

Research Paper

Spirituality as a Correlate of Psychological Well-Being amongst Survivors of COVID-19

Taruna Gera^{1*}, Ajit Bhardwaj², Namita Lohra³, Devansh Singh⁴, Sangeeta Boora⁵, Shubhangi Singh⁶, Jyoti Boora⁷, Tanisha Sharma⁸

ABSTRACT

We all have witnessed the havoc wreaked by the COVID-19 pandemic, taking lives, causing panic, anxiety, pain and lasting damage. The repercussions of which are still felt sonorously. Social, emotional & psychological agitation was experienced worldwide but was heightened manifold, for those that survived the deadly virus of COVID-19. Spirituality has been found to be a predictor of psychological well-being, in many researches that have highlighted rare but important findings for victims of life-threatening diseases and general folk alike. The current study attempted to explore spirituality as a correlate of psychological well-being amongst the survivors of COVID-19. This research study's sample included 76 survivors (N=76) from the Indian state of Haryana. Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24; King, 2008) and Ryff's Psychological Well Being Scale (RPWBS-18; Ryff et al., 2010) were tools that were utilised per assessment of the concerned variables.

Keywords: COVID-19 Survivors, Psychological well-being, Spirituality, Pandemic, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Self-Acceptance

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

²Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

³Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

⁴Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

⁵Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

⁶Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

⁷Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

⁸Student, B.Sc.(Hons.) Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology, Hisar, Haryana, India.

*Corresponding Author

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A pandemic, largely defined as a universal event impacting substantial distribution of varied civilizations dispersed widely, pointedly in and with relation to a disease or disorder, brings with it an increase in emotional and psychological distress, as well as an enhanced risk for psychological illnesses. (British Psychological Society, 2022). The incidence and effects of this defined classical pandemic were seen first-hand when the novel COVID-19 pandemic befell upon the world, matching the criteria of being a pandemic in the March of 2020.

The increase in widespread emotional distress that followed, has been documented for the period that this pandemic has been wreaking havoc, forcing people to stay united in maintaining their safety, both physical and psychological. Still, even with the measures that have been taken to safeguard the populous from catching the virus and facing the dire consequences it may bring, the virus has spread and up until March of 2023, a total of 761,071,826 confirmed cases have been recorded worldwide, along with almost 7 million deaths. But for all those that have seemingly recovered from the illness, the survivors, the psychological and emotional implications for them too have only been harsh, being a calamity in their own right.

According to Pfefferbaum and North (2020), the consequences of the scenario triggered profound emotional distress and elevated psychiatric illness risk. The emotional burnout & mental calamity were evident, highlighted in those that were dealing with COVID-19 first hand, including administrators of hospital and public services and health-care-workers. The toll for the family members of the infected have been highlighted as well in more recent times. But the anxiety and worry for the victims and the survivors have been tenfold, including that of spreading this virus, becoming a possible and potent carrier, exposing close ones, resulting in an auxiliary stage of burnout that made them more vulnerable to affective psychological disorders.

Brooks et al. (2020) highlighted the early problems faced by quarantined people, including but not limited to complications like anxiety, melancholy, irritability, sleeplessness, racism, disorientation, fury, dissatisfaction, rage, monotony, and stigma that came alongside isolation and self-induced but necessary solitude. Individuals became worried, alone, perplexed, and readily annoyed as a consequence of their implemented incarceration to homes. The unpredictability and collective state of panic, financial and sentimental damages, and a repetitive way of life that functioned as an entry point to psychological disorders, with the prevalence of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) on the rise.

A percentage as high as that of 96% of recovering patients reported post-traumatic stress symptoms (Bo et al., 2020), follow-up research went ahead to report weakness in muscles, easy fatigue, insomnia (Huang et al., 2020) in the same characteristic group. Survivors might remain in perpetual fear of the illness's possible return, which may negatively impact their sense of now and also their perceived capacity to make plans for their futures.

The densely populated areas of Indian cities and suburbs alike, and with the degree of ambiguous uncertainty that was brought on by the pandemic, it was unavoidable that India would endure significant hardship. Varalakshmi and Swetha (2020) stated that when the viral outbreak started and nationwide lockdown was enforced, people became anxious and panicked with stress responses. The total number of reported cases in the country, by March of 2023, stood around 44 million (Dong et al, 2023), 98.75% of them being survivors, indicating the level of biopsychosocial emotional distress that it produced.

