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The effectiveness of spiritual intelligence training in perceived stress and vitality and Mindfulness in nursing home caregivers

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Abstract

Abstract

The primary goal of social policies is to enhance the quality of life and, specifically, to improve the health of individuals in society. In this context, spiritual intelligence, as one of the cognitive capacities of humans, plays a significant role in various aspects of life, particularly in psychological and behavioral dimensions. The present study aimed to evaluate the impact of spiritual intelligence training on perceived stress, vitality, and mindfulness among caregivers in an orphanage. This research was conducted as a quasi-experimental study using a pretest and posttest design with a control group. The statistical population included all caregivers at Imam Ali Orphanage in Karaj in 2023. Sampling was done using a convenience method; 30 individuals were randomly assigned to the experimental (15 individuals) and control (15 individuals) groups. The instruments included the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983), the Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), and the Mindfulness Scale (Brown & Ryan., 2003). Participants in the experimental group received an intervention based on spiritual intelligence (King, 2009) over eight 90-minute sessions. The findings from the analysis of covariance revealed that spiritual intelligence training resulted in a reduction in perceived stress and an increase in mindfulness among orphanage caregivers ($p < 0.01$); however, it had no significant effect on vitality ($p > 0.01$). Therefore, it can be concluded that spiritual intelligence training can play an effective role in enhancing mindfulness, reducing perceived stress, and ultimately improving the quality of life of orphanage caregivers.

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Introduction

Mental and physical health are among the most basic human needs for achieving a balanced life and effective functioning in society and work environments (Akerstrom et al., 2021). Caregivers in daycare centers face significant psychological and emotional challenges as they are responsible for caring for unaccompanied or maltreated infants and young children, who are often in a vulnerable physical and mental state (Ogden et al., 2018). These conditions impose significant psychological strain on caregivers and threaten their mental health. Perceived stress, as an individual's subjective perception of environmental stress, not only compromises caregivers' mental health but also reduces the quality of child care (Eshghizadeh et al., 2020). Organizational factors, such as a lack of resources, long shifts, and inadequate support, exacerbate this strain and can lead to emotional burnout. This type of stress reduces the ability to form effective emotional connections with children, which is critical for their healthy development (Zal Jarchlou et al., 2021).

On the other hand, vitality (i.e., energy and motivation for tasks) and mindfulness (i.e., focusing on the present moment and managing emotions) are key components of mental health. Vitality acts as a protective factor, but its decline leads to chronic fatigue and decreased performance (Navya & Sharma, 2022). Caregivers who lose their vitality may affect the quality of care (Mazruei et al., 2022). Mindfulness helps respond effectively to children's needs, but the lack of it increases internal conflicts and stress (Devoy & Maguire, 2024). In addition, taking advantage of spiritual and religious dimensions, such as spirituality (i.e., searching for meaning and purpose), can reduce stress and improve vitality and mindfulness (Talebvand et al., 2023). Spiritual intelligence, the ability to find meaning and manage emotions in difficult situations, increases resilience; it is an effective intervention for the mental health of caregivers (Laila & Bisawa, 2024).

Previous research has shown that spiritual intelligence training has a positive impact on happiness and quality of life (Asadi et al., 2023). It improves emotional intelligence and decision-making and reduces burnout (Asadi et al., 2025). In nurses, spiritual intelligence interventions increase job satisfaction and reduce stress (Sharifnia et al., 2022). It also enhances emotional functioning and behavioral regulation in childcare workers (Clayton & Brownlee, 2021).

Therefore, considering the importance of caregivers' mental health and its impact on children, the objective of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence training in reducing perceived stress and improving vitality and mindfulness. The research question asks if spiritual intelligence training reduces stress and improves vitality and mindfulness in caregivers of infants. The hypothesis is that spiritual intelligence training reduces perceived stress, increases vitality, and improves mindfulness.

Methods

The research method was a quasi-experimental study with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population included all caregivers in Imam Ali Nursery in Karaj in 2023. The sample consisted of 30 individuals (using the convenience sampling method) who were randomly divided into the experimental (15 individuals) and control (15 individuals) groups. After the pretest, the experimental group received eight 90-minute sessions of spiritual intelligence training (weekly), but the control group did not receive the training. The posttest was administered at the end. Ethical principles such as anonymity and confidentiality were observed. Data analysis was performed using multivariate and univariate covariance using SPSS software (version 26).

The instruments included Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14; Cohen et al., 1983) ranging from 0-56 (alpha 0.85 original, 0.83 Iranian, 0.75 present); Mindfulness Scale (15 items; Brown & Ryan, 2003) ranging from 15-90 (alpha 0.82 original, 0.83 Iranian, 0.73 present); Vitality Scale (7 items; Ryan & Frederick, 1997) ranging from 7-49 (alpha 0.76 original, 0.85 Iranian, 0.69 present). The spiritual intelligence training protocol (King, 2009) consisted of eight weekly sessions, each lasting 90 minutes.

