

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COVID-19 FEAR, DEPRESSION, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Müjde KERKEZ

Asst. Prof., Sırnak University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, mkerkez@sirnak.edu.tr, Sırnak/Türkiye, 0000-0002-6968-9454

Canan BİRİMOĞLU OKUYAN

Asst. Prof., Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, cananbirimoglu@subu.edu.tr, Sakarya/Türkiye, 0000-0002-7339-6072

Abstract

Spiritual values and spirituality are crucial in preventing mental issues such as depression and solitude in student life. In this descriptive research, we aimed to investigate the relationship between COVID-19 fear, depression and spiritual well-being in university students. It was a statistically significant difference between the department in which the students are educated and the total levels of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale ($p<0.05$). As students' fear of COVID-19 increased, their psychological well-being scores decreased. Moreover, a statistically significant, moderate and negative relationship was observed between the COVID-19 fear scale and spiritual well-being levels ($r=-0.495$; $p<0.001$). It was determined that the 2nd-year students of the First and Emergency Aid Program who attended their clinical practice had higher depression levels and lower spiritual well-being levels compared to other departments. It may be recommended that university students participate in appropriate psychosocial programs aimed at depression and factors that negatively affect their mental health and that these factors be taken into account in school curricula.

Keywords : COVID-19, Depression, Spiritual Well-Being, University Student.

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNDE COVID-19 KORKUSU, DEPRESYON VE MANEVİ İYİ OLUŞ ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

Öz

Öğrencilik hayatında depresyon ve yalnızlık gibi ruhsal sorunların önlenmesinde manevi değerler ve maneviyat çok önemlidir. Tanımlayıcı nitelikteki bu çalışmada, üniversite öğrencilerinin COVID-19 korkusu, depresyon ve manevi iyi oluşları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi amaçlandı. Öğrencilerin öğrenim gördükleri bölüm ile Manevi İyi Oluş Ölçeği toplam düzeyleri arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık bulundu ($p<0,05$). Öğrencilerin COVID-19 korkusu arttıkça ruhsal iyi oluş puanları düştü. Ayrıca COVID-19 korkusu ile manevi iyi oluş düzeyleri arasında istatistiksel açıdan önemli, negatif ve orta düzeyde bir ilişki bulundu ($r=-0,495$; $p<0,001$). Klinik uygulamalarına devam eden İlk ve Acil Yardım Programı 2. sınıf öğrencilerinin diğer bölümlere göre depresyon düzeylerinin daha yüksek, manevi iyi oluş düzeylerinin ise daha düşük olduğu belirlendi. Üniversite öğrencilerinin depresyon ve ruh sağlıklarını olumsuz etkileyen faktörlere yönelik uygun psikososyal programlara katılmaları ve bu faktörlerin okul müfredatlarında dikkate alınması önerilebilir

Anahtar Kelimeler: COVID-19, Depresyon, Manevi İyi Oluş, Üniversite Öğrencisi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the global increase in the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological issues of the pandemic people have also increased (1). According to recent study data evaluating the effects of the pandemic on mental health, it has been determined that the prevalence of depressive and anxious symptomatology increased in the community (2). Here with, the uncertainty due to the pandemic and the fear and anxiety experienced by individuals lead to the development of significant mental disorders (3). In addition, the World Health Organization reported that the depression levels of people went up by 25% during the pandemic (4,5). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has adverse effects on students.

In a research study involving university students conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the data revealed that the fear and anxiety arising from the threat of virus infection resulted in heightened levels of stress. Furthermore, the results showed that the uttermost pressure could affect students' physical, psychological and social well-being and reduce their learning ability and motivation (6,7). The insufficient clinical handling of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a rise in symptoms related to panic disorder and mental conditions like anxiety and depression (2). More importantly, depression is seen as a factor that can lead individuals to suicide if not prevented, especially among university students (8). Considering the present and anticipated rise in the burden of depression and its subsequent economic implications, it is crucial to identify preventive strategies for the welfare and health of society.

People are sociocultural entities with social, biological, and spiritual aspects. As a result, a problem in one area might lead to another difficulty in a different one (9). At this point, it is only possible to talk about health when people do not have issues in all aspects and work in harmony. Depression is connected with worse quality of life, but spirituality is associated with higher quality of life.

