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The Relationship Between Religious Teachings and Reduction of Negative Emotions Caused by Materialism: A Case Study of Theology Students at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan

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ABSTRACT

Objective: A pronounced predisposition towards materialism has historically engendered both individual and societal ramifications. In various religious doctrines, materialism is regarded as a formidable peril to human existence and is believed to incite turmoil within the human psyche. Conversely, numerous empirical investigations posit that religiosity, faith in a divine entity, and belief in an afterlife—contrarily to materialism—exert beneficial influences on psychological well-being and the alleviation of adverse emotional states. This research endeavor seeks to investigate the influence of religious doctrines on the mitigation of negative emotions that stem from materialistic inclinations.

Methods: The research cohort comprised 248 students enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan. The Materialism Questionnaire (Masoud) and the Negative Emotions Questionnaire (DASS-21) were concurrently administered to the students. The data procured from this investigation were subjected to multiple regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient assessment, with materialism operationalized as the independent variable and negative emotions (depression, anxiety, stress) as the dependent variables.

Results: The findings revealed that materialism exerts a significant influence on the negative emotional states of students. Furthermore, materialism also affects each specific dimension of negative emotions (depression, anxiety, stress). The Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant positive association between the majority of materialism components and negative emotional states.

Conclusions: The results of this study imply that materialism possesses a noteworthy positive correlation with the negative emotional states experienced by students.

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Introduction

In contemporary societies, worldview serves as a principal axis dividing communities into religious and secular orientations. One of the major philosophical and behavioral outcomes of such worldviews is materialism, defined as an “independent love for the world such that it becomes the motivation and stimulus for human actions” (Akbari & Fathi Ashtiani, 2009, p. 73). From a religious perspective, materialism is often portrayed as a root cause of spiritual and psychological distress, whereas religiosity is posited as a source of mental peace and resilience against life’s adversities.

Mental health has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges of modern life, particularly with regard to the prevalence of negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Although considerable research has addressed the causes and correlates of these psychological difficulties, some fundamental roots—particularly those related to worldview and life orientation—have been comparatively overlooked (Colbert, 2011, as cited in Marzabadi & Ebrahimi, 2016). Religious teachings across traditions often emphasize the detrimental effects of excessive attachment to worldly affairs, encapsulated in the notion that “love for the world is the greatest trial and the root of discomforts and hardships” (Tamimi Amadi, 2014). Within Islamic scripture, materialism is presented as a threat to both mental well-being and faith, with several Qur’anic verses associating it with inner unrest and existential dissatisfaction.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that religiosity can contribute to improved mental health outcomes. For instance, research indicates that religious beliefs—particularly those involving faith in a transcendent being and life after death—are associated with reduced anxiety, enhanced life satisfaction, and greater resilience against psychosocial stressors (Ellison, 1991; Hill, Ellison, & Burdette, 2009, as cited in Kopani & Taghavi, 2015). Conversely, the abandonment of religious belief has been linked to diminished well-being and higher susceptibility to mental distress (Fenlon et al., 2012, as cited in Beheshti & Zargham Hajebi, 2018). Such findings suggest that religion provides not only a moral framework but also existential meaning, which in turn mitigates the effects of negative emotions (Feldman & Snyder, 2005, as cited in Dehdari et al., 2013; Westgate, 1996).

Materialism, as a counterpoint to religiosity, has been extensively addressed in religious texts and examined in psychological literature. It is generally characterized by a prioritization of material

possessions and worldly success over spiritual or transcendent concerns. Qur'anic narratives describe materialistic individuals as those whose emotional states fluctuate with the presence or absence of material blessings, thereby undermining their capacity for stable contentment (Akbari & Fathi Ashtiani, 2009). Modern psychological studies corroborate these insights, indicating that materialism is associated with decreased mental health and increased levels of depression and anxiety (Hall, Quing, & Mador, 2008; Tavanipour, 2013). Moreover, materialistic orientations have been shown to negatively affect social behavior, work performance, and organizational functioning (Ghafari Jafari & Beheshti, 2015; Khordpuzi & Shahabi-Zadeh, 2015).

