

Exploring the Impact of Religiosity on Existential Anxiety and Hope among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The present study seeks to assess the level of religiosity among young adult and its impact on their level of hope and existential anxiety. A sample of 163 young Adults between the age group of 18-25 made up the sample. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used keeping in mind the study's inclusive requirements. The study investigated existential anxiety using the Existential Anxiety Questionnaire by Weems et al. (2004). The religiosity levels were assessed using The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) developed by Huber et al. (2012) 15 item self-reported scale. Hope among young adults were measured using the Adult Hope Scale by Snyder et al. (1991) is a 12-item scale. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation coefficient, and linear regression were done using SPSS 21. The results indicated that there is a weak but negative correlation between religiosity and existential anxiety. In contrast, there is a large positive association between religiosity and hope levels. According to the regression analysis, religiosity has a weak but significant predictive strength for existential anxiety. However, results showed a noteworthy impact of religiosity on Hope levels. Therefore, religiosity is an important influence on the level of hope and existential anxiety among young adults.

Keywords: *Existential Anxiety, Hope, Psychological Well-being, Religiosity, Resilience*

India is a multicultural and diverse country where religion plays an important role in providing people with never-ending guidance. Religion has a huge impression on cultural norms, individual behavior, and social structure. Religion carries a significant undertone that not only concerns the divine but, is a system of belief that permeates art, literature, architecture, and even governance. Essential to the idea of religion is the definition, which states that it is a group of customs, rituals, and beliefs observed by a group of people who share a connection with the Transcendent (Koenig et al. 2012). Religious concepts often talk about the conclusive truth or reality, beliefs associated with the Afterlife, and how one's deeds affect one's fate in the hereafter. Therefore, Religion or Religiosity has a huge impact on how we view our existence or the meaning of our lives. Clifford Geertz (1966) asserted that religion gives us a frame of reference through which we understand suffering and difficult set of conditions. Religion can be characterized as a person's

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retaliation to some existential issues while they are considering the distinction between life and death, two ideas that are complementary (Wulff, 2010).

There are a lot of existing studies that explore the implications of religion or religiosity on mental health. Existential anxiety is a part of mental health that is rarely discussed. A significant human problem, according to a lot of theoretical and philosophical work, is our fundamental concerns about existence. Paul Tillich (1952) characterizes Existential Anxiety as centered around three joined areas of apprehension. The first has to do with death and fate. The second is about meaninglessness and emptiness, while the third is related to condemnation and guilt. Numerous research suggests that Existential anxiety is influenced by religiosity. According to Tongeren et al. (2016), existential well-being was linked to a security-related religious perspective and rose with religious commitment in their study. This suggests that religious beliefs give significance to one's life and provide existential stability. Religiosity provides a framework for understanding life's hurdles and encourages hopefulness in the face of hardship.

Hopefulness is another major aspect that can be influenced by Religiosity. In an investigative study on the severity of hopelessness and depression among Turkish college students, the findings indicated that, in comparison to those who never or sometimes experienced God, participants' scores on the Beck Hopelessness Scale reduced the more they experienced God (Yapici et al. 2014). As a result, religiosity plays an important role in shaping our views and may even provide a safeguard by reducing existential anxiety and fostering hope. Thinking about death and evaluating our moral position can cause great distress, and during these times, religion can offer immense comfort. Prior studies have concentrated on the relationship between religiosity and mental health, but they have not examined the role that religion has on hope and existential anxiety.

Young adults are underrepresented in research because the majority of studies focus on the elderly population. There aren't many studies on religiosity conducted in the Indian subcontinent and its effects on Hope and Existential Anxiety. Huber (2003) identified five dimensions of religiosity that use the following characteristics to assess religiosity: Ideology, intellect, public practice, private practice, and religious experience. This measures how important religion is in a person's psyche. A research study by Syed Muza Kazim et al. (2023) found that religiosity can help in reducing existential loneliness and dread. Religiosity lessens the impact of existential dread which has a negative connection with happiness. A study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic examined the impact of social isolation on mental health (Lucchetti et al., 2020). Lower levels of fear and anxiety during social isolation were linked to increased private religious activity and increased religiosity attendance. It was also associated with less sadness. The results above show how influential religion may be on our emotions and mental health in a variety of trying circumstances.

