



Religious Support

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Abstract

This research aims to explore religious support and the statistically significant differences based on gender (male and female) and academic branch (scientific and literary). The sample consisted of 500 students from intermediate schools in the city of Diwaniya, selected using a stratified random sampling method. The researcher utilized the Fiala et al. (2002) scale for measuring religious support.

Data were analyzed statistically using the SPSS program and appropriate statistical methods. The results indicated that the sample exhibited a level of religious support, with statistically significant differences in religious support based on gender, favoring females, and also favoring the scientific branch among intermediate school students in Diwaniya.

Based on the findings, several recommendations and suggestions were made.

Keywords: Religious support.

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Introduction

The intermediate stage is a critical period in the development of youth, as they undergo complex physical and psychological transformations. Religion and social upbringing play a pivotal role in guiding young people and providing them with the values and principles necessary to navigate challenges. Additionally, religious influences have profound social and psychological effects on individuals and communities. Modern studies affirm that religiosity can positively impact mental and social health, enhance social bonds, and offer strong social support, helping individuals feel a sense of belonging and security. This, in turn, enables them to form

their personal identities and manage emotions and relationships independently. However, social support remains an essential element, as adolescents need ongoing guidance and support from family and friends to develop in a healthy and balanced manner.

1. Research Problem

The intermediate stage is one of the most important educational phases for students, coinciding with early adolescence. During this time, they often experience a state of imbalance, leading to various behavioral and psychological issues. Adolescents face intense conflicts between the opinions of their peers and their personal inclinations on one hand and the views and expectations of their families on the other. They may turn to a close friend for support or seek out groups they believe can provide strength to overcome their problems, which may sometimes include religious groups (Pargament, 1997: p.21).

If individuals drift away from religion, they may face a range of psychological issues, including depression, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with life. Many of the problems students encounter could stem from this distance from religious practices (Cusner, 2021: p.47).

Thus, the problem of this research is to answer the following question: What is the level of religious support among intermediate school students in the city of Diwaniya?

2. Research Importance

First - Theoretical Importance: The significance lies in the importance of the topic addressed by the study; as a variable worthy of exploration and research, along with its related psychological variables. Additionally, its psychological, educational, social, and intellectual importance is urgent, especially in this era, amidst the relentless attack aimed at questioning established beliefs and spreading negative ideas. Furthermore, it is essential to guide and counsel them, enhancing their self-confidence and decision-making abilities during this crucial stage of their lives. Here, the role of educational institutions and their leaders becomes evident in nurturing the generation positively to become future leaders of the nation. This research also provides a knowledge base, as this knowledge can assist researchers in developing effective interventions to address problems. It serves as a reference for researchers by offering tools to measure this variable.

Second - Practical Importance: The results of this study assist those involved in planning professional development and training programs in educational institutions by guiding these programs based on the study's findings, reinforcing strengths, addressing weaknesses, and supporting students. It benefits supervisors and educational counselors by directing modern methods for teachers to address shortcomings in their roles regarding this aspect. The scales can help identify students who need religious support and address their issues.

To the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to explore the nature of the correlational relationship within Iraqi society, highlighting an urgent need to study the significance of this variable.

3. Research Objectives

The current research aims to identify:

1. Religious support.
2. Statistically significant differences in religious support based on the variables of gender (male, female) and academic branch (scientific, literary).

3. Research Scope

The current research is limited to intermediate school students in Al-Diwaniyah Governorate, specifically in the morning study programs, including both genders (male and female) and academic branches (scientific and literary) for the academic year 2023-2024.

5. Terminology Identification

Religious Support: Defined by Fiala et al. (2002) as a set of supportive resources that individuals perceive, originating from at least three sources: direct support from God, support from individuals within a religious group, and support from religious leaders. Individuals resort to this support when facing a problem or in need (Fiala et al., 2002, p. 763).

