



## Evaluation of Mediating Role of Spiritual Intelligence in the Relationship between Social Capital and Psychological Capital of Graduate Students

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#### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** Spiritual intelligence, social capital, and psychological capital are approaches that help the individual to coordinate with the environment, health and performance improvement. This study aimed to evaluate the role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between social capital and psychological capital of postgraduate students of the University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran in the academic year of 2018-2019.

**Materials and Methods:** This was an applied research in terms of goal and an analytical and correlational study in terms of methodology. In total, 341 postgraduate students were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling and according to the Cochran sampling formula. Data were collected employing spiritual intelligence questionnaire (King), social capital (Gaiani) and psychological capital inventory (Luthans et al.). Data analysis was performed in SPSS version 16 and LISREL using Pearson's correlation coefficient and the structural equation model.

**Results:** In this study, the mean age of the students was  $27.42 \pm 3.79$  years. In addition, the mean social capital was  $52.68 \pm 11.24$  (out of 90), the psychological capital was  $88.77 \pm 12.79$  (out of 120), and the spiritual intelligence was  $63.61 \pm 11.87$  (out of 92). According to the results, the coefficient value of correlation of social capital with psychological capital ( $r=0.335$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), social capital with spiritual intelligence ( $r=0.359$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), and spiritual intelligence with psychological capital ( $r=0.585$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) was positive and significant. Furthermore, the direct effect of social capital on psychological capital ( $\beta=0.12$ ,  $t=2.11$ ), the direct impact of social capital on spiritual intelligence ( $\beta=0.42$ ,  $t=6.78$ ), and direct effect of spiritual intelligence on psychological capital ( $\beta=0.64$ ,  $t=9.25$ ) were positive and significant. The indirect effect of social capital on psychological capital was also significant and positive with the mediating role of spiritual intelligence ( $\beta=0.268$ ).

**Conclusion:** According to the results of the study, spiritual intelligence and social capital were positively correlated with the psychological capital of students. Therefore, the psychological capital of students could be improved by focusing on the growth of spiritual intelligence and social support.

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## Introduction

Psychological capital has roots in the positivist psychology movement, which encompasses four structures of hope (perseverance in pursuing goals and revising the goals for success, if necessary), optimism (positive documents for the current and future successes), resilience (positive adaptation in response to adverse situations), and self-efficacy (assurance of having the abilities to perform difficult and challenging assignments) (1). Psychological capital can be considered as important features and skills that, if owned by students in the educational environment, could reduce their vulnerability in facing stressful academic events. This could reduce the academic burnout, improve satisfaction and well-being of students, and enhance the overall GPAs and scores in the educational environment (2).

Therefore, addressing the psychological capital of students and assessing the factors related to this issue is of paramount importance. In this regard, we can refer to social capital and spiritual intelligence. Social capital is a concept developed over the last few decades, especially with the works of scholars such as Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Bourdieu compares social capital to a

rock linked to the communication network in the organization, marking that the institutionalization of this network depends on the relative durability of the relationship between individuals. On the other hand, Coleman considers social capital as social processes that promote their interests by facilitating the actions of their members. Finally, Putnam regards the components of social capital to be networks, norms of civic participation, and trust in other citizens, which, contrary to other conventional capital, is a public good that is not owned by the private owners (3). Social capital is described as a social benefit by trust and civic participation (4). This capital could be defined as a network of relationships and connections based on interpersonal and intergroup social trust, and the interactions of individuals between institutions, organizations, and social groups, that promote solidarity and social cohesion, benefiting from social support, and the necessary energy to facilitate actions performed to realize individual and collective goals (5).

Luthans & Jensen reported the positive effect of social capital on psychological capital (6). In addition, Cooper realized that social capital had priority over psychological capital.

Therefore, the lack or weakness of social capital leads to individual isolation and negative individualism, and ultimately resulting in the weakening of psychological capital (7). In a research, Ghaffari and Khani marked that students with higher social capital showed greater interest in continuing education and higher academic performance (8).

