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Spirituality & Subjective Well-being in Young Adult: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

Spirituality and religion has been the attention of clinicians and researchers in the area of mental health. Research has shown positive implications toward health and mental well-being. Human health is a multidimensional construct which is influenced by gamut of factors. Youths of any nation are important because they are the most potent and productive in their work. The healthy and well-functioning youths are assets to any system and organization. Involving in Spiritual activities is often associated with positive health and many positive behaviors. It becomes vital to investigate these variables in Indian context. The aim of the current paper was to examine Spirituality and Health in college going Youths. The main objectives of the current study were to (i) Examine spirituality among college going Boys & Girls (ii) Examine Subjective well-being among college going Boys & Girls (iii) Examine correlations between Spirituality & Subjective Well-being. A sample of 174 college going students from one of the Government Universities at Hisar City were selected for the current study using convenient sampling method. The measures used were Spirituality Questionnaire, 20item version (Hardt, Schultz, Xander, Becker & Dragan, 2012) & Subjective well-being questionnaire (Deiner, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics like mean, SD and inferential statistics like t test and correlational analysis was used to examine the relationships among the variables. The findings indicate significant gender differences on Spirituality, significant positive relationship between

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spirituality and Subjective well-being. The study showed insignificant gender differences on Subjective well-being. The study highlights the significance of spirituality as possible factor leading to positive health among college Youths and a need to train them in Spiritual oriented practices and interventions to enhance their health.

Key words: Spirituality, subjective well-being, young adults, Spiritual practices

Introduction:

The word spirituality is derived from the Latin word 'spirare' which means, to breathe. In modern usage it includes such a wide range of human experience--traditional religions, New Age teachings, personal mystical experience and the quest for meaning in life--which researchers have not been able to agree on a universal definition that can be measured. There is no one, clear comprehensive definition of spirituality in the literature. Spirituality implies that there is a deeper dimension to human life, an inner world of the soul. It assumes that humans are fundamentally spiritual beings living in a spiritual, as well as physical, universe. Spirituality is about "the inner life or spirit of each of us as it relates to the unseen world of Spirit or of God.

Spirituality is a broad concept that includes a sense of connection to something greater than oneself, often linked to religious beliefs, personal meaning, transcendence, and mindfulness.

Spirituality has become an increasingly important area of study in Clinical Psychology, particularly in how individuals cope with stress and trauma. Pargament (1999) researched the links between spirituality, religion, and coping mechanisms. He highlights the theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and practical implications for individuals facing crises. The significance of preserving spiritual beliefs and practices during challenging times, as well as the role of spirituality in enhancing psychological well-being are being observed.

Koenig (1997) defines spirituality as a broad concept encompassing an individual's search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not involve religious practices. Koenig emphasizes that spiritual beliefs can significantly influence individuals' coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, and overall well-being [Koenig et al., 2012]. He posits that spirituality may serve as a protective factor against mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, leading to better health outcomes for many individuals. His research has focused on how spiritual beliefs and practices can serve as vital resources for individuals facing psychological distress. Koenig's research includes numerous studies that demonstrate a positive correlation between spirituality and mental health. For instance, a meta-analysis of studies found that religious involvement and spirituality are associated with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Furthermore, Koenig has documented how prayer and religious practices contribute positively to people's coping and adjustment during times of crisis, including major life transitions and health-related challenges (Koenig et al., 2001). He advocates for the incorporation of spiritual assessments in clinical settings to better address the needs of patients. He proposes that understanding

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a patient's spiritual beliefs can enhance therapeutic relationships, allowing for more personalized care and facilitating discussions about meaning, purpose, and existential concerns that often accompany mental health conditions. He stresses the importance of clinicians being open to and respectful of patients' spiritual beliefs in order to foster more effective interventions.

It is about the search for the sacred. The most fundamental concept of spirituality as posited by Koenig (1997) is that there is a transcendent dimension to life, something or someone beyond our own ego and sense experience. The experience of connection to this larger, sacred reality is what gives our lives ultimate meaning. Thus, spirituality also has to do with a sense of connectedness and interrelatedness, and with the search for meaning and purpose in life. Spirituality has been called "that which integrates everything else into meaning. It has been described as "having to do with the quality of the relationship to what or who is most important to us. Sims (1994) argues that spirituality has 5 domains. These are meaning in life i.e. what a person lives for, interrelatedness, wholeness, morality and awareness of God. Spirituality is an inner, personal experience, universal and without boundaries.

