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ORIGINAL

Influence of the Strength of Faith, Emotional Intelligence, and Post-COVID-19 Psychological Well-being in Peruvian Adults

Influencia de la Fuerza de la Fe, la Inteligencia Emocional y el Bienestar Psicológico Post-COVID-19 en Adultos Peruanos

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ABSTRACT

The strength of faith and emotional intelligence can be predictors of good mental health in survivors of the COVID-19 pandemic in sociocultural contexts such as Peru. This study aims to explore the influence of the strength of faith and emotional intelligence on psychological well-being in Peruvian adults post-COVID-19. A total of 390 adults (Mean: 39,36; SD: 13,91) participated, responding to the Santa Clara Religious Faith Strength Questionnaire, Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5). The instruments showed good structural validity and adequate reliability levels (> ,70). The strength of faith has a significant and positive effect on psychological well-being (β = 0,23; p < 0,05). Emotional intelligence has a significant and negative effect on psychological distress (β = -0,53; p < 0,05) and a significant and positive effect on psychological well-being (β = 0,48; p < 0,05). The overall model fit indices indicate favorable and acceptable indicators (RMSEA = 0,031; CFI = 0,990; TLI = 0,989). This study highlights the positive influence of the strength of faith and emotional intelligence on the psychological well-being of COVID-19 survivors. These findings underscore the importance of considering the spiritual dimension and the development of emotional skills in recovery and psychological support efforts.

Keywords: Multivariate Normality; Correlations; Structural Equation Modeling; Mental Health; Post-COVID-19.

RESUMEN

La fortaleza de la fe y la inteligencia emocional pueden ser predictores de buena salud mental en sobrevivientes de la pandemia del COVID-19 en contextos socioculturales como el peruano. Este estudio pretende explorar la influencia de la fortaleza de la fe y la inteligencia emocional en el bienestar psicológico en adultos peruanos post-COVID-19. Participaron 390 adultos (Media: 39,36; DE: 13,91), quienes respondieron el Cuestionario de Fortaleza de Fe Religiosa de Santa Clara, la Escala de Inteligencia Emocional de Wong Law y el Inventario de Salud Mental (MHI-5). Los instrumentos mostraron una buena validez estructural y niveles de fiabilidad adecuados (> ,70). La fortaleza de la fe tiene un efecto significativo y positivo sobre el bienestar psicológico (β = 0,23; p < 0,05). La inteligencia emocional tiene un efecto significativo y negativo sobre el malestar psicológico (β = -0,53; p < 0,05) y un efecto significativo y positivo sobre el bienestar psicológico (β = 0,48; p < 0,05). Los índices globales de ajuste del modelo indican indicadores favorables y aceptables (RMSEA = 0,031; CFI = 0,990; TLI = 0,989). Este estudio destaca la influencia positiva de la fuerza de la fe y

la inteligencia emocional en el bienestar psicológico de los supervivientes de la COVID-19. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de considerar la dimensión espiritual y el desarrollo de habilidades emocionales en los esfuerzos de recuperación y apoyo psicológico.

Palabras clave: Normalidad Multivariante; Correlaciones; Modelización de Ecuaciones Estructurales; Salud Mental; Post-COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

In the current global scenario, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented crisis, impacting the physical and mental health of millions of people. A recent Gallup report (2021) covering 122 countries reveals a significant increase in negative experiences of stress, worry, sadness, and anger among adults following the pandemic events. In the second year of the pandemic, increased uncertainty was observed, with a growing number of deaths despite the implementation of vaccination programs (Ray, 2022). In Peru, the Tacna region faced a particularly challenging context with high case and mortality rates (National Epidemiology Center, 2022).

Within this environment, the psychological impact of COVID-19 and its implications for mental health have become crucial research topics. Previous studies have explored various variables that may influence mental health, including trust and faith (Bashir et al., 2020), self-esteem (Sherin Lee & Vinod, 2019), and emotional intelligence (Persich et al., 2021). These studies suggest that such factors can play a role in mitigating the effects of stress and strengthening psychological resilience. However, so far, this research has focused on specific contexts and population groups, and has not been studied jointly in COVID-19 survivors.

