

Research Paper

Examining the Association between Spirituality, Anxiety and Stress Among Female Employees in Workplace: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Stress and anxiety in the workplace are significant concerns affecting employees globally, particularly among females. Spirituality has emerged as a potential coping mechanism for stress and anxiety. Previous research indicates that spirituality at the workplace has a significant negative correlation with stress and anxiety. However, its association with these factors among female employees in workplaces remains underexplored. This pilot study aims to examine the association between spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in workplaces. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among female employees (N=50) from various industries in India. Participants completed self-report measures assessing spirituality, anxiety, and stress levels. Statistical analyses including correlation and regression were employed to explore the relationships between variables. Preliminary findings suggest a significant negative association between spirituality and anxiety ($r = -0.269$) and stress ($r = -0.510$) among female employees. Regression analysis further elucidates there is a tentative or weak predictive association between spirituality and anxiety as well as stress levels within the scope of the research. These findings suggest that there is a potential relevance of spirituality as a protective factor against anxiety and stress among female employees in workplaces. Implications for interventions aimed at promoting employee well-being and organisational productivity are discussed. Further research should consider a large sample and also how gender and workload might influence the link between spirituality and well-being.

Keywords: *Spirituality, Anxiety, Stress, Quantitative Study, Organisational Psychology, Female Employees*

India's massive workforce of 523.8 million is a significant driver of its economic strength. However, a staggering number of Indian workers (76%) report work-related stress negatively impacting their mental health (ADP Research Institute survey). Furthermore, more than half of employees are at high risk of poor mental health. ^[1]

The dynamic nature of today's workplace breeds anxiety and stress, impacting both employees and organisational success. A World Health Organisation (WHO) study identifies work-related stress as a major contributor to worldwide mental health difficulties, hurting individual health, families, and profitability in general. ^[2] Interestingly, office jobs, despite

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lacking repetitive physical demands, often lead to higher stress than manual labour professions. [3] This pressure is particularly evident in the banking sector, where job insecurity, overtime, and poor social support exacerbate stress, leading to employee discouragement and absence. [4,5] Furthermore, the constant barrage of digital technology and the blurring of work-life boundaries due to remote work contribute to employee overload. [6,7]

Female Workforce and their Mental Health

The contemporary Indian workplace is witnessing a profound shift, with an increasing number of women joining the workforce, driven by expanding economic opportunities and a growing emphasis on women's empowerment (World Bank, 2022). However, this transition presents a myriad of challenges for women navigating the demanding and competitive professional landscape in India. Despite the undeniable benefits of enhanced financial independence and professional growth, women often find themselves contending with a complex array of factors contributing to anxiety and stress. [8]

A major challenge faced by Indian women is achieving a satisfactory work-life balance. Traditional societal norms often place a disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities on women, even as they pursue careers, leading to role conflict and feelings of inadequacy. [9] This imbalance is a significant factor prompting many Indian women to leave their jobs. [10] Furthermore, women in professional roles in India typically shoulder more family responsibilities than their male counterparts, resulting in work-family and family-work conflicts, which, in turn, strain their efforts to attain work-life equilibrium. [11] Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of support from employers and colleagues for the implementation of family-friendly policies in India, exacerbating the challenges faced by women. [12] The resulting disparity between work and personal life can lead to stress, decreased productivity, absenteeism, and even job abandonment. Nevertheless, the engagement of women in income-generating activities can contribute significantly to meeting household needs, [13] underscoring the importance of effective management of work and home roles.

Furthermore, Indian workplaces often lack the necessary infrastructure to address the specific needs of female employees, including long working hours, inflexible work arrangements, and potential gender biases, all of which contribute to a stressful work environment. Additionally, cultural norms surrounding assertiveness and communication styles may disadvantage women in negotiating workload and advocating for themselves. [14]

These workplace stressors can manifest in anxiety and stress among female employees, with anxiety characterised by feelings of worry and unease, and stress being the body's response to demands. While some stress can be motivating, chronic stress can lead to various negative health consequences, [15] ultimately affecting job performance, wellbeing, and overall satisfaction at work. [16, 17]

In light of these challenges, spirituality emerges as a potential source of resilience for women navigating the complexities of the Indian workplace. Spirituality, encompassing the quest for meaning and purpose in life, can provide inner peace, strength, and a connection to something larger than oneself. [18] In the Indian context, spirituality is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric, offering a rich tradition of religious and philosophical practices that many women turn to for solace, guidance, and coping mechanisms. [19]

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The Potential Solution: Spirituality at Work