Another factor affecting psychological capital is spiritual intelligence (9). Spiritual intelligence includes a type of adaptation and problem-solving behavior that incorporates the highest levels of growth in different cognitive, ethical, emotional, and interpersonal areas, guiding the individual to coordinate with surrounding phenomena and achieving internal and external integrity (10). In fact, spiritual intelligence is the basis of an individual's beliefs that affect his/her performance and is able to deepen the person's relationship with him/herself, others or the larger world in daily life (11). According to King, the components of spiritual intelligence are critical existential thinking (the capacity to think critically about meaning, purpose, and other existential or metaphysical issues), the production of personal meaning (having a purpose in life, having a sense of direction, the sense of order

in life), transcendental consciousness (the ability to perceive the spiritual dimensions of life) and the expansion of consciousness state (the ability to enter the states of the accelerated states of consciousness in the individual's orientation) (12).

Sisk reported that individuals with a spiritual intelligence show traits of coping with hardships, pains, and failures, having self-awareness, being able to control oneself, and being flexible. Therefore, spiritual intelligence can be employed to make the best and most appropriate decisions based on psychological and physical aspects in order to promote and improve compatibility and adaptability to today's complex living environment and conditions (13). Khosravi and Niknames affirmed that spiritual intelligence was key to a better adaptation to the environment. According to these scholars, those with higher spiritual intelligence had a higher tolerance in dealing with life pressures and higher levels of ability to adapt to the environment, thereby showing higher psychological capital (14).

Regarding the mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between social capital and psychological capital, it can be expressed that research findings show a correlation between social capital and

spiritual intelligence on one hand (16, 15), and demonstrate an association between spiritual intelligence and psychological capital from the other hand (9). Evaluation of the psychological capital of students and the factors affecting this notion can help the authorities design and implement any type of social and cultural planning at the university level. Today, it is no secret that social and psychological capitals are components of sustainable development. It is anticipated that the education environment could be regarded as less stressful by students if they are able to maintain social and psychological capital and spiritual intelligence during education. By forming social networks, communication with divine sources and positive optimism factors, hope, self-efficacy and resilience in dealing with academic stress, students can maintain their physical and mental well-being and happiness and improve their academic performance. With this background in mind, this study aimed to evaluate the mediating role of spiritual intelligence in the relationship between social capital and psychological capital of postgraduate students of the University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zanjan, Iran.

### Materials and Methods

This was an applied research in terms of

goal and analytical and correlational in terms of methodology. The statistical population included all graduate (N=2385) and postgraduate (N=345) students of Sistan and Baluchestan University, Zahedan, Iran in the academic year of 2018-2019. Given the lack of homogeneity of students in terms of gender, level of education, and school, 341 students (46 graduate and 295 postgraduate students) were selected by proportionate stratified random sampling (based on gender, level of education, school, and field of study) and random sampling based on Cochran sampling formula. In this study, the inclusion criterion was studying at least one academic year at Sistan and Baluchestan University while the inclusion criterion was being a first-second-semester or guest student.

After obtaining permission and observing the ethical considerations, the researcher was present in the research environment and explained the research objectives to the volunteers, ensuring them of the confidentiality terms regarding their personal information. The volunteers responded to the questionnaire individually, and the maximum response time was 25 minutes. The questionnaires employed were:

A) Spiritual intelligence questionnaire: designed by King in 2008, the questionnaire

consists of 23 items and four components of critical existential thinking (seven items), the production of personal meaning (five items), transcendental consciousness (six items), and transcendental consciousness development (five items) to evaluate spiritual intelligence. The questionnaire's items are scored based on a five-point Likert range from completely disagree (0) to completely disagree (4). However, item six of the questionnaire is scored reversely. The minimum and maximum scores in the questionnaire are 0 and 92, respectively. The closer the score to 92, the higher the sign of spiritual intelligence, and vice versa.

