>4</sup>. Introduced four essential requirements to achieve the meaning of life. These needs are: purpose, value, self-efficacy and self-worth (self-esteem). Effectiveness is defined as having a sense of control over events and self-worth is defined as considering life as a valuable resource, self-respect, and receiving (perceiving) respect from others. Some of these essential substantive needs are reflected in the model presented by Reker<sup>5</sup> in relation to spirituality. These theorists presented a model which based on that model, meaningful is a multi-dimensional concept with three related components. These are: cognitive, motivational and emotional components. Among several significant components in life, some studies have highlighted the importance of the effect of mood and emotion in the formation of the meaning of life. For example, the results of some studies indicate that there is a strong correlation between meaningful experience in life and positive affect. Positive affect leads to an increase in meaning of life, and this is especially seen in women who can not find any reason for their mood. The results of these studies show that mood can be considered as one of the ways to assess meaningful life<sup>6</sup>.

In general, among different populations, it is important to study meaning of life in the student population. They are subject to multiple educational, financial and individual pressures. Entering the university is a new experience for students and yet they are still very young people who are in conflict to answer existential questions, find the meaning of life, and respond to the " questions " of life. Studies conducted on students show that students who do not have a goal and do not know why they came to university, show the highest levels of distress<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the focus of the current research is on the meaning of life in student.

The study of meaning of life in Iranian students has been done only from the angle of communication with variables such as satisfaction in life, expectancy to life, identity style

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<sup>1</sup> S. K. Fletcher, "Religion and life meaning: Differentiating between religious beliefs and religious community in constructing life meaning", *Journal of Aging Studies*. Vol: 18 num 2 (2004): 171-185.

<sup>2</sup> T. Schnell and P. Becker, "Personality and meaning in life", *Personality and individual differences*. Vol: 41 num 1 (2006): 117-129.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Hicks and L. A. King, "Religious commitment and positive mood as information about meaning in life", *Journal of Research in Personality*. Vol: 42 num 1 (2008): 43-57.

<sup>4</sup> R. F. Baumeister and L. S. Newman, "How stories make sense of personal experiences: Motives that shape autobiographical narratives", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Vol: 20 num 6 (1994): 676-690.

<sup>5</sup> G. T. Reker, *The Life Attitude Profile-Revised: (LAP-R)* (Ontario: Student Psychologists Press Peterborough, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Hicks and L. A. King, "Religious commitment and positive..."

<sup>7</sup> T. M. Jenkins; J. Kim; C. Hu; J. C. Hickernell; S. Watanaskul and J. D. Yoon, "Stressing the journey: using life stories to study medical student wellbeing", *Advances in Health Sciences Education*. Vol: 23 num 4 (2018): 767-782.

and attachment to God<sup>8</sup>, and not as a prediction model with variables of spirituality, self-esteem and positive affect<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, considering the significance of meaning of life in the population and the role of spirituality as one of the most important sources and the role of self-esteem and positive affect as the important prerequisites and components of the meaning of life, the main issue of the current research is that does the meaning of life be predicted base on spirituality, self-esteem and positive affect?

## Method

The present study is designed to predict the meaning of life based on the variables of spirituality, positive affect and self-esteem. Thus, the present research is a correlational study. The statistical population of the present study consists of all students of different educational levels of Shahed University-one of the universities of Iran. 500 students from Shahed University were selected by proportional sampling method. After determining the percentage and number of students from each college, the following questionnaires were distributed to students who were willing to participate.

-**The Life Attitude Profile-Revised (LAP-R)**<sup>10</sup>: LAP-R is designed to measure the meaning of life and is the content of the 48 items that are scored based on the 7- point Likert scale and consists of 6 factors which are: Purpose (PU), Coherence (Co), Choice / Responsibility (C /R), Death Acceptance (DA), Existential Vacuum (EV), and Goal Seeking (GS). The internal consistency indexes of LAP-R have been reported to be satisfactory and their range obtained from 0.77 to 0.87. The reliability range which is related to the double implementation of LAP-R, is from 0.77 to 0.87. The studies of the validity of LAP-R have suggested an appropriate convergence of it.