Spiritual values and spirituality are crucial in preventing mental issues such as depression and solitude in student life. Spirituality is not only one of the leading sources of recovery from traumatic situations, but also contributes to improving quality of life and reducing stress (10). Some longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have shown that spirituality has a definite positivity. Furthermore, it has been stated that spirituality is effective against depression, affecting response to treatment, significantly reducing the prevalence and incidence rates, and has a protective effect on students' health due to the protective feature of spirituality (11). Therefore, in this cross-sectional and descriptive study, we aimed to understand the individualized disruption of life, routines, and depression and its psychological effects among university students studying in health-related departments due to COVID-19. Hence, the study aimed to address the following inquiries:

1. What are the COVID-19 fear and depression levels of associate degree students studying in health-related departments during the pandemic?
2. What are the spiritual well-being levels (spiritual prosperity) of associate degree students studying in health-related departments during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Is there a correlation between the fear of COVID-19, depression and spiritual well-being of associate degree students studying in health-related departments during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. MATERIALS and METHODS

2.1.Type of Research

It was made as a descriptive design to examine the levels of fear of COVID-19, depression and spiritual well-being of university students during the pandemic.

2.2. Participants

The research sample included students enrolled in the associate degree program at a university situated in eastern Turkey (N=340). It was determined that 181 students were required for the study with a 95% confidence level and an alpha value of 0.05 (12). The research survey was therefore administered to 216 students. The research was carried out face-to-face with university students with an associate degree, namely between March and April 2022. The study participants were students enrolled in the Vocational School of Health Services who volunteered to participate. The questionnaires were answered via extracurricular hours. Each student was given 7-10 minutes to fully answer the survey questions.

2.3. Collection of Research Data

Based on the light literature information, the researchers created a questionnaire and used a sociodemographic characteristics form for the students, which included questions on age, gender, family income, educational attainment, and class.

2.3.1. The Fear of COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19S)

The COVID-19 fear scale was developed by Ahorsu et al. (2020). The validity and reliability in Turkey were conducted by Seller and his colleagues. (Satici et al., 2021). The score that can be obtained from the scale varies from 7 to 35. As the total score from the scale increases, it indicates the excess of fear towards COVID-19. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.84. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient in our research was calculated as 0.74.

2.3.2. Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)

The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale developed by Aaron Beck et al. was conducted by Hisli (14). This scale, comprising twenty-one self-report questions, reveals both the physical and psychological symptoms of depression in individuals. The scale encompasses scores that range from 0 to 63, where elevated scores are indicative of increased levels of depression in individuals. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient for the scale is 0.92, while in this study, it was determined to be 0.91.

2.3.3. Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)

The scale developed by Eksi and Kardas consists of a total of twenty-nine items (15). The scale allows for a total score range of 29 to 145, and as the total score on the scale rises, an individual's level of well-being also increases. The scale exhibits an internal consistency coefficient of 0.89, while in this study, it was determined to be 0.83.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethics Committee Permission (2022-E.33141) was obtained from the University Ethics Committee, and institutional permission was obtained from the university where the research was conducted. In addition, verbal consent was obtained from the participants.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data obtained in the research were evaluated with the SPSS 22.0 package program. Number, percentage distributions, mean and standard deviation were used to show descriptive features. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to determine its conformity to the normal distribution. A one-way ANOVA and independent t-test were used for normally distributed data; the Bonferroni test was used for further analysis; and the Pearson test was employed for correlation analysis. The significance level was accepted as 0.05.

3. RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study, their fear of COVID-19, their depression levels and their distribution according to their spiritual well-being were examined in this section.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of students (n=216)

	n	%
Age Mean±SD	21.47±2.15	
Gender		
Female	156	72.22
Male	60	27.78
Income status		
Low	68	31.48
Middle	131	60.65
Good	17	7.87
Department		
TDS	64	29.63
First and EmergencyAid Program	69	31.94
Child Development	54	25.00
Optician	29	13.43
Grade		
First grade	89	41.20
Second grade	127	58.80
Region of birth		
Eastern Anatolia	40	18.52
Southeast Anatolian	162	75.00
Other*	14	6.48
Family structure		
Elementary family	144	66.67
Extended family	69	31.94
Fragmented Family	3	1.39
TOTAL	216	100.0

According to Table 1; 72.22% of the students are female, 60.65% of them are from the middle-income class, 31.94% of them are studying in the First and Emergency Aid department, 58.80% of them are in the 2nd grade, 75.00% of them are from the Southeast Anatolian Region, 66.67% of them stated that they have an elementary family (Table 1).