Among the potential influencing variables, two notable aspects are the strength of faith and emotional intelligence. The strength of faith, as a coping strategy in situations of severe stress, can be a source of hope (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). It refers to the importance of religious beliefs and practices in an individual's life, regardless of how they are defined in different religious traditions (Ai et al., 2021). On the other hand, emotional intelligence, which involves skills in the assessment and regulation of one's own and others' emotions, can play a crucial role in effective coping and promoting mental health (Wong & Law, 2002).

In light of Greenspoon & Saklofske's two-factor theory (2001), which proposes that mental health consists of subjective well-being and psychopathology, it is essential to explore how the strength of faith and emotional intelligence can impact the mental health of COVID-19 survivors.

This study aims to fill a gap in the scientific literature on the relationship between the strength of faith, emotional intelligence, and mental health in COVID-19 survivors in Peru. To date, no studies have focused on these variables in this context. While research has been conducted on the physical effects of COVID-19 and some studies have addressed its psychological impact on specific populations (Hueda-Zavaleta et al., 2021; Sánchez Esquiche et al., 2021; Valle Cohaila et al., 2021), the population of COVID-19 survivors has been largely overlooked.

Our research is relevant as it will contribute to understanding how the strength of faith and emotional intelligence can act as protective factors for post-COVID-19 mental health in Peruvian adults. It will also highlight the importance of developing social skills and spiritual practices to mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic on mental health. Ultimately, our goal is to determine the influence of the strength of faith and emotional intelligence on psychological well-being and psychological distress post-COVID-19 in Peruvian adults. Thus, we hypothesize that the strength of faith and emotional intelligence significantly influence the mental health of these individuals.

Study Design and Participants

This study adopts a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and predictive design (Hernández et al., 2018), focusing on adults who survived COVID-19. A sample of 390 participants of both sexes was gathered, with an average age of 39,36 years (standard deviation of 13,91). The gender distribution reveals that 46,92 % of the participants are male, and 53,08 % are female. In terms of marital status, the sample consisted of 45,90 % single individuals, 48,46 % married individuals, and 5,64 % divorced individuals. Examining the participants' educational level, the most common level of education was high school, representing 35,89 % of the sample, followed by 30,77 % with a college education.

Procedure

The study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of the Peruvian Union University (approval code 2022-CE-EPG-0000212), ensuring compliance with national and international ethical standards. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental

or guardian consent and child assent being required in the case of minors. Data were collected through online surveys. The survey period ran from December 2022 to April 2023, and was aimed at adult COVID-19 survivors. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. They then gave their consent, confirming voluntary participation (AMM, 1964).

Instruments

Santa Clara Religious Faith Strength Questionnaire (SCSRFQ). The Peruvian Spanish version adapted by Caycho-Rodríguez et al. (2022) from Plante & Boccaccini (1997) was used. It is a unidimensional self-report measure that assesses the strength of religious faith in adults, consisting of 10 items with 4 Likert-type response options (1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree). The scale demonstrated adequate internal consistency (α=0,98; ω=0,98).

Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS). The Peruvian adaptation by Merino Soto et al. (2016) developed by Wong and Law (2002) was used. It is a self-report measure for young adults, composed of 4 factors and 16 items, with 4 items per factor. It uses a 5-point ordinal response format (from 1 = Completely Untrue of Me to 5 = Completely True of Me). The 4 subscales or factors are Self-Emotion Appraisal, Others' Emotion Appraisal, Regulation of Own Emotions, and Use of Emotion to Facilitate Performance. The coefficient α was highly satisfactory in all subscales, with magnitudes exceeding ,85.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5). The Peruvian Spanish version adapted by Vilca et al. (2022) developed by Berwick et al. (1991) was used for adults. The R-MHI-5 consists of five items that assess the presence of psychological well-being (items 2 and 4) and psychological distress (reverse-coded items 1, 3, and 5). Additionally, the Spanish version has four response categories ranging from "never" (0) to "always" (3), where higher scores indicate better mental health.

Data Analysis

First, a multivariate normality analysis was performed using the Mardia test. Next, a correlation and reliability analysis was conducted. Then, a structural equation modeling analysis was performed to examine the proposed model. Finally, the overall model fit indices were evaluated. All analyses were conducted using the statistical software RStudio. The lavaan package was used for the assumption testing and model checking through structural equation modeling.

