# The Effectiveness of Religious Spirituality Training in Improving Interpersonal Relationships and Personality Development

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

**Article type:**
*Original Research*

**Objective:** The present study aims to examine the effectiveness of "Religious Spirituality" training in improving interpersonal relationships and personality development.

**Methods and Materials:** The research method employed was an experimental design with a pre-test and post-test and a control group. The target population consisted of male high school students in the second stage of secondary education from one of the high schools in District 2 of Kerman, who were in the 11th grade and aged 17–18 during the 2024–2025 academic year. From this population, a sample of 24 students who scored low on the Relationship Quality Questionnaire was selected. After obtaining their consent to participate in the study, they were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=12) or the control group (n=12). The experimental group received nine 90-minute sessions of spirituality training based on the teachings of Islam, following the book Psychotherapy and Spirituality (Wiesgatt, 2008) and the spiritual interventions of Richards and Bergin (2005), while the control group did not receive any training. For data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics (analysis of covariance) were applied using SPSS-26 software. The research data were collected using the Relationship Quality Questionnaire (Pierce et al., 1991) and the Gray-Wilson Personality Questionnaire (GWPQ).

**Findings:** The results indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the variable of relationship improvement (F=81.03, P=0.000) and the variable of personality development (F=91.01, P=0.000).

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that "Religious Spirituality" training significantly enhances interpersonal relationships and personality development. Integrating spirituality into education can foster self-awareness, resilience, and prosocial behaviors, emphasizing the need for further research in diverse populations.

*Keywords:* Religious spirituality, interpersonal relationships, personality development

## 1. Introduction

Crises are an inevitable reality of life. As life becomes more complex, crises have increased in both diversity and scope. However, history has shown that if crises are managed properly, their threats can be transformed into valuable opportunities. Nevertheless, crisis management is a complex endeavor. During crises, the normal course of individual and social life is severely disrupted, and decision-making is often influenced by personal and transcendental beliefs rather than logic (Komijani, 2023).

Personality development involves a dynamic process and the restructuring of integrated traits that distinguish individuals in terms of interpersonal behavioral characteristics (Wrzus, 2021). Personality growth is constantly evolving and is influenced by contextual factors and transformative life experiences. Moreover, personality development has a dimensional and subjective nature (Hang et al., 2023), meaning it can be conceptualized as a continuum with varying degrees of intensity and change. It is subjective because its conceptualization is rooted in social norms regarding expected behavior, self-expression, and personal growth (Bilohur, 2019). The dominant perspective in personality psychology suggests that personality emerges early and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime (Roberts et al., 2010). It is believed that adult personality traits have their foundation in infant temperament, meaning that individual differences in temperament and behavior appear early in life, potentially even before self-awareness and language development (Rothbart et al., 2000). The Five-Factor Personality Model maps childhood temperament dimensions (Putnam et al., 2001), indicating that individual differences in corresponding personality traits—neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness—exist from an early age (Deal et al., 2005).

The rich diversity that differentiates individuals cannot be understood without carefully examining how they interact and connect with others. Therefore, personality science necessitates a detailed study of social relationships. This is related to the three key objectives of personality science: description, explanation, and prediction. To describe personality, it is essential to determine how individuals behave, strive, think, and feel in relation to others. To explain how personality develops and exerts its influence, it is necessary to understand social processes. For better predictions of key life outcomes based on personality, it is crucial to consider individuals' embeddedness in social contexts (Mõttus et al., 2020).

Based on previous research on personality outcomes and relationship development, and more specifically, the interaction of personality and relationships (Back, 2021; Back et al., 2011; Mund et al., 2018), it has been demonstrated that both personality and relationships are related to relatively stable differences in individuals' experiences and behaviors, albeit at different levels. Personality operates at the individual level and can be defined as the typical way in which an individual acts, thinks, desires, and feels, as well as the self-concepts that emerge within them. Relationships, on the other hand, exist at a dyadic level and can be characterized by how a couple acts, thinks, desires, and feels, along with relational concepts (such as relationship satisfaction) that emerge in both partners (Back et al., 2011).

