

The effect of spiritual well-being on career anxiety among students

Alfi Rahmi¹, Januar Januar², Hannilfi Yusra³, Nopi Nopita Sari⁴

1. Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Islamic Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Sjech M.Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia
2. Department of Islamic Religious Education, Faculty of Islamic Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Sjech M.Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia
3. Department of Sharia Economic Law, Faculty of Sharia, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, Sungai Penuh, Indonesia
4. Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Islamic Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Sjech M.Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: alfirahmi@uinbukittinggi.ac.id

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Abstract

Career anxiety among university students is commonly associated with external factors such as job readiness and environmental pressure. However, the role of internal aspects, particularly spiritual well-being, has not been widely explored. In fact, an individual's ability to find meaning in life and deal with uncertainty may influence their level of anxiety. This study aims to examine the effect of spiritual well-being on career anxiety among students across different semesters. This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey design involving 230 university students. Data were collected using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) and the Career Anxiety Scale (CAS). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. The results show a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and career anxiety ($r = -0.300$; $p < 0.05$). Regression analysis indicates that spiritual well-being significantly affects career anxiety, with a contribution of 9%. This means that higher levels of spiritual well-being are associated with lower levels of career anxiety. These findings suggest that spiritual well-being plays a role as an internal factor in helping students manage career anxiety. Therefore, strengthening internal aspects, including meaning in life and psychological balance, is important in student development and counseling practices.

Introduction

Students face not only academic demands but also uncertainty regarding their future careers. From the very start of their college years, students begin considering job opportunities, assessing their own abilities, and envisioning life after graduation. These conditions often give rise to career anxiety, which can be defined as a psychological condition characterized by feelings of worry, doubt, and uncertainty regarding future employment and career outcomes (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Career anxiety is an emotional state characterized by feelings of worry, doubt, and uncertainty regarding one's future employment career outcomes. This anxiety arises when individuals face the demands of making career decisions and the lack of clarity regarding their future direction. Among students, career anxiety is often linked to

concerns about personal readiness, job opportunities, and social pressures when entering the workforce (Atikah, Kurniawati, & Rifameutia, 2023; Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008; Fouad, Cotter, & Kantamneni, 2009).

From a career development perspective, individuals begin exploring career options from adolescence through early adulthood (Super, 1980). Furthermore, Career Construction Theory emphasizes that concern for one's future career develops gradually through individuals' experiences and educational processes (Savickas, 2013; Brown, Steven D. and Lent, 2013; Wang & Li, 2024). In this process, the uncertainty faced can lead to career anxiety among students. Career anxiety is influenced by individuals' perceptions of the workplace, including views on competition, skill demands, and job opportunities (Tsai, et al. 2017). Technological advancements and changes in the job market further exacerbate students' career anxiety. Information regarding job competition and ever-changing skill requirements makes students increasingly aware of the uncertainty of the future (World Economic Forum, 2020). This finding indicates that career anxiety is not only experienced by seniors but also in the early stages of college (Atikah et al., 2023).

The effects of career anxiety are not only cognitive in nature but also impact students' psychological and physiological well-being. Research indicates that career anxiety can affect sleep quality, academic concentration, and overall psychological well-being (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Students experiencing career anxiety tend to doubt their abilities and dwell on negative possibilities (Filhayati & Zahro, 2025; Hazla et al., 2024).

To date, research on career anxiety has primarily focused on external factors, such as self-efficacy, career exploration, and social support as identified in previous studies. Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to show greater confidence in dealing with career-related challenges of the workplace (Rafli, Muslihati, & Information, 2025). Additionally, social support, particularly from family, plays an important role in enhancing students' career readiness and adaptability, helping individuals cope with career demands and transitions more effectively (Rahmi, Firman, & Afdal, 2023). Other research indicates that these factors contribute to career adaptability, thereby helping individuals cope with career demands and transitions more effectively (Rahmi, Iswari, & Kamarudin, 2024). On the other hand, technological advancements and the use of digital media such as microblogs are also reported to enhance students' career adaptability through expanded access to information, career exploration, and self-reflection in the decision-making process (Suryahadikusumah, 2022). However, not all students can manage this pressure optimally; in fact, some experience career anxiety influenced by other psychological factors, such as feelings of alienation (Amellia, Suminar, & Himawati, 2026).