RESULTS

Multivariate Normality Analysis

To verify multivariate normality, the Mardia test was performed. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, Shapiro-Wilk normality test coefficients, and significance values, where only the Emotional Intelligence variable exhibits univariate normality. Regarding Table 2, non-significant results (p < 0,05) indicate the absence of multivariate normality.

Table 1. Univariate Normality Analysis of Study Variables

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	SW	p	g1	g2	Norm.
Faith Strength	30,41	6,41	0,957	0,000	-0,56	-0,38	No
Emotional Intelligence	57,35	8,36	0,993	0,096	-0,05	0,51	Si
Psychological Well-being	5,23	1,20	0,936	0,000	0,14	-0,07	No
Psychological Distress	6,24	1,57	0,939	0,000	0,54	0,07	No

Note: $\bar{x}$: mean, SD: standard deviation, SW: Shapiro-Wilk, p: significance. g1: skewness, g2: kurtosis, Norm.: Sample Normality

Table 2. Multivariate Normality Analysis

Indicator	M	P
Multivariate Skewness	98,767	0,000
Multivariate Kurtosis	1,963	0,049

Note: M: Mardia coefficient, p: significance

Correlation and Reliability Analysis

Table 3 displays the correlation matrix among the different study variables, indicating their confidence intervals in brackets. It can be observed that the relationship between Strength of Faith and Psychological

Distress is significant, negative, and very weak, and cannot be considered for the structural equation model. Additionally, significant moderate correlations were found.

Furthermore, reliability scores reached high levels (Hayes & Coutts, 2020) for Strength of Faith and Emotional Intelligence and acceptable levels for Psychological Well-being and Psychological Distress.

Table 3. Correlations and Reliability among Study Variables

Variables	Correlations				Items	α	ω
	FF	IE	B	M			
Faith Strength	1				10	0,94	0,95
Emotional Intelligence	0,41** [0,32 - 0,49]	1			16	0,91	0,92
Psychological Well-being	0,39** [0,30 - 0,47]	0,41** [0,32 - 0,49]	1		2	0,60	0,60
Psychological Distress	-0,17** [-0,27 - -0,08]	-0,33** [-0,42 - -0,24]	0,25** [-0,34 - -0,16]	1	3	0,56	0,56

Note: **:significance less than 0,01, SF: Strength of Faith, EI: Emotional Intelligence, PW: Psychological Well-being, PD: Psychological Distress, α: Cronbach's alpha, ω: McDonald's omega

Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

Figure 1 presents the proposed explanatory model considering the 4 study variables. The Strength of Faith significantly explains Psychological Well-being, while Emotional Intelligence significantly explains both Psychological Well-being and Psychological Distress, with the latter two covarying inversely. It is worth noting that Emotional Intelligence is a second-order variable composed of its dimensions: Self-Emotion Appraisal (SEA), Others' Emotion Appraisal (OEA), Regulation of Own Emotions (ROE), and Use of Emotion to Facilitate Performance (UOE).