Spirituality at the workplace offers a promising approach to combating these challenges. Rathee & Rajain (2020) define it as the pursuit of purpose, connection with colleagues, and alignment between personal values and organisational goals. [20] It fosters a work environment that supports personal and spiritual growth, fostering a sense of community and purpose (beyond religious beliefs). Research suggests that incorporating spirituality into the workplace can lead to several benefits:

- Spirituality fosters employee contentment, dedication, and happiness, ultimately leading to higher organisational performance. [21]
- Employees find more meaning and purpose in their jobs, which contributes to happiness and satisfaction. [22]
- A sense of connection and belonging among employees promotes loyalty and engagement. [23]
- According to research, organisations that promote altruistic morals, a common goal, and meaning can improve employee resilience, reducing the detrimental impacts of stress. [24]

Given the multifaceted challenges faced by women in the Indian workplace, spirituality emerges as a compelling avenue for fostering resilience and addressing the complexities of professional life. Spirituality is strongly rooted in Indian culture, encompassing numerous religious and philosophical traditions. These traditions offer women an extensive repertoire of rituals and ideas that serve as pillars of comfort, guidance, and coping techniques in the workplace. [19] It offers a holistic framework through which women can navigate the demands of their professional lives while nurturing their inner selves. By fostering a connection to something greater than oneself, spirituality instils a sense of purpose and resilience, enabling women to confront workplace challenges with equanimity and grace.

Moreover, spirituality offers practical tools for managing stress and anxiety. Through practices such as meditation, prayer, and mindfulness, women can cultivate a sense of inner peace and calm amidst the turbulence of the workplace. These practices not only alleviate immediate symptoms of stress but also promote long-term psychological wellbeing, enhancing resilience and adaptive coping strategies.

The existing literature on spirituality, anxiety, and stress in the workplace reveals significant gaps. Limited research explores its impact on job performance, and the link between spirituality and job outcomes like stress requires further clarification. [25] Furthermore, there are very few studies understanding the impact of stress and anxiety of female employees in India. Additionally, research is needed on the connection between spirituality and mental health, employee behaviour, creativity and loyalty. [26]

This pilot study seeks to investigate the potential correlation between spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in India. By exploring this relationship, we aim to gain insights into how spiritual beliefs and practices may impact women's mental wellbeing in the workplace. The findings of this study have the potential to inform future research endeavours and workplace interventions aimed at supporting the wellbeing and success of female employees in India's ever-evolving work environment.

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Aim and objectives

The primary aim of this pilot study is to investigate the potential association between workplace spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in India.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the levels of workplace spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in workplaces.
2. To examine the relationship between workplace spirituality and anxiety
3. To examine the relationship between workplace spirituality and stress.
4. To determine whether there is a predictive role of spirituality in reducing anxiety and stress.
5. To gain preliminary insights into how workplace spirituality might influence anxiety and stress levels in female employees.

Hypothesis

- **H₁**- There is a statistically significant negative correlation between spirituality and anxiety among female employees in workplace.
- **H₂**- There is a statistically significant negative correlation between spirituality and stress among female employees in workplace.
- **H₃**- There is a statistically significant prediction that higher levels of spirituality among female employees in the workplace will correlate with reduced levels of anxiety and stress.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and subjects

We conducted the study from February 2024 to March 2024 and adopted a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the association between spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in the Indian workplace context. Only after obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), data collection was commenced. A total of 50 female employees from different sectors across India were recruited for the present study. Respondents who accessed the survey online. Purposive sampling was utilised to recruit the participants who met specific inclusion criteria, including being female, aged 18 years and above, currently employed, and able to access and complete online surveys. Upon expressing interest, participants provided informed consent before completing an online survey that assessed spirituality, anxiety, and stress levels.

Measures

The questionnaire was divided of four sections: Demographic characteristics, Tecchio's Workplace Spirituality Scale, [27] McCarthy and Goffin's Workplace Anxiety Scale [28] and Marlin Company's Workplace Stress Scale. [29] Demographic data consisted of age, work area and marital status.

- **Workplace Spirituality Scale:** This scale was used to measure the degree of spirituality experienced or expressed within the workplace environment. Workplace spirituality refers to the extent to which individuals find meaning, purpose, and connection to something larger than themselves in their work context. Respondents rate their agreement with 28 statements on a 7-point Likert scale, where 7 represents "strongly agree" and 1 represents "strongly disagree". The scores for each item are then summed to obtain a total score, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of

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workplace spirituality. A higher total score indicates a greater degree of workplace spirituality, suggesting that individuals within the organisation perceive their work as meaningful, fulfilling, and aligned with their personal values and beliefs.

