

Relationship between spirituality, anxiety, depression and stress

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ABSTRACT

Spirituality is the quality of being concerned with the consciousness as opposed to physical materials. In this study the degree to which levels of spirituality can be related to the levels of anxiety, depression and stress among young adults were examined. Anxiety is a feeling of unease which is caused due to worry or fear; Depression is a common mental health problem that is induced due to feelings of low mood, and lastly, stress is the body's reaction to changes that are there due to the physical environment. The aim of the study is to study the relationship between spirituality and anxiety, depression & stress among young adults. The researcher hypothesis is that there will be significant relationship between spirituality and anxiety, depression and stress among young female adults. Additionally, the hypotheses also state that there will be significant relationship between spirituality and anxiety, depression and stress among young male adults. The gathered samples from 60 participants (30 male and 30 female) were used to conduct the study. The participants were asked to fill the Spiritual Intelligence Scale and Anxiety, Depression and Stress Scale. After data collection for analysis of result, mean and correlation were used for the analysis of the data. It was found that spiritual young female adults were also found to have lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress. Meanwhile Spirituality levels didn't impact the levels of anxiety, depression and stress of young male adults. This reasoning behind this could be the internalization of spirituality among the female participants in comparison of the male participants. Further study on this implication is required.

Keywords: *Relationship, Spirituality, Anxiety, Depression, Stress*

The origins of spirituality can be traced back to the fifth century, where it was considered as a way to re-animate God into human beings. This began as a Biblical notion and from the 5th century onward to the 21st century, spirituality has come a long way. In today's context, spirituality is both admired and ridiculed by thousands of people around the world. Some view it as a religious practice while others view it as a practice for mindfulness and a tool to get in touch with their spiritual selves.

To understand what spirituality is, first, there occurs a need to understand religion. Religion can be understood as a social institution which holds the society together while simultaneously also

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stratifies it. Religion is a socio-cultural institution which guides the behavior of its groups which relate humanity to something supernatural; divine even.

Religion provides a set of norms which a person is required to follow all their lives. This behavior can be summed up to the term religiosity. How much a person adheres to these said norms is where a person falls in the scale of religiosity. Religiosity, in sociological terms, can be described as the level of internalization of certain religious doctrines into the functioning of a society.

Spirituality isn't an institutionalized practice. It is an important aspect of all the religions and even some humanistic ideologies. Spirituality eliminates the hierarchical status that religion entails. Spirituality can be defined as a connection to something bigger than humanity. For example, the universe, which touches and concerns all of us. Spirituality is a holistic take on our lives. It aspires to find a deep connection between everyone and everything the universe constitutes of.

Although similar, both religiosity and spirituality have many differences. On closer inspection, it can be seen that while religion is based on the lives of historical figures (example; Christ, Moses, Muhammad, Krishna, Buddha), Spirituality is based on the practical application of the founder's teachings. Religiosity involves objective experiences while spiritual experiences are generally quite subjective. Similarly, religiosity arrives from an organized institution while spirituality is considered formless.

Kenneth I. Pargament, PhD, who is an expert in the psychology of religion and spirituality wrote two books, "The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice" (1997) and "Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred" (2007). In these books he simultaneously visits the ideas of spiritual and religious coping techniques and their implications in psychotherapy as well as in practice. His books entail comprehensive analysis on spiritual coping techniques. In his work, he also adds the vast nature of spiritual coping practiced by individuals and some techniques prescribed by practitioners in the field of psychology. He also emphasizes on how spiritual coping techniques can be both adaptive as well as maladaptive in nature.

When viewed under the lens of modern psychology, spirituality has started to emerge as a crucial element for a good mental health status. There have been empirical studies on many groups which have been able to portray the image of spirituality as a tool to deal with major stressors of life such as, chronic illnesses, loss of loved ones, sudden life changes, natural disasters and even mental illnesses. There are many forms of spiritual/religious coping which people depend upon. Some strategies are more beneficial than the other and can lead to an increase in adaptability in adjusting to life changes. These methods can be seen as positive spiritual coping methods. This category of coping mechanisms includes reaching out to a higher being, certain rituals or norms to better embrace life changes and even seeking for forgiveness.

As mentioned above, some coping skills work better than others, the ones which aren't as effective can lead toward maladjustment and adaptability issues. Negative spiritual coping can include things like having delusional beliefs, lack of internal locus of control and conflicts with other people. These maladaptive coping tendencies lead to higher levels of psychological distress and even pose life threatening challenges in some extreme cases.

