

# Spiritual intelligence, spiritual health and occupational stress in Islamic organisations



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By reaching perfection and closeness to God and reaching the source of the light of existence, man can benefit from his endless mercy. Almighty God is absolute perfection, and nearness to absolute perfection is the main goal of creation. Considering that those who are not God do not have anything of their own, and whatever perfection God's servants have is originally from God and belongs to him, the closer people get to God, the more they will benefit from God's mercy. Therefore, in the work environment, this perfection appears in the form of spiritual intelligence and spiritual health based on Islamic teachings and affects organisational variables such as occupational stress. Today, the role of spiritual intelligence is considered an important issue in improving spiritual health, reducing occupational stress and effective social functioning, especially in an Islamic environment, which leads to a better understanding of employees about their job. Therefore, the present study aims to evaluate the effect of spiritual intelligence of Muslim managers on the spiritual health and occupational stress of employees in Islamic organisations in Iraq. The statistical population includes 3422 Muslim managers and employees of 50 service organisations (including finance, education and tourism) in Iraq in 2022. The results of the hypothesis test in Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) shows, spiritual intelligence has a significant effect on spiritual health ( $P = 0.885$ ;  $T = 11.058$ ). On the other hand, spiritual intelligence has a negative and significant effect on occupational stress ( $P = -0.763$ ;  $T = -7.854$ ). Finally, spiritual health also has a negative and significant effect on occupational stress ( $P = -0.912$ ;  $T = -10.134$ ).

**Contribution:** The findings of the research indicate that spiritual intelligence leads to the improvement of spiritual health and as a result reduces occupational stress, especially in an Islamic environment. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration by the managers of the organisations in order to achieve the maximum benefit in light of Islamic teachings.

**Keywords:** Islam; Islamic organisations; Muslim managers; spiritual health; occupational stress; spiritual intelligence.

## Introduction

Nowadays, spirituality based on Islamic teachings has broadly attracted attention in response to the turbulent and complex environments of organisations. In general, spiritual intelligence is specific to human beings and originates from awareness of a transcendental dimension. Transformative intelligence is one that empowers people to be creative and change laws and roles. In addition, it helps humans make countless adjustments and transform conditions in the best way possible (Abdullah 2012). The business space in organisations with Islamic governance and culture necessitates attention to spirituality based on Islam in all organisational pillars, such as organisational health and the stress of employees in the workplace. In a workplace, people spend most of their time doing work-related activities. Therefore, it is vital to emphasise the effects of spiritual intelligence on organisational health and occupational stress in an Islamic environment. Proper tools are required to make the right choices in life and determine what is right or wrong, the most important of which is spiritual health. Obviously, humans do not get anxious by using intelligence and can distinguish right from wrong at the crossroads of personal and social life. In addition, intelligence can help find the true light among weak and strong ones that would make a human go astray, enabling them to reach the final destination (Holleman et al. 2012). In fact, spiritual intelligence can be used to solve problems based on their positions, meanings and values

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(Alamanda et al. 2021). Intelligence gives meaning to our work and activities and can be used to become aware of the meaning of our performance and realise which actions and behaviours are more credible and which paths of life are more excellent in order to be made as the pattern of life (Ahmad & Khan 2016).

Over the past decades, health has been analysed based on certain dimensions (physical health, mental health and social health). Suggesting the inclusion of spiritual health in the concept of health faced experts in the health field with an important aspect of a person's individual and group life. Because of this suggestion, the World Health Organization (WHO) dealt with the issue of whether the spiritual dimension should be included in the definition of health in addition to physical, mental and social health (Banks 1980). Today, most health models include spiritual health as well. The spirituality concept is related to all health areas of all ages and has aroused interest in researchers worldwide (Bensley 1991). A recent growing trend has emerged at an international level regarding emphasis on spiritual needs (Badrudin et al. 2021). Organisations believe that their employees are their most valuable assets, and many of them have explicitly started to place greater emphasis on the existential value of human beings. What is different in this emphasis here is the focus on the spiritual aspects of human beings (Boswell, Kahana & Dilworth-Anderson 2006). Meanwhile, recent studies have shown that occupational stress and a resulting decrease in individual and organisational productivity have become major issues for managers in big companies and organisations. In addition to personal injuries, occupational stress includes symptoms such as hopelessness, pessimism about the future of employment, loss of positive motivation, reduction of productive efforts at work, lack of sympathy, negativity, irritability, tendency to justify failures and attributing them to others and lacking a sense of professional creativity (Chapman 1986), which impose numerous consequences and costs on organisations, such as frequent job changes, many absences and vacations, a decrease in the quantity and quality of work and mental health disorders (Nixon et al. 2011).