B) Social capital questionnaire: designed by Gaiani in 2012, the questionnaire consists of 18 items and three components (a seven-item structure, a four-item relationship, and a seven-item cognitive structure) to evaluate social capital. The questionnaire's items are

scored based on a five-point Likert from extremely low (1) to extremely high (5). The minimum and maximum scores of the questionnaire are 18 and 90, respectively. A higher score is indicative of higher social capital.

C) Psychological capital inventory: designed by Luthans et al. in 2007, this questionnaire contains 24 items and four six-item components of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience to evaluate individual psychological capital. The questionnaire is scored based on a five-point Likert scale from extremely low (1) to extremely high (5). The minimum and maximum scores of the questionnaire are 24 and 120, respectively. In this regard, a higher score is indicative of better psychological capital.

Reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, the results of which are reported in Table 1:

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha Coefficients of Questionnaires**

Factor	Number of questions	Coefficient	Factor	Number of questions	Coefficient
Self-efficacy	6	0.864	Cognitive	7	0.895
Hope	6	0.848	Social capital(total)	18	0.902
Optimism	6	0.656	Critical existential thinking	7	0.701
Resilience	6	0.625	Personal meaning production	5	0.755
Psychological Capital(total)	24	0.899	Transcendental awareness	6	0.702
Structural	7	0.842	Conscious state expansion	5	0.751
Relational	4	0.774	Spiritual intelligence (total)	23	0.927

Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported in Table 1 confirmed the necessary reliability of the questionnaires. Data analysis was performed in SPSS version 16 and LISREL using Pearson's correlation coefficient and the structural equation model. In this research, ethical considerations were observed by explaining the research objectives to the subjects prior to the distribution of questionnaires, ensuring the participants about

the confidentiality terms regarding their personal information and demonstrating the fact that participation in the study was voluntary.

## Results

In this study, the mean age of the subjects was  $27.42 \pm 3.79$  years, and their demographic characteristics were reported in Table 2:

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Subjects**

Variable	Frequency (percent)
Sex	Female
	185(54.3)
Married	Male
	156(45.7)
Grade	Single
	271(79.5)
Field of Study	Married
	70(20.5)
Grade	Masters
	295(86.5)
Field of Study	Ph.D
	46(13.5)
Field of Study	Science and Engineering
	171(50.14)
Field of Study	Literature and Humanities
	170(49.86)

A structural equation model was used to assess the research hypotheses. In table 3, the descriptive indexes of variables including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis are presented. In causal modeling, the distribution of variables should be normal, in which case the values of skewness and kurtosis of the variables should be between +2 and -2. According to the results of Table 2, the absolute value of skewness and kurtosis of

all variables is proportional to the standard. Therefore, the assumption of causal modeling (i.e., the normality of a single variable) is established. In addition, the hypothesis of the relationship between research variables was evaluated before designing the structural equation model through Pearson's correlation coefficient test, results of which are reported in Table 4.