- **Workplace Anxiety Scale:** This scale was used to assess the level of anxiety experienced by individuals in relation to their performance in work and social situations. It evaluates the extent to which individuals feel anxious or stressed about their performance, which can impact their productivity, well-being, and overall performance outcomes. Respondents rate their agreement with eight statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 for "strongly agree" to 1 for "strongly disagree". The scores for each item are then summed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of performance anxiety. A higher total score on this scale suggests a greater degree of performance anxiety, indicating that individuals may experience stress, nervousness, or worry related to their ability to perform effectively in various tasks or roles.
- **Workplace Stress Scale:** This scale aims to assess the prevalence and impact of stressors within the workplace environment. Respondents rate the frequency of experiencing eight stress-related items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "very often". Scores are assigned based on the selected frequency option, with higher scores indicating more frequent experiences of workplace stress. A higher total score on this scale indicates a higher level of perceived workplace stress, suggesting that individuals experience stressors more frequently or intensely in their work environment. This could indicate potential areas for organisational improvement in managing stress and promoting employee well-being.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved the use of both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages will be used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the participants and their scores on the Workplace Spirituality Scale, Workplace Anxiety Scale and Workplace Stress Scale. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis and linear regression were conducted to examine the associations between spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in the Indian workplace. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was utilised for data analysis. Additionally, the findings from this pilot study will guide the development of larger-scale studies to further explore the identified associations.

RESULT

Sample characteristic

In this study, a sample of 50 female employees participated, providing valuable insights into their demographic characteristics and key variables. Analysis of participant demographics revealed that the majority of respondents fell within the age range of 15-29 years, constituting 80% of the sample. Furthermore, a substantial portion of participants, 42%, were employed in corporate settings. In terms of marital status, the majority of participants, accounting for 76% of the sample, reported being unmarried. [Table 1]

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Score ranges, means, and standard deviations for Workplace Spirituality Scale, Workplace Anxiety Scale and Workplace Stress Scale

1. Workplace Spirituality

The spirituality scores exhibited a wide range from 71 to 193, with a mean score of 140.34 and a standard deviation of 30.036. This indicates considerable variability in spirituality levels among the participants, suggesting that while the average spirituality score is relatively high, there is notable diversity in individual scores. [Table 2]

2. Workplace Anxiety Scale

Participants' anxiety levels ranged from 8 to 36, with a mean score of 24.02 and a standard deviation of 7.844. This suggests that, on average, participants reported moderate levels of anxiety, with a considerable spread of scores around the mean, indicating variability in individual anxiety experiences. [Table 2]

3. Workplace Stress Scale

Stress levels among participants ranged from 8 to 35, with a mean score of 21.26 and a standard deviation of 7.222. This indicates that, on average, participants experienced a moderate level of stress, with variability in individual stress levels evident within the sample. [Table 2]

Correlation

In addition to examining demographic characteristics and individual variable scores, correlational analysis was conducted to explore potential relationships between spirituality, anxiety, and stress levels among female employees. The results revealed significant negative associations between spirituality and both anxiety ($r = -0.269$, $p < 0.01$) and stress ($r = -0.510$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as spirituality levels increase, anxiety and stress levels tend to decrease among female employees. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of spirituality may experience lower levels of anxiety and stress compared to those with lower spirituality scores. The significance level ($p < 0.01$) indicates that this relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance and underscores the robustness of the association. Hence, Hypothesis 1 and 2 can be accepted. [Table 3]

Regression analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to further examine the predictive association between spirituality and anxiety as well as stress levels among female employees. The results indicate a tentative or weak predictive relationship between spirituality and both anxiety and stress within the scope of the research.

For the relationship between spirituality and anxiety, the coefficient of determination (R square) is 0.073, suggesting that approximately 7.3% of the variance in anxiety levels can be explained by spirituality scores. The adjusted R square, which takes into account the number of predictors in the model, is 0.053. This adjusted value suggests that spirituality accounts for 5.3% of the variance in anxiety levels after considering other relevant factors. The standard error of the estimate is 7.632, indicating the average difference between observed and predicted anxiety scores. The F statistic (3.757) is associated with a significance level of 0.058, indicating that the relationship between spirituality and anxiety levels is not statistically significant at the conventional alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, while there is a weak predictive association between spirituality and anxiety, it does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. [Table 4]

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For the relationship between spirituality and stress, the coefficient of determination (R square) is 0.260, indicating that approximately 26% of the variance in stress levels can be explained by spirituality scores. The adjusted R square, considering the number of predictors, is 0.244. This adjusted value suggests that spirituality explains 24.4% of the variance in stress levels after accounting for other relevant factors. The standard error of the estimate is 6.278, indicating the average difference between observed and predicted stress scores. The F statistic (16.846) is associated with a significance level of 0.00, indicating that the relationship between spirituality and stress levels is statistically significant. [Table 5] Hence, Hypothesis 3 is partially accepted.