Findings

Demographic information indicated a relative similarity between the two groups; the majority of the participants in the control group were 30-40 years old (53.3%), had a bachelor's degree (33.3%), were

married (86.7%), had one child (53.3%), and received a middle income (66.7%). The majority of participants in the experimental group were 30-40 years old (60%), held a diploma/bachelor's degree (each 33.3%), were married (80%), had one child (40%), and had a middle income (53.3%).

Before conducting inferential analysis, the normality of the data distribution and the results of Levine's test for homogeneity of variances showed that the necessary assumptions for the multivariate analysis of covariance were met. In this regard, the results of the multivariate covariance with the Pillai effect test indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in at least one of the variables ($p < 0.01$; $F = 21.26$). To find out this difference, univariate analysis of covariance was performed on all three variables, shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *The results of the univariate analysis of covariance*

Variables	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean of squares	F	Significance level	Eta square	Coefficient
Perceived stress	367.26	1	367.26	10.36	.001	.874	.288
Vitality	50.66	1	50.66	3.71	.460	.46	.121
Mindfulness	342.67	1	367.26	20.33	..001	.991	.81

As Table 1 shows, the difference between perceived stress and mindfulness of nursery caregivers in the pretest and posttest phases in the experimental group was significant, and spiritual intelligence training reduced perceived stress and increased mindfulness among nursery caregivers.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of spiritual intelligence training in perceived stress, vitality, and mindfulness in nursery caregivers. The results showed that this training had a significant effect on reducing perceived stress, but did not have a significant effect on vitality, while it was effective in improving mindfulness.

The finding on reducing perceived stress is consistent with the results of previous research (Sharifnia et al., 2022). In explaining this finding, it should be stated that nursery caregivers face heavy psychological and emotional pressures because the responsibility of caring for unaccompanied infants requires high commitment and can lead to psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Spiritual intelligence training, by strengthening internal capacities, enables individuals to cope better with life's adversities and experience more positive emotions. This training provides a semantic framework for understanding challenges and managing job stress constructively (Navya & Sharma, 2022). Spiritual intelligence functions as an adaptive and problem-solving behavior that encompasses cognitive, moral, emotional, and interpersonal levels of development and guides the individual towards inner and outer harmony. Spirituality creates a healthier lifestyle that has a positive impact on mental health and provides a basis for reducing perceived stress in this group.

Contrary to expectations, spiritual intelligence training did not have a significant effect on improving vitality, which is inconsistent with previous research (Asadi et al., 2025). However, the lack of a specific study on nursery school caregivers in the past could be the reason for this discrepancy. Job differences, such as constant emotional stress and lack of organizational support, may have neutralized the effect of training. According to theoretical foundations, spiritual intelligence improves meaning in life, increases hope, and strengthens optimism. This intelligence creates deep insight into events, makes people resilient, and helps solve problems. Spirituality, as a cognitive-motivational concept, provides adaptive resources that facilitate problem solving and goal achievement. Spiritual intelligence is the adaptive application of these factors in everyday life; it brings about transformation in various areas. However, the lack of impact on vitality in this specific group indicates the need for further research to identify influential environmental and individual factors.

On the other hand, the positive effect on mindfulness is consistent with previous research (Devoy & Maguire, 2024; Laila & Bisawa, 2024). This finding suggests that encouraging spirituality in the workplace leads to increased creativity, honesty, trust, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, reduced turnover intention, work ethic, and higher performance. Spiritual intelligence provides a framework for organizing skills and increases adaptability. This intelligence facilitates the interaction between logical thinking and emotion and brings about personal growth. Spiritual intelligence facilitates adaptive growth and reduces internal conflicts through adaptive problem-solving behaviors. Its key elements include understanding true identity, avoiding self-destruction, and self-acceptance, which promote mindfulness. Transcendental awareness provides the power to perceive non-physical dimensions and identify deep values by moving beyond superficial issues.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that every research has limitations. In this study, there were limitations such as non-random sampling, which was limited to caregivers of Imam Ali Nursery in Karaj, the cross-sectional nature of the research, and the lack of follow-up assessment. Based on the findings, it is suggested that the Welfare Organization and infant care centers develop workshops and training courses on spiritual intelligence. Specialists can use the potential of this research to reduce perceived stress and promote mindfulness. Given the practical aspect of spiritual intelligence, it is recommended that employers strengthen it in employees to improve overall spirituality. Future research can examine the long-term effects of this training in similar job groups.

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Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, there are no conflicts of interest in conducting this research study.

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