So, it is important to have clear definition of spirituality and religion without which integrating it into clinical practice will create confusion. Pargament defines religion as "the search for significance in ways related to the sacred" while spirituality as "search for the sacred" and is the central function of religion.

The term subjective well-being is defined as the individual's current evaluation of his happiness and satisfaction with life. It is a broad concept and includes individual's emotional responses, domain satisfaction and global judgement of life satisfaction (Diener et al, 1999). Subjective well-being can also be defined in terms of general emotional functioning which is conceptualized within the construct of subjective well-being having high positive affect, low negative affect and high satisfaction with life. Subjective well-being can be defined as quality of an individual's life with regard to both the presence and relative frequency of positive and negative emotions over time and one's overall satisfaction with life. According to Diener and Suh (1997), subjective evaluation may be in the form of cognitions or in the form of affect. The cognitive part is an information based appraisal of one's life that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives.

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to how people experience and evaluate their own lives, including emotional reactions and cognitive judgments. It is often used as a measure of happiness and life satisfaction. SWB includes three main components:

1. Life Satisfaction - A cognitive assessment of one's overall quality of life.
2. Positive Affect - The presence of positive emotions like joy, gratitude, and contentment.

3. Negative Affect – The absence or low levels of negative emotions like sadness, stress, and anger.

Subjective well-being encompasses cognitive and affective components, including life satisfaction, positive emotions, and low levels of negative emotions. It is influenced by various factors, including genetics, personality, life circumstances, and intentional activities (such as practicing gratitude or fostering social relationships). It is commonly studied in psychology and economics to understand well-being beyond material wealth.

Numerous studies suggest that spirituality enhances SWB by providing meaning and purpose in life (Frankl, 1959; Steger et al., 2006), fostering positive emotions such as gratitude, hope, and inner peace (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), and encouraging prosocial behavior and social support (Putnam, 2000).

Spirituality helps individuals cope with stress, adversity, and trauma by offering comfort and resilience (Pargament, 1997). Spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer enhance emotional regulation and reduce anxiety (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Participation in spiritual groups fosters social connections, reducing loneliness and depression (Koenig, 2012).

The impact of spirituality on well-being varies by culture, age, and socioeconomic factors. Older adults tend to derive more well-being benefits from spirituality compared to younger individuals. Collectivist cultures emphasize community-based spirituality, enhancing SWB differently than in individualistic cultures (Diener & Suh, 2000).

There have been inconsistent findings on gender differences on spirituality. The findings of the current research can be corroborated by some other studies (Kirmani, 2015a; Rich, 2012; Simpson, Cloud, Newman, & Fuqa, 2008). They found that males and females did not differ on the variable of spirituality in their examined samples.

Males and females might differ in terms of how spirituality is expressed in their behaviour. Females might express spirituality in terms of relational connections while males might express spirituality in terms of beliefs. The findings of the current research can be understood from multiple perspectives based on the measures used, demographic variables, and nature and approach of toward measuring spirituality.

Spirituality and Well-being:

The soul is the spiritual part of being human, and since humans are spirited beings, it is impossible to imagine a person's well-being outside the spiritual context. Spirituality is a part of well-being and therefore has a possible influence on it. The relationship between spirituality and subjective well-being has been a topic of interest for researchers in various fields, including psychology, sociology, medicine, religious studies, and social work. Spirituality can be defined in many ways, but it generally refers to a sense of connection to something larger than oneself, such as a higher power, the universe, or nature. Subjective well-being, on the other hand, refers to a person's overall sense of happiness and satisfaction with life.

The extant research suggests that spirituality can be a potential resource for promoting wellbeing and supporting the notion of a positive correlation between the two. For instance, Ryff et al (2021) while examining the theoretical works, and empirical studies from the MIDUS National Longitudinal study provides sufficient proof linking religion and spirituality to well-being and health. Fabricatore et al. (2000) examined whether personal spirituality moderates the relationship between stressors and subjective well-being among college students. The findings revealed that though stress has a negative effect on well-being, personal spirituality is positively correlated with life satisfaction and prevents the influence of stress. This points to the possibility that spirituality may be used as one type of coping strategy for maintaining well-being during stressful life events. Further, Deb and Strodl (2019) examined the relationship between spirituality and quality of life (QoL) in postgraduate university students in India. The findings revealed that higher levels of spirituality were associated with higher QOL, particularly regarding physical health, psychological items, and environmental aspects. In this study, religiosity was not associated with QOL, however, existential well-being and a feeling of hope or control both positively related to several dimensions of QOL. Of all QoL measures, negative religious coping was most strongly inversely related. These findings suggest possible benefits for QoL by promoting spirituality in Indian University Students.