While the relationship between materialism, religiosity, and mental health has been explored in various contexts, there is a notable gap in research specifically addressing the impact of materialism on students' negative emotions. University students, in particular, constitute a population vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and stress, with some studies reporting prevalence rates as high as 73% for anxiety and 31% for stress of varying severity (Dehdari et al., 2013). These negative emotions not only impair academic performance and increase burnout (Mikaeili et al., 2014) but also hinder creativity by generating cognitive clutter (Gillette, Vallerand, & Bourreau, 2013). Given that the university period coincides with significant developmental and social challenges, understanding the potential role of materialism in exacerbating negative emotions is of critical importance.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the relationship between materialism and negative emotions—specifically depression, anxiety, and stress—among university students. By examining this relationship, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how value orientations and life perspectives influence mental health in young adult populations.

Material and Methods

The statistical population of this study comprised all students enrolled in theology-related programs at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan, totaling approximately 700 individuals. The required sample size was determined using Cochran's formula and Morgan's table, with a margin of error set at 0.05. Based on these criteria, a sample size of 248 participants was calculated. Questionnaires were distributed among students from various specializations, including Islamic

theology and religious sciences, jurisprudence and law, Islamic philosophy and theology, literature, and mysticism. Completed questionnaires were collected for subsequent analysis.

Instruments

Materialism Measurement Scale (MMS): The Materialism Measurement Scale, developed by Akbari and Ashtiani (2009), was employed to assess participants' levels of materialism. The instrument contains 60 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Previous research has confirmed both the construct and content validity of the MMS. Akbari and Ashtiani (2009) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.8921, indicating high internal consistency, as well as a test–retest reliability coefficient of 0.99 (Pearson correlation) and a guaranteed method correlation of 0.955.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21): Negative emotional states were measured using the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). While the original DASS consists of 42 items, this study utilized the shortened 21-item version (DASS-21), which assesses three subscales—depression, anxiety, and stress—each containing seven items. Responses are scored on a 4-point Likert scale (*not at all, a little, a lot, very much*). Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) reported satisfactory internal consistency for the three subscales (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$ for depression, 0.84 for anxiety, and 0.90 for stress). The Persian version of the DASS-21 has been validated in prior Iranian studies. Sahabi, Asghari, and Salari (2005) examined its criterion validity by correlating DASS subscales with established measures, including Beck's Depression Inventory, Zatok's Anxiety Inventory, and the Perceived Stress Scale. Significant correlations were found: 0.70 (depression), 0.67 (anxiety), and 0.49 (stress), all at $p < 0.001$.

Procedure

A total of 248 questionnaires were administered to students enrolled in theology programs at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan. Participants completed both the MMS and the DASS-21. Data collection was conducted in person, and all questionnaires were retrieved immediately after completion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS software (version 25). Descriptive statistics were computed, and graphical representations were generated using Microsoft Excel 2016. Inferential

statistical analyses, including correlation tests and regression analysis, were conducted to examine the study hypotheses.

Results

Correlation Analysis

Table 1 presents the pairwise correlations among the study variables. Correlations not significant at the 0.05 level are indicated in bold. The results show no statistically significant linear relationship between materialism and anxiety, depression, or overall negative emotions, nor between lack of adherence to religious laws and psychological symptoms of materialism. All other correlations were significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of variables

	Tension	Anxiety	Depression	Negative emotions	Worldly psychological	Secular social trends	Lack of inclination	Luxuryism	Failure to obey the rules	Escape from the afterlife	Worldliness
Tension	1										
Anxiety	0.63	1									
Depression	0.65	0.58	1								
Negative emotions	0.87	0.85	0.86	1							
Worldly psychological symptoms	0.361	0.18	0.33	0.34	1						
Secular social trends	0.32	0.19	0.36	0.34	0.19	1					
Lack of inclination towards servitude	0.27	0.19	0.33	0.31	0.17	0.49	1				
Luxuries	0.13	0.06	0.11	0.12	0.23	0.34	0.30	1			
Failure to obey the rules	0.18	0.23	0.18	0.22	0.13	0.34	0.33	0.35	1		
Escape from the afterlife	0.21	0.14	0.19	0.21	0.15	0.41	0.49	0.41	0.47	1	
Worldliness	0.38	0.26	0.39	0.40	0.43	0.72	0.72	0.62	0.65	0.76	1

Regression Analysis

As shown in Table 2, the p -value associated with the t -test for the materialism index is less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding indicates that materialism significantly predicts negative emotions. The intercept of the regression model is also significant, suggesting that the baseline level of negative emotions is statistically meaningful.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between the materialism index and the negative emotions index is $r = 0.401$, indicating a moderate, positive linear relationship. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.161, meaning that approximately 16% of the variance in negative emotions

is explained by materialism, with the remaining variance attributable to other factors. The overall regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The Durbin–Watson statistic was close to 2, indicating no autocorrelation in the residuals.