Today is an era of competition and complexity, and all organisations are dealing with each other and often have unpredictable behaviours. Therefore, the only way to get people to work is to encourage them to develop their spirituality, the proper foundation for which must be laid by their leaders and managers (Shaari & Matore 2019). In fact, a spiritual leader creates a vision of the organisation's future with their unique traits and influences employees in such a way that they can believe in the realisation of this vision. This can result in the improved internal motivation of employees to dedicate greater efforts to their work. Such leaders help employees understand the true meaning of their jobs and value their careers (Cottini & Lucifora 2013). Considering the inevitability of some stressful factors in different professions and the need to prevent the psychological and behavioural effects of stress, one of the responsibilities of managers that

could result in employee retention and prevention of their displacement is to take measures in order to improve their work life quality and teach them coping strategies (McBrien 2006). In this regard, spiritual health improvement, especially through Islamic teachings, is a method used to reduce occupational stress. In general, spiritual health is one of the four health dimensions of human beings that, along with physical, mental and social health, improves the overall health of the individual and coordinates other dimensions of health, which leads to enhanced adaptability and mental function (Mathews et al. 1998). Spiritual health is identified with characteristics such as stability in life; peace; feeling of close connection with oneself, God, society and environment; harmony; and having meaning and purpose in life. Overall, spiritual health comprises two spiritual and existential health dimensions. Spiritual health reflects a connection to God or infinite power, whereas existential health shows our connection with others and the environment and our connection with ourselves, which can be considered the ability to integrate different dimensions of existence and have different choices (Kuroda & Yamamoto 2018). Accordingly, spiritual intelligence seems to be a necessity for improving spiritual health and reducing employees' occupational stress, which the researchers attempted to achieve. With this background in mind, the present study aims to evaluate the effect of the spiritual intelligence of Muslim managers on the spiritual health and occupational stress of employees in Islamic service organisations in Iraq in 2022.

## Spiritual intelligence

Spiritual intelligence is the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the situation. People with high spiritual intelligence can behave fairly and compassionately while judging. In addition, spiritual health lays the foundation for achieving meaning in life (Yang & Wu 2009). The most important applications of spiritual health in the environment include personal security and creating peace of mind, creating understanding between people, improving communication in the work environment, managing changes and removing obstacles (Fry 1988). Even though intelligence has been defined differently, the core of all these definitions is an emphasis on problem-solving to establish adaptability and achieve goals (Emmons 2000b). Spiritual intelligence is the ability that enables us to achieve spiritual and moral dreams and move towards them. In fact, this intelligence is the foundation for all the things we believe in and involves the role of beliefs, norms and values in our activities. Moreover, spiritual health enables us to ask questions about important matters in life and make changes (Emmons 2000a). In an Islamic environment, beliefs, values and norms emerge from Islamic teachings, which shape spiritual intelligence (Mohammadi Rey Shahri 2000).

## Spiritual health

Today, attention to the spiritual dimension of health has been considered in many of the definitions provided for health,

and suggestions have been made to include spiritual health in the definition of health by the WHO as a health dimension. The lack of differentiation between spiritual health and spirituality in many sources is one of the significant topics. While it can be rationally argued that there are some overlaps between the definitions of spirituality and spiritual health, it is common and challenging to consider them synonymous with each other or at least to use them in different texts without distinguishing between them (Young 1984). Spiritual health is an important dimension of an individual's health, and researchers and experts in the world have defined it differently. In addition, there are obvious similarities and differences in the definitions of the respective views, which are caused by the social conditions of these people, in addition to their cultures, as well as religious beliefs or lack thereof. Based on the definitions for spirituality derived from texts related to general and spiritual health in the world, more attention has been paid to the following dimensions. Despite the progress made in scientific and international forums regarding spiritual health, the definition of Western health systems is different from what Islam and the Qur'an mean by the definition of comprehensive and complete health. This difference between the two (secular and Islamic) views on health can be the basis of unique theorising in this field in the Islamic school. Nevertheless, this viewpoint can be referred to by scientific circles at the global level because of the comprehensive view of the Qur'an and Islam on the category of health (Asadzandi et al. 2017).