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“Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively.” This is a highly accepted and regarded definition given by Huppert (2009, p.137). It describes the eudaemonic (daimon - true nature or spirit, reflected in Maslow’s theory of self-actualization) nature of wellbeing (Ryff and Keyes 1995; Ryff and Singer 2006), involving personal growth, constructive activity and a meaningful life (Wood et al. 2009).

Ryff’s six factor model eloquently defines the dimensions of psychological well-being (1989) which are- *autonomy* referring to self-determinism, individualism, along with the intrinsic regulation of behaviour. *Environmental mastery* refers to the inclination in choosing or changing the surrounding context using actions that may be physical or mental, as well as being able to control events. *Personal growth* is the tendency in an individual to grow on a personal scale and to develop their potential and talents the best they could. *Purpose in life* is usually defined as a secure and steady intention to achieve something that may be meaningful to the individual. *Self-acceptance* allows for holding firm positive attitudes toward oneself, and is considered a giant leap towards maturity, self-actualization, and effective functioning. *Positive relations with others* is the penchant that emphasizes warm, trusting, and caring relationships with others.

Spirituality is a very vague term, being treated as a proxy of religiosity in psychological literature fairly often, such that the two terms were synonymous for a long time. In the 21st century however, after the boom in reception to Positive Psychology (since 2002, greatly driven by Seligman’s Authentic Happiness), spirituality has been distinguished from religion and religiosity. Empirical researches have shown that an individual doesn’t have to be religious in order to be spiritual. Now, Spirituality can be described as a person's inner experience and/or belief value system (Burris, 1999), which imparts a purpose for existence and, as a result, consequently helps individuals surpass present circumstances (Burkhardt, 1989).

Joseph’s (1987) and The World Health Organization’s (WHO) definitions of spirituality and well-being, bode well with each other, as spirituality is considered an underlying dimension of consciousness that strives for meaning, and oneness with universe, and well-being is maintained as an optimal state of health essentially characterised by an individual’s realisation of their fullest potential physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually and economically (Smith, 2006); and clarifies how the two variables are not as independent of each other as they seem.

Numerous empirical studies have identified spirituality as a moderator of psychological well-being (Fiorito, 2007). Individuals with greater spirituality scores displayed reduced anger levels and respiratory rates after being subjected to a strained event, as well as were seen to have greater health-protective personality qualities - extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. (Labbe & Fobes, 2010). In a large number of societies and populations, spirituality is said to be correlated with enhanced mental and physical health (Osarrodi et al. 2012).

A vaccine to counter the physical elements of the virus has been in use for several months now but there is no direct counter for its mental impact yet. It was high time the focus shifted from honouring the lost lives to working and caring for the betterment of those that are still with us, even though deeply battle scarred. Their physical recuperation could be facilitated only by a more rapid and effective psychological healing. It would serve our

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purpose to look for characterial virtues and strengths and to strive for an increment in their levels in order to properly equip possible survivors against the inevitable future waves. All in all, the negative detrimental impact of significant post-traumatic stress symptoms makes it urgent to initiate assessments and utilise appropriate psychological interventions, even going further to develop new ones, that may be highly specialized. The current research targets to highlight the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being along with its dimensions in survivors of COVID-19.

Objectives of the present research

1. To gauge the association between spirituality and psychological well-being among survivors of COVID-19
2. To gauge the association between spirituality and the dimensions of psychological well-being among survivors of COVID-19

Hypotheses of the present research

1. There shall be a significant relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being amongst survivors of COVID-19
2. There shall be a significant relationship between spirituality and the dimensions of psychological well-being amongst survivors of COVID-19

METHOD

Participants

The current research study's target population was COVID-19 survivors aged 20 to 60 years. The use of purposive random sampling technique was employed to finalise 39 male and 37 female participants, for a total of 76 ($M=33.4$, $SD=15.3$) participants in the sample. Only those that consented voluntarily to participate in the research were taken within the sample.

Measures

The current study made use of the following tools:

- **Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24; King, 2008):** The inventory consists of 24 items designed to measure various behaviours, thought processes, and mental characteristics as they relate to spiritual intelligence. The subjects get to choose between five options ranging from not at all true of them to very true of them. Reverse scoring is valid for some items, and cumulative score lies between 0-96 where higher scores represent higher levels of spiritual intelligence and/or individual capacity. Cronbach's Alpha = .920 Split-Half Reliability = .91
- **Ryff's Psychological Well Being Scale (RPWBS-18; Ryff et al., 2010):** Ryff et al. 2010 is an 18-item scale that assesses general psychological well-being and includes several sub-dimensions such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal progress, positive relationships with others, life purpose, and self-acceptance. Reverse-scored elements have been drafted in the opposite manner to what the instrument is measuring. The total scores range from 18 to 126, with higher values representing better levels of psychological well-being and/or each capacity.