Table 2: The Distribution of Scores Obtained by Students from the Scales

	Min.	Max.	Mean±SD
Fear of COVID-19 Scale	7.00	35.00	19.00±5.31
Beck Depression Inventory	0.00	63.00	20.78±10.05
SpiritualWell-BeingScale	29.00	145.00	98.02±17.15

In Table 2: When the total average score of the students from the scales is examined; the fear of the COVID-19 scale's mean total score is 19.00±5.31; the Depression scale's mean total score is 20.78±10.05; the spiritual well-being scale's mean total score is 98.02±17.15.

Table 3: Comparison of Students' Socio-demographic Characteristics with the Mean Scores Obtained from the Scales.

		Fear of COVID-19 Scale	Beck Depression Inventory	Spiritual Well-Being Scale
		Mean±SD	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Gender				
Female	156	18.50±5.16	20.06±10.29	99.37±17.70
Male	60	20.31±5.51	22.65±9.21	94.53±15.24
		t=-2.263	t=-1.701	t=1.865
		p=0.025	p=0.090	p=0.064
Grade				
First grade	89	19.55±5.39	19.03±9.16	100.44±16.71
Second grade	127	18.62±5.25	22.01±10.49	96.33±17.32
		t=-1.251	t=-2.159	t=1.740
		p=0.211	p=0.032	p=0.083
Department				
TDS	64	19.56±5.47	20.17±8.64	97.69±15.51
First and Emergency Aid Program	69	19.33±5.17	24.13±11.46	96.32±16.50
Child Development	54	18.01±4.59	19.19±9.56	95.59±19.19
Optician	29	18.86±6.45	17.14±8.27	107.34±15.84
		F=0.948	F=4.575	F=3.575
		p=0.418	p=0.004	p=0.015
Family structure				
Elementary	144	18.86±5.48	20.49±10.81	98.83±16.33
Extended	69	19.37±4.82	20.94±8.30	96.30±18.91
Fragmented	3	17.66±9.45	31.00±2.00	99.00±15.87
		F=0.314	F=1.629	F=0.507
		p=0.731	p=0.199	p=0.603

t=Independent Sample t-Test; F=One-Way Anova (Post Hoc Bonferroni Analysis); p<0.05

When Table 3 is examined, there is a comparison of some descriptive characteristics of the students and the total score averages of the Fear of COVID-19 scale, depression scale and spiritual well-being scale. It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the gender of the students and the total scores on the fear of COVID-19 scale. In other words, it was determined that male students experienced more fear of COVID-19 than female students ($p<0.05$). It was established that there was a statistically significant difference between the student's grade level and department and Beck Depression Inventory total scores ($p<0.05$). In a further investigation to determine the awareness between the groups, it was established that the 2nd-grade students and the students studying in the First and Emergency Aid Program had higher depression levels than the other students ($p<0.05$). It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the department they studied and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale total scores ($p<0.05$). In the further analysis conducted to determine the discrepancy between the groups, it was observed that the students studying in the First and Emergency Aid Program had lower spiritual well-being than students in other departments.

Table 4: The correlation relationship between the scales. (n=216)

Scale	1	2	3
1 Fear of COVID-19 Scale	1		
2 Beck Depression Inventory	r=0.351**	1	
	p<0.001		
3 Spiritual Well-Being Scale	r=-0.495**	r=-0.433**	1
	p<0.001	p<0.001	

**p<0.001, pearson correlation analysis

As shown in Table 4, an analysis of the scores obtained by students from the scales revealed a weak positive and statistically significant correlation between the Fear of COVID-19 scale and depression levels ($r=0.351$, $p<0.001$). In essence, an increase in students' fear of COVID-19 was associated with a corresponding increase in their levels of depression. Additionally, an inverse and statistically significant moderate correlation were observed, indicating that as fear of COVID-19 increased, students' spiritual well-being levels decreased ($r=-0.495$; $p<0.001$). Furthermore, a weak and negative statistically significant correlation was identified between students' depression levels and their spiritual well-being levels ($r=-0.433$; $p<0.001$), suggesting that as depression levels increased, spiritual well-being levels decreased.