Well-Being An independent-samples t-test was performed to evaluate the research question as to whether there are gender differences in levels of well-being. Male participants reported higher levels of well-being than female participants, with the results approaching significance, $t(61) = 1.8, p = .08$. In other words, men reported slightly higher levels of subjective well-being than women but the difference was not significant. An additional independent-samples t-test was performed to test the hypothesis that participants from divorced or single parent families will have no difference in well-being when compared to those from intact families. There was no statistically significant difference in wellbeing for participants from divorced or single parent families versus those from intact families, $t(61) = -.43, p = .67$. Thus, the levels of well-being were similar regardless of parental marital status. A one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate the research question as to whether there are ethnic differences in well-being. No statistically significant difference was found for ethnicity, $F(4, 57) = .63, p = .65$. Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Other had equal levels of well-being. An additional one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate the research question as to whether there are class standing differences in wellbeing. No statistically significant difference was found for class standing, $F(4, 58) = .55, p = .70$. Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors, and Graduate students all had similar levels of well-being.

Gender and Spirituality:

Loewenthal, MacLeod, and Cinnirella (2002) studied a sample of 530 adults consisted of 230 Christians, 56 Hindus, 157 Jews and 87 Muslims and measure their religious activity through a religiosity scale. The researchers found that 302 women described themselves as significantly less religiously active than 226 men. This was confined to non-Christian group. It can be concluded from this study that the general conclusion based on many

Spirituality & Subjective Well-being in Young... S. Verma, M. N. Kirmani, R. Khan, P. Thakur & R. Pal studies that women are more religious and spiritual than men is culture-specific and contingent on the measurement method used in studies. Age does not differentiate gender differences in spirituality. The findings are consistent across adolescents and adults.

Buchko (2004) in her study of the faith development of college students found that both men and women attended a church service almost two times per month in the past year. Women reported more prayer and meditation time than men and would sense more of God's activity and presence in day to day life. Her study also found that women reported having more close relationships with God and with their spiritual advisors than that of men. It can be concluded that for women, affective dimension of spirituality and faith is more important to women than men.

Hammermeister, Flint, El-Alayli, Ridnour, and Peterson (2005) examined health, demographic variables and spirituality in a group 435 college going students enrolled in health and fitness classes. Spirituality was measured using Spiritual Well-Being Scale. The researchers found that females scored higher than males on spirituality measure.

Bryant (2007) attempted to examine 434 College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV) which dealt spirituality and the effect of college on students' spirituality. The researcher found that women scored higher than men on the measure of spirituality.

Rich (2012) examined spirituality in a sample of 399 university going students using a survey research. The data was collected using convenience sampling method. The level of students' spirituality was assessed using Spiritual Perspective Scale (1986) by Reed. The results of the study supported the hypothesis as the scores of males and females did not differ on the measure of spirituality in the studied sample.

Luqman, Puri, and Tanwar (2015) examined spiritual personality of a group of 100 students of which 50 were males and 50 were females. The spiritual personality was measured by spiritual personality inventory developed by Husain, Luqman, and Jahan (2012). The results showed that females scored higher than males both dimension wise and overall on the measure of spiritual personality.

Pradhan and Khan (2015) studied a sample of 412 young Indian adults of which males were 212 and females were 196 with age range from 19-25 years and examined the gender differences on the measure of spirituality. A 67 item scale (Pradhan, 2011) was used to examine the spirituality. The scale has three dimensions of spirituality i.e. spiritual experiences, practices and beliefs. The researchers found that spiritual experiences, practices and beliefs were reported more by females than males.

Kirmani (2015a) studied a sample of 100 colleges going students of which 50 were males and 50 were females from one of the government universities at Aligarh and examined gender differences in spirituality. The researcher found that males and females did not differ on the variable of spirituality.

Based on the above mentioned studies it can be concluded that studies on gender and spirituality are equivocal. There can be multitude of factors which might have resulted in such findings. The nature of spirituality measures and its dimensions, demographic factors and cross cultural variables could be some of the reasons of these differences.