- **The Spirituality Assessment Inventory (SAI)**: SAI is used to examine the effect of spiritual orientation and is composed of six subscales: Awareness (A), Realistic Acceptance (RA), Disappointment (D), Grandiosity (G), Instability (I) and Impression Management (IM). All items are graded based on a 5-point Likert scale of " Not at all true " to "Very true". The high score in each attribute indicates the highness of the same attribute. In the first and second run, the alpha coefficients of SAI are obtained 0.64-0.96 and 0.70-0.96, respectively. Also, the correlation coefficients of the test-retest of SAI are obtained 0.71-0.92. The content validity results of SAI have been reported to be acceptable<sup>11</sup>.

- **The Self-Esteem Rating Scale- Short Form (SERS-SF)**: SERS-SF is a 20 item scale (10 positive items and 10 negative items), which is a short form of the Self-Esteem Rating Scale (SERS). The study by Lecotme et al.<sup>12</sup> resulted in a short form of SERS

<sup>8</sup> H. Schaap-Jonker; N. van der Velde; E. H. Eurelings-Bontekoe and J. M. Corveleyn, "Types of God representations and mental health: A person-oriented approach", *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. Vol: 27 num 4 (2017): 199-214.

<sup>9</sup> J. C. Meléndez Moral; F. B. Fortuna Terrero; A. Sales Galan and T. Mayordomo Rodríguez, "Effect of integrative reminiscence therapy on depression, well-being, integrity, self-esteem, and life satisfaction in older adults", *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. Vol: 10 num 3 (2015): 240-247.

<sup>10</sup> G. T. Reker, *The Life Attitude Profile-Revised...*

<sup>11</sup> T. W. Hall and K. J. Edwards, "The Spiritual Assessment Inventory: A theistic model and measure for assessing spiritual development", *Journal for the scientific study of religion*. Vol: 41 num 2 (2002): 341-357.

<sup>12</sup> T. Lecomte; M. Corbière and F. Laisné, "Investigating self-esteem in individuals with schizophrenia: relevance of the Self-Esteem Rating Scale-Short Form", *Psychiatry research* Vol: 143 num 1 (2006): 99-108.

which the Cronbach alpha of the positive and negative subscales of it obtained 0.91 and 0.89, respectively. Also, the test-retest reliability coefficient of SERS-SF showed a good stability (0.91 and 0.91 for positive and negative scales, respectively). In addition, both scales had a high correlation with the total score of Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS) (0.72 and 0.79 for positive and negative scales, respectively), which shows the proper validity of SERS<sup>13</sup>.

- **Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS):** PANAS is a 20-item self-measurement tool that designed to measure two dimensions of the mood: "Positive Affect" and "Negative Affect"<sup>14</sup>. Each subscale has 10 items. Items are ranked on a five-point scale (1 = very low to 5 = very high) by the subject<sup>15</sup>. The reliability of PANAS for positive and negative affects has been reported based on Cronbach's alpha, 0.88 and 0.87, respectively and based on the correlation of test-retest, 0.68 and 0.71, respectively (11).

**Results**

The average age of the participants was 20.68 years old (SD = 41.3). Female subjects formed the largest number of subjects (55%). Single individuals formed the largest sample size (81.4%). The students of the humanities were the largest sample (31.4%) and the students of the arts were the lowest sample size (4.3) and the undergraduates formed the largest sample (73.6%) and the Ph.D. students formed the lowest sample size (14.5%).

Table 1 shows the results of the regression of LAP-R, based on the subscales of SAI, SERS-SF and PANAS. Due to some subscales of LAP-R had the correlation of over 0.70, the regression of those subscales was considered separately.

