

## Spiritual health from the perspective of western and Islamic scientists

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Spiritual health is a new concept in the area of health, attracting the attention of many health-related researchers in recent decades. This notion was initially proposed and developed in western societies. The health system of our country has begun to investigate the issue in recent years.

Given that spiritual health is rooted in people's beliefs and culture (which are essential elements in defining and exploiting spiritual health), examining the Islamic and western viewpoints toward this concept prevents the waste of many resources and sheds light on the notions that have remained unknown to our society.

Investigating western researchers' studies, papers, and writings on spiritual health and comparing their cultural, ideological, and social infrastructures with ours yield serious and notable differences.

The first important difference between these two perspectives has to do with their view toward human beings. In the writings of western authors, humans are regarded as worldly and physical creatures, with little attention being paid to their spiritual and transcendental dimensions. Even in those cases where sporadic references are made to the spiritual dimensions of humans, spirit is regarded as a follower of the physical dimension (1-5). In contrast, according to our religious-philosophical teachings, humans are two-dimensional creatures, with their spiritual dimension being more serious than the physical one. Therefore, spiritual health should not be solely regarded as a function of humans' physical health. Indeed, this idea was the incentive encouraging western scientists to begin examining spiritual health. More specifically, the effects of spiritual ideologies on humans' physical health (6) motivated secular societies of the west to redirect their attention toward spirituality and theology. Therefore, from the western perspective, spiritual health is at the service of physical health and its attraction is attributed to inexpensiveness and lack of aggression. From the Islamic viewpoint, however, spiritual health is not defined only from the physical vantage point. Instead, it is basically demonstrated in the light of attention to human soul, which is regarded as the independent and major factor of spiritual health in humans. In fact, according to the Islamic viewpoint, spiritual health originates from human soul (7).

The second major difference between Islamic and western perspectives pertains to the impact of spiritual health. For western scientists, the definition of spiritual health is solely founded on human life in this world. Such scientists try to track the effects of spiritual health only in the materialistic world. Conversely, the Islamic viewpoint contends that spiritual health has a much broader definition than the materialistic world, with its domain being spread to the afterlife and eternity. Islamic scientists believe that the complete and inclusive achievement of health is only possible in humans' eternal life (8, 9).

The third distinction entails the difference between western and Islamic approach toward spiritual health. According to the western approach, spiritual health is assessed based on the criteria related to physical health. Following this approach, spiritual health has to do with whatever is measurable in the realm of physical health. In most of the western researches

and even some studies inside Iran, physical elements have necessarily been taken into account while evaluating spiritual health. This limited and instrumental view toward spirituality and spiritual health leads to the restriction and distortion of the concept of spiritual health. On the contrary, in the Islamic approach, all human dimensions are connected (10). As a result, spiritual health affects both physical health and human soul. This encourages Islamic researchers to believe that spiritual health is at the service of soul as well as body, hence its influence is exercised well beyond the materialistic world.

The fourth discrepancy refers to the way western and Islamic scientists view the factors that may impact spiritual health. According to the western perspective, further attention is paid to the effect rather than that factor that causes this effect. Thus, every spiritual or metaphysical factor that has a positive impact on body receives due attention even if it is an unreal or delusional phenomenon. For example, calmness is a materialistic element of spiritual health from the western perspective. Thereby, everything that leads to calmness is justifiable even if it is mixed with

superstition or false thinking (11) (like what is observed in false mysticism). For this reason, spirituality and religion are two distinct concepts from the western viewpoint. By contrast, according to the Islamic view, spirituality and religion are not separable and the religious ontology of Islam encompasses and analyzes every phenomenon that may have a real effect. From the Islamic vantage point, real and true elements (not just factors that may have some effects on body) are praised in the realm of spiritual health. It should be noted that western scientists are deprived of a reliable metaphysical source that is able to feed them. In Islam, however, valuable sources like the Holy Quran and anecdotes from the innocent prophet and Imams (peace be upon them) are available for researchers.

At the end, we urge that, prior to doing research in the area of spiritual health, respected researchers take notice of these differences and begin their studies by adopting an Islamic and local perspective. By doing so, the results of their studies can be implemented in our society.

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