

Structural Equation Model of Spiritual Well-Being, Attachments Styles, and social Well-Being among Students

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Abstract

Introduction: The present study aimed to investigate the structural relationships among attachment styles, social well-being, and spiritual well-being in students, based on a conceptual model utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Method: This descriptive correlational study target to all students aged 18-50 from the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences at Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, during the academic year of 2022-2023. Using convenience sampling, 310 students were selected to complete the following questionnaires online: The Paloutzian and Ellison Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS), Hazan and Shaver Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ), and Keyes Social Well-Being Scale (KSWBS). Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and SEM with path analysis in SPSS-26 and AMOS-24 software.

Results: The findings indicated that secure attachment style ($P=0.001$, $\beta=0.32$) positively correlated with spiritual well-being, while avoidant ($P=0.001$, $\beta=-0.29$) and ambivalent ($P=0.001$, $\beta=-0.268$) styles negatively correlated. Social well-being ($P=0.001$, $\beta=0.33$) showed a significant positive correlation with spiritual well-being. Secure attachment ($P=0.001$, $\beta=0.15$) had a positive indirect effect, while ambivalent attachment ($P=0.001$, $\beta=-0.15$) had a negative indirect effect on spiritual well-being.

Conclusion: The findings suggest the need for university-based programs that foster secure attachments and social well-being to support students' overall psychological and spiritual development.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Social Well-Being, Spiritual Well-Being, Students

Introduction

Students are among the largest, most important, and most precious human resources, who drive growth and change in the educational system. They also play a very important role in the success or failure of this system and ensure its continuity. Thousands of students enter universities across the country (Iran) each year. The well-being of these students can be influenced by various factors, such as adaptation to academic conditions, different attachment styles, academic failure, and low social well-being during this period of education [1].

Nowadays, spiritual well-being is as important as other health dimensions; it is considered a new dimension of health along with physical, psychological, and social aspects. Spiritual well-being has two dimensions: religious health (defined as a connection with God) and existential health (defined as a connection with others). These two dimensions together constitute spiritual well-being [2]. The main components of spiritual well-being are spiritual cognition, spiritual emotions, and spiritual actions. In this respect, spiritual cognition is defined as understanding God, humanity, the philosophy of the creation of the natural world, and everything within it. Spiritual emotions include feelings of peace, joy, hope, and love towards God, divine messengers, and His creatures. Spiritual actions reflect behaviors that reveal an individual's inner spiritual beliefs in his/her life [3]. Spirituality acts as a powerful force in human life which gives meaning to individuals' existence and provides a

sense of wholeness and integrity for them. Spiritual well-being signifies a sense of well-being, purpose, peace, harmony, and acceptance. In fact, it connects individuals to a higher transcendent Being. Having spiritual well-being makes students able to feel closer to God, see problems from a different perspective, and feel themselves to be empowered, valuable, and responsible [4]. Additionally, focusing on factors influencing spiritual well-being allows the educational system to cultivate students who are empowered, realistic, and capable of adapting to stress and difficulties [5].

Attachment is a strong emotional bond which is the result of warm, intimate, and stable relationships between parents and infants [6]. This concept is a two-dimensional structure comprising attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety refers to the fear of abandonment and a strong inclination to seek acceptance and support, feeling close to and trusting attachment figures. Attachment avoidance, on the other hand, is characterized by discomfort with intimacy and closeness, reflecting concerns about self-disclosure of thoughts and feelings, fear of dependency in intimate relationships, and feelings of vulnerability [7]. Based on these two primary attachment structures, there is a three-dimensional model of attachment, namely secure attachment (characterized by low levels of anxiety and avoidance, and a positive view of oneself and others), avoidant attachment (characterized by high levels of anxiety and avoidance, including traits such as distrust, vulnerability, inability to communicate, and sensitivity), and ambivalent attachment (characterized by high levels of anxiety and fear, such that individuals are highly sensitive to negative emotions and experience conflict between forming close relationships on the one hand and fear of rejection on the other) [8]. Attachment is capable of predicting how individuals interact with peers and friends of the same and opposite sexes over time and is one of the most significant factors in personal growth and mental health [9]. Those with a secure attachment style, who are also religious, feel that God is with them during difficult times, trust in Him, and use spiritual methods to cope with their problems. In contrast, those with insecure attachment styles experience more negative emotions, have lower mental health, and have less trust in God [10].