It is clear that introducing the definition of spiritual health to the Western health literature and secular systems has not seriously altered various dimensions, including medical education and the provision of daily medical services and university counselling centres. In fact, the problems of modern systems and the serious challenges faced by them persist, and the complexity of these challenges is increasing every day. Spiritual and religious values are considered a general and inclusive concept in the definitions related to the countries of East and South Asia. Moreover, the spiritual and religious basis is considered important in European public health texts. The American public health literature has referred to a combination of spirituality with religion and well-being while the spiritual health dimension has been overlooked in the definitions of health by the WHO (Azizi 2015). Nonetheless, no fundamental and practical definitions have been obtained that could pave the way for many researchers and scientific development. Notable definitions are those that have referred to the two-dimensionality of spiritual health. Some of these definitions consider spiritual health a sense of connection and harmony between oneself, others, nature and the transcendent being through a dynamic, coherent and attainable process that leads to the knowledge of the ultimate goal and meaning of life (Bensley 1991).

Furthermore, they defined spiritual health as a feeling of being connected with others, having meaning and purpose in life and having belief and connection with a higher power (Chapman 1986). In addition, spiritual health has been defined as positive feelings and understanding of a person's relationship with

themselves, others and a supernatural force and nature. Spiritual health makes a person feel that their life is purposeful, and they have a sense of identity, perfection, satisfaction, affection, respect, positive attitude, peace and inner balance (Como 2007). Based on the literature, spiritual health involves a sense of acceptance, positive emotions, ethics and a sense of mutual connection with a sovereign and superior holy power, others and oneself obtained through a dynamic and coordinated process of cognitive, emotional, action and personal consequences. Some of the main components of spiritual health include spiritual knowledge, spiritual emotions, spiritual actions and spiritual outcomes (Fisher 2009).

## Mental pressure and stress at work

Different definitions have been provided for mental pressure. For instance, Gordon (1993) believes that mental pressure is a physiological and psychological state that emerged as a result of specific patterns (personal environment, noise, pressures, job promotion, monotony in work and life or general atmosphere and invasion of one's existence). In another definition, mental pressure is attributed to a person's reaction to new threatening factors in a workplace (Mikkelsen, Saksvik & Landsbergis 2010).

Fontana (1989) provided a comprehensive definition for mental pressure at their Internet Information Center as follows: mental pressure is a type of arousal, anxiety or physical tension that occurs when the origin of needs is more than a person's ability to adapt to it. The following concepts complete this definition:

- Physical definition: physical exposure to external pressures (force in feet, pounds, kilograms, pascals) where the material is deformed by the force and eventually breaks.
- Biological definition: the body's reaction to external forces (heat, altitude, high pressure, lack of sleep).
- Novel sociological definition: vulnerability to diverse work needs, time pressure and psychological and social conflicts that are related to today's world.

Some state that mental pressure is caused by the body's response to any arising need (Perrewé et al. 2004). Based on these conditions, two different and conflicting types of mental pressure emerge:

- Positive mental pressure: useful or good tension, which is related to the feeling of happiness and cheerfulness and doing work and stimulates the person to perform better and create opportunities and challenges.
- Negative mental pressure (distress): unhelpful or bad tension, which is long-term and causes several mental pressures. It is caused by the aforementioned needs or unfavourable responsibilities.

## Research hypotheses

**H1:** Spiritual intelligence of Muslim managers has a significant effect on spiritual health of Muslim employees.

**H2:** Spiritual health of Muslim managers has a significant effect on occupational stress of Muslim employees.

**H3:** Spiritual health has a significant effect on occupational stress of Muslim employees.

## Methodology

This was a descriptive survey in terms of methodology and an applied one regarding the objective. The statistical population included 3422 Muslim managers and employees of 50 service organisations (including finance, education and tourism) in Baghdad and Najaf in 2022. Data were collected using field and library methods, with the former involving three standard questionnaires and the latter focusing on a review of the literature.

**Spiritual health questionnaire:** Developed by Elahbakhshian et al. (2010), the tool encompasses 20 items, 10 of which are related to religious health, and the other 10 are related to existential health. All items are scored based on a five-point Likert scale from 'completely disagree' to 'completely agree'.

**Spiritual intelligence questionnaire by King (2008):** The tool includes 24 items and four subscales of critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness and conscious state expansion.

**Occupational stress inventory by Osipow and Spokane (1987):** The tool encompasses 60 items used to assess occupational stress in individuals from six dimensions: role overload, role insufficiency, role ambiguity, role boundary, responsibility and physical environment.