Statistical analysis

The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were employed in the statistical evaluation, and Pearson's product-moment correlation served to examine the significance of the association between the concerned variables.

Procedure

The informational data from the sample was gathered using specific psychological tools to meet the goals of the current study. To secure participants' consent, a brief explanation of the questionnaires' goals and purpose was conveyed. One-on-one video conferencing and Google forms were used to administer the assessment scales. This method of data collection provided efficiency, less time consumption, enough information, resulting in low environmental cost to the participants. The research subjects who required detailed and technical guidance received it when it was due.

RESULTS

SPSS version 26.0.0.0 (2019) was utilised for the statistical analysis of the collected data. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson's product-moment coefficient of correlation were used to analyse the association between the variables in the present research. The findings have been presented in Table number 1.

Table 1: Inter-correlation matrix and descriptive statistics for spirituality and psychological well-being.

Variable	S	PB	PW _a	PW _b	PW _c	PW _d	PW _e	PW _f	Mean	SD
S	1	.338**	.248*	.411**	.184	.143	.366**	-	53.82	15.798
PB		1	.589	.723	.704	.288	.684	.721	89.14	13.923

** - Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* - Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: S-Spirituality, PB-Psychological Well-Being, SD-Standard Deviation, PW_a-Autonomy, PW_b-Environmental Mastery, PW_c-Personal Growth, PW_d-Purpose in Life, PW_e-Self-Acceptance, PW_f-Positive Relations with Others

Table 1 demonstrates the obtained outcomes from the present study, and the association between spirituality and psychological well-being. The results of this study show a strong positive association ($r=.338, p<.01$) between spirituality and psychological well-being. The results also demonstrate strong favourable correlations between spirituality and dimensions of psychological well-being, except in the dimension of Positive Relations with Others.

DISCUSSION

Psychology as a field of science has been endowed with certain responsibilities, one of them being to make efforts to improve humankind's mental wellness. Currently, COVID-19 has done a great deal in adversely affecting mental health worldwide. An extensive review of the available research upon the psychological impacts of COVID-19 on its survivors indicated a dire space that would better be occupied sooner rather than later. This research sought to address that need, by identifying and establishing the apparently likeable relationship among psychological well-being, with its dimensions, and spirituality, in order to assist survivors of COVID-19 in their journey to recovery.

A parametric and positive directional significant correlation was established between spirituality and psychological well-being among COVID-19 survivors, confirming the first hypothesis of the current study, and establishing a significantly positive relationship between the given variables. It has been demonstrated that spirituality affects the trajectory of both medical & psychological interventions as well as the process of recovering from chronic illnesses. (Piedmont, 2004) This holds true in the present research, as highly spiritual people tend to be able to focus on metaphysical aspects of their lives, which helps them in detaching from an ailing physical-self.

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Moreover, spirituality not only directly plays a role in the betterment towards psychological well-being, it also influences and works as a positive catalyst to increase the character strengths of gratitude and hope amongst individuals, which in turn plays a crucial role in the betterment of psychological well-being (Gera et al., 2023), evident by the findings of several studies. When spirituality, gratitude and hope may combine, they may show highly positive effects. A patient with a high level of gratitude may be more hopeful, leading to better connectedness with the self, with their spiritual self, finally leading to overall betterment in psychological well-being.