In addition to attachment styles, social well-being is another crucial factor that influences spiritual well-being. Social well-being refers to an individual's perception of the quality of their relationships with others. The main components of social well-being include acceptance and valuing of people in society as social partners, recognizing and understanding them, participating in society, and believing in positive societal change. These components are related to the five main dimensions of social well-being: social actualization (potentialities, positive developments, and evolution of society), social contribution (cooperation, unity, friendship, and mutual support within the community), social acceptance (acceptance of diverse viewpoints to adapt to society), social coherence (the quality of an individual's relationships with society, where individuals see

themselves as part of the community), and social integration (comprehensibility, rationality, and predictability of society) [11]. Social well-being is a key indicator for assessing the health of communities and it plays a fundamental role in their dynamism and efficiency. It is for this reason that the World Health Organization's (WHO) new definition of health includes social well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social welfare, rather than just the absence of various physical and mental illnesses [12]. For students, who play a crucial role in achieving societal goals, social well-being is essential. Low social well-being disrupts effective communication among students, resulting in social isolation, hopelessness about the future, loss of self-efficacy, and a decrease in spiritual well-being [13].

In a study with the aim of comparing social well-being, spiritual well-being, and emotion regulation strategies in patients with multiple sclerosis and non-patients, findings demonstrated that spiritual well-being and its components (religious health and existential health), social well-being and its three dimensions (social flourishing, social acceptance, and social adaptation), and emotion reappraisal were lower in multiple sclerosis patients compared to non-patients. However, there was no significant difference in emotional inhibition between the two groups [14]. Another study examined the role of attachment styles to God and spiritual well-being in predicting the mental resilience of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed a positive correlation between secure attachment style and spiritual well-being with mental resilience, and a negative significant correlation between both avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles with spiritual well-being and mental resilience [15].

Considering the above points, it can be argued that spiritual well-being has numerous positive psychological outcomes for students. Students with high levels of spiritual well-being can make successful decisions and achieve better mental health. As students are considered the young and active part of society, it is indeed essential to identify factors that ensure and improve their spiritual well-being. Additionally, there is a research gap with regard to the relationship between the considered variables within the student community, and there are limitations to the existing studies. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to present a structural model in order to predict spiritual well-being based on attachment styles with the mediation of social well-being among students. In this research, the conceptual model of the present study is grounded in attachment theory, initially introduced by John Bowlby in 1969 [16] and later expanded by Hazan and Shaver in 1987 [17], as well as Keyes' model of social well-being developed in 1998 [18]. Attachment theory posits that individuals form internal working models based on early interactions with caregivers, which shape their emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual orientation throughout life. A secure attachment style promotes trust, meaning-making, and adaptive coping strategies, all of which are positively associated with spiritual well-being.

Conversely, insecure attachment styles—such as avoidant and ambivalent—may hinder emotional security and impair spiritual development. Keyes' framework of social well-being highlights individuals' perceptions of social integration, coherence, acceptance, and their perceived contribution to society as essential dimensions of psychological and existential health. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the present

study hypothesizes that attachment styles influence spiritual well-being both directly and indirectly through their impact on social well-being. Accordingly, the proposed conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1, illustrating that attachment styles, as the predictor variable, influence spiritual well-being through the mediating role of social well-being among university students.