Theoretical Definition: It is the score that a student obtains while answering the items on the religious support scale.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

Religion is an effective social force, and history attests to its ability to focus and coordinate human effort, creating fear and awe, enhancing both war and peace, uniting social groups, and rallying them against one another. In addition to its social power, religion is considered a psychological force that can influence the outcomes of individuals' lives (McCullough and Willoughby, 2009, p. 1).

(1) Pargament's Model (1997)

Kenneth Pargament argues that religion plays a profound role in individuals' lives, especially during difficult times, serving as a powerful source of meaning and purpose that helps individuals cope with crises and challenges. Pargament notes that religion can be a means of adaptation, as some individuals turn to religion for support and comfort, while others may distance themselves from it. This raises questions about whether

religious belief is merely a defensive mechanism or a form of denial. On one hand, religion can provide a sense of intimacy and trust with God, enhancing psychological comfort and reducing anxiety and depression. On the other hand, awareness of sin and feelings of moral inadequacy can lead to decreased life satisfaction and self-esteem. Building a bridge between religion and psychology can be beneficial for a deeper understanding of how religion affects mental health and personal behaviors (Pargament, 1997, p. 21).

(2) Fiala et al.'s Model (2002)

Fiala and colleagues believe that the theoretical literature on social support research has often focused on family relationships or friendships, rarely addressing the impact of religious congregations. Given the increasing interest in the relationship between religion and psychological variables in recent years, the significance of religion in coping is well-documented, as is its overall effect on life satisfaction and subjective well-being. However, specific resources of support within "religion" that are responsible for its positive impact still need to be identified (Fiala et al., 2002, pp. 762-763).

Based on this premise, Fiala and colleagues explain religious support by clarifying that support from God is a distinguishing factor of religious organizations. The researchers hypothesize that an individual's concept of God can affect both coping and well-being. Positive views about (goodness, love, and care) are associated with positive self-concept, self-esteem, reduced feelings of loneliness, and the ability to effectively manage stressful events. Individuals are more likely to turn to God for support if they expect such support or have previously perceived God's support. Consequently, individuals who see God as a supportive and guiding force tend to achieve more positive outcomes than those who do not.

Additionally, the support provided by the religious community can also influence psychological performance, serving as potential sources of companionship, community, and support from others who share similar values and goals. Thus, a theory of community is proposed to provide its members with coping resources and positive feelings. People experiencing stress are likely to seek help from religious leaders more than from any other specialist or counselor, with the pastor or religious leader playing a critical role in shaping the nature of communal life (Fiala et al., 2002, pp. 762-765)

Previous Studies:

A study by Fiala et al. (2002) aimed to investigate religious support among a group of Christians in the United States, consisting of 249 participants from middle schools. The results revealed a presence of religious support among individuals (Fiala et al., 2002, p. 767).

On the other hand, a study by Torralba et al. (2021) focused on understanding religious coping among adolescents in the cities of Murcia and Valencia. The sample comprised 531 individuals from high schools. The

analysis results indicated that religious coping has become a secondary option, positively associated with age, and intertwined with secular coping strategies. Furthermore, religious coping tends to be more effective when connected to religious communities and combined with other non-religious strategies (Torralba et al., 2021, p. 1).

Chapter Three: Research Procedures

1. **Research Population:** The current research population comprises middle school students in the city of Diwaniya for the academic year 2023-2024, totaling 11,165 students, including 4,824 males and 6,341 females. The number of students in the scientific branch is 10,472, while those in the literary branch are 693.
2. **Sample:** The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling method, with 500 male and female students chosen proportionately from both the scientific and literary branches of middle schools in Diwaniya.
3. **Research Tools:** The researcher adopted, translated, and adapted the Religious Support Scale (2002) by Fiala et al., which consists of 21 items. The response alternatives are graded from 4 to 1 for positive items, and the reverse applies for negative items.