Spirituality & Subjective Well-being in Young... S. Verma, M. N. Kirmani, R. Khan, P. Thakur & R. Pal Simpson, Cloud, Newman, and Fuqa (2008) studied 250 church goers and religious staff and examined their spiritual well-being, quest for religious orientation, spirituality and sex role orientation. The study found that there were no significant differences between males and females in terms of religious participation, spirituality, and religion.

Method:

Aim & Objectives: The aim of the present study was to examine Spirituality and Subjective well-being in college Youths.

Objectives: The main objectives of the current research were to

- (i) Examine Spirituality among college going Boys & Girls
- (ii) Examine Subjective well-being among college going Boys & Girls
- (iii) Examine relationship between Spirituality and Subjective well-being

Hypotheses:

H01: Boys and girls will not differ on Spirituality

H02: Boys and girls will not differ on Subjective well-being

H03: There will not be any association between spirituality & subjective well-being

Participants

The sample consisted of 174 college going students from one of the Government Universities of Hisar City selected using convenience sampling method. Out of these, 107 (61%) were girls and 67 (39%) were boys. The sample comprised of 23 post graduate and 151 graduate students. The age range being from 17 to 30 years with a mean age of 21.37 years and SD of 3.06. All the participants identified themselves as Hindus.

Research Design

The cross-sectional research design was being used in the current research. The variables explored were spirituality and subjective well-being. Non-experimental research design was used in the research.

Measures:

- 1) **Socio Demographic Data Sheet.** It was developed by the investigator indicating participants' sociodemographic variables like name, age, gender, course, and Religion.
- 2) **Spirituality Questionnaire-20 item**(Hardt,Schultz,Xander,Becker&Dragan, 2012).It is a five point rating scale response categories being *not true at all,hardly true,don't know, rather true* and *absolutely true*. The scoring being 1,2,3,4 and 5 respectively for these 5 response categories. Thus, minimum score on this scale is 20 and the maximum score is 100.It has 4 dimensions each dimension having 5 items each. The four dimensions being belief in God, search for meaning, mindfulness and feeling of security. The higher the score, the higher the spirituality. The questionnaire has sufficient reliability and validity 0.89 and 0.90 respectively.

3) **Subjective well-being scale** (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The subjective well-being of the students will be assessed with the help of Satisfaction with Life Scale by Diener. It is a 5 item scale with seven point rating consisting of five global statements about life satisfaction. The subjects have to respond as “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “slightly disagree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “slightly agree”, “agree” and “strongly agree” and the scoring being 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 respectively. Thus, the minimum score is 5 and the maximum score is 35. The score above 21 on this scale indicates above average satisfaction with life.

Procedure:

The researcher first made google form and posted to the participants after having informing them about the purpose and its possible implications for the students. The permission was sought from them and details about the administration of the psychological tests and possible time taken was explained. Having sought the permission, the online administration was done. The participants were assured about the confidentiality of their responses and that the name of the University will not be disclosed in subsequent publications without the prior written permission from the university. The online data comprised of 44 participants and 130 were taken offline in group. The data was collected between 10 February and 7th March 2025.

Analysis of data

The protocols were scored and descriptive statistics like mean and SD were calculated. Pearson Product moment correlation was used to examine correlation between the variables. Independent t- test was used to examine gender differences.

Ethical considerations

The written informed consent was taken from the participants. The confidentiality of their responses was assured. They were told that they are free to leave the research in between. It was reassured that no psychological & physical harm is involved in the research process.

Results

Table 1 (a): Distribution of students according to Programs, Gender & Age

Sl. No.	Program	Students		Gender	Students		Age	
		Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent		
1	UG	151	86%	Girls	107	61%	Mean	21.37
2	PG	23	14 %	Boys	67	39 %	Range	17-30 Years
3	Total	174	100%	Total	174	100.0%		

Table 1 (b):

	Variable A			Variable B		
	M	SD	t	M	SD	t
Boys (n = 67)	20.83	6.14	1.14	63.43	14.99	4.70**
Girls (n = 107)	21.89	5.82		73.69	13.33	

** t value is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Variable A refers to Subjective Well-being, Variable B refers to Spirituality
 The present study found no gender differences on the variable of subjective well-being.
 The research, however, found that gender differences are found on the variable of spirituality. Girls has been found to be more spiritual than boys

Table 1 (c)
Correlation between Variables A & B

Variable	Correlation
Spirituality	1
Subjective well-being	0.279**
Spirituality	0.279**
Subjective well-being	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Spirituality has been found to be positively associated with subjective well-being. The correlation value has been to be 0.279. According to Cohen (1988), this relationship is medium.

