

Research Paper

The Role of Spirituality in Reducing Loneliness Among Generation Z

Ms. Anshika Jain^{1*}, Dr. Shivani Tomar²

ABSTRACT

Spirituality has long been recognized as a key component of emotional well-being and mental health. This research explores how spiritual practices influence mental health outcomes, focusing specifically on reducing loneliness among Generation Z (Gen Z). With loneliness and mental health challenges becoming increasingly prevalent in this group, spirituality is investigated as a potential coping mechanism to promote emotional wellness. The study employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with n=4 Gen Z participants. Open-ended questions are used to gather detailed insights, and thematic analysis and sentiment analysis is conducted to identify recurring patterns related to community involvement, spiritual rituals, and personal growth. The findings aim to highlight the role of spirituality in fostering psychological well-being and reducing feelings of loneliness.

Keywords: Coping Mechanisms, Generation Z, Loneliness, Mental Health, Spirituality, Well-being

In recent years, researchers investigating the connection between spiritual activities and mental wellness have gained attention from studies seeking practical ways to improve young people's emotional wellness. As a major problem among Generation Z (Gen Z), loneliness has the potential to have a profound impact on both individual and societal well-being. This study explored the potential of spirituality as a means of reducing feelings of loneliness among members of Generation Z, focusing on the effects of participation in spiritual practices, community activities, spiritual practices, and personal development.

Generation Z is the youngest generation to reach adulthood, and its definition varies widely across studies. Gen Z is sometimes known as "iGen" (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). However, the Pew Research Center (2019) and other researchers usually identify Generation Z as people born between 1997 and 2012. This classification is based on the significant historical, technological, and economic events that influence their lives. Unlike Millennials who grew up amid the development of the Internet, Generation Z has been engaged in digital technology since childhood, shaping their social habits, coping methods, and spiritual engagement. As of 2024, individuals belonging to Gen Z are between 12 and 27 years old,

¹Research Scholar, Sharda School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida- Uttar Pradesh, India

²Assistant Professor, Sharda School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida- Uttar Pradesh, India

*Corresponding Author

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but this study focuses on those aged 18 to 25 years (born between 1997 and 2006), ensuring a sample of young adults who can provide informed perspectives on spirituality and loneliness. This age range aligns with previous research that examined digital engagement and social behaviors among young adults (Twenge, 2017).

Spirituality, defined as a connection to something larger than oneself and a desire for meaning and purpose in life, has been linked to better mental health outcomes (Baldacchino 2017) first McCarroll, O'Connor, and Meakes (2005) stated that the meaning of spirituality has developed and expanded over time, with various interpretations existing alongside each other. Previous research has shown that engaging in spiritual practices, such as mindfulness meditation, religious engagement, and acts of altruism can improve self-awareness, emotional stability, and social cooperation (Iwamoto et al., 2020). Research suggests that group religious or spiritual activities can help reduce social isolation, especially among the elderly (Sebastião & Mirda, 2021). While these data indicate that spirituality can improve social well-being, research relating spirituality to loneliness reduction in Generation Z is limited.

Despite a growing body of literature on spirituality and mental health, existing research has largely focused on older adults rather than on Generation Z (Pitman et al., 2018). This overlook emphasizes the importance of investigating the unique issues that Generation Z faces as well as how spirituality can serve as a coping method for loneliness. While earlier research has examined the mental health advantages of spirituality, none have directly addressed its direct function in preventing loneliness among young adults. Community-based activities, technology-driven solutions, and acts of kindness, all of which can be incorporated into spiritual practices, have been suggested as potential interventions for loneliness. However, further research is needed to determine their effectiveness in Gen Z's unique digital and social landscapes.

Loneliness is a subjective, negative emotional state arising from a perceived discrepancy between desired and actual social connections. It's a feeling of being alone, separated, or apart from others, distinct from objective social isolation (the number of social contacts). Essentially, it's the distress experienced when one's social needs are not met. Deberard and Kleinknecht (1995) found that in college students, both the intensity and duration of loneliness correlated with psychological and physical stress symptoms, but duration was the stronger predictor.