**Table 3: Descriptive Indices of Research Variables**

Variable	Sex	Mean	T	P-value	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Critical existential thinking	Female	19.74	1.092	0.276	19.96	3.97	-0.387	0.808
	Male	20.21						
Personal meaning production	Female	14.12	0.258	0.797	14.17	3.14	-0.221	0.13
	Male	14.21						
Transcendental awareness	Female	16.18	0.915	0.361	16.34	3.44	-0.027	-0.201
	Male	16.53						
Conscious state expansion	Female	13.14	0.072	0.943	13.12	3.21	0.076	-0.382
	Male	13.11						
Spiritual intelligence	Female	63.21	0.679	0.497	63.61	11.87	0.079	-0.135
	Male	64.08						
Self-efficacy	Female	23.24	0.388	0.699	23.16	4.22	-0.604	0.746
	Male	23.07						
Hope	Female	22.59	1.165	0.245	22.84	4.31	-0.549	0.955
	Male	23.14						
Optimism	Female	21.58	1.566	0.118	21.85	3.43	-0.513	1.79
	Male	22.17						
Resilience	Female	20.72	0.992	0.322	20.9	3.51	-0.335	1.39
	Male	21.11						
Psychological capital	Female	88.16	0.957	0.339	88.77	12.79	-0.651	1.99
	Male	89.49						
Structural	Female	21.25	0.203	0.839	21.2	5.11	0.129	0.239
	Male	21.14						
Relational	Female	11.62	1.003	0.317	11.46	3.28	-0.007	0.032
	Male	11.26						
Cognitive	Female	19.76	1.161	0.247	20.02	4.43	0.177	0.224
	Male	20.32						
Social capital	Female	52.64	0.072	0.942	52.68	11.24	0.219	0.509
	Male	52.73						

**Table 4: Correlation Coefficients between Research Variables**

Variable	Spiritual intelligence		Psychological capital		Social capital	
	r	sig	r	sig	r	sig
Spiritual intelligence	1	0.001	0.585	0.001	0.359	0.001
Psychological Capital	0.585	0.001	1	0.001	0.335	0.001
Social capital	0.359	0.001	0.335	0.001	1	0.001

According to the mentioned table, the coefficient of the correlation between spiritual

intelligence with psychological capital and social capital was estimated at 0.585 and 0.359,

respectively. In addition, the value of correlation coefficient between psychological capital and social capital was 0.355, which was positive and significant ( $P<0.001$ ). The structural equation model was designed by considering the establishment of a relationship between research variables. Moreover, the fit of the model was evaluated before assessing the research hypotheses. Generally, the fit of the model is

used in determining the relationship between observed and latent variables (Table 5). fit indexes include a goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean residual (SRMR). The fit results were reported to be acceptable in accordance with the standards set based on Table 5.

**Table 5: Fit Indices of Theoretical Model of Research**

Index	Desirable amount	The amount obtained
GFI	0.8 and up	0.93
RMR	Below 0.09	0.84
CFI	0.9	0.97
RMSEA	Below 0.08	0.08

To analyze the hypotheses, the developed theoretical model must be processed first for each hypothesis to determine the extent of support of the theoretical model by the data collected. To answer this question, we used the quantitative fit indexes of the model (CFI, GFI, SRMR). The relations in the model could be assessed if the overall indexes were acceptable or the theoretical model would be

confirmed. These correlation relations are the regression coefficient (coefficient of influence) associated with the hypothesis and factor load for each item. All relationships between latent variables and factor loads of each of the items are shown in Figure 1. According to the model obtained based on Figure 1, the research hypotheses can be analyzed, as follows:

**Table 6: Path Analysis**

Assumptions	Beta	T	Conclusion
Social capital has a positive effect on psychological capital.	0.12	2.11	Confirmation
Social capital has a positive effect on spiritual intelligence.	0.42	6.78	Confirmation
Spiritual intelligence has a positive effect on psychological capital.	0.64	9.25	Confirmation
Social capital has a positive effect on spiritual capital through spiritual intelligence.	0.268		Confirmation