An understanding of spirituality being a part of adaptability and strength was identified in Laubmeier et al. (2004), where, among 103 cancer-diagnosed-patients, spirituality was found to be correlated with a better quality of life and reduced distress, irrespective of perceived life threat. This is in line with the present findings as well, those scoring high in spirituality were better able to deviate their focus from the ailment they were suffering from, allowing themselves to face less distress and thus evidently lead a better-quality life, even in the face of a highly damaging virus.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate with Hill et al. (2000) who provided evidence that those having a greater sense of spirituality (religious or not) possess greater levels of intentional and active involvement in developing and changing as a person, termed as the *personal growth* initiative. It doesn't need to be said that during a time of crisis, only a person that is able to look towards the future and keep developing will be able to counteract the negative intrusive thoughts that are bound to arise in that situation. The survivors being able to take control of and *master* their surroundings and *environment* also played an important part in them determining the narrative they were providing themselves, as they stayed secluded and alone, not allowing themselves to be encumbered with worrying and threatening thoughts, even in the challenging conditions of going through a life-threatening illness. The predisposition to be *autonomous* only ever furnishes in their being able to take a hold of the situation and not get overwhelmed, which is highly exigent for better mental health. The tendency to be self-accepting, in accepting their current situation and not losing hope, choosing to get over it rather than crumbling shows that spirituality and *self-acceptance* go hand in hand as well, which may further allow the survivors to be hopeful towards the future, looking forward to or maintaining an already existing *purpose in life*. The only caveat in the second hypothesis being wholly fulfilled was the negative correlation between *positive relations with others* and spirituality, which may be explained in the terms that as spirituality allows for an intensified awareness and connectedness with oneself, it may sometimes lead to the person being a little detached from others, focusing too much on oneself, which may be as well because the person needs their space to disconnect from other people and their environment, in order to master their thoughts and become autonomous. Even more, a spiritual person in the given situation may need to stop themselves from getting affected by exterior and unwelcome thoughts, which could only be done by maintaining a distance from others, physically, emotionally and mentally, as was necessary, even though that may partially affect the positive relations with others temporarily, for the greater good.

Several researchers signify discovering ready and strong correlations between spirituality and numerous psychological outcomes, the outcomes being emotional adjustment, life-quality and regulation of emotions, among others, one major researcher among them being Piedmont (2004). In addition, Cotton et al. (2009) exhibited how emotional and existential well-being is positively associated and correlated with spiritual well-being, and how

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spiritual well-being is unfavourably associated with depressive symptoms among a post-pubescent population.

Based on established data, greater degrees of religiosity and spirituality are associated with greater degrees of psychological well-being among Black people of all sexes (Jang et al., 2006) and lower levels of psychological distress among Black women. Mattis & Watson (2008) propose that, in contrast to religious engagement and devotion to theology as in definitions of religiosity, spirituality relies principally on subjective personal perceptions of the transcendent. Spirituality frequently combines relational (for example, interaction with a higher power, connectedness to others/the universe, and prayer) and meaning-making components and dimensions. (Hill et al., 2000; Mattis & Watson, 2008; Zinnbauer et al., 1999). The association then, between spirituality and life enhancing decisions in crucial situations is highly evident. Spirituality also fully mediated the relationship between religiosity and mental health and between religiosity and life satisfaction. The current study further supports these notions and establishes a fair and robust relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being, and its dimensions, be that of Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Self-Acceptance or Purpose in Life, among others. This robust relationship not only persists during a detrimental and lethal illness like COVID-19 but even helps in the recovery and maintenance of a sound mind during and post the recovery phase.

Implications and Limitations

According to Pfefferbaum and North (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic triggered "widespread emotional distress and increased risk for psychiatric illness," with the situation being dire for individuals that survived the lethal virus. Thus, to bring a positive change in the psychological health of the survivors, identifying preventative measures and ergo focusing on preventive interventions became critically essential. The present investigation's outcomes present spirituality as a sort of armour, a safeguarding factor for the well-being of the survivors by establishing a foundation for potential future psychotherapeutic treatments. Designing initiatives aimed at enhancing survivors' mental health is crucial under the light of the present scenario, this may be done by inciting spirituality and connectedness with oneself and the universe, thus making it significantly easier for the survivors to carry on and lead their life where coronavirus becomes a forgotten scar for them, that doesn't hurt anymore. Making the programs comparatively cheaper, and ensuring widespread accessibility will remain all-important during a widespread predicament or not.

The present research yields noteworthy and substantial insights but also encounters a few sets of limitations. Considering the research took place during a certain specific time, using a randomly purposive sample, it becomes challenging to extrapolate wider inferences from the findings that were obtained. Due to this research's online format, only those that were somewhat technologically literate and had ready access to the necessary resources were able to be incorporated into the sample. It is promptly proposed that participants in future studies be chosen at random, while increasing accessibility and that longitudinal studies be carried out to account for any temporal changes.

CONCLUSION

Whilst verifying the correlation among spirituality and psychological well-being, along with its dimensions, in survivors of COVID-19, the present research offers considerable evidence that the association between the given variables is robust in nature. Moreover, it also proffers an array of possible tactics and preventative actions that may be established and

adapted, so as to lessen the detrimental psychosocial impact among the concerned population.

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Conflict of Interest

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