According to Maes, Vanhalst, and Qualter (2020), extended loneliness has a detrimental effect on academic performance and health, but childhood loneliness is frequently temporary and adaptive. They pinpoint peer, family, and personal issues and recommend interventions including stigma reduction and social skills training. According to Peplau (2022), loneliness can be social, stemming from the absence of friends or a sense of belonging, or emotional, stemming from the absence of a deep, personal relationship.

Furthermore, community-based activities, technology-driven solutions, and acts of kindness, all of which can be integrated into spiritual practices, have been proposed as potential therapies for loneliness. However, further research is required to establish their efficacy in Gen Z's distinct digital and social environments. Unlike previous generations, who focused on in-person religious traditions, Generation Z incorporated digital spirituality into their daily lives. The rise of meditation apps, YouTube-guided mindfulness sessions, and virtual church services suggests that spiritual engagement has evolved in response to technological

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advancement. However, it is unknown how traditional and modern spiritual activities promote loneliness reduction in Generation Z. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with Gen Z participants to explore their spiritual engagement, experiences of loneliness, and perceptions of well-being.

Although this study emphasizes the importance of spirituality in preventing loneliness among Generation Z individuals, some limitations must be addressed in future research. The limited sample size is a significant restriction as it limits the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Furthermore, this study makes no distinction between the effects of digital and traditional spirituality, making it difficult to determine how different types of spiritual engagement influence loneliness. Another gap is the lack of long-term research, as this study did not investigate the long-term effects of spiritual practices on loneliness. Furthermore, the impact of cultural and religious diversity in determining the relationship between spirituality and loneliness is unknown, demanding additional research on how various spiritual beliefs affect emotional well-being.

The findings will help advance our understanding of the long-term impact of spiritual engagement on emotional resilience and shape future interventions and wellness initiatives customized to Gen Z. This study intends to provide a complete perspective on how Generation Z might use spirituality to increase social connectivity and emotional well-being, by investigating both traditional and modern spiritual activities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the existing research on spirituality, mental health, and Generation Z. It begins by exploring various definitions and conceptualizations of spirituality within the context of mental health research, highlighting the multifaceted nature of spiritual experiences and beliefs. The review then delves into the characteristics and challenges specific to Generation Z and examines the factors that may contribute to their heightened vulnerability to loneliness and mental health issues.

Spirituality has been extensively studied in psychological and sociocultural studies as a predictor of mental health, emotional resilience, and social connectedness. Some researchers say that spirituality is difficult to define because of its subjective nature and multiple interpretations (Taggart, 2001). Others argue that spirituality is substantive, involving sacred or divine elements, or functional, focused on how it affects people's sense of meaning and purpose in life (Moberg, 2002). Spiritual engagement has been connected to coping methods for emotional distress, with research indicating that it is critical for promoting psychological well-being (Neck & Milliman, 1994; Vaill, 1996).

Higher spirituality decreased loneliness, depression, and anxiety in Blackfoot American Indian people, with the effects partially mediated by decreased loneliness, according to Henders on-Matthews et al. (2025). Bradley (2022) discusses loneliness, social isolation, and solitude in community contexts, emphasizing non-medical support approaches and suggesting community-based solutions.

The mental health advantages of spirituality have also been thoroughly investigated. Koenig and Carey (2024) cautioned that some research exaggerated the link between spirituality and mental well-being due to methodological biases but agreed that genuine spiritual engagement promotes emotional resilience. Similarly, Miura et al. (2024) distinguished between social isolation and perceived loneliness, and highlighted that loneliness does not

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always imply physical seclusion. This observation is especially pertinent for Generation Z, who may actively participate in online spiritual communities while still feeling lonely, emphasizing the necessity for research on the usefulness of digital spirituality. Barber (2018) explores the connection between loneliness and mental ill health, noting its growing public attention, and suggests ways nurses can support individuals experiencing loneliness.