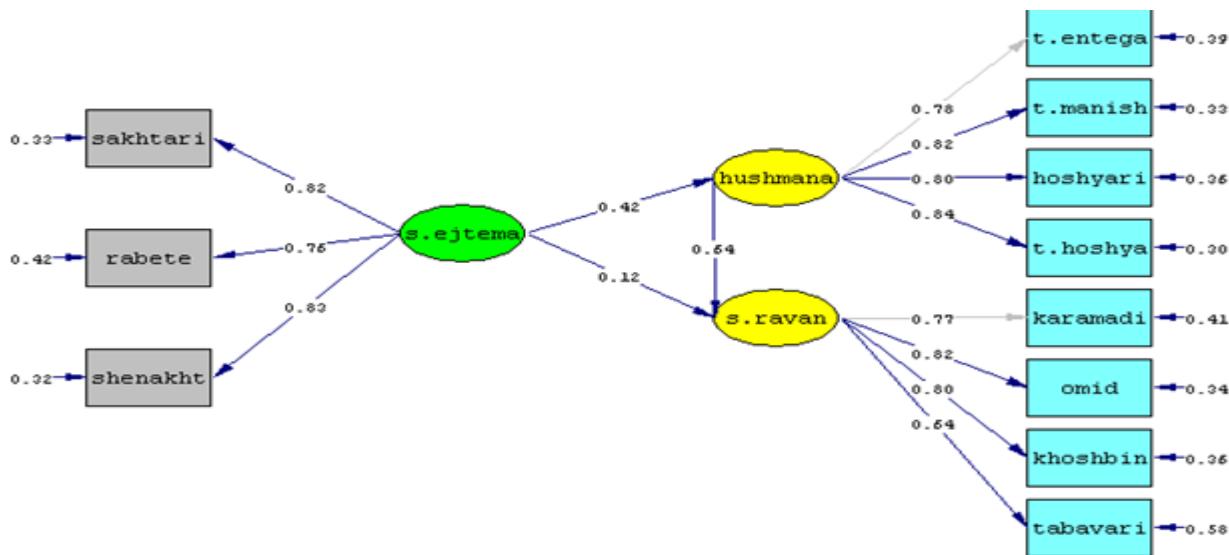


Figure 1: Fit Model (Standard Coefficients)

## Discussion

According to the results of the present study, spiritual intelligence played a significant and positive role in the relationship between social capital and psychological capital of students. In explaining this finding, it could be argued that a person must communicate with others in order to enjoy social capital. In fact, it is the others who are the actual source of one's enjoyment of benefits and privileges. Therefore, the concept of social capital causes the connection with others through important sociological variables, such as trust, awareness, civic participation and social solidarity. This connection, meaning the close relationship with others, greatly helps an

individual and gives him/her a sense of belonging and prevents isolation and depression. Therefore, social capital will have a positive effect on the individual's psychological capital (17).

Lynch and Kaplan also marked that social capital created social creates solidarity and social commitment through establishing social networks, thereby increasing the self-esteem and psychological capital of individuals (18). Meanwhile, people with higher spiritual intelligence have a coherent belief that creates meaning in life and hope for the future, in a way that they give meaning to the psychological problems and dangers occurring in life are optimistic and hopeful individuals. On the other hand, these people

have social support and a healthier lifestyle, all of which are indicative of their greater resilience and ultimately higher psychological capital (19). These people believe that spiritual intelligence creates meaning and purpose for life. In fact, people with this feature better deal with crises and problems since they experience less mental disturbance by having hope for God (20). Spiritual intelligence allows people to create a new condition that, even if stressful or disturbing, could have a meaning or purpose. By doing so, they can adapt to the new condition, change the stressful factor, and reduce their negative effects (21).

Spiritual Intelligence enables a person to have a deep insight about events of life, do not fear life difficulties, face problems patiently and find logical solutions for them. Therefore, it can be admitted that spiritual intelligence increases the flexibility power and self-awareness of a person so that more patience and tolerance could be shown in the face of difficulties of life. As a result, spiritual intelligence can improve the relationship between social capital and psychological capital. The second result of the present study showed that social capital had a positive and significant effect on psychological capital (optimism, hope, self-efficacy and resilience)