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Like a coin, spiritual coping has two sides to it. The negative or maladaptive spiritual coping mechanisms are strongly correlated to religiosity and the way it is viewed in psychology. Renowned psychologist, Dr. Sigmund Freud, stems to label religion as a societal neurosis in his book “The Future of an Illusion” (1927). In the same book he further examines the need for religion and concludes that religion is stemmed from our need for unity but does the opposite of that. In his book “Totem and Taboo” (1913), Freud even goes as far as claiming that the end of religion would be the end of human conflicts by a large extent but of course his claims need to be read in the context of the times he lived in.

While religion has been viewed under severe scrutiny in the research field, spirituality hasn't had the chance to be studied in a similar way. In this paper, the researcher aims to examine spirituality, especially negative spiritual coping mechanisms, and its effects on the levels of anxiety, depression and stress among young adults.

Though there have been several studies which assert spirituality as a positive coping mechanism, Rippentrop et al (2005) found this not be the case for all situations. In this study, the researcher examined R/S (religious/spiritual) strategies to cope with the mental pressure while undergoing an illness. It was found that use of spirituality was like that of a coping mechanism – both negative as well as positive. This is relevant to the current study as it helps to further validate the aim to examine spirituality as a form of coping, especially as negative one.

Elaborating on this, Pargament et al. (1988) classified coping mechanisms which are- self-directing which means that the individual has intrinsic motivation and plays an active part in working on the various issues that they might be having. The spiritual body here (for example: God) plays a passive roll. Next is deferring. Here the individual waits for external spiritual forces to solve their issues. No active steps are taken by the individual to solve their own issues. Lastly, there is the collaborative style where the individual incorporates the spiritual body and themselves into a situation which has been difficult to deal with. The balance between intrinsic and extrinsic forces is clearly showcased within this type of coping mechanism.

Going by the above-mentioned research, this paper constructs the hypothesis that significant gender difference will be found when examining spirituality and anxiety, depression and stress levels of young adults. It is assumed that the sample will more likely to be found using spirituality as a defense mechanism rather than a technique to be mindful.

Similarly, Wachholtz et al (2009) examined the role of religion/spiritual forms of coping to deal with chronically painful conditions which lead to mental illnesses such as depression. Although the research concluded that R/S forms of coping are generally positive, more need for research in the negative aspects of it was generated as several patients were seen using the deferring coping style. This paper takes a further look into that area.

To further examine R/S as negative coping mechanism, another research is added here. Koenig et al (2001) indicated major areas in which R/S beliefs and practices have negative consequences. Some of these consequences are seen to be symptoms such as stopping life-saving medication without seeking professional advice. It also includes refusing blood donations and vaccinations for children. Some symptoms can also be seen as condemning Planned Parenthood and contraceptives as well as manifesting abuse in the name of religion. This by far is quite relevant to the current paper as it further elucidates the side effects of

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spiritual beliefs when used as a negative coping mechanism. It is aimed to find similar outcomes in this paper.

On further research, it has been observed that there is a significant gap in this field of study. The researcher aims to contribute here. The research trend in spirituality can be seen relevantly growing since the early 2000s. To further shed light on this, Weaver et al (2006) examined the degree of relevance of R/S beliefs in the research domain. The results showcased that although there is a relevant hike in research related to spirituality in relation with health, the field is still dominant with researches related to religion in relation to mental health.

The rationale for this paper can be found in the study of religion or faith as a dysfunctional instrument i.e. a negative coping mechanism in the direction of psychopathology. Not only does religion create a stem for radical beliefs, for example, delusion like beliefs, it also encourages practitioners to adapt to negative coping. Since spirituality stems from religion, the researcher feels the need to further examine spirituality and its effect on psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and stress. The hypothesis is constructed for the purpose of establishing the status of negative spiritual coping mechanism as well as finding correlation between spirituality levels and levels of anxiety, depression and stress among the two genders which have been taken under observation.

Here spirituality will be correlated with anxiety, depression and stress in subgroups of male and female separately. The methodology has been designed this way to see the internalization of spirituality between the two genders by seeing their anxiety, depression and stress levels.

Koenig (2009) examined R/S factors in psychiatric research. In this paper, the link between spirituality and mental health was examined and special attention was given to depression, suicide, anxiety, psychosis and substance abuse. It was seen after further analysis of the results that while R/S coping strategies do promote positive coping such as source of comfort and hope, they are also entangled with neurotic and psychotic disorders which are often linked with delusional beliefs.

The current study is important for illustrating the importance of incorporating spirituality as a research topic in order to test its claimed benefits.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is aimed to see the impact of spirituality on anxiety, depression and stress among young adults. This study was conducted with 60 young adults, from Delhi, 50% male (N=30) and 50% female (N=30) with age range between 18-25 years.