Chmiel (2024) found that among Gen Z PR professionals, non-territorial offices reduced loneliness, while hot-desking and open plans lowered job satisfaction. Flexible work affected loneliness and satisfaction but not overall well-being, and extremes in meeting formats reduced satisfaction. Around 30% showed depressive symptoms, with a significant other offering protection, highlighting the role of workplace design and social connections in mitigating isolation.

Spiritual disciplines, including yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, have been shown to alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression (Barua, 2024). Breath control, mindful movements, and present-moment awareness have been shown to increase emotional stability and self-regulation, making them viable coping methods for loneliness. Hayvon (2024) investigated the impact of digital platforms on trauma rehabilitation and discovered that virtual participation promotes a sense of belonging and social connections. This shows that digital spirituality such as virtual meditation groups, online religious services, and prayer networks may provide comparable psychological advantages.

Bessaha et al. (2023) found that loneliness leads to higher psychological distress, and that strong social support networks reduce mental health risks. Their findings support the hypothesis that spiritual communities, both religious and secular, act as emotional support networks for young adults who are lonely. Similarly, Trang et al. (2023) investigated how loneliness and the need for connection influence Generation Z's online self-presentation for job-seeking, implying that social media activity can serve as an indirect coping mechanism. These findings highlight the necessity of understanding how digital interaction, both secular and spiritual, influences the emotions of isolation.

Further research should focus on the interaction between spirituality and mental health therapies. According to Vieten et al. (2023), the majority of mental health professionals advocate including spirituality in therapy because they recognize its function in alleviating loneliness and misery. Lucchetti et al. (2021) reviewed the association between spirituality, religiousness, and mental health, and concluded that spiritual engagement is consistently associated with reduced levels of sadness, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

Arslan and Yıldırım (2021) discovered that spiritual well-being reduces pandemic-related stress, confirming the idea that spirituality acts as a buffer against loneliness and uncertainty. Overall, research has indicated that spirituality plays an important role in emotional resilience, mental health, and social connections. Whether through traditional religious involvement, digital spiritual networks, or mindfulness practices, spirituality appears to provide coping mechanisms for loneliness, especially among Generation Z. However, further study is needed to separate the long-term effects of spiritual participation and determine whether digital and traditional spiritual practices promote social connectedness in comparable ways.

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METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the role of spirituality in promoting emotional well-being among Generation Z.
2. To explore the connections between spiritual practices such as community involvement, rituals, and personal reflection and reduced feelings of loneliness.
3. To analyze participants' personal experiences with spirituality through qualitative interviews.
4. To understand how spirituality functions as a coping mechanism for mental health challenges outside conventional clinical or therapeutic settings.

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach using case studies to explore the role of spirituality in reducing loneliness among Generation Z. This approach enables a detailed examination of how individuals perceive and experience spirituality as a mechanism for coping with loneliness. This study sought to understand the influence of spiritual practices, community involvement, and personal growth on the emotional well-being of young adults in the digital age.

Tools and Tests

The interview schedule comprised ten major open-ended questions that explored themes related to spirituality, loneliness, and emotional well-being.

The interview questions covered three broad themes:

- Spiritual Engagement and Practices
- Impacts on Loneliness and Well-being.
- Community and Social Connection through Spirituality
- Spirituality as a Coping Mechanism for Isolation

Sample

Participants in this study were n= 4 Generation Z persons aged 18 to 25 years, chosen using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in spiritual views and practices. The inclusion criteria required individuals to self-identify as spiritually active and have experienced emotions of loneliness at some point in their lives.

Procedure

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews that allowed in-depth conversations about spirituality, loneliness, and emotional well-being. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and were performed over the phone to ensure participants' accessibility and convenience.