DISCUSSION

The contemporary Indian workplace presents a complex scenario where a significant portion of the workforce, particularly women, grapple with high levels of anxiety and stress. [30,31] The literature review outlined various stressors, including work-related pressures, societal expectations, and lack of support structures, contributing to the mental health challenges faced by female employees. [32] In response to these challenges, this pilot study sought to investigate the potential correlation between spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in workplaces.

Levels of Spirituality, Anxiety, and Stress in Workplace Environment

The preliminary findings of this study indicate notable levels of workplace spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees. These findings align with prior research highlighting the prevalence of stress in the Indian workforce, particularly among women. [33, 34] The presence of high levels of anxiety and stress underscores the urgent need to explore effective interventions to support the mental well-being of female employees. [31]

Relationship between Spirituality and Anxiety

Consistent with the literature review's propositions, the study found a negative association between spirituality and anxiety among female employees. This suggests that higher levels of spirituality may correspond to lower levels of anxiety. Such findings resonate with existing literature that emphasises spirituality as a potential coping mechanism for mitigating anxiety in the workplace. [18, 30] However, it's important to acknowledge the complex interplay of various factors contributing to anxiety and the need for further exploration into the mechanisms underlying this relationship.

Relationship between Spirituality and Stress

The study revealed a negative association between spirituality and stress among female employees. This suggests that incorporating spiritual practices and beliefs into the workplace environment may contribute to reducing stress levels. These findings corroborate existing research, emphasising the potential benefits of spirituality in fostering resilience and coping with workplace stressors. [19] However, it's essential to recognize the multifaceted nature of stress and the need for holistic approaches in addressing it. [35]

Predictive Role of Spirituality in Reducing Anxiety and Stress

Regression analysis indicated a tentative or weak predictive association between spirituality and anxiety as well as stress levels. While the findings suggest a potential role for spirituality in mitigating anxiety and stress, the strength of this predictive relationship warrants further investigation. Future research endeavours should delve deeper into the

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nuanced dynamics between workplace spirituality, mental health outcomes, and other contextual factors.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study contributes to the growing body of literature examining the intersection of workplace spirituality, anxiety, and stress among female employees in workplaces. Findings suggest a significant negative link between spirituality and anxiety/stress levels among female employees in workplaces, highlighting the potential of spirituality as a coping mechanism against psychological distress and a resource for promoting mental well-being and resilience in the face of workplace challenges. While the predictive association is tentative, it emphasises the importance of integrating spiritual practices in interventions to enhance employee well-being and organisational productivity.^[20] However, further research is warranted to elucidate the causal mechanisms and long-term impacts of incorporating spirituality into organisational practices. Ultimately, addressing the mental health needs of female employees requires holistic approaches that acknowledge the diverse cultural, social, and organisational contexts shaping their experiences in the workplace.

Limitations and future scope

The study's limitations stem from the utilisation of a convenience sampling method, where participants self-reported their data. This approach may have introduced errors in documentation, lacked self-awareness, or influenced responses due to potential biases. Additionally, the study predominantly focused on females, limiting its generalizability due to the small sample size.

To enhance the credibility of these findings and formulate targeted interventions, it is imperative to conduct further research with larger and more varied samples. This future investigation should delve into potential gender disparities and examine how varying work hours and marital status may impact the association between spirituality and well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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TABLES

Table 1 - Demographic Characteristics: Frequency and Percentage

Age	15-29	40 (80%)
	30-39	3 (6%)
	40-49	3 (6%)
	Over 50	4 (8%)
Work area	Technology	4 (8%)
	Corporate	21 (42%)
	Financial	3 (6%)
	Healthcare	5 (10%)
	Government	2 (4%)
	Education	7 (14%)
	Others	8 (16%)
Marital status	Unmarried	38 (38%)
	Married	8 (8%)
	Divorced/ Separated	4 (4%)
Note(s): N = 50		

Table 2 - Score Ranges, Means, And Standard Deviations

Spirituality	Mean	140.34
	Standard Deviation	30.036
	Range	122
Anxiety	Mean	24.02
	Standard Deviation	7.844
	Range	28
Stress	Mean	21.26
	Standard Deviation	7.222
	Range	27
Note(s): N = 50		

Table 3 - Pearson Correlation

	Spirituality	Anxiety	Stress
Spirituality	1		
Anxiety	-0.269	1	
Stress	-0.510**	0.286*	1

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

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

Table 4 - Linear Regression: Spirituality as a predictor of reduced anxiety levels

<i>Beta Coefficient</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
-0.269	0.073	3.757	0.058

Table 5 - Linear Regression: Spirituality as a predictor of reduced stress levels

<i>Beta Coefficient</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
0.510	0.260	16.846	0.00