A part of Existential Anxiety is fear of mortality. Numerous studies investigate the connection between religiosity and death phobia. Research was done to determine the association between older individuals' spiritual health, religious coping strategies, and their fear of dying (Rababa, M. et al., 2021). It was discovered that, in comparison to their male counterparts, female older persons exhibited lower levels of death anxiety and higher levels of religious coping. A study based on cultural thanatology explored religious and spiritual concerns (Veena, S. et al., 2020). Based on how they understood their religious beliefs according to their culture, thematic analysis showed that participants experienced either

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spiritual agony or relief regarding the issue of mortality. A summary of a study that looked at the relationship between morality, religion, and fear of dying (Bassett et al., 2018) illustrates the complex relationship between religiosity, morality, and death fear. A higher fear of dying is linked to the belief that one has not lived up to one's religious beliefs, especially for those who believe that God is punishing. Therefore, different aspects of religion can either enhance or decrease anxieties about death.

Giving people a sense of purpose and hope in life is another benefit that religion may provide. Research examining the existential role of religiosity in mental health and whether or not it enhances mental health (Derek et al., 2019) concluded that the main defense of religiosity against anxiety and sadness is its meaning in life. Thus, by providing a purpose, engaging in religious activities reduces the risk of anxiety and melancholy. Recapitulating research on the mediating role of perceived control and the positive effects of religiosity on well-being (Jackson et al., 2011), the findings showed that, for the entire sample, perceived control influences, to a partial extent, the effects of spiritual experiences and religious coping strategies on subjective well-being. This suggests that a number of elements need to be taken into account and that religion alone cannot improve well-being. Chokkanatha (2013) examined the relationship between psychological suffering, religiosity, and psychological resources (mastery and social support). According to the direct-effect scheme, there is a direct and inverse link between psychological suffering and religiosity. This indicates that psychological suffering is lower in high levels of religiosity. Psychosocial resources were found to act as an intermediary in the association between religiosity and psychological problems, as demonstrated by the mediation model. Derived from the study on the link between religious beliefs, distress, and well-being in Hindu students in India (Crystal L. Park et al., 2020) the results defied accepted wisdom. A positive correlation between religious views and anxiety and sadness was discovered. There is a weak correlation between religious beliefs and positive well-being, especially purpose in life. This emphasizes the need for additional research on religious beliefs and their effects on well-being, particularly on non-Christian samples and outside of the United States. It is significant that having strong religious convictions supports our psychological health and enables us to deal with life's uncertainties. Depending on one's perspective there are different relationships between religiosity and subjective well-being. Regardless of religion, however, spirituality has a beneficial effect on one's subjective well-being. Thus, it follows that religiosity does not predict life satisfaction among those who are unsure of their religious orientation (Villani et al., 2019). When examining how religiosity affects mental health, there are a number of things to take into account. Very religious individuals demonstrated a great degree of hope, which was linked to a decreased level of depressive symptoms. This suggests that one mediating factor is hope (Rose et al., 2018).

Religion serves as a moral compass as well as a source of purpose, ethical guidance, and a framework to help people make sense of life's mysteries and questions. The benefits and drawbacks of religion for mental health and related problems have long been discussed. Research suggests that religion can help people feel less afraid of dying, give their lives purpose and meaning, act morally by guiding them, give them a lens through which to view the world, and raise their hope levels, all of which have a positive impact on mental health. Additionally, religion serves as a tool to promote social solidarity. It contributes to the development of social identity and a feeling of community within society. In general, religion gives people a sense of security, connection, and closeness to God; these qualities then have a transforming role in helping people discover new viewpoints and life's purpose.

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Studies on young adults' degree of religiosity and how it affects their mental health are extremely rare. In earlier research, existential anxiety was not frequently examined. Early adulthood is a period of change and transition. Young adulthood is a time for important life decisions, such as choosing a career and a life mate. Humans' burden of decision-making and accountability for their own acts is another factor that can lead to stress and emotions of ambiguity. This can be a contributor to existential Anxiety. (Arnett, 2000). Hope according to Snyder et al. (1991) according to his idea, hope is the conviction that one may take a variety of adaptable paths toward one's objectives, recognizing obstacles along the way and devising plans to get over them to accomplish the ultimate objective. It is also fuelled by people's sense of agency in achieving their objectives, which is defined as success-oriented resolution or goal-directed energy. The main goals of the study are to determine the young adult sample's degrees of religiosity and how they relate to hope and existential anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the study:

- To assess the relationship between religiosity and existential anxiety among young adults.
- To assess the relationship between religiosity and hope among young adults.
- To assess the predictive strength and nature of relationship between religiosity and existential anxiety among young adults.
- To assess the predictive strength and nature of relationship between religiosity and hope among young adults.