Tools used for data collection were The Spiritual Intelligence Scale, which is a self-assessment questionnaire designed by Dr. K.S. Mishra (2014) which has 42 items and the Anxiety, Depression and Stress Scale, which is a self-assessing questionnaire designed by Pallavi Bhatnagar, Megha Singh & Manoj Pandey (2011) which has 48 items.

The sampling was done using the simple random method. After that, rapport formation was done and along with that a notice of confidentiality was given.

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The participants were then required to complete the ADSS and the SIS for the test. Participants (between the age ranges of 18-25 years) were asked to give their consent. After that, the questionnaires were explained to the participants before they began filling them out. The participants were only instructed to give their age and gender in the demographic details. Both ADSS and SIS were later scored and interpreted by using the on-campus psychology laboratory.

After data collection for analysis of result, correlation was used for the analysis of the data.

Hypotheses

1. There will be significant relationship between spirituality and anxiety, depression and stress among young female adults.
2. There will be significant relationship between spirituality and anxiety, depression and stress among young male adults.

RESULT

After data collection, the statistical analysis was done which is as follows:

Table 2.1 Correlation value between spirituality and anxiety among young adult females.

Variables	N	r	P
Anxiety	30	-0.14	Insig
Spirituality	30		

Insignificant at both 0.05 and 0.01 level

Table 2.2 Correlation value between spirituality and anxiety among young adult males.

Variables	N	r	P
Anxiety	30	0.61	Sig***
Spirituality	30		

Significant at both 0.05 and 0.01 level

Table 3.1 Correlation value between spirituality and depression among young adult females.

Variables	N	r	P
Depression	30	-0.08	Insig
Spirituality	30		

Insignificant at both 0.05 and 0.01 level

Table 3.2 Correlation value between spirituality and depression among young adult males.

Variables	N	r	P
Depression	30	0.53	Sig***
Spirituality	30		

Significant at both 0.05 and 0.01 level

Table 4.1 Correlation value between spirituality and stress among young adult females.

Variables	N	r	P
Stress	30	-0.25	Insig
Spirituality	30		

Insignificant at both 0.05 and 0.01 level

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Table 4.2 Correlation value between spirituality and stress among young adult males.

Variables	N	r	P
Stress	30	0.55	Sig***
Spirituality	30		

Significant at both 0.05 and 0.01 level

DISCUSSION

In the last two decades there has been an increase in the number of researches conducted on spirituality. This paper tries to further expand this momentum to study spirituality as a coping mechanism in order to speculate the base that spirituality leads to mindfulness. As stated above, spiritual beliefs are important for people especially when growing up as it shapes a significant part of individual personality types.

Dill. L.J. (2017) empirically studies spirituality as a factor concerning African American youth's general well-being and overall health. In this study it is elucidated that spirituality shows dimensions similar to that of a coping mechanism. The article further interviews several African-American youth and finds spiritual mechanisms instilled among the sample when facing adversities of life.

A coping mechanism is a psychological strategy to deal with adversities in life. For example; a major life change. It is specifically important when an individual is going through a stressful situation. The concept of how spirituality can be used to reduce day-to-day anxiety, stress and depression, can be seen as a coping mechanism. Spirituality enables a person to put their problems aside and focus on feelings of comfort. While it is important to realize that there are several studies that define spirituality as a positive method to cope, this study has found that the participants, specifically the young male adults, practicing spirituality in the sample are actually using it to hinder their coping processes. This explains why their anxiety, stress and depression levels are higher than expected.

Spirituality stems from various aspects of different religions. It has been deemed fairly useful in the psychology community. In this paper spirituality is explored, like religion. Here, the gender differences among Indian young adults in order to see how spirituality as a coping mechanism is exercised is also explored. Psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and stress are results of maladaptive or negative coping mechanisms. It has been found that there is a positive as well as negative correlation between levels of spirituality and levels of anxiety, depression and stress among young adults.

Spiritual coping techniques to prevent mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and stress are heavily researched in growing field of psychology in India. The young adults who were taken under study for this paper come from urban backgrounds and perceive spirituality more casually. These demographic specifications along with the gender differences which were observed in this paper entail the findings.

Negi et al (2019) collected data from 914 Indian college going engineering students. Like the present study, this research was able to conclude that the sense of spirituality of the female group was stronger than that of the male group. The reasons for this is found to be because the female students who were tested to be spiritual, constantly engaged in spiritual activities while the male students didn't. This largely differentiated the impact of their daily stressors.