The development of relationships is shaped by the personality of both parties and their unique combination. For instance, the level of trust individuals have in each other is influenced by their inclination toward others, their ability to evoke trust, and their unique willingness to trust one another, which goes beyond the sum of their individual traits. Relationships also provide social interaction contexts in which personality can develop (Back, 2021). Personality traits influence social relationships and arguably shape and are shaped by all types of relationships. Research has mainly examined the relationship between personality traits and social relationships within peer (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998) and family contexts (Branje et al., 2004). In their study, Grossmann et al. (2023) found that extraversion predicts higher friendship quality, and deep exploration is positively associated with friendship quality (Grossmann et al., 2023).

In recent years, mental health issues have significantly increased across various societies, and it appears that in the coming years, mental disorders will become one of the most significant global health challenges. In this regard, spirituality and religiosity seem to be promising factors in preventing mental health problems and promoting psychological well-being (Salesi et al., 2024; Seghatoleslam et al., 2024; Tsoho & Soylar, 2024; Wisuda, 2024). Furthermore, although spirituality and religiosity are considered fundamental components of human development, they have often been neglected, particularly during childhood (Salesi et al., 2024; Schnitker et al., 2021; Unterrainer et al., 2014). In fact, developmental theories have largely dismissed the notion that children have valid

spiritual experiences and needs (Caspi & Roberts, 2001), and spirituality and religion have been relatively overlooked in studying human development.

Solihat and Fauzi (2020) found that spiritual education is significantly associated with superior personality development (Solihat & Fauzi, 2020). Religiosity and spirituality can play a crucial role in mental health recovery and serve as a protective factor against addictive behaviors or suicidal tendencies (Salesi et al., 2024). Similarly, religiosity has been linked to lower levels of risky behaviors such as aggression, antisocial tendencies, and substance use among adolescents across diverse religious and cultural backgrounds (Schnitker et al., 2021). Mandalia et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study on youth in England and found that individuals with lower religiosity were more engaged in high-risk health behaviors, suggesting that intrinsic religiosity may provide a critical protective function against such behaviors (Mendalia et al., 2019).

Salesi et al. (2024) emphasized that the relationship between educational components, well-being, and spiritual health should be a priority in the education system to preserve and enhance individuals' spiritual health, which is one of the most crucial prerequisites for providing comprehensive care. The growing emphasis on spirituality and spiritual development has captured the attention of mental health professionals and psychologists over the past few decades. Advances in psychology, along with the dynamic and complex nature of modern societies, have highlighted the increasing significance of spiritual needs in comparison to material desires. It appears that people worldwide are becoming increasingly inclined toward spirituality and spiritual matters (Salesi et al., 2024).

In reality, individuals do not leave their religious beliefs outside the therapy room; their beliefs, values, experiences, relationships, and even spiritual struggles remain with them at all times. Spirituality is a universal human experience. Religious practices, rituals, and perceptions of God may vary across cultures, yet the human tendency to connect with a greater and sacred reality has remained a constant force throughout history. In essence, spirituality is an aspect of humanity that reflects one's connection and integration with existence, providing meaning and hope while transcending temporal, spatial, and material limitations (Salesi et al., 2024).

The movement toward spirituality has been expanding as an intellectual and cultural trend, influencing various aspects of life, including education (Mirabedini et al., 2021). Komijani (2023) examined the role and functions of

spirituality in managing individual and social crises, highlighting that religious teachings, in addition to promoting mental health and spiritual growth, foster moral development—such as compassion, kindness, benevolence, empathy, and solidarity—while also emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge as a virtue and an act of worship (Komijani, 2023).

In today's world, increasing attention is being given to spirituality and higher values in education, particularly spiritual education. Some efforts have been made to explore this issue in Iran; however, the field of education has not extensively, effectively, or comprehensively addressed it. The training of spiritual skills in psychology and behavioral sciences is relatively recent. Highlighting the importance and necessity of this research, it is essential to recognize that in the Iranian and Islamic society, many individual and social behaviors are directly or indirectly influenced by religious teachings and beliefs. Given these considerations, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of "Religious Spirituality" training in improving interpersonal relationships and personality development.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employed an experimental design with a pre-test, post-test, and control group. The target population consisted of male high school students in the second stage of secondary education from one of the high schools in District 2 of Kerman, who were in the 11th grade and aged 17–18 during the 2024–2025 academic year.