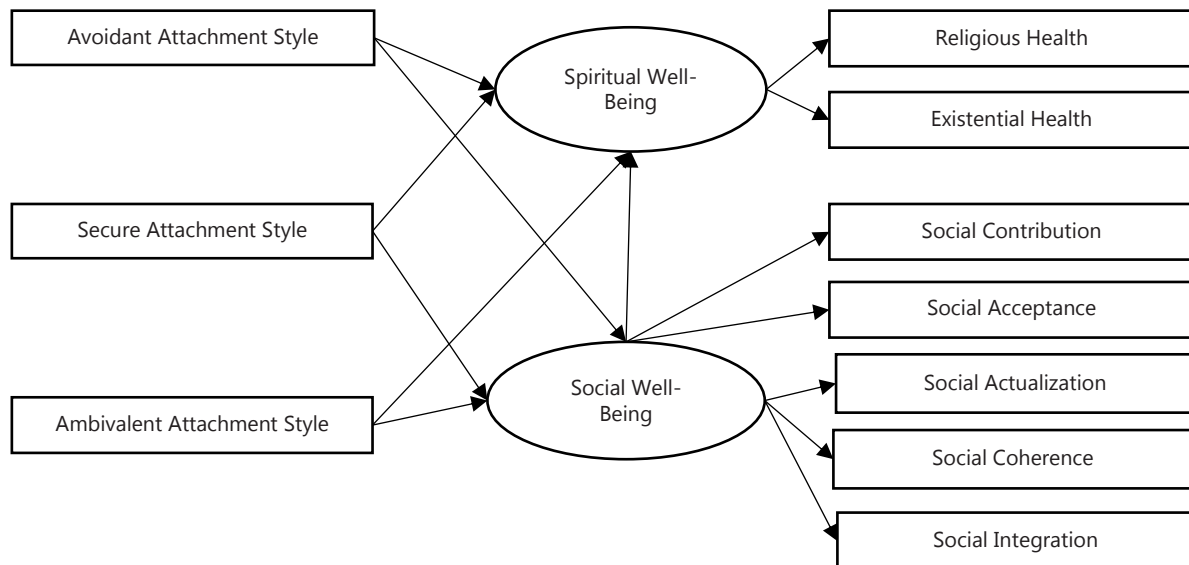


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.

Method

This research was an applied study in terms of its objective and descriptive-correlational in methodology, in which the relationships between variables were examined using structural equation modeling.

The statistical population consisted of all students (male and female) aged 18-50 years from the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences at Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch, during the 2022-2023 academic year. From this population, 310 students were chosen by utilizing convenience sampling, considering potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, based on Kline's recommendations [19]. The participants completed the research questionnaires online.

This research was conducted in coordination with the academic authorities of Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch. The data collection process was carried out online using a structured set of self-report questionnaires hosted on the Porsline platform. The link to the survey was distributed via multiple virtual platforms, including WhatsApp, Eitaa, iGap, Telegram, and Instagram, specifically targeting student groups and channels affiliated with the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences. Prior to participation, a brief invitation message explained the purpose of the study and included a consent form, instructions for completion, and a statement assuring ethical compliance. The questionnaires were anonymous and voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any point without any consequences. There was no time limit imposed for completing the forms. The data collection period lasted for two months, from February to March 2023. To ensure data quality, duplicate responses and

submissions with excessive missing data were excluded. After screening, 310 complete and valid responses were included in the final analysis. The study observed all ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of privacy, and confidentiality of participant information. All data were securely stored and analyzed using SPSS-26 and AMOS-24.

The tools used in this study were as follows:

Spiritual Well-being Questionnaire (SWBS): The 20-item version of this questionnaire was developed by Paloutzian and Ellison in 1982 [20]. It is divided into two dimensions, namely religious health and existential health. Each of these dimensions consists of 10 items, with scores in the range of 10 to 60. Odd-numbered questions belong to religious health, while even-numbered questions belong to existential health. The total spiritual well-being score, ranging from 20 to 120, is the sum of these two dimensions. Items 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 18 are reverse-scored. In previous international research, Paloutzian and Ellison [20] reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.85 for both the religious and existential subscales of the SWBS. In Iran, Kazemzadeh et al. [1] reported an overall reliability coefficient of 0.91 and confirmed the content validity of the scale through expert review and exploratory factor analysis. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha values were 0.89 for the overall spiritual well-being scale, 0.87 for the religious health subscale, and 0.78 for the existential health subscale.

Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ): This 15-item questionnaire which was developed by Hazan and Shaver in 1987 [17], has five items for secure attachment style, five items for avoidant attachment style, and five items for

ambivalent attachment style. The total score for this questionnaire ranges from 5 to 25. Internationally, Hazan and Shaver [17] reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.80 for the dimensions of the Adult Attachment Questionnaire. In Iranian studies, Maleki [8] found acceptable reliability indices ($\alpha > 0.75$) and supported the construct validity of the scale using confirmatory factor analysis. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha values were reported as 0.75 for the overall attachment scale, 0.83 for ambivalent attachment, 0.81 for avoidant attachment, and 0.77 for secure attachment.

Social Well-being Questionnaire (KSWBS): The 33-item version of this questionnaire was developed by Keyes in 1998 [18] and includes five dimensions: social coherence (6 items), social integration (7 items), social contribution (6 items), social actualization (7 items), and social acceptance (7 items). The total score for social well-being is the sum of these dimensions and ranges from 0 to 132. In Keyes' original study [18], the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the social well-being subscales ranged from 0.72 to 0.84. In Iranian research, Yousefi [21] reported high reliability for the overall scale ($\alpha = 0.88$) and confirmed its construct validity through exploratory factor analysis. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five subscales of social well-being were reported as follows: 0.75 for social coherence, 0.79 for social integration, 0.78 for social contribution, 0.72 for social actualization, and 0.85 for social acceptance. Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation), were used to summarize participants' demographic information and responses to the study variables. To examine relationships among variables, Pearson's

correlation coefficients were calculated. For inferential statistical analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a path analysis approach was employed to test the hypothesized model and evaluate both direct and indirect effects among attachment styles, social well-being, and spiritual well-being. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26 for preliminary analyses and AMOS version 24 for model testing. The model's fit was assessed using multiple goodness-of-fit indices, including the Chi-square statistic (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Additionally, assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were evaluated prior to conducting SEM. The bootstrapping method ($n = 2000$) was applied to assess the significance of indirect effects.

Results

The sample for this study consisted of 310 students within the age range of 18-50 from the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences at Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch, during the 2022-2023 academic year. Table 1 presents the participants' sociodemographic characteristics. Additionally, Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients between attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent), social well-being (social contribution, social acceptance, social actualization, social coherence, and social integration), and spiritual well-being (religious health and existential health). The correlation coefficients between the variables were as expected and they were also consistent with the research hypotheses.

Table 1. Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variables	Categories	Count (%)
Gender	Female	254 (81.9%)
	Male	56 (18.1%)
Age (years)	Mean \pm SD	29.01 \pm 7.97
Marital Status	Single	164 (52.9%)
	Married	121 (39.1%)
	Divorced	25 (8%)
Education Level	Bachelor's	138 (44.5%)
	Master's	120 (38.7%)
	Doctorate	52 (16.8%)

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients between Research Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Attachment - Avoidant Style	-									
2. Attachment - Secure Style	-0.18**	-								
3. Attachment - Ambivalent Style	0.41**	-0.33**	-							
4. Social Well-being - Social Contribution	-0.25**	0.38**	-0.45**	-						
5. Social Well-being - Social Acceptance	-0.22**	0.44**	-0.27**	0.46**	-					
6. Social Well-being - Social Actualization	-0.14*	0.40**	-0.22**	0.44**	0.54**	-				
7. Social Well-being - Social Coherence	-0.24**	0.38**	-0.33**	0.41**	0.48**	0.49**	-			
8. Social Well-being - Social Integration	-0.17**	0.34**	-0.27**	0.42**	0.46**	0.42**	0.50**	-		
9. Spiritual Well-being - Religious Health	-0.33**	0.38**	-0.38**	0.26**	0.30**	0.25**	0.34**	0.32**	-	
10. Spiritual Well-being - Existential Health	-0.40**	0.37**	-0.42**	0.37**	0.34**	0.23**	0.41**	0.35**	0.64**	-
Mean	12.79	14.28	12.26	18.94	22.88	23.40	17.35	21.75	37.80	39.19
Standard Deviation	3.47	3.55	3.80	4.17	5.47	5.50	3.24	5.20	7.58	8.64

Note. Correlation coefficients marked with * and ** denote significance levels of $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$, respectively.