Hypothesis

- **H₁:** There will be a significant relationship between religiosity and existential anxiety among young adults.
- **H₂:** There will be a significant relationship between religiosity and hope among young adults.
- **H₃:** Religiosity will significantly predict the levels of existential anxiety among young adults.
- **H₄:** Religiosity will significantly predict the levels of hope among young adults.

Research Design

The study utilizes quantitative research design to examine the impact of religiosity on existential anxiety and hope among young adults. Correlational analysis was conducted to assess the association of religiosity with existential anxiety and hope. The linear regression to find the predictive strength of religiosity on existential anxiety and hope. The aim was to understand the impact of religiosity on levels of existential anxiety and hope through collection and analysis of numerical data.

Sample

The sample of the research consists of young adults. The data was collected from 163 young adults. The age criteria were from 18 to 25 years. This sample size was selected keeping in mind the objectives of the research. The procedure used for sampling was a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

- 1. Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS):** Centrality to religiosity scale (CRS) by Huber & Huber, 2012 establishes the importance of religiosity in an individual's personality. It is a 15-item self-reported measure with a 5-point Likert scale. The scale attempts to measure five dimensions of religiosity.
- 2. Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ):** The Existential anxiety questionnaire (EAQ) by Weems et al. (2004) measures the dimensions of existential anxiety as proposed by Paul Tillich's work (1952). The questionnaire consists a total of 13 yes/no type questions. Seven of the items are negatively scored.
- 3. Adult Hope Scale:** The Adult Hope Scale established by Snyder et al. (1991) is a psychological tool to assess an individual's hope levels as a trait. It is a 12-item questionnaire with four items acting as distractors. The items on the scale are rated on an 8-point Likert type scale.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis techniques involved in the study were descriptive statistics, correlational analysis (spearman's correlation coefficient), and Linear regression using the SPSS software, version 21.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria designed for the sample include individuals who are aged between 18 to 25 years and are experiencing a transitional phase. A good proficiency in English language was required. The sample ranged from college students to working individuals.

Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria were individuals who do not match the age range of 18-25 years, individuals with cognitive disabilities, those suffering from language deficits, people who are already familiar with the topic of research, and persons lacking comprehension capability.

Procedure

A well-structured process was employed to investigate the research objective. Ethical practices like confidentiality were taken care of and informed consent was collected from every participant. Psychological tools which were valid and reliable were chosen to study and measure the variables in the study. 25% of the data was collected online using google forms, while rest of it was collected in-person. The questionnaires were distributed in college campus, libraries, and youth centres. Once the data was collected, a cleaning process was done and it was arranged in an excel sheet. Scoring was done according to the guidelines of the tool. Statistical analysis was done using IBM SPSS 21.

RESULTS

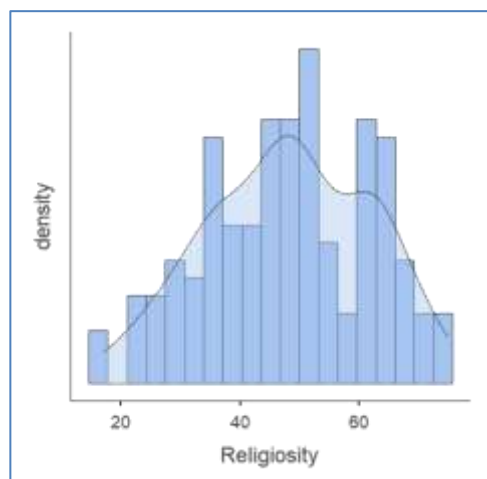
Table 1 Descriptive statistics for Religiosity, Hope and Existential Anxiety (EA)

Variable	N	M	Mdn	SD	Min	Max
Religiosity	163	48.0	49.0	13.7	17.0	75.0
EA	163	5.58	5.00	3.04	0.0	13.0
Hope	163	46.2	47.0	9.04	19.0	64.0