From this population, a sample of 24 students who scored low on the Relationship Quality Questionnaire was selected. After obtaining their consent to participate in the study, they were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=12) or the control group (n=12). The experimental group received nine 90-minute sessions of spirituality training based on the teachings of Islam and the spiritual interventions while the control group did not receive any training.

The inclusion criteria were: participants' consent to attend the therapy sessions, obtaining a low score on the Relationship Quality Questionnaire, and no absences from the sessions. The exclusion criteria were: having a diagnosed disorder or illness, absence from more than three sessions, and simultaneous participation in other therapeutic interventions.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Relationship Quality

The Relationship Quality Questionnaire was developed by Pierce et al. in 1991. Initially, the questionnaire consisted of 29 items, but in a later revision, four items were removed, leaving a total of 25 items. It is scored using a four-point Likert scale ranging from "none" to "high." The questionnaire comprises three subscales: perceived social support (7 items), interpersonal conflicts (12 items), and relationship depth (6 items). Additionally, in each of the 25 items, individuals are required to assess the quality of their relationships with parents, friends, and spouses. The validity of this questionnaire was reported in the study by Hoseini Ghadamgahi (1997), and its reliability was reported as 0.86 (Hashemi, 2020).

### 2.2.2. Personality

This questionnaire consists of 120 items, with three response options for each question: "Yes," "No," and "I don't know." Respondents select "I don't know" only if they are completely unable to choose between "Yes" or "No." For positively keyed items, responses are scored as follows: "Yes" = 2 points, "I don't know" = 1 point, and "No" = 0 points. For negatively keyed items, the scoring is reversed: "Yes" = 0 points, "I don't know" = 1 point, and "No" = 2 points. The questionnaire includes six components: approach, active avoidance, passive avoidance, extinction, fight, and flight. Regarding its reliability, Barrett and Gray (1989) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales as follows: for men, 0.71, 0.61, 0.58, 0.61, 0.65, and 0.65, and for women, 0.68, 0.35, 0.59, 0.63, 0.71, and 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, convergent validity was demonstrated through correlations between the subscales of the Gray-Wilson Personality Questionnaire (GWPQ) and Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire (Kafi et al., 2024).

## 2.3. Intervention

### 2.3.1. Religious Spiritually

Session 1: Preparation, Goal Setting, and Introduction

The first session focuses on preparing participants for the intervention. Group objectives and rules are established, and members are introduced to one another. A discussion is initiated on the concepts of spirituality, personality, and relationships. The significance of these aspects in daily life is highlighted. Participants complete the Relationship Quality Questionnaire and the Gray-Wilson Personality Questionnaire to assess their baseline levels of relationship quality and personality traits.

Session 2: Identifying Problems in Relationships and Personality

This session explores participants' challenges in relationships and personality traits that may contribute to unhealthy social interactions. Through guided discussions and self-reflection, participants identify personal patterns that may lead to difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships. The psychological effects of personality traits on relationship formation and sustainability are examined.

Session 3: Supplication and Religious Rituals

Participants engage in Dua Kumayl and other Islamic prayers to introduce them to the concept of spiritual healing. The role of worship and religious rituals in fostering inner peace, emotional stability, and improved relationships is discussed. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences with prayer and spirituality.

Session 4: Quranic Verses, Divine Attributes, and Destiny

This session focuses on the interpretation of selected Quranic verses and the recitation of Asma'ul Husna (the Beautiful Names of God). The discussion includes theological concepts such as divine decree (qada wa qadar), reinforcing the belief that a higher power can guide individuals toward well-being and meaningful relationships. Participants reflect on their spiritual beliefs and their impact on personal growth.