After reviewing the descriptive findings, the assumptions of univariate normal distribution, skewness, and kurtosis of the variables were assessed, and the evaluation of multicollinearity through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance value were carried out. Table 3 shows that the skewness and kurtosis values of all components were within the ± 2 range. This shows that the assumption of univariate normal distribution was met. Moreover, the results from Table 3 indicate that the assumption of multicollinearity was also met, as the tolerance values of the predictor variables were greater than 0.1, and the VIF values were less than 10.

Moreover, to evaluate the assumption of multivariate normal distribution, Mahalanobis Distance (MD) was analyzed. The skewness and kurtosis values were 1.06 and 0.47, respectively, which were within the range of ± 2 . This demonstrates that the assumption of multivariate normal distribution was satisfied. Lastly, the homogeneity of variances was examined through the scatter plot of standardized residuals, confirming that this assumption was also met.

The model analysis used in this study were as follows:

Measurement Model: In this study, social well-being and spiritual well-being were latent variables which formed the measurement model. We assumed that the latent variable of social well-being was measured by the indicators of social participation, social acceptance, social actualization, social coherence, and social integration. The latent variable of spiritual well-being was measured by the indicators of religious health and existential health. In addition, the goodness of fit for the measurement model was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with AMOS-24 software and Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE). The fit indices of the measurement model are shown in Table 4. Based on the results, all fit indices from the CFA supported the acceptable fit of the measurement model with the collected data. In the measurement model, the highest factor loading belonged to the existential health indicator ($\beta = 0.857$), and the lowest factor loading belonged to the social participation indicator ($\beta = 0.632$). Since all factor loadings were above 0.32, it can be concluded that all indicators were adequately capable of measuring the latent variables in this study.

Structural Model: After evaluating the fit of the measurement model, the second stage was to estimate and evaluate the fit indices of the structural model (Figure 1). In the structural model, it was hypothesized that attachment styles predict spiritual well-being in students through the mediation of social well-being. The structural model was analyzed, and the results showed that the fit indices supported the acceptable fit of the structural model with the collected data ($\chi^2 = 58.50$, $\chi^2/df = 2.09$, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.93, and RMSEA = 0.05).

Based on the results in Table 5, the total path coefficient between secure attachment style ($P = 0.001$, $\beta = 0.32$) and spiritual well-being was positive. Further, the total path coefficients between avoidant attachment style ($P = 0.001$, $\beta = -0.292$) and ambivalent attachment style ($P = 0.001$, $\beta = -0.26$) and spiritual well-being were negative and

significant. However, the path coefficient between social well-being ($P = 0.001$, $\beta = 0.330$) and spiritual well-being was positive and significant. According to the findings in Table 5, the indirect path coefficient between secure attachment style ($P = 0.001$, $\beta = 0.155$) and spiritual well-being was positive, and the indirect path coefficient between ambivalent attachment style ($P = 0.001$, $\beta = -0.156$) and spiritual well-being was negative and significant. The indirect path coefficient between avoidant attachment style and spiritual well-being was not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that social well-being positively mediates the relationship between secure attachment style and spiritual well-being; it also negatively mediates the relationship between ambivalent attachment style and spiritual well-being among students. The bootstrapping method with a sample size of 2000 was employed for estimating the standard error of indirect paths.

Figure 1 illustrates the structural model explaining the relationships between attachment styles and social well-being with spiritual well-being among students. According to the results, the total squared multiple correlations for the spiritual well-being variable was 0.48, showing that attachment styles and social well-being together explain 48% of the variance in spiritual well-being among students.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the structural relationships among attachment styles, social well-being, and spiritual well-being in students at the Roudehen Branch of Islamic Azad University.