## Results

Data analyses were performed using descriptive and inferential statistics. In addition, the research hypotheses were tested in Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) software by applying structural equation modelling (SEM). It is important to note that that 3422 out of 3397 questionnaires were completed and entered into the analysis process. Based on the demographic characteristics questionnaire, 78% of the employees were male and the rest (22%) were female. In addition, all participants were Muslim. Regarding marital status, 67% of the respondents were married and 33% were single. The general model of the research was designed in the LISREL software, and the conceptual model of the research was investigated using SEM in order to evaluate the relationships between research variables, reliability coefficients and model quality using the test results.

### Hypothesis 1

The spiritual intelligence of Muslim managers has a significant effect on the spiritual health of employees.

According to the results obtained from the structural model, spiritual intelligence on spiritual health has a  $t$ -value greater than 1.96 (Joreskog & Sorbom 1989), which was equal to 11.058. Therefore, the second hypothesis was confirmed at a 95% confidence interval. In addition, the path coefficient for the effect of managers' spiritual intelligence on spiritual health was equal to 0.885, meaning that a one-unit increase in the spiritual intelligence variable resulted in changes in the spiritual health variable by 0.885 units (Figure 1). As a result, spiritual intelligence has a positive and significant effect on spiritual health.

### Hypothesis 2

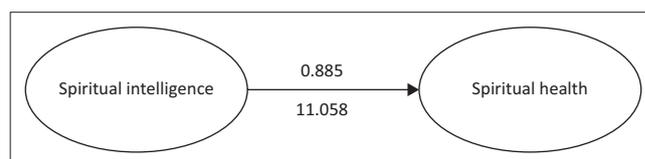
The spiritual health of Muslim managers has a significant effect on the occupational stress of employees.

According to the results obtained from the structural model, spiritual intelligence on spiritual health has a  $t$ -value lower than -1.96 (Joreskog & Sorbom 1989), which was equal to -7.854. Therefore, the third hypothesis was confirmed at a 95% confidence interval. In addition, the path coefficient for the effect of managers' spiritual intelligence on occupational stress was estimated at -0.763, meaning that a one-unit increase in the spiritual intelligence variable resulted in changes in the occupational stress variable by 0.763 units (Figure 2). As a result, spiritual intelligence has a negative and significant effect on occupational stress.

### Hypothesis 3

Spiritual health has a significant effect on the occupational stress of Muslim employees.

According to the results obtained from the structural model, spiritual intelligence on spiritual health has a  $t$ -value lower than -1.96, which was equal to -10.134. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was confirmed at a 95% confidence interval. In addition, the path coefficient for the effect of spiritual intelligence on Muslim employees' occupational stress was estimated at -0.912, meaning that a one-unit increase in the spiritual intelligence variable resulted in changes in the occupational stress variable by 0.912 units (Figure 3). As a result, spiritual intelligence has a negative and significant effect on occupational stress.



**FIGURE 1:** Structural model of the first research hypothesis.



**FIGURE 2:** Structural model of the second research hypothesis.

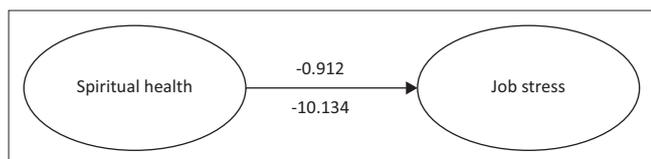


FIGURE 3: Structural model of the third research hypothesis.

## Discussion

Without any doubt, spirituality in human life is as important as breathing. Spirituality is a human value, positive, existential and dependent on the ontology of human dimensions, which plays an important role by creating a desire for life and search for the meaning of life – and beyond life. Spirituality is a global phenomenon required by all people to find meaning and accept life through connection with oneself and others. Therefore, physical health needs communication with a doctor of the body, and spiritual health needs communication with a doctor of the spirit. Since the human soul has complex capacities and dimensions, there are connections and influences between the soul and the body, between the individual and the society, between the world inside and outside of man, between the unseen world and intuition and between the world and the hereafter. The sure way of spiritual health is to rely on the divine revelation that has the necessary scientific framework for these complex relationships. This shows the necessity of religion. Spirituality in the Islamic world can be defined in two ways: spirituality is a state created as a result of ignoring material affairs and focusing on inner affairs. Therefore, spirituality can be defined as attention to the reality of the world since it is the opposite of attention to material affairs. Here, reaching the truth of the world means getting close to God. Accordingly, paying attention to God can be considered the basis of spirituality in heavenly religions. A number of religious intellectuals provide a functionalist definition of spirituality: spirituality brings a way of facing the universe and inner satisfaction in a person's life. Therefore, to them, spirituality is an approach, not a school. The difference is that spirituality in a school is a part of principles accepted by all fans and thinkers of that school, but spirituality in approach is not the same, and different types of spirituality can be established in this certain approach to the world and religion. Islamic spirituality is a feeling and state [*good life and lightness of heart*] created for humans as a result of doing things that are related to God and for getting close to him based on Islamic law and through knowledge, faith, good deeds and serving God. It is worth mentioning that this type of spirituality will be different for various people. Firstly, if the good life and lightness of the heart are not achieved, spirituality is not provided. Secondly, knowledge about the truths of the world and the kingdom of the material world, as well as faith in God, his attributes and actions, does not have the concept of spirituality. Thirdly, a large part of spirituality is formed in the light of meritorious and good deeds, and righteous deeds are necessary for correct faith, the foundation of spirituality and its necessary condition.