Data Analysis

This study used a qualitative synthesis to uncover patterns and narratives about spirituality, loneliness, and emotional well-being. Rather than employing organized thematic

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classification, participants' responses were analysed holistically to capture shared experiences and variances in spiritual engagement.

Discussions were divided into three categories: narratives related to spirituality, loneliness, and emotional coping techniques. Additionally, sentiment analysis evaluated the emotional tone of the responses, categorizing them as good, negative, or neutral, to see how spirituality influenced participants' emotional states. This study, which combines qualitative synthesis and sentiment analysis, provides complete knowledge of how spirituality promotes emotional resilience and social connectivity among Generation Z.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Understanding Spirituality

How would you describe your understanding of spirituality? Participants described spirituality as a deeply personal and transformative experience. For some, it offered inner peace and guidance. Ms. Surana called it "a reset button for my mind," emphasizing its power to bring clarity and focus (Surana, personal communication, March 2024).

Mr. Kumar viewed it as a vital aspect of life: *"It is one of the important aspects of life which completes a human being."* (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024). Meanwhile, Mr. Das perceived spirituality as a continuous journey of learning. *"There are a lot more things to know and understand about spirituality."* (Das, personal communication, March 2024).

These responses align with previous research indicating that spirituality is often regarded as a pathway to self-awareness and emotional stability (Koenig, 2018).

Personal Experiences with Spiritual Practices

Can you share your personal experiences with spiritual practices or beliefs?

Participants practiced a variety of spiritual practices, including temple visits, meditation, and chanting, to build inner serenity. Ms. Jain said she finds peace in chanting and meditation:

"Engaging in practices like chanting and meditation is my way of finding peace. These activities help clear my mind and promote relaxation." (Jain, personal communication, March 2024). Similarly, Mr. Kumar emphasized the significance of religious rituals, stating: *"Being a Hindu, regular visits to temples and praying help a lot."* (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024). Mr. Das found that reciting the Hanuman Chalisa instilled discipline and emotional strength. These insights echo Pargament's (2007) findings on how spiritual engagement offers direction and purpose.

Spirituality and Emotional Well-Being

In what ways, if any, do you feel your spiritual beliefs or practices impact your emotional well-being?

Participants described spirituality as a soothing force that helps regulate emotions. Ms. Jain shared:

"Spirituality helps me calm down, clear my thoughts, and feel at peace. It keeps my emotions in check and helps me think in a way that's good for my growth." (Jain, personal communication, March 2024). Similarly, Mr. Kumar found that spirituality aided his ability to stay composed: *"It helps in keeping my mind calm and composed in difficult times."* (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024).

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These reflections align with studies showing that spirituality is associated with lower stress levels and enhanced emotional resilience (Gall & Guirguis-Younger, 2013).

Loneliness and the Role of Spirituality

How would you describe your experiences with loneliness?

Participants described loneliness as a common yet difficult experience. Mr. Das called loneliness "the worst thing in the world," but he distinguished it from solitude, which he considered vital for self-reflection (Das, personal communication, March 2024). Ms. Jain observed that loneliness can occur even in gregarious settings:

"Loneliness can hit randomly, even when I'm around people. Sometimes it's just a passing feeling, other times it sticks around." (Jain, personal communication, March 2024).

These responses align with existing literature that suggests loneliness is not merely about physical isolation but also about the perceived absence of meaningful connections (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018).

Spirituality as a Coping Mechanism for Loneliness

Have you noticed any connection between your spiritual practices and feelings of loneliness?

Many participants believed that spirituality helped **alleviate loneliness**. Mr. Kumar observed a direct link between spiritual engagement and reduced loneliness:

"If a person is spiritual, there is less chance of them feeling lonely." (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024). Similarly, Ms. Jain found that spiritual practices lessened the intensity of loneliness:

"When I focus on my spiritual practices, my feelings of loneliness don't hit as hard. It helps me feel connected to myself, to something bigger, and even to the present moment." (Jain, personal communication, March 2024).