The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between secure attachment style and spiritual well-being, and significant negative relationships between avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles and spiritual well-being. These results are consistent with the findings of Maleki [8], Safara et al. [15], and Cherniak et al. [22], who demonstrated that secure attachment promotes spiritual development through fostering trust, emotional openness, and a sense of existential meaning. In contrast, individuals with insecure attachments are more likely to experience inner conflict and reduced spiritual connectedness.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding can be explained through attachment theory. Bowlby, Hazan and Shaver argued that secure attachment leads to the formation of positive internal working models, which support emotional regulation, connectedness with others, and trust in transcendent systems all of which are vital for spiritual well-being. Insecure attachments, however, create distrust and emotional disengagement, limiting individuals' openness to spiritual experience and meaning-making [8].

A significant direct relationship was found between social well-being and spiritual well-being, supporting the findings of Ariapooran et al. [14] and Yakup [23]. These studies emphasized that individuals with stronger social ties, a sense of community belonging, and perceived social contribution are more likely to experience higher

spiritual satisfaction and existential meaning. Keyes also posits that social well-being encompasses dimensions such as social coherence, contribution, and integration, all of which directly enhance psychological and spiritual resilience.

This finding aligns with Keyes' theory of social well-being, which asserts that social integration and acceptance contribute to a person's existential framework, enhancing their capacity for spiritual engagement. Individuals who feel socially supported are more likely to participate in shared cultural and spiritual activities, fostering both connectedness and transcendence [23].

The study also showed that social well-being mediates the relationship between attachment styles and spiritual well-being. Specifically, the path from secure attachment to spiritual well-being was mediated positively through social well-being, whereas the path from ambivalent attachment was mediated negatively. No significant mediating effect was observed for the avoidant attachment style. This mediating process has been confirmed in prior studies such as those by Hosseini et al. [24], Eidi et al. [25], Li et al. [26], and Reyes-Perez et al. [27], who found that social support and social health significantly influence the pathway from attachment to psychological and spiritual outcomes.

This mediating role confirms the conceptual model based on the integration of Bowlby's attachment theory and Keyes' social well-being model. Individuals with secure attachment are more capable of forming stable social relationships, which in turn enhance their spiritual well-being through experiences of empathy, trust, and community. In contrast, ambivalent attachment characterized by fear of rejection and emotional inconsistency impairs social interactions, leading to fragmented social experiences that negatively affect spiritual development. The absence of a significant mediating effect for avoidant attachment may be due to these individuals' general tendency to suppress emotions and avoid social closeness, thereby bypassing the positive functions of social well-being [26].

Conclusion

This study shows the roles of different attachment styles and social well-being in affecting students' spiritual well-being. In this study, we found that, by creating strong social bonds and meaningful interactions, secure attachment style can improve spiritual well-being; however, avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles are related to lower spiritual well-being. Also, through enhancing the positive effects of secure attachments on spiritual health, social well-being plays a mediating role. Both social well-being and spiritual well-being make lives more meaningful and together they increase resilience and overall well-being. It can be concluded that the cultivation of secure attachment and strong social connections can considerably improve mental and spiritual health.

The limitations of this study include the lack of in-person visits to the community members, the use of self-reporting methods, the non-utilization of other data

collection methods such as interviews, and the use of convenience sampling. In addition, the sample was limited to only the students of the Faculty of Psychology and Social Sciences at Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch. Given these limitations, therefore, we should be cautious in generalizing the results.

Based on the aforementioned limitations and findings, we suggest that similar studies be conducted in other universities or with different samples so that their findings can be compared with the findings of the present study. Additionally, we recommend that other data collection methods be used such as interviews and observations to obtain more complete and accurate information. We also suggest that future research examine other variables that are related to attachment styles, social well-being, and spiritual well-being and that impact them (such as resilience, coping styles, social class, etc.). Furthermore, since the findings of this study indicate that attachment styles, mediated by social well-being, can predict spiritual well-being in students, it is recommended that educational authorities implement programs for enhancing the spiritual well-being of students. Finally, we suggest that workshops be held to cultivate secure attachment, social well-being, and spiritual well-being among students.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

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

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly to enhance the quality of the text by improving grammar, spelling, and clarity. Following the use of this tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed and manually edited the content as necessary and accept full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

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