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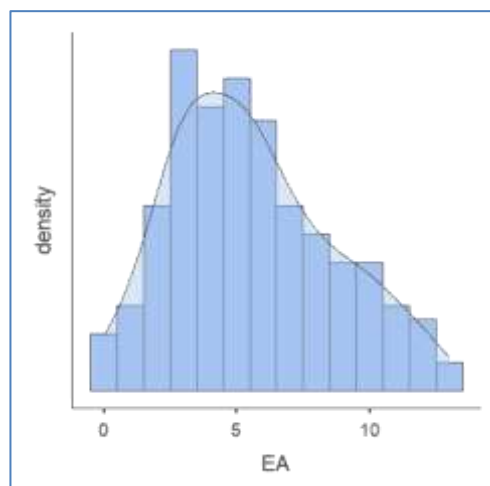
Table 1 indicates the N, Mean, Median, Standard deviation, minimum, and maximum of religiosity, existential anxiety, and hope of young adults in the sample collected. The mean value of religiosity is 48 and the median is 49 for religiosity. The standard deviation for religiosity is 13.7 with the minimum value as 17 and maximum value as 75. For existential anxiety the mean and median is 5.58 and 5.0, respectively. Standard deviation of existential anxiety is 3.04. The minimum value is 0 and maximum value is 13. Hope has a mean of 46.2 and standard deviation of 9.04. The minimum value is 19 and maximum value is 64.

Figure 1.



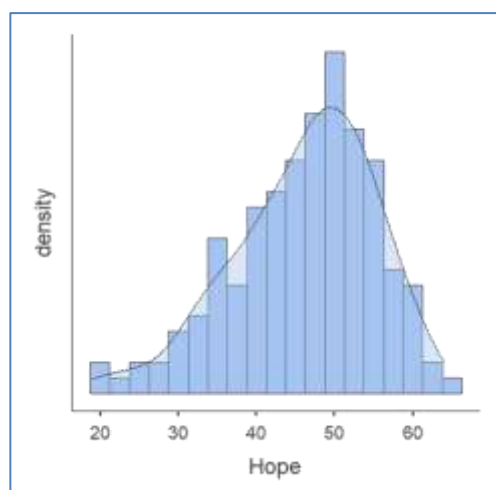
Religiosity Distribution

Figure 2.



Existential anxiety distribution

Figure 3.



Hope Distribution

Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 indicate the distribution of religiosity, Existential Anxiety, and Hope among young adults. According to the figure 1, the religiosity distribution is slightly negatively skewed. While, figure 2 indicates slight positive skew in existential anxiety distribution. Figure 3, indicates that the distribution of hope is highly negatively. Since the distribution is not normal, non-parametric tests were used to analyze the data.

Table 2. Correlations for study variables

		Religiosity	EA	Hope
Religiosity	Spearman's rho	—		
EA	Spearman's rho	-0.186*	—	
Hope	Spearman's rho	0.299***	-0.290***	—

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2 indicates the correlation between religiosity and existential anxiety among young adults. The spearman coefficient between religiosity and existential anxiety is -0.186 significant at $p < 0.05$. The spearman coefficient between religiosity and hope is 0.299 significant at $p < 0.001$. The correlation between religiosity and existential anxiety is negative, it is weak but significant in nature. The correlation between religiosity and hope is positive and significant in nature.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Summary for Religiosity predicting Hope and Existential Anxiety

Variable	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	B	β	α	t	F
Hope	.333	.111	.105	.049	.220	.333	35.615	4.481**	20.078**
EA	.222	.049	.043	.017	-.049	-.222	7.949	-2.887*	8.337*

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 presents the linear regression analysis for religiosity as a predictor of existential anxiety and hope. As indicated, religiosity accounted for approximately 11.1% of the positive variance in hope among young adults (Model 1: $R^2 = 0.111$, $F = 20.078$, $p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.333$). The table also indicates that religiosity accounted for approximately 4.9% of the negative variance in existential anxiety among young adults (Model 2: $R^2 = 0.049$, $F = 8.337$, $p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.222$).

DISCUSSION

The study's aim was to determine the association of religiosity with existential anxiety and hope. Also, to find the level of impact it has on both existential anxiety and hope. The outcome of the study indicated some promising conclusions. The first hypothesis of the study was that there will be a significant correlation between religiosity and existential anxiety. The results support it. The outcomes indicate that religiosity has a negative association with existential anxiety. Although it's weak, it's significant ($r_s = -0.186^*$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, as religiosity levels rise among young adults there is a modest decrease in their existential anxiety levels. Religiosity provides people with a structure and a sieve with which they live their life and interpret difficult circumstances (Clifford Geertz, 1966). This must help in dealing with their existential concerns. Research indicates that religion plays a role in reducing existential issues of loneliness and anxiety (Syed Muza Kazim et al., 2013). The second hypothesis assumed was that there will be a significant relationship between religiosity and hope. The result showcases that religiosity has a positive association with hope levels among young adults ($r_s = 0.299^{***}$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, as religiosity increases among the young adults the hope levels also increase. Research indicated that turning to religion as a coping strategy helped mothers of children with developmental disabilities to gain a positive outlook (Karaca et al, 2021).