Indicators of the Validity and Reliability of the Scales:

A. Construct Validity: Construct validity was verified through the extreme groups method and the correlation of item scores with the total scale score:

1. **Extreme Groups (External Consistency):** To analyze the items of the scale using this method, it was administered to a sample of 500 students. After sorting the scores in ascending order, 27% from the upper group and 27% from the lower group were selected, totaling 135 responses. Using the t-test for independent samples, the calculated t-value for all items of the Religious Support Scale (21 items), Perceived Parenting Scale (30 items), and Emotional Autonomy Scale (20 items) was found to be greater than the tabulated value of 1.96. All items of the scales were significant at the 0.05 level.
2. **Relationship Between Item Scores and Total Scale Score (Internal Consistency):** Using Pearson's correlation coefficient to extract the correlation between the score of each item and the total scale score, it was found that all correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, with 498 degrees of freedom. The calculated t-value was greater than the critical tabulated value for the significance of the correlation coefficient (0.098) for the Religious Support Scale.

B. Reliability: The reliability of the current scale was verified using the following methods:

1. **Test-Retest Method:** To calculate the reliability coefficient, the scale was administered to a sample of 40 students from secondary schools in Al-Diwaniyah. After an initial application, the scale was re-administered to the same individuals two weeks later. Using Pearson's correlation coefficient between the scores from both applications, the reliability coefficient for the Religious Support Scale was found to be 0.861, indicating a good level of stability in individuals' responses over time.
2. **Cronbach's Alpha:** The reliability of the scale was also calculated using the Cronbach's Alpha formula, resulting in a total reliability coefficient of 0.824. This value suggests good internal consistency among the items on the scale.

4. Final Application: The researcher applied the scale in its final form to the sample of the study from October 1, 2023, to November 1, 2023.

5. Statistical Methods: The researcher utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data statistically, employing the appropriate statistical methods, including:

- One-sample t-test
- Independent samples t-test
- T-test for correlation to assess the significance of correlation coefficients
- Pearson correlation coefficient
- Alpha formula for internal consistency
- Two-way ANOVA
- Z-test

Chapter Four: Presentation and Interpretation of Results

1. Understanding Religious Support Among Students:

The statistical analyses indicate that the mean score of the sample participants on the Religious Support Scale was (67.21), with a standard deviation of (9.233). The hypothetical mean was (52.5). When comparing the mean score of the sample to the hypothetical mean of the scale, and testing the difference between them using a one-sample t-test, it was found that the calculated t-value (35.630) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at a significance level of (0.05) and with (499) degrees of freedom. This indicates that high school students in the city of Diwaniya exhibit significant levels of religious support. Table (1) illustrates this finding.

Table (1)

Significance of the Difference Between the Mean and Hypothetical Scores of the Sample on the Scale

Variable	Sample Size	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Degrees of Freedom	Calculated t-Value	Critical t-Value	Significance Level
Religious Support	500	67.21	9.233	52.5	499	35.630	1.96	Significant

The result regarding religious support can be interpreted according to the adopted theory, indicating that the sample individuals perceive religious support positively due to previous experiences that had a beneficial impact on them or when facing problems. This finding aligns with the study by Lazar and Bjorck (2008), which, despite being conducted in a different cultural context, also showed that students had a high score on the religious support scale (Lazar and Bjorck, 2008: p.401). In contrast, it differs from the study by Torralba et al. (2021), which indicated that high school students in Spain had a low score on the religious coping (religious support) scale (Torralba et al, 2021: p.4).