4. DISCUSSION

University admission is a transitional process for students. University students consist of a population considered particularly vulnerable to mental health issues (4). The findings of the current study focus on the effects of pandemic-related transitions on this particular population's mental health and well-being. Implications of this results showed that most students who experienced COVID-19 fear had an average rate of depression, and their spiritual well-being was affected in the study.

Considering that fear is an emotion that is influenced by the gender of individuals, we observed that the fear of COVID-19 is associated with the gender of the students in our study, which is consistent with previous studies (10,16). Similarly, recent research has shown that gender is a critical factor in how people are affected by the pandemic, and women have more negative experiences with the pandemic than men (17-19). In contrast to these findings, previous studies with students have indicated that the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic does not exhibit gender-based differences. Moreover, both male and female students have reported experiencing comparable levels of stress and negative emotions attributed to the pandemic (20,21).

In the current study, it was revealed that the 2nd-grade students studying in the First and Emergency Aid Program had higher depression levels. Perhaps 2nd-grade students go to clinics for practice areas because the First and Emergency Aid Program students are at the forefront of representing health care like their other colleagues, and they are also more likely to face the risk of disease in clinical settings (22). Similarly, it was stated that the levels of depression increased as the grade level increased in the health-related departments (23). Unlike these results, it was reported that there was no difference between departments in recognizing stress, anxiety and depression levels in Malaysian University students in another study (24).

Studies on spirituality are getting more attention because of the pandemic and its effect on the mental health of individuals. Here, we observed that the spiritual well-being of the students in the First and Emergency Aid Programs was lower than in the other departments. This might be happening because students in primary and emergency programs are more likely to be depressed, and the situation is making them feel bad. Our research also found a significant association between fear of COVID-19 and both spiritual well-being and depression. A previous study has reported that the COVID-19 pandemic reduces the vitality levels of individuals who experience quarantine regulations (25). The individuals are afraid of the virus, while the pandemic reduces their life energy and increases their level of solitude. The dread of COVID-19 has an impact on an individual's level of life pleasure. In a similar study, researchers noted that the presence of apprehension about COVID-19 and the tendency to engage in repetitive thinking function as mediators in the association of intolerance of ambiguity with mental well-being. Furthermore, intolerance of uncertainty was revealed as a factor that amplifies the fear of COVID-19, and this heightened fear subsequently had adverse effects on mental health (26). Moreover, it has been reported that students with high levels of depression and anxiety have lower levels of spiritual well-being (27). In another study, it was reported that university students with symptoms of depression in their personal and social life had lower spiritual well-being, indicating that these students experienced sadness more (28). Conversely, university students who

possess elevated levels of spiritual well-being tend to have well-defined life goals, a sense of purpose and frequently experience a sense of serenity and stability (29). The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies.

There are several limitations in the research. The research results are limited to data obtained from students who accepted participation in the study during the dates when the data collection tools were applied.

5. CONCLUSION

As a result of the research, it was determined that the COVID-19 fear of the students studying in health-related associate degree programs proceeded until the end of the pandemic, and thus, the fear and pandemic process adversely affected their depression levels and spiritual well-being. In particular, it was shown that at this time, students in the First and Emergency Aid Program who were enrolled in clinical practice and studying in the second grade had higher depression levels and lower levels of spiritual well-being than students in other departments. Furthermore, the fact that these students are still taking a crack at fear, depression, and low spiritual well-being during the period when they will be most engaged in their profession and that they will not be able to fulfill their vocation effectively or leave their careers will bring along power deprivation in the health sector. In order to reduce their levels of anxiety and sadness during the pandemic, it is advised that students enroll in professional psychosocial and rehabilitative programs that include spiritual care practices suited for their class and level.

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