Session 5: Participation in Religious Gatherings, Forgiveness, and Divine Mercy

The psychological and social benefits of participating in religious ceremonies, such as congregational prayers and community gatherings, are discussed. The themes of repentance, divine forgiveness, and God's mercy are explored, emphasizing that faith provides emotional support and resilience. Inspired by the interventions of Richards and Bergin (2005), participants are encouraged to adopt self-compassion and extend forgiveness to others.

Session 6: Recitation and Listening to the Holy Quran

Participants listen to the recitation of the Holy Quran and take turns reading selected verses aloud. This activity aims to enhance mindfulness, emotional regulation, and spiritual awareness. The soothing and therapeutic effects of Quranic recitation on stress and interpersonal relationships are discussed.

Session 7: Quranic Stories and Seeking Intercession through Ahl al-Bayt (AS)

This session introduces Quranic stories that illustrate the importance of seeking guidance and intercession through the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). The discussion focuses on the moral and ethical lessons derived from these stories and how they can be applied to personal and social life. Participants reflect on their spiritual connections and sources of support during difficult times.

Session 8: The Benefits of Congregational Prayer and the Life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

The importance of Salat al-Jama'ah (congregational prayer) and regular prayer in fostering discipline, social cohesion, and spiritual well-being is emphasized. The life and character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are discussed as a model for ethical behavior and interpersonal relationships. Participants are encouraged to reflect on how they can integrate these teachings into their daily lives.

Session 9: Summary, Reflection, and Conclusion

In the final session, participants review the key lessons learned throughout the intervention. They discuss their personal growth and changes in their perspectives on spirituality and relationships. The intervention is formally concluded with a collective reflection on the impact of spiritual practices on their well-being. Finally, participants retake the Relationship Quality Questionnaire and the Gray-Wilson Personality Questionnaire to assess post-intervention changes.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

For data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics (analysis of covariance) were applied using SPSS-26 software.

### 3. Findings and Results

The aim of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of "Religious Spirituality" training in improving interpersonal relationships and personality development. The descriptive statistics of the variables, categorized by groups and test type, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Variables in Pre-Test and Post-Test*

| Variable | Test Type | Experimental Group (Mean ± SD) | Control Group (Mean ± SD) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relationships | Pre-Test | 51.00 ± 1.53 | 49.83 ± 1.31 |
| | Post-Test | 55.08 ± 1.62 | 49.16 ± 1.39 |
| Personality | Pre-Test | 138.83 ± 3.24 | 140.91 ± 2.87 |
| | Post-Test | 145.08 ± 3.05 | 140.33 ± 2.79 |

As shown in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of the components related to relationships and personality variables in the experimental group were higher than those in the control group in the post-test. In other words, after receiving the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated greater improvements in interpersonal relationships and personality development compared to the control group. This indicates that the mean and standard deviation of the improvement in relationships and personality growth were higher in the experimental group than in the control group at the post-test stage.

To assess the impact of "Religious Spirituality" training on the improvement of relationships and personality development among students, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted. The independent variable in this analysis was the group type (experimental or control), while the dependent variable was the post-test scores of the relationship improvement and personality development components.

Before conducting the analysis of covariance, the assumptions of normal distribution of the dependent variable and homogeneity of variance within groups were tested. The results confirmed that the assumption of normality for the pre-test and post-test data in the relationship improvement and personality development components was met ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, the Levene's test for homogeneity of variance indicated that the variance between the experimental and control groups was not significantly different, confirming the assumption of homogeneity of variances. The M. Box test results also indicated that the covariance matrices of the post-test variables in both groups were equal, with no significant differences between them ($p = 0.827$). Therefore, it was appropriate to use the analysis of covariance, indicating that the experimental and control

groups were homogeneous in terms of variance before the intervention was implemented.

**Table 2**

*Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) on Post-Test Scores of Relationship Improvement and Personality Development in the Experimental and Control Groups*

| Test Type | Value | F | df Hypothesis | df Error | Significance Level |
|-----------|-------|---|---------------|----------|--------------------|
| Pillai's Trace | 0.890 | 77.026 | 2 | 19 | 0.000 |
| Wilks' Lambda | 0.110 | 77.026 | 2 | 19 | 0.000 |
| Hotelling's Trace | 8.10 | 77.026 | 2 | 19 | 0.000 |
| Roy's Largest Root | 8.10 | 77.026 | 2 | 19 | 0.000 |

The results of Wilks' Lambda test in Table 2 indicate a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of the dependent variables at a statistically significant level.