2. Statistically Significant Differences in Religious Support According to Gender (Males, Females) and Branch (Scientific, Literary)

Table (2) Statistical Significance of Differences in Religious Support Among Students Based on Gender (Males - Females) and Branch (Scientific, Literary)

Variable	Specialty	Number	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	Calculated t-value	Tabular t-value	Significance Level (0.05)
Religious Support	Males	215	64.55	9.404	498	-5.781-	1.96	Significant for females
	Females	285	69.22	8.587				
	Scientific	468	67.48	9.363		2.462		Significant for Scientific
	Literary	32	63.34	5.917				
	Literary	32	61.25	9.916				

A. Gender (Males - Females)

The average score for the male sample was (64.55) and for females was (69.22). Upon comparison, it was found that there are statistically significant differences in religious support favoring females, indicated by the

calculated t-value of (-5.781), which is greater than the tabulated t-value of (1.96) at a significance level of (0.05) with (498) degrees of freedom, making it statistically significant.

This finding can be interpreted as females perceiving the support provided to them as unique, due to prior experiences and positive outcomes when facing problems, where support was tangible in both good and bad times. Their perception of support is higher than that of males, influenced by their increased faith and the familial environment that imposes greater religious obligations compared to males. Additionally, the advice and guidance received through media and social networks may play a significant role.

Furthermore, interaction with peers who share similar religious beliefs likely contributes to the higher levels of religious support among females, particularly in offering counsel when facing challenges. This result aligns with the study by Bjorck and Maslim (2011), which indicated that women in the U.S. have high scores on the religious support scale (Bjorck and Maslim, 2011: p.75), and with the study by Fiala et al. (2002) conducted on (249) church attendees in America, which revealed that participants enjoyed a high level of religious support (Fiala et al, 2002: p.761)

B. Field of Study (Scientific - Literary)

The support is notably higher among students in the scientific field compared to those in the literary field. This difference may be attributed to the academic pressures faced by students in the scientific track, which are generally more challenging than those in the literary track. As a result, students may turn to God for relief from these pressures, seeking tranquility and positive outcomes in managing the stresses of academic life.

This finding aligns with Maton's study (1989), which emphasized that adolescents resorting to religious support can reduce the stress resulting from academic and psychological pressures (Maton, 1989b: p.310).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the researcher recommends the following:

1. **Conduct Scientific Seminars and Cultural Conferences:** These should aim to strengthen the foundations of religious support and ways to enhance it, along with the psychological benefits it brings to individuals and society.
2. **Organize Guidance and Awareness Workshops in Schools:** Focus on promoting correct religious culture, especially among adolescents.
3. **Utilize the Research Scale in Future Studies:** The scale developed in this research can be beneficial for studies involving other adolescent groups.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. **Conduct a Quasi-Experimental Study:** Investigate the impact of religious support on life satisfaction across various life domains.
2. **Examine the Relationship between Religious Support and Other Variables:** Explore connections with psychological and social adaptation, psychological adjustment, and productive personality traits.
3. **Carry Out Similar Studies in Other Social Groups:** Such as university students and working adolescents, to broaden the understanding of religious support in different contexts.

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Appendices

Religious Support Scale

Items	Response Options	
	agree	disagree

	always	sometimes	rarely	never
☐ My religious leaders give me a sense of belonging.				
☐ My religious leaders care about my life and situation.				
☐ I can turn to my religious leaders for advice when I face problems.				
☐ I feel appreciated by my religious leaders.				
☐ I am valued by the religious leaders as an individual among them.				
☐ If something goes wrong, my religious leaders will help me.				
☐ I feel distant from my religious leaders.				
☐ God cares for me in all aspects of my life.				
☐ I can turn to God for support when I face problems.				
☐ God values me.				
☐ If something goes wrong, God will help me.				
☐ I feel appreciated by God despite my mistakes.				
☐ God gives me the feeling that I am under His care.				
☐ I feel distant from God.				
☐ I am a person who is valued by my religious community.				
☐ I feel appreciated by my religious community even when I am absent from them.				
☐ Members of my religious community make me feel I belong to them.				
☐ If I encounter a problem, members of my religious community do not leave me alone.				
☐ Members of my religious community care about my life and situation.				
☐ I can turn to members of my religious community for advice when I am facing problems.				
☐ I differ in many ideas from members of my religious community.				