Spirituality is one of the most important basic needs of humans that can affect their other needs. In Islamic spirituality, epistemological answers can be given to the fundamental questions of man regarding ontology, the truth of humanity and the purpose of creation. In order to achieve spirituality, humans need to correct and revise their vision and attitudes in these three levels and focus on the relationship between spirituality, monotheism, self-knowledge and philosophy, and the purpose of creation. The foundation of Islamic spirituality is based on the knowledge of God and monotheism, and it finds meaning in it. In the philosophy of ethics, it has been proven that the root of virtues dries up by removing God and monotheism, and such a person does not see any motivation to acquire virtues. A person who does not believe in the origin and resurrection may not do anything because of the necessity of socialising and living together with the same species. However, this respect for manners is not rooted in belief and inner values; rather, it may be out of necessity or fear of the police. Human nature refers to the mental and psychological characteristics of humans. Human nature has unique characteristics. Humans are multidimensional beings who are potentially and actually institutionalised in their nature, which has the ability to grow to the extent of Allah's caliph. When your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place a successive 'human' authority on earth'" (The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 30).

In addition, achieving perfection and the highest goal of life is being close to God and reaching the source of the light of existence [*The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Alaq, Ayat 8; The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 156; The Holy Qur'an, Surah An-Najm, Ayat 42*], so that man can benefit from his infinite mercy. Almighty God is absolute perfection, and nearness to absolute perfection is the main goal. Given that those who are not God have nothing for themselves, and any perfection in God's creatures actually belongs to him, the closer a person gets to God, the more dependent they will be on him. The condition for benefiting from God's mercy is worship and reaching the level of human perfection. Therefore, the main goal of human creation is to reach divine perfection, and the testing of servants and worship are intermediate and instrumental goals to achieve that supreme goal, that is, perfection. In a workplace, this type of perfection emerges in the form of spiritual intelligence and spiritual health and affects organisational variables such as occupational stress.

## Conclusion

Managers' emotional abilities in recognising appropriate emotional responses when faced with everyday events lead to expanding the scope of insight and creating a positive attitude about them. Therefore, managers who are able to identify, control and use these emotional capabilities will benefit more from social support, a sense of satisfaction and mental health and can generate this feeling in the organisation and employees. Meanwhile, the workforce satisfied with their job and workplace can play a significant role in supplying comprehensive quality and productivity in government and commercial organisations and can be the basis for economic, social and cultural

development. Given that stress reduces growth and health, and with regard to its growing trend in service organisations caused by the mental pressure of the work put on employees in addition to the psychological load and pressure of clients, this factor can increase occupational stress. However, occupational stress can be reduced if managers and employees seek to improve their spiritual health. In this regard, the results obtained from testing the research hypotheses, which are presented in Figures 1–3, confirmed this issue. According to the results, spiritual intelligence has a significant effect on spiritual health ( $P = 0.885$ ;  $T = 11.058$ ). On the other hand, spiritual intelligence affected occupational stress negatively and significantly ( $P = -0.763$ ;  $T = -7.854$ ). Finally, spiritual health has a negative, significant impact on occupational stress ( $P = -0.912$ ;  $T = -10.134$ ).

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### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### Authors' contributions

Q.A. wrote the original draft; S.G.T. contributed to project administration; T.A. contributed to conceptualisation; M.H.A. was responsible for validation; Z.T.S. contributed to data curation; T.K. was responsible for visualisation; I.M. contributed to investigation; A.A.R.-C. contributed to conceptualisation; D.S. was responsible for methodology.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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