These findings suggest that explanations of career anxiety that rely solely on external factors are not entirely sufficient. A more comprehensive approach is needed, taking into account individual internal dimensions, particularly those related to life meaning and psychological well-being. In this context, spiritual well-being is relevant to examine as a potential factor explaining variations in career anxiety among students. Spiritual well-being can be considered an important dimension of human life that reflects the harmony of a person's relationship with oneself, others, the environment, and God (Sukandar, 2025). Spiritual well-being refers to a condition which an individual possesses a sense of life's meaning, clear purpose, and inner peace in living their life (Paloutzian, R. F., & Ellison, 1982; Paloutzian, Ph, Ellison, & Ph, 2021). From a career psychology perspective, work can also be interpreted as a life calling, meaning when an individual views work activities as part of a broader and meaningful life purpose. This interpretation contributes to an individual's psychological well-being and life direction (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018). This interpretation contributes to psychological well-being and provides a clearer life direction. Individuals with good spiritual well-being tend to have stronger psychological

resilience in the face of stress (Park, 2010) and are better able to minimize the impact of stress on their mental health (Steger, Frazier, & Kaler, 2006).

Individuals who can view work as part of their life's purpose tend to demonstrate more positive and adaptive career trajectories (Datu & Mateo, 2015). A sense of life's meaning also plays a role in strengthening an individual's resilience in the face of stress, thereby contributing to better mental health (Arslan & Yıldırım, 2021). From a spiritual coping perspective, belief in the meaning of life helps individuals view difficult situations as part of a meaningful process rather than merely as a threat (Kenneth I. Pargament, 1997).

Many studies indicate that spiritual well-being acts as a protective factor against anxiety (Koenig, 2012; Kenneth I. Pargament, 1997). Studies of college students show that spiritual well-being is significantly associated with psychological health, including lower levels of anxiety and stress (Leung & Pong, 2021). However, most studies still place spiritual well-being within the context of general well-being or clinical anxiety, without specifically examining its role in career anxiety. This indicates a significant research gap that needs to be addressed, particularly among students across semesters who are in a phase of career exploration and uncertainty.

This study offers a new perspective by examining spiritual well-being as an internal factor in explaining career anxiety, which has traditionally been understood primarily through external factors. Furthermore, the focus on students across different semesters contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of career anxiety at various stages of academic development. Based on this discussion, this study aims to examine the influence of spiritual well-being on career anxiety among students across different semesters.

Methods

Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design, meaning data collection is carried out at one specific point in time to examine the relationships among the variables under study. This design was selected because it is in line with the objectives of the study: to empirically test the influence of spiritual well-being on career anxiety among students without manipulating variables. The cross-sectional approach enables researchers to obtain a general overview of participants' conditions of respondents' psychological conditions and efficiently identify relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The method applied in this study is correlational with an analytical approach, wherein this study aims to identify the extent to which spiritual well-being can act as a predictor spiritual well-being serves as a predictor of career anxiety. This approach is considered appropriate because the variables examined are psychological in nature under investigation are psychological constructs that develop naturally and cannot be tested experimentally (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Cross-sectional designs are commonly used in career psychology research to examine the relationship between individual internal factors and career-related psychological conditions; thus, they are considered appropriate for describing the conditions of students across semesters as they face career uncertainty.

Participants

The sample in this study was obtained using a random sampling technique. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms distributed to students from various semesters. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were first provided with an explanation regarding the purpose of the study with an explanation regarding the purpose of the study with an explanation of the study's objectives and asked to give their consent as a form of voluntary participation. This procedure was conducted to ensure that the study adhered to ethical principles that the study complied with ethical principles, particularly regarding informed consent and the confidentiality of respondent data (Code & Psychologists,

2017). The total number of participants involved in this study was 230 students from various semesters. The following is an overview of the study's respondents

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents in This Study

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Semester	Semester 3	124	53,9
	Semester 5	16	7,0
	Semester 6	23	10,0
	Semester 7	22	9,6
	Semester 8	45	19,5
Age	18 years old	7	3,0
	19 years old	57	24,8
	20 years old	79	34,3
	21 years old	39	17,0
	22 years old	48	20,9