of students, which is in line with the results of previous studies (23, 22). It is notable that with the membership of individuals on social networks, their social communication ability has increased, and people feel hope and growth in their lives more than before (24). On the other hand, the lack of or weakness of social capital leads to individual isolation and negative individualism and ultimately results in a weakening of psychological capital. More precisely, the lack of social networks that support the right relationships between individuals, the break of interpersonal relationships and the reduction of interpersonal trust are able to prevent the demonstration of individual abilities in the social arena. In fact, the existence of such a disproportionate atmosphere can take away the opportunity of self-expression and bravery from mankind, deprive him/her of the vast resources of feedback, replace despair and pessimism in the person's perceptual and psychological system (25) and, ultimately, decrease psychological capital in the individual. The third finding of the current research demonstrated that social capital had a positive and significant effect on spiritual intelligence, which is in congruence with the findings of previous studies (15, 16). Regarding the fact that the main components of social capital are

created by the participation and trust between the members, one can find the relationship between social capital and spiritual intelligence. This is mainly due to the fact that spiritual intelligence could be found in the form of criteria such as honesty, compassion, attention to overall consciousness, mutual sympathy, the sense playing an important role in a broader whole, spiritual and practical forgiveness and benevolence, seeking harmony and coordination with the nature and the whole being, and being comfortable alone without feeling lonely (26). All of these criteria can be affected by social capital.

Spiritual intelligence can also affect social capital by creating peace of mind, establishing an understanding between people, and managing changes and removing obstacles (27). In addition, spiritual intelligence has always emphasized people's respect for morality, constructive relationship, respect for others, observing the rights of others, forgiveness, and sacrifice, which can be a significantly important basis for strengthening social capital (28). The fourth finding of the present study indicated that spiritual intelligence had a positive and significant effect on psychological capital, which is in accordance with the results of previous studies (29-32). In explaining the relationship

between spiritual intelligence and psychological health, King expressed that spiritual intelligence can make it easier for individuals to understand the origin and destination of human life and the world. Naturally, it is expected that such an understanding will direct individuals to the selection of high goals and organizing their overall orientation in life, thereby improving their psychological capital (33).

Sediq Arfa'i et al. marked that spiritual intelligence goes through a process in which one of its main pillars is having a true understanding of God and having purpose and meaning in life, which an introduction to resilience and adaptation to problems. If a person has a higher level of spiritual intelligence, he/she considers a meaning and goal in life and the world, by which he/she is able to tolerate the problems and show greater resilience and, therefore, has better psychological capital (31). Lysne et al. reported that beliefs, words, and images that require a source of love, protection, and comfort reduce stress and have a beneficial effect on the body's specific mechanisms. Possibly with the same mechanism, the components of spiritual intelligence will affect psychological capital (32).

One of the major drawbacks of this study was

collecting the data through self-report, which might have caused bias in completing the questionnaire even though the subjects were ensured of the confidentiality terms. Another limitation was the implementation of the research in just a specific region of Iran since the opinions of the graduate students of University of Sistan and Baluchestan cannot be the full representative of the views of students throughout the country. This limits the spatial generalization of the research.

## Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, social capital had a positive effect on students' psychological capital either directly or indirectly and through the intermediary variable of spiritual intelligence. Therefore, it is recommended that strengthening the activities of non-governmental organizations, creating opportunities for social interactions (e.g., individual and group), encouraging individuals to participate in social activities, planning and culture-building for the youth and paying more attention to this area be carried out by university administrators and planners. By doing so, the proper foundation could be laid for the growth of social capital in the higher education system and at the society level and social networks could be

developed and promoted. These issues could eventually affect the increase of social capital of students. In addition, university authorities could design and implement various interesting programs to gather students together, increase their social capital, and contribute to the establishment of their social relations network. Furthermore, it is suggested that spiritual intelligence be re-defined and revised from the Islamic point of view and based on the culture of the society and proper educational packages related to this issue be designed so that students could be exposed to the education of spiritual intelligence based on Islamic teachings. Then, we would be able to assess the effect of these educational courses. It is also recommended that future qualitative or integrated studies be conducted to evaluate the mediating role of spiritual well-fare, spiritual health, and religious orientation in this regard.

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