		Awareness	Realistic Acceptance	Disappointment	Grandiosity	Instability	Impression Management	Positive affect	Negative affect	Positive self-esteem	Negative self-esteem
B	Purpose	2.213	0.372	-0.299	0.737	-0.972	0.276	0.421	-0.071	0.024	-0.013
	Coherence	2.380	0.346	-0.361	0.844	-1.344	0.262	0.400	-0.093	0.022	-0.018
	Choice/Responsibility	1.770	0.202	-0.511	0.506	-1.754	0.625	0.457	-0.176	0.022	-0.016
	Death Acceptance	3.282	0.054	-0.134	1.255	-0.587	1.182	0.213	-0.005	0.043	-0.011
	Existential Vacuum	-1.146	-0.231	0.699	1.766	0.299	-0.902	-0.048	0.131	-0.017	0.073
	Goal Seeking	2.121	0.656	-0.115	0.102	0.092	-1.262	0.195	0.114	0.079	0.014

<sup>13</sup> T. W. Hall and K. J. Edwards, "The Spiritual Assessment Inventory..."

<sup>14</sup> V. Costin and V. L. Vignoles, "Meaning is about mattering: Evaluating coherence, purpose, and existential mattering as precursors of meaning in life judgments", *Journal of personality and social psychology* (2019).

<sup>15</sup> J. B. Fabry, *The pursuit of meaning: Viktor Frankl, logotherapy, and life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

$\beta$	Purpose	0.222	0.071	-0.041	0.074	-0.097	0.030	0.386	-0.073	0.064	-0.042
	Coherence	0.220	0.061	-0.046	0.078	-0.124	0.026	0.339	-0.089	0.055	-0.054
	Choice/Responsibility	0.155	0.034	-0.062	0.044	-0.153	0.059	0.366	-0.160	0.053	-0.045
	Death Acceptance	0.251	0.008	-0.014	0.096	-0.045	0.098	0.149	-0.004	0.089	-0.028
	Existential Vacuum	-0.108	-0.041	0.091	0.166	0.028	-0.092	-0.041	0.128	-0.042	0.222
	Goal Seeking	0.236	0.139	-0.018	0.011	-0.010	-0.152	0.199	0.131	0.237	0.049
$\rho$	Purpose	0.000	0.210	0.529	0.090	0.036	0.570	0.000	0.099	0.178	0.443
	Coherence	0.000	0.295	0.495	0.081	0.009	0.628	0.000	0.052	0.267	0.337
	Choice/Responsibility	0.006	0.557	0.355	0.316	0.001	0.268	0.000	0.000	0.274	0.419
	Death Acceptance	0.000	0.913	0.865	0.082	0.443	0.143	0.008	0.938	0.141	0.688
	Existential Vacuum	0.079	0.509	0.213	0.001	0.583	0.116	0.402	0.010	0.425	0.000
	Goal Seeking	0.000	0.038	0.820	0.826	0.851	0.015	0.000	0.013	0.000	0.454
$R$	Purpose	0.647 <sup>a</sup>									
	Coherence	0.620 <sup>a</sup>									
	Choice/Responsibility	0.632 <sup>a</sup>									
	Death Acceptance	0.262 <sup>a</sup>									
	Existential Vacuum	0.535 <sup>a</sup>									
	Goal Seeking	0.427 <sup>a</sup>									
$R^2$	Purpose	0.418									
	Coherence	0.384									
	Choice/Responsibility	0.400									
	Death Acceptance	0.069									
	Existential Vacuum	0.287									
	Goal Seeking	0.182									
$F$	Purpose	32.434									
	Coherence	28.117									
	Choice/Responsibility	30.007									
	Death Acceptance	3.321									
	Existential Vacuum	18.128									

	Goal Seeking	10.059
p	Purpose	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Coherence	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Choice/Responsibility	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Death Acceptance	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Existential Vacuum	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Goal Seeking	0.000 <sup>a</sup>