Instruments

1. Spiritual Well-Being

In this study, spiritual well-being was assessed using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1983) and subsequently utilized and further elaborated upon by Paloutzian. This instrument is intended to evaluate an individual's level of spiritual well-being through two primary dimensions: religious well-being, which relates to an individual's relationship with God, and existential well-being, which relates to the meaning and purpose of life (Ellison, 1983; Paloutzian, Bufford, & Wildman, 2012; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; Paloutzian et al., 2021). Religious well-being refers to an individual's perceived relationship with God, including feelings of closeness, faith, and meaningful religious experiences love, and meaningful religious experiences. Meanwhile, existential well-being reflects an individual's sense of life meaning and purpose, including having a life purpose, experiencing life satisfaction, having a clear life direction, and being able to accept oneself. Both aspects of this dimension are measured through several statements, for example, positive expressions such as feeling close to God or having a clear purpose in life, as well as negative statements such as, "I feel far from God" or "My life feels aimless," which then need to be reverse scored.

The SWBS consists of 20 items measured using a Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The overall score is calculated by summing all item responses, including reverse scoring for negatively worded items (Paloutzian, R. F., & Ellison, 1982). The overall SWBS score falls within a range of 20 to 120. For descriptive purposes, scores are then grouped into three categories: low (20–40), moderate (41–99), and high (100–120) (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; Ellison, 1983). This grouping is used as a guide for interpreting the respondents' level of spiritual well-being, not as an absolute categorical boundary (Paloutzian et al., 2021).

The SWBS developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) has been widely used to measure spiritual well-being across two dimensions: religious well-being and existential well-being. Psychometrically, the SWBS has demonstrated good internal reliability since its initial development, with a previous studies have shown that the SWBS has good

internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha indicating acceptable reliability of 0.87 for the religious dimension and 0.78 for the existential dimension, as well as adequate test-retest stability (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). Subsequent research has also supported the reliability of this instrument, demonstrating consistent results across different populations, ranging from 0.82 to 0.94, as well as stable construct validity across various populations (Bufford, Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1991). In a cross-cultural context, the SWBS demonstrates relatively consistent reliability, ranging from 0.80 to 0.90, and retains its original factor structure (Bufford & Paloutzian, 2023), including in adaptation studies reporting an alpha of 0.814 (Malinakova et al., 2017). In Indonesia, "The findings of the instrument's adaptation also demonstrate good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.80 to 0.89, including a reported value of 0.895, indicating high internal consistency (Fijianto, Andriany, & Hartati, 2020). Overall, the SWBS possesses strong construct validity and stable reliability, making it suitable for use in empirical research on spiritual well-being.

2. Career Anxiety

In this study, career anxiety was assessed using the Career Anxiety Scale (CAS) developed by Thai and colleagues (Tsai, Hsu, & Hsu, 2017). This instrument is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 12 items and is designed to identify levels of career anxiety among students. The assessment includes several indicators, namely concerns about future employment, confusion about choosing a career, fear of failure, doubts about one's abilities, and uncertainty about career direction. These indicators are reflected in various statements, such as feeling anxious about future employment, uncertainty in choosing a career, and worry about not achieving success. as well as several positive statements that need to be reversed in the analysis process. Each item responses are measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The total score is calculated by summing all item responses, with higher scores indicating greater levels of career anxiety at the time of assessment.

The researchers utilized the results of psychometric testing conducted by Mirah and Indianti (2018), which indicated that this instrument possesses excellent quality. The reliability coefficient was reported at 0.93, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Additionally, The instrument's validity test showed that all items had a corrected item-total correlation (r_{IT}) above 0.30, meaning each item was deemed capable of adequately representing the construct of career anxiety (Mirah & Indianti, 2018).

Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative approach, using statistical techniques to address the research objectives., namely to examine the influence of spiritual well-being on students' career anxiety. The analysis was carried out in several stages, beginning with the processing of raw data through to testing the relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Prior to inferential analysis, the data were first examined to meet classical assumptions, including normality testing using Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk. To test the relationships and effects between variables, To examine the relationship between variables, simple linear regression analysis was applied. This technique was selected as it corresponds with the study's objective, particularly in identifying the predictive role of spiritual well-being. Regression analysis enables researchers to examine both the direction and strength of the relationship between variables, as well as the contribution of the independent variable (Field, 2024). All data analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software, which is widely used in educational and psychological research. The use of this software helps ensure

the accuracy of calculations and facilitates the systematic interpretation of data (Pallant, 2020).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Tabel	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SWBS	230	33.00	120.00	90.6522	15.65236
CA	230	12.00	57.00	38.6087	7.50161
Valid N (listwise)	230				

Results

Before conducting inferential analysis, the descriptive results of the research data are first described. This analysis includes the distribution of scores for the variables of spiritual well-being and career anxiety, thereby providing an initial understanding of the trends in the data obtained from the respondents

Table 2 indicates that the mean score of students' spiritual well-being is 90.65, indicating that, in general, their level of spiritual well-being falls into the "fairly good" category. Meanwhile, the average career anxiety score of 38.61 indicates that the level of career anxiety among students tends to be in the moderate category. The standard deviation values for both variables are relatively small, indicating that the data distribution is fairly homogeneous.

Table 3. Categorization of Spiritual Well-Being and Career Anxiety

Category	Spiritual Well-Being		Career Anxiety	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1	0,4	34	14,8%
Medium	154	67,0	163	70,9%
High	75	32,6	33	14,3%
Total	230	100,0	230	100%

Referring to Table 3, most students are categorized within the moderate level of both spiritual well-being and career anxiety. This indicates that students generally possess a fairly solid foundation of spiritual well-being but still experience career anxiety within reasonable limits. Nevertheless, the presence of a group with high levels of career anxiety warrants attention, as it has the potential to affect their readiness to enter the workforce. Prior to further analysis, a normality test was performed to ensure that the data met the required assumptions. to ensure that the data met the assumptions of parametric analysis. The results of the normality test indicated that the data were normally distributed, as the significance value (0.07) exceeded 0.05; thus, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed and meet the requirements for further analysis. Next, a correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between spiritual well-being and career anxiety.

Table 4. Correlation Test

Variable	r	Sig.	N
SWBS – CA	-0,300	0,000	230

The analysis results revealed a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and career anxiety ($r = -0.300$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that higher levels of spiritual well-being are associated with lower levels of career anxiety. However, the strength of the

relationship found is relatively weak. To test to examine the effect of spiritual well-being on career anxiety, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Table 5. Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0,300	0,090	0,086

The R value the strength of the between the two variables, while the R-squared value of 0.090 suggests that spiritual well-being accounts for 9% of the variance in career anxiety. This suggests that other factors outside the scope of this study also influence students' career anxiety.

Table 6. Anova Test

F	Sig.
22,566	0,000

The results of the ANOVA test indicate that the regression model used is significant ($p < 0.05$), and therefore, the model is deemed suitable for explaining the relationship between the variables.

Table 7. Regression Coefficient

Variabel	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	51,647	-	18,544	0,000
SWBS	-0,144	-0,300	-4,750	0,000

The results of the analysis indicate that spiritual well-being has a significant negative effect on career anxiety. The regression coefficient is negative ($B = -0.144$), meaning that any increase in spiritual well-being is associated with a decrease in career anxiety. However, the magnitude of this effect is relatively small

Discussion

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the model is appropriate for analyzing the relationships among the variables in this study. This provides a solid foundation for interpreting how spiritual well-being is related to career anxiety.

The findings indicate a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and career anxiety. The negative regression coefficient ($B = -0.144$) suggests that students with higher levels of spiritual well-being tend to experience lower levels of anxiety about their future careers. Although this relationship is statistically meaningful, its magnitude remains relatively modest, which signals that spiritual well-being is only one of several contributing factors.

This pattern is reinforced by the correlation results ($r = -0.300$, $p = .000$), which point in the same direction. In practical terms, the findings suggest that students who are able to maintain a sense of inner meaning, purpose, and emotional balance are generally better equipped to manage uncertainty related to career decisions. This interpretation aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of meaning-making and psychological resources in reducing anxiety and enhancing well-being (Park, 2013; Steger et al., 2006). However, the relatively small explanatory power ($R^2 = .090$) indicates that most of the variation in career anxiety cannot be explained by spiritual well-being alone. This highlights the need to view career anxiety as a multidimensional issue rather than attributing it to a single psychological factor.