The third hypothesis postulated was that religiosity will significantly predict the levels of existential anxiety among young adults. The results indicate that religiosity explained 4.9%

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of negative variance in the levels of existential anxiety among young adults. The findings indicate a significant impact ($p < 0.05$). This adds to the evidence that religiosity impacts existential anxiety by reducing its level. Religious beliefs and practices provide people with coping strategies that might help them to experience less existential fear or anxiety. Religiosity entails belief about an afterlife and reincarnation that might give individuals with a sense of control over the issue of mortality.

The fourth hypothesis drawn for the study was that religiosity will significantly predict the levels of hope among young adults. The results indicate that religiosity significantly predicts the level of hope levels among young adults. It contributes to about 11.1% of hope among young adults ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that religiosity helps to build a positive outlook towards life. Hence, the H_4 (hypothesis) is retained. Study indicates that religiosity contributes to a strong sense of purpose, happiness, and life satisfaction in life (Villani et al, 2023) which may cause young adults to be more hopeful when their religiosity levels increase. A lot of religion gives emphasis on being hopeful and having a positive outlook towards life. Believing in religious doctrines and participating in rituals might generate a sense of awe and great respect, and might inspire us. Practicing and engaging in religiosity sets a reminder for young adults to savour the beauty of life and helps them deal with adversities.

The current study also exhibits certain limitations that needs to be taken into consideration. There might be cases of sampling biases due to certain individuals being targeted because of purposive and snowball sampling. The age group of 18-25 is restrictive and doesn't represent the complexity of experiences young adults go through. Self-report measures were utilized to assess the religiosity levels, existential anxiety, and hope levels. This may lead to respondent biases like social desirability.

The present study holds potential for further exploration and there are various future implications. It will be helpful for mental health practitioners and counsellors to get a sense about the connection between religiosity and mental well-being. The findings can help in creating a personalised intervention approach that incorporates religiosity to support young adult's mental health. The importance of religiosity and its association with hope and existential anxiety should be covered in various workshops and coursework material during the training period of mental health practitioners. Evidence from research suggests that immigrants and refugees from Tibet living in exile in Tibet, have high level of spirituality which contributes to higher resilience and psychological well-being (Kashyap et al, 2014).

There are ample of directions in which future researches might proceed towards. Longitudinal studies can be utilized to explore the impact of religiosity on young adults over time. Qualitative researches can be conducted to explore individual's lived experiences and their perceptions about religious practices. This helps to explore the fundamental mechanisms underlying the effect religiosity has on existential anxiety and hope.

Empirical data of the present study very strongly poses that optimism is related with physical and mental health. Optimistic individuals have fewer physical and psychological complaints with their life. If there is any problem like illness of her child then also, mothers with optimistic outlook help themselves to cope with the situation.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the impact of religiosity on existential anxiety and hope among young adults between the age group of 18-25 years. The correlational analysis and linear regression models indicate that religiosity contributes significantly to level of hope and existential anxiety among young adults. When religiosity increases hope levels also rise. Whereas, when religiosity levels increase, the degree of existential anxiety decreases. This indicates that our belief, practices, and experiences relating to the transcendence helps us to be more optimistic about the future and eases the fundamental concerns about our existence. Religiosity entails a conviction that there's a higher power that helps us during trying times. This might be a way through which religiosity increases hope levels among individuals. Religiosity usually talks about a bigger plan which can promote resilience in the time of hardships. In comparison to older generation, young adults are moving away from religious orientation, belief systems, and practices. This study highlights the religiosity levels among young adults and its effects exploring how it can have an impact on Millennials and generation Z. Religiosity can be a useful coping mechanism and can be utilized for developing interventions for grief. Therefore, religiosity can be used as a significant tool who's worth has been overlooked from a long time due to fast paced lifestyle. Therefore, collaborative research endeavors are needed to produce more polished knowledge about the effects of religiosity and its psychological impact.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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