**Table 3**

*Results of Univariate Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on Post-Test Scores of Relationship Improvement and Personality Development*

| Source | Variable | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Significance Level | Eta Squared |
|--------|----------|----------------|----|-----|------|--------------------|-------------|
| Group | Relationship Improvement (Post-Test) | 127.15 | 1 | 127.15 | 81.03 | 0.000 | 0.80 |
| | Personality Development (Post-Test) | 264.59 | 1 | 264.59 | 57.35 | 0.000 | 0.74 |

As observed, the statistical tests for multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) indicate that the experimental and control groups significantly differ in at least one of the dependent variables. The results of univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for the post-test scores of the dependent variables are presented.

As shown in Table 3, the F-ratio for relationship improvement was F = 81.03, p = 0.000, and for personality development, it was F = 57.35, p = 0.000. These findings confirm that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the dependent variables (relationship improvement and personality development).

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of "Religious Spirituality" training in improving interpersonal relationships and personality development. The results indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the dependent variables (relationship improvement and personality development), demonstrating that "Religious Spirituality" training positively impacts these aspects. These findings align with the prior studies (Komijani, 2023; Mendalia et al., 2019; Mirabedini et al., 2021; Salesi et al., 2024; Schnitker et al., 2021; Solihat & Fauzi, 2020).

To interpret these findings, it can be stated that personality psychologists have sought to better understand religiosity by examining its relationship with personality traits (Ashton & Lee, 2021). Research has highlighted the connection between personality and religiosity across various cultural contexts (Abdel-Khalek, 2013; Ferrari, 2015; Lewis & Maltby, 1995; Wilde & Joseph, 1997). Some researchers have criticized self-reported associations between personality and religiosity, arguing that they may be influenced by common biases. However, Ashton and Lee (2021) pointed out that multiple previous studies have demonstrated that self-rated religiosity is not only correlated with self-reported social traits but also with observer ratings of the same traits provided by family members, teachers, or colleagues. Additionally, religiosity has been found to be associated with forgiveness, charity, and other prosocial behaviors (Ashton & Lee, 2021).

Spiritual attributes such as self-awareness, flexibility, self-control, the ability to cope with difficulties and suffering, and resilience should be incorporated into educational content and school-based training activities. These components can play a crucial role in improving life quality, meaning-making, and self-efficacy during childhood and adolescence. Therefore, emphasizing three core elements—innate disposition (fitrah), rationality, and spirituality—in schools can strengthen religious education

during adolescence and young adulthood. This approach ensures that religious commitment is aligned with intrinsic and rational foundations, preventing students from falling into superficial beliefs, superstitions, or pseudo-spiritual ideologies. Religious education rooted in fitrah (innate education) and rationality fosters a more authentic and meaningful spiritual development.

## 5.    Limitations & Suggestions

Over the past 10 to 20 years, research on personality and social relationships across diverse subfields has contributed to a deeper understanding of the interplay between who we are—our personality—and how we engage with others—our relationships. Understanding this interaction is fundamental to comprehending personality itself, as it pertains to the patterns of how individuals strive for and navigate social situations, their behaviors toward others, and their perceptions of social interactions. Moreover, it is crucial for understanding the social consequences of personality traits and their long-term implications for life outcomes, including personality changes and stabilization within relational contexts.

Despite substantial progress and ambitious efforts in this field, research on personality and social relationships remains fragmented, with many unresolved questions and gaps in knowledge. Further studies are needed to examine additional components related to relationship development and personality growth.

This study was not without limitations. Some of the key constraints include: (a) the sample was drawn from a single high school at the secondary education level, (b) the participants had a limited age range, which necessitates replication of findings in a more diverse population, and (c) the study employed a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time rather than using a longitudinal approach to track changes over time.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

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