From a broader perspective, these results underline the importance of internal psychological resources in shaping how students respond to transitional challenges. Individuals with stronger spiritual well-being are more likely to interpret uncertainty in a constructive way, which in turn reduces the intensity of anxious responses. This is consistent with findings that link well-being to adaptive coping and lower stress levels (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018; Ryff, 1989). At the same time, other studies suggest that variables such as career adaptability and self-efficacy often show stronger predictive power in explaining career-related anxiety, positioning spiritual well-being as a complementary factor rather than a primary determinant (Savickas, 2013a; Brown, Steven D. and Lent, 2013).

Conceptually, these findings are in line with the framework proposed by Raymond F. Paloutzian and Craig W. Ellison, who emphasize the role of meaning-making in spiritual well-being. Individuals who are able to construct a clear sense of meaning in life tend to demonstrate greater resilience when facing pressure, as they are less likely to perceive uncertainty as a direct threat (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). For students navigating the transition from education to the workforce, this capacity becomes especially important, given the ambiguity and demands typically associated with this stage.

At the same time, it is important to consider alternative explanations for the findings. Career anxiety is not shaped solely by internal factors, but is also influenced by external conditions such as labor market competition, socioeconomic background, and social support. Previous studies have highlighted the role of contextual and environmental influences in shaping career development outcomes (Blustein, 2017; Brown, Steven D. and Lent, 2013). In this regard, the relatively low R^2 value observed in this study may reflect the complex interplay between personal and contextual variables. It is therefore plausible that spiritual well-being operates in conjunction with, rather than independently from, these broader influences.

Taken together, the results suggest that spiritual well-being can be understood as a supportive psychological resource that helps buffer against career-related anxiety, rather than as a dominant predictor. This perspective not only aligns with existing literature but also adds nuance by positioning spirituality within a broader network of influences that shape students' readiness to face career uncertainty.

Implications

The findings of this study indicate that spiritual well-being reduces career anxiety, although its contribution is relatively limited. These results have several important implications, both theoretically and practically. The findings enrich the body of research in the field of guidance and counseling, particularly regarding career anxiety, by identifying spiritual well-being as a relevant internal factor. Until now, research has primarily emphasized aspects such as self-efficacy and social support; thus, these findings offer an additional perspective that the dimensions of life meaning and spirituality also play a role in the psychological dynamics of college students.

These findings provide a foundation for guidance and counseling practitioners in higher education to integrate spiritual aspects into career development services. Counseling programs can focus not only on the technical aspects of career planning but also on strengthening life's meaning, self-reflection, and the development of personal values. This approach is expected to help students manage anxiety more adaptively as they face the demands of the workplace.

Higher education institutions may consider developing more holistic career guidance programs that incorporate elements of character development and psychological well-being, including spiritual aspects. A campus environment that supports comprehensive personal development has the potential to help students better prepare for the transition into the workforce.

Limitations and future directions

This study has certain limitations, particularly its cross-sectional design, which is unable to provide an in-depth explanation of causal relationships. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine other variables such as self-efficacy, social support, and career adaptability, and to employ a longitudinal design in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of career anxiety.

Conclusion

This study indicates that spiritual well-being has a significant negative relationship with career anxiety among students across semesters. This means that the higher the level of spiritual well-being, the lower the tendency for anxiety regarding one's future career. This confirms that internal factors—particularly an individual's ability to find meaning in life and maintain inner balance—play a role in helping students cope with career uncertainty. Nevertheless, the contribution of spiritual well-being to career anxiety is relatively small, at 9%. This finding suggests that career anxiety is not influenced by a single factor but results from the interaction of various aspects, both internal and external. Thus, spiritual well-being can be understood as one of the protective factors that helps reduce career anxiety, though it is not the sole determinant.

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Author Contribution Statement

AR designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, reviewed the results, made final revisions to the manuscript, and drafted the manuscript. JA contributed to the conceptualization and data analysis. HY was involved in data collection and analysis. NNP assisted with data processing.

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