Discussion

The present study examined the gender differences in spirituality and subjective well-being and attempted to find the association between spirituality and subjective well-being.

Gender & spirituality

The current study aligns with the work of Hammermeister, Flint, El-Alayli, Ridnour, and Peterson (2005) which shows females found to be higher on spirituality. The hypothesis of no gender differences on Spirituality has been rejected.

Brynt (2007) found that women scored higher than men on the measure of spirituality. Luqman, Puri, and Tanwar (2015) found the similar results that females scored higher on

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spirituality than males. Pradhan and Khan (2015) also found in the research that females scored higher than males on spirituality.

Few researchers found that males and females do not differ on spirituality (Kirmani, 2015a, Simpson, Cloud, Newman, and Fuqa, 2008).

The current research explored spirituality through dimensions like belief in God, being mindful, search for meaning and feeling of security. The inconsistent findings could be due to differences in cultures, methodology used, qualitative versus quantitative research, demographic factors etc. The current findings can be explained based on cultural factors wherein females are expected to be engaged in spirituality related behavior like belief in God etc

Gender & subjective well-being

The current research found no gender differences between boys and girls on subjective well-being. The current findings align with the findings of Kumar, Kumari and Kumari (2023). The hypothesis of no gender differences on subjective well-being has been accepted. In one of the first reviews on subjective well-being and happiness, Wilson (1967) concluded that gender does not have any significant effect on avowed happiness. He reported that "happy individual was of either sex" (p. 294).

They studied a sample of 200 senior secondary students in Bihar and found that males and females students do not differ on the variable of subjective well-being. Lokeshwar and Monika (2021) also obtained the similar results. Similar findings were obtained by other researchers working in the area (Allen & Haccoun, 1976, Mahon, Yarcheski, and Yarcheski, 2005, Sadia & Sadia, 2013). There has findings reporting males and females differ in subjective well-being and happiness. Inglehart (1990) reported that women have better subjective well-being. Lee, Seccombe, and Shehan (1991) also found females to report more on subjective well-being than males.

Most of empirical work on gender and happiness and subjective well-being used self-report measures. Besides self-report measures, subjective well-being and happiness are being measured through facial expressions and measures of psychophysiology like skin conductance and GSR. Researchers seem to have consensus on gender differences in intensity of happiness which include both experiences and expression of happiness. Less consensus has emerged among researchers concerning gender differences in the frequency of positive emotions.

Subjective well-being and Spirituality Association

The current research significant positive association between spirituality and subjective well-being. It means as spirituality increases in people, their subjective well-being also increases.

Spirituality provides meaning and purpose in life (Frankl, 1959; Steger et al., 2006) and fostering positive emotions such as gratitude, hope, and inner peace (Emmons &

Spirituality & Subjective Well-being in Young... S. Verma, M. N. Kirmani, R. Khan, P. Thakur & R. Pal McCullough, 2003) and encouraging prosocial behavior and social support (Putnam, 2000).

Spirituality refers to here being mindful, belief in God, search for meaning and feeling of security. Being mindful is expected to make people aware about their own behaviors, and feelings. Faith related cognitions like God's belief often motivates people to engage in pro social behavior. All these are the possible pathways toward enhancing their subjective well-being. There are other pathways which explains the process of increasing subjective well-being through Spirituality. Spirituality helps individuals cope with stress, adversity, and trauma by offering comfort and resilience (Pargament, 1997). Spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer enhance emotional regulation and reduce anxiety (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Limitations, strengths, implications and future directions

One of the limitations of the current research is using convenient sampling leading to limited generalizations. Qualitative research will give better results on variables like spirituality and subjective well-being. One of the strengths of the current research is the sample size. The implication of the current research is to incorporate spirituality construct in health care system. Brining spirituality into therapy has significant clinical implications in terms preventive and promotive aspects of health and well-being as a whole.

Conclusions:

The study found that females found more spiritual than males. On subjective well-being, however, no gender differences were found. The result also found positive associations between spirituality and subjective well-being.

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