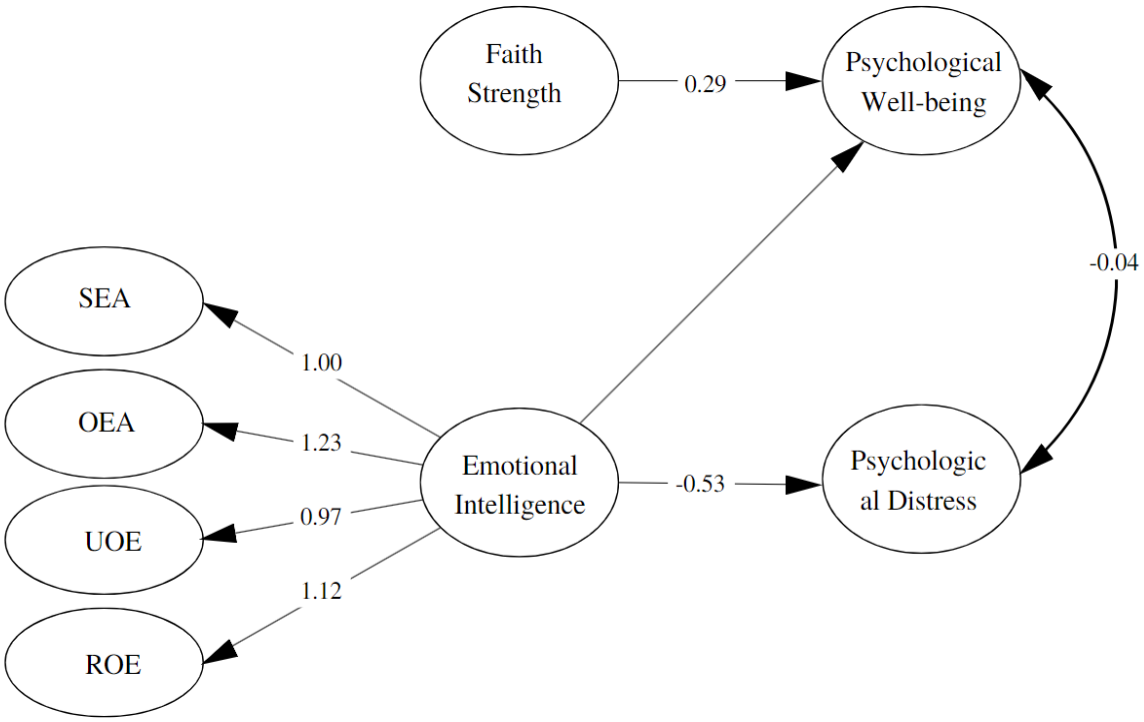

Figure 1. Proposed SEM Model

The proposed model aims to test the effect of the latent factors, Strength of Faith on Psychological Well-being, and Emotional Intelligence on Psychological Well-being and Psychological Distress. Table 4 shows that Strength of Faith has a significant and positive effect on Psychological Well-being (β = 0,23; p < 0,05). Emotional Intelligence has a significant and negative effect on Psychological Distress (β = -0,53; p < 0,05) and a significant and positive effect on Psychological Well-being (β = 0,48; p < 0,05).

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Table 4. Regression Analysis of Study Variables

Model	ß	EE	z	P
FF-B	0,23	0,027	8,416	0,000
IE-M	-0,53	0,040	-13,151	0,000
IE-B	0,48	0,044	10,754	0,000

Note: FF: Strength of Faith; B: Psychological Well-being; IE: Emotional Intelligence; M: Psychological Distress; SE: Standard Error; p: Significance value.

The overall model fit indices indicate favorable and acceptable indicators. Table 5 reveals that the x^2/df indicator is below the expected score; Green et al. (2009) stated that this indicator is sensitive to sample size and that other goodness-of-fit indices should be considered.

Regarding the absolute fit indices, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is close to 0, which is an adequate score, below 0,08. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) presents an expected value below 0,05 (Hair et al., 2019; Schreiber et al., 2010). As for the incremental fit measures, the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) obtained an optimal value above 0,90, the Non-Normed Fit Index or Tucker-Lewis Index (CFI) also achieved an optimal value above 0,90, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI) obtained a good value as well (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2013; Schreiber et al., 2010). Regarding the parsimony fit measure, the Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI) was close to 1, indicating a good indicator of parsimony (Hair et al., 2019; Schreiber et al., 2010).

Table 5. Goodness-of-Fit Indices

Goodness-of-Fit Index	Obtained Values	Levels of Fit
x^2	585,89	-
gl	425	-
p	0,000	<0,05
x^2/ gl	1,38	Between 2 y 5
Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)	0,037	Close to 0
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0,031	≤ 0,05
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	0,970	≥ 0,90
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0,963	> 0,90
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0,989	≥ 0,90
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0,990	≥ 0,90
Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)	0,835	Close to1

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of strength of faith and emotional intelligence on post-COVID-19 mental health in Peruvian adults. The results support the general hypothesis that both strength of faith and emotional intelligence positively influence the psychological well-being of these individuals. Additionally, it was found that emotional intelligence also influences psychological distress. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have explored predictors and mediators of psychological well-being in different populations.

Firstly, it was found that strength of faith is a significant and positive predictor of psychological well-being in COVID-19 survivors. This result aligns with previous research that has highlighted the role of spirituality and faith in promoting psychological well-being (Lalani, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Spirituality can provide a sense of purpose and connection, as well as coping strategies that help individuals deal with stressful situations like the pandemic. Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between strength of faith and well-being in different sample groups, including parents and caregivers of individuals with intellectual disabilities, Jewish women, and young students (Boehm & Carter, 2019; Geller et al., 2020; Magdalena Midi et al., 2019).