Table 1  
The regression of LAP-R based on the subscales of SAI, SERS-SF and PANAS

As table 1 shows, the subscales of SAI, SERS-SF and PANAS were able to explain significantly the variance of the purpose, coherence, choice / responsibility, death acceptance, existential vacuum and goal seeking. Meanwhile, it seems that the subscale of positive affect has the greatest contribution in explaining the variance of the purpose ( $\beta = 0.38$ ), coherence ( $\beta = 0.33$ ) and choice/responsibility ( $\beta = 0.36$ ) variables. Also, the awareness subscale has shown the highest contribution in explaining the variance of death acceptance variable ( $\beta = 0.25$ ) and the subscale of negative self-esteem has the highest contribution in explaining the variance of existential vacuum ( $\beta = 0.22$ ). In addition, the subscales of awareness and positive self-esteem show the highest contribution in explaining the variance of the goal seeking ( $\beta = 0.23$ ).

## Discussion

Regarding the main hypotheses of current study, it can be said that many of the research variables were able to predict significantly the subscales of LAP-R (purpose, coherence, choice/responsibility, death acceptance, existential vacuum and goal seeking).

As shown, among subscales of SAI, the subscale of awareness more than any other subscale, was able to explain subscales of LAP-R<sup>16</sup> have presented a remarkable definition of spirituality. Spirituality derives from the Latin *Spiritus*, meaning the role of life or the "way to be" and "experiencing" which comes up with an awareness of an immaterial dimension. Thus, based on this definition, it can be said that the element of awareness plays a very important role in the perception of an immaterial dimension (like God). On the one hand, according to one of the significant definitions of meaning of life<sup>17</sup>. "When a person realizes that his existence and being linked to an original source and relies on extensive and reliant frameworks and supports such as the religion and philosophy that he chooses to live, understands the meaning of life, on the other hand, meaning of life is essentially cognitive and involves the beliefs of the purpose in life as well as ethical beliefs and includes perceptions that integrate everyday experiences theoretically and temporally, it can be expected that dimensions of spirituality and especially awareness can significantly predict subscales of LAP-R.

<sup>16</sup> T. Schnell and P. Becker, "Personality and meaning in life..."

<sup>17</sup> G. W. Sutton; H. L. Kelly; B. J. Griffin; Jr. E. L. Worthington and C. Dinwiddie, "Satisfaction with Christian psychotherapy and well-being: Contributions of hope, personality, and spirituality", *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Vol: 5 num 1 (2018).

Concerning the explanation of the subscales of LAP-R through dimensions of spirituality, we can say that in general, the results of this section of the current study are consistent with the results which relate the dimensions of religion with two components of feeling Meaningfulness and searching meaningfulness. On the whole, their study showed that life would be more meaningful when an individual was open to religion. Thus, it can be said that since religion and spirituality with meaning of life have a close conceptual relationship, such results can be expected.

The results of the current study showed that self-esteem, with the exception of the subscale of goal seeking, could not predict significantly any of the subscales of LAP-R. But, as expected, negative self-esteem (given that it refers to reduce self-worth) could predict significantly the subscale of existential vacuum. In this regard, it can be said that the current research has not been able to accurately explain subscales of LAP-R through the positive and negative self-esteem and one of its possible reasons is the type of used questionnaire in current research and low number of items related to self-esteem.

As the results of current study showed, positive affect could predict significantly the subscales of LAP-R. In this regard, it can be said that the results of the current research is the same with the results of many studies that suggest that achieving meaning of life is associated with positive outcomes of mental health, such as positive affect and satisfaction in life.

## Conclusion

The results of current study showed that spirituality and positive affect could predict a meaning of life. It seems that given the mentioned limitations, it is possible to present these suggestions for future studies: expand location and time of sampling and evaluate the meaning of life in particular populations, such as the elderly, patients with cancer and with mental disorders, and so on.

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