These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation give people with a sense of connection beyond their immediate surroundings (Hill & Pargament, 2003).

Spiritual Rituals for Overcoming Loneliness

Can you describe any spiritual rituals or practices that you find particularly helpful in combating feelings of loneliness?

Participants identified specific rituals that provided comfort during periods of loneliness. Ms. Jain shared that chanting and meditation were particularly helpful:

"Chanting gives me a sense of rhythm and focus, almost like I'm tuning into something bigger than myself. Meditation helps clear my mind and makes me feel more at peace with being alone." (Jain, personal communication, March 2024). Mr. Das noted that the Hanuman Chalisa strengthened his emotional resilience. These findings **reinforce** Levin's

(2020) research on spiritual practices as emotional grounding tools.

Social Connection Through Spiritual Communities

How does your involvement in spiritual communities or groups affect your sense of connection with others?

Participants understood the value of spiritual communities for fostering social belonging. Mr. Kumar discovered that interacting with like-minded people increased his sense of

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belonging: *"It helps in sharing your thoughts with like-minded people."* (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024). Mr. Das also highlighted the social benefits of spiritual involvement: *"My last trip to Kashi helped me make new friends and overcome my fear of going to new places."* (Das, personal communication, March 2024).

According to research, religious and spiritual communities can provide essential emotional support and connections.

Spirituality and Personal Growth

In what ways, if any, has your spirituality contributed to your personal growth?

Participants reported on how faith influenced their personal growth. According to Mr. Kumar, spirituality plays an important part in motivation. *"Feeling a sense of connection with God keeps me motivated to be better than yesterday."* (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024).

Ms. Jain observed that spirituality enhances patience and awareness, consistent with research on spiritual development (Pargament, 2007).

Sentiment Analysis Overview

A sentiment analysis was used to better comprehend the emotional tone of the participants' comments. The data show that the majority of answers were positive, with significant themes including tranquillity, resilience, and personal progress. Some comments were neutral, noting both obstacles and coping techniques, while a few expressed negative attitudes, primarily connected to feelings of loneliness and sadness.

Positive Sentiment: Spirituality as a Source of Peace and Growth

A significant portion of the responses reflected positive emotions, highlighting spirituality as a means of emotional regulation, motivation, and connection. Many participants described spirituality as a tool for inner peace and mental clarity, helping them navigate life's difficulties.

Mr. Kumar emphasized the calming effect of spirituality, stating, *"It helps in keeping my mind calm and composed in difficult times."* Similarly, Ms. Jain described spirituality as a reset button, helping her gain clarity and balance: *"Spirituality helps me find peace, clear my thoughts, and focus on what truly matters."*

Mr. Das described the importance of spiritual practices in fostering resilience: *"Whenever I feel overwhelmed, spiritual practices like meditation allow me to reset and gain clarity."* Ms. Jain also shared that chanting and meditation help her maintain a stable emotional state: *"Chanting gives me a sense of rhythm and focus, almost like I'm tuning into something bigger than myself."*

Participants linked spirituality with self-improvement. Mr. Kumar noted that spirituality provides continuous motivation: *"Feeling a sense of connection with God keeps me motivated to be better than yesterday."* Similarly, Mr. Das mentioned that spirituality helps build confidence and enables him to embrace solitude: *"Boosts my confidence and helps in solitude."*

These responses indicate that spirituality serves as a positive psychological resource, fostering emotional resilience, motivation, and self-awareness.

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Neutral Sentiment: Acknowledgment of Life's Challenges

Some responses displayed a neutral tone, acknowledging both the struggles of loneliness and the role of spirituality in managing them. Participants recognized that loneliness is a natural part of life, and spirituality provides one of many ways to cope. Mr. Kumar accepted loneliness as an inevitable aspect of life, stating: *"There are ups and downs in life, and loneliness is just another part where being spiritual helps a lot."* Ms. Jain similarly acknowledged the unpredictable nature of loneliness: *"Loneliness can hit randomly, even when I'm around people."*

Mr. Kumar noted that spiritual coping mechanisms may differ from person to person: *"It must depend person to person on how they deal with loneliness."* Ms. Jain also emphasized that everyone has unique ways of coping: *"At the end of the day, everyone has their own way of dealing with loneliness this just happens to work best for me."* These responses indicate an acceptance of loneliness as a shared human experience, with spirituality serving as one possible approach to managing it.