Secondly, it was found that emotional intelligence also positively influences the psychological well-being of COVID-19 survivors. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own and others' emotions (Szcześniak & Tułecka, 2020). These findings support previous research that has identified emotional intelligence as an important factor in life satisfaction and well-being in different sample groups, such as older adults, university students, and adolescents (Rey et al., 2019; Extremera et al., 2020; Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019). The ability to process and regulate emotions can help individuals cope with

the emotional challenges associated with the pandemic and promote greater psychological well-being.

Regarding the influence of strength of faith and emotional intelligence on psychological distress, the results showed that strength of faith did not have a significant correlation with psychological distress. Although some previous studies have found a negative relationship between spirituality and psychological distress in different populations (Margetić et al., 2022; Gudenkauf et al., 2019), this specific study did not find a significant association. This may indicate that the influence of strength of faith on psychological distress may vary depending on the context and characteristics of the sample.

On the other hand, it was found that emotional intelligence has a significant and negative effect on psychological distress in COVID-19 survivors. These results are consistent with previous research that has demonstrated an inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress in diverse populations, such as individuals with rosacea, frontline nurses, and university students (Barberis et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021; Yusoff et al., 2021). The ability to recognize and regulate emotions can help prevent or reduce psychological distress by facilitating healthy coping strategies and greater emotional resilience.

Implications

The implications of the findings of this study have a significant impact on professional practice and psychological theory. Firstly, the results highlight the importance of considering strength of faith and emotional intelligence in the care and treatment of COVID-19 survivors. Mental health professionals and service providers should recognize the positive role these variables can play in promoting psychological well-being. This involves incorporating interventions that strengthen faith and foster the development of emotional intelligence skills into treatment programs and care for survivors.

Additionally, the results support and enrich existing psychological theory by providing robust empirical evidence of the relationship between strength of faith, emotional intelligence, and psychological well-being. These findings support the notion that spiritual and emotional aspects are important factors to consider in understanding mental health and well-being. By incorporating these variables into theoretical models, researchers and theorists can develop a more comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing mental health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of clear recommendations for applying the results in relevant contexts, it is crucial for mental health professionals and service providers to consider the importance of spirituality and emotional intelligence when designing interventions and treatment programs. This involves incorporating strategies that promote strengthening of faith and the development of emotional skills, such as emotion recognition and regulation. By addressing these dimensions, the psychological well-being of COVID-19 survivors can be improved.

Limitations

This study, like any other, is not without limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed with humility and intellectual curiosity. Firstly, it is important to note that this study was based on a specific sample of COVID-19 survivors. This geographical and temporal limitation may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations and contexts. To address this limitation in future research, it would be valuable to conduct studies in different regions with larger and more diverse samples, which would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between strength of faith, emotional intelligence, and psychological well-being in different cultural and social contexts.

Another limitation that needs to be addressed is the possible presence of uncontrolled or confounding variables that could influence the results. Although statistical analyses were conducted to control relevant variables, there is always the possibility that unconsidered factors may have influenced the results. In future research, the inclusion of additional variables such as social support, resilience, and socioeconomic context could be considered to obtain a more complete picture of the determinants of psychological well-being in COVID-19 survivors.

Lastly, it is important to consider that this study focused on a specific snapshot in time and did not examine longitudinal changes over time. The experiences of COVID-19 survivors may evolve and change as they face new adversities and challenges. To better understand these dynamic processes, longitudinal studies that follow participants over time are recommended, as they would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how strength of faith and emotional intelligence influence psychological well-being as survivors recover and adapt to their experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the importance of strength of faith and emotional intelligence in post-COVID-19 psychological well-being in Peruvian adults. The results support the positive influence of strength of faith and emotional intelligence on psychological well-being, while emotional intelligence is also related to psychological distress. These findings have important implications for promoting mental health in the population affected by

the pandemic. The integration of interventions that strengthen faith and foster the development of emotional intelligence skills could be beneficial in improving psychological well-being and reducing distress in COVID-19 survivors.

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