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The findings of the present research suggest that there was a statistically significant relationship between levels of spirituality and levels of anxiety, depression and stress among young male adults. As seen on result tables 2.2, 3.2 and 4.2 it can be seen that there is a significant correlation between spirituality and the anxiety, depression and stress of young male adults. This means that the male group of the study, regardless of their spiritual practices, haven't actually internalized the values of spirituality. This enables them to just use it as a coping mechanism rather than a tool to actually better their mental health.

Differing to the above finding, the study also suggests that there was no statistically significant relationship between levels of spirituality and levels of anxiety, depression and stress among young female adults. When observing tables 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1, it can be seen that the correlation between spirituality and anxiety, depression and stress is not significant among the female group of the study. This suggests that the women who have scored higher in spiritual levels also show a lower level of day to day anxiety, stress and depression.

Bryant (2007) found significant gender differences in spiritual qualities and spiritual development. Among the 3680 college students that the researcher studied, significant differences among men and women were found. Women demonstrated higher influence of spirituality shown in their personalities when in comparison to men. This research finding is significant to the current paper. Here, it can also be observed that women who have higher levels of spirituality also have lower levels of day to day anxiety, stress and depression while men regardless of spirituality, scored higher in levels of anxiety, stress and depression. Kim et al (2017) designed a study to examine depression as well as R/S in Korean-American adolescents. Out of the 182 adolescents who participated in the study, it was found that there was no difference in the rate of depression among the genders. However, it was examined that boys showed higher level of Negative Religious Coping while girls showed higher levels of forgiveness, i.e. Positive Religious Coping. These findings can be associated to this paper's findings and explain our results. It can be oblique that the female group uses spiritual coping techniques in a positive manner which is why their anxiety, depression and stress levels are seen to be lower when they have higher spirituality scores.

The salient finding of this study being the gender difference regarding the usage of spiritual coping mechanisms as negative or positive mechanisms to reduce the set of mental problems explored in this paper can help mental health professionals create a better understanding about internalization of societal constructs more prevalent in women than in men. It can be seen that despite spirituality being a universal phenomenon, it is being practiced in bipolar spectrums of coping.

The gender difference which is observed in the study could have many reasons but to sum it up, one of the core reasons for this can be the societal differences that women perceive. Women in the Indian society are likely to face the pressure of childbirth, having a family, marriage, social harassment and regular objectification of their bodies. This makes activities such as praying, meditating and being involved in spiritual groups an easy and positive way to cope with the societal struggles they have to face on a daily basis.

Fallot et al (2015) examined spiritual coping used by women trauma survivors in this study. After collecting the sample from two racially diverse samples, it was shown that women are more predetermined to be using positive religious as well spiritual coping techniques. The findings also suggested that the sample group of women, regardless of their demographics,

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strongly associated to positive coping mechanisms and even more so when their trauma or experiences were pathological.

A special need for attention given to the spiritual beliefs formed by young adults and especially male young adults can be seen here. Despite having high levels of spirituality, the selected sample of young male adults seem to be struggling with day to day anxiety, depression and stress when compared to the female group. Having a better understanding of spiritual beliefs and diverting from the sense of delusion is important before promoting spiritual exercises for a healthier mental health.

One of the places to look for answers as to why the male group of the present sample isn't able to utilize spirituality in its actual capacity can be the ascribed status of masculinity that seems to be inherent in the majority of men residing in an Indian society. What can be speculated here is that men inherently are inherently taught to be tough and are condemned when they show real emotions. In order for spirituality to work, it seems like vulnerability and acceptance of the current state of the individual is extremely important.

Limitations and scope for further work

The present study was done as a preliminary work to understand the direction of relationship between the variables. Thereby, a restricted sample size is the one of the most palpable delimitations of the work. Although statistically the results can be extrapolated towards generalization, a bigger sample size and a more inclusive methodology could provide more conclusive research evidence. The study also had a limited time frame under which the sample collection and assessment had to be done.

The present study is conducted to understand the relationship between spirituality levels and anxiety, depression and stress levels of the target population. This research helps in gaining an insight on this relationship and different demographic factors (e.g. sexuality, gender, and family dynamics) can also influence one's engagement using spirituality for mindfulness.

It seems interesting that despite the fact that most of the leading spiritual leaders in India are men, the male group of the current study (regardless of their spirituality level) had high scores of anxiety, depression and stress. This area needs to be further researched. Besides that, the implications of spirituality and its relationship to daily stressors to a young adult individual's life need to be examined in a larger sample as well as with different tools. Similar studies which can be designed to specifically see the extent of the impact of spirituality in female and males need to be made before making spirituality an institutional part of psychology- especially mindfulness.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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