Table 2 . Results of the regression model

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	Std. error	Beta	T value	R	R ²	Durbin-Watson statistic
Negative affect index	Intercept	0.815	0.167	-	4.881*	.401	0.161	1.75
	Worldliness index	0.455	0.069	0.401	6.609*			

The normality of residuals—an assumption of regression analysis—was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test and visual inspection of residual plots, both of which confirmed normality. Accordingly, the regression equation is:

$$y = 0.815 + 0.455x$$

where Y represents negative emotions and X represents materialism.

The results demonstrate a significant positive association between materialism and negative emotions among students. Higher levels of materialism are associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, with materialism accounting for 16% of the variability in these negative emotions.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant positive association between materialism and negative emotions—specifically depression, anxiety, and stress—among students. These results align with the work of Akbari and Fathi Ashtiani (2009), who reported that higher levels of materialism were significantly related to poorer general health indicators, including physical symptoms, anxiety, and depression. Similarly, Issa Zadeh and Issa Zadeh (2017) concluded that materialism constitutes a fundamental obstacle to spiritual health, thereby contributing to the onset and progression of various psychological disorders.

The destructive effects of materialism on emotional well-being can be understood within the context of motivational orientation. A materialistic individual invests substantial energy and hope in attaining worldly possessions and achievements. When such goals are unattained, the resulting psychological disappointment often manifests in heightened negative emotions. Given that emotional regulation is a critical component of mental health, the persistence of depression, anxiety, and stress can severely

impair an individual's daily functioning, diminish personal efficacy, and hinder goal attainment. This dynamic may perpetuate a self-reinforcing cycle in which diminished well-being further undermines worldly success. Religious teachings have long reflected this understanding, warning that excessive attachment to the material world leads to disappointment and distress.

Conversely, individuals with lower levels of materialism, as demonstrated in this study and previous research, tend to report fewer negative emotions and greater mental stability. Freed from the constant pressure to acquire or retain material possessions, they can pursue their goals with greater composure, adapt more flexibly to setbacks, and maintain overall well-being. Religious traditions often emphasize this principle; for instance, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) is reported to have said, "Whoever abandons the world, the world comes to him against its will" (Tamimi Amidi, 2017). Empirical evidence supports this perspective. Lal and Sarin (2020) found that individuals with strong religious or spiritual beliefs—particularly those influencing attitudes toward work—experience higher personal accomplishment and mental resilience. This suggests that detachment from materialistic pursuits can foster peace of mind, which in turn enhances emotional regulation.

The social implications of materialism are equally significant. Unchecked materialistic tendencies can lead to behaviors that contravene ethical principles, especially when individuals perceive worldly attainment as their primary purpose. Over time, escalating desires may prompt violations of personal values and potentially harmful actions toward others. Such outcomes underscore the broader societal risks associated with excessive materialism.

Regression analyses in this study further revealed that three components of materialism—psychological symptoms of materialism, social tendencies toward materialism, and lack of inclination toward worship—were significant predictors of depression. The Pearson correlation coefficient for these components with depression was 0.47, indicating a moderate positive relationship. This is consistent with the findings of Kheradpajoh and Shahabizadeh (2015), who observed that these dimensions of materialism were associated with higher susceptibility to anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms. Given that depression profoundly affects interpersonal relationships, the predictive role of social tendencies toward materialism is particularly noteworthy.

Existing literature reinforces the link between reduced religiosity and poorer psychological outcomes. For example, treatments incorporating religious beliefs have been found to outperform conventional approaches in alleviating depressive symptoms and reducing relapse risk (De Souza & George, 2006, as cited in Khoshkonesh et al.). Longitudinal data from 1973 to 2012 also show that individuals who

abandoned religious affiliation reported lower mental health and well-being compared to their religious counterparts (Fennan & Danisen, 2016; Beheshti & Zargham Hajebi, 2018). Similarly, Robinson et al. (2011, as cited in Beheshti & Zargham Hajebi, 2018) found that religious practice and attendance serve as independent protective factors against anxiety disorders, depression, and suicide attempts.

Taken together, the present findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that materialism not only undermines individual mental health but also contrasts sharply with the protective effects of religiosity. By fostering meaning, reducing excessive worldly desires, and enhancing emotional regulation, religious beliefs may serve as a crucial counterbalance to the psychological risks associated with materialistic orientations.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of University of Sistan and Baluchestan.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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