Negative Sentiment: Loneliness and Emotional Struggles

While the majority of replies were favourable or neutral, some expressed negative emotions, including loneliness and feelings of detachment. Even in these circumstances, participants frequently mentioned how spirituality eventually helped them overcome their difficulties.

Mr. Das described loneliness as deeply distressing, stating: *"Loneliness is the worst thing in the world, but solitude is what we need to learn."* Ms. Jain also recalled moments of deep emotional isolation: *"I remember feeling completely alone, like no one truly understands me."* Some participants provided examples of how spirituality helped them navigate difficult times. Mr. Kumar shared that he turned to spirituality after facing academic failure: *"I failed an important exam, but during that difficult time, my devotional practices helped me succeed in subsequent exams."* Mr. Das described how a spiritual journey helped him combat social anxiety: *"My last trip to Kashi helped me overcome my fear of going to new places and making friends."*

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the importance of spirituality in reducing loneliness and improving emotional well-being among Generation Z. Participants in qualitative interviews stated that spiritual activities, such as meditation, chanting, prayer, and community involvement, gave them a sense of connection, emotional resilience, and inner harmony. Many claimed that spirituality helped them cope with loneliness by increasing their self-awareness and sense of purpose. Jain expressed, *"Whenever I meditate, I feel a deep sense of peace, and loneliness doesn't affect me as much"* (Jain, personal communication, March 2024). Similarly, Kumar noted, *"Going to the temple or being part of a spiritual group makes me feel that I am not alone"* (Kumar, personal communication, March 2024). These findings are consistent with those of previous research indicating that spiritual engagement can improve mental health by lowering stress, encouraging mindfulness, and improving emotional stability. Additionally, the study highlights the diverse ways in which Gen Z engages with spirituality. While some participants practiced traditional religious spirituality, others relied on modern, digital spirituality, such as meditation apps, online religious services, and virtual spiritual communities. Das shared, *"I find comfort in listening to guided meditations online, especially when I feel disconnected"* (Das, personal communication, March 2024), reinforcing the idea that digital spirituality may serve as an alternative to traditional practices in fostering social and emotional well-being.

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Furthermore, spirituality was discovered to serve a dual purpose: as a personal introspective practice and a method of social connection. Participants who participated in spiritual communities or religious meetings reported that their experiences made them feel less alienated and supported. Individual spirituality practitioners such as meditation or prayer highlighted the need for self-soothing and emotional clarity. However, the survey also highlighted differences in how people perceive spirituality, with some relying on traditional religious activities and others adopting new, digital forms of spiritual involvement, such as apps and virtual groups.

Despite these findings, this study has some limitations, such as the small sample size and lack of longitudinal data on the long-term impact of spirituality on loneliness. Future studies could build on these findings by using larger, more diverse populations and by evaluating the impact of traditional and digital spirituality. Furthermore, investigating cultural and religious disparities in spiritual participation may provide more insights into how spirituality influences emotional well-being across many backgrounds. Understanding these differences is critical for developing comprehensive mental health interventions that incorporate spirituality as a tool for emotional resilience and social connections.

Future Implications

The findings of this study have significant significance for mental health practitioners, educators, and spiritual leaders. Understanding how spirituality promotes emotional well-being allows intervention designers to incorporate spiritual practices into mental health programs and community support. Furthermore, organizations that serve young adults should explore creating spiritually inclusive environments to enhance emotional resilience and social connections. Spirituality is used as a tool for assessing emotional resilience and social connections.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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