

Research Paper

## The Role of Contemporary Micro-Spirituality in Enhancing Self Soothing Skills among Gen-Z Learners

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### ABSTRACT

Contemporary micro-spirituality has become a common practice among young individuals as a way to manage everyday emotional stress. The present study aims to explore how micro-spiritual practices are used for self-soothing during emotional distress. A qualitative research design was adopted using an interpretative-constructivist approach. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals who engage in practices such as affirmations, manifestation, meditation, tarot, and prayer. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Four major themes were identified: (1) Emotional Distress and Triggers, (2) Types and Meaning, (3) Practice Effect, and (4) Influencing Factors. The findings suggest that micro-spirituality acts as a simple and accessible self-soothing strategy, helping individuals reduce stress, regulate emotions, and gain a sense of comfort in daily life.

**Keywords:** Contemporary micro-spirituality, Emotional Distress, self-soothing, Gen-z, Coping strategy

Mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and emotional instability are increasing in everyday life. Individuals are constantly searching for simple and effective ways to manage their emotions. One such emerging approach is contemporary micro-spirituality, which includes small and personal spiritual practices used in daily life. Studies have shown that such personalized spiritual practices can provide individuals with a sense of control, comfort, and emotional stability Shirodker, A. G. (2025)

Micro-spirituality includes activities such as affirmations, manifestation, meditation, tarot reading, and simple prayers. Many people, particularly younger generations, are increasingly turning towards these practices as a form of self-soothing. Activities like listening to subliminal, practicing gratitude, engaging in water rituals, or seeking guidance through tarot cards help individuals calm their minds, regulate emotions, and find inner peace. These practices often serve as immediate coping tools that provide psychological relief without

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requiring external support. These practices are flexible and do not follow strict rules, making them easy to use in everyday situations. Many individuals use these practices as a way to calm themselves during emotional distress.

Previous research has shown that spirituality plays an important role in coping and emotional well-being. However, most studies focus on general spirituality, and there is limited research on how small daily practices are used for self-soothing. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the role of contemporary micro-spirituality in self-soothing by examining individuals' lived experiences, emotional triggers, types of practices used, their perceived effects, and the factors influencing their engagement in such practices.

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

#### ***Self-soothing***

Psychodynamic Perspective-Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theory connects self-soothing to early developmental stages. He proposed that thumb-sucking is an oral comfort behaviour rooted in the oral stage, where the mouth is the primary source of pleasure and tension reduction. Later psychodynamic theories, such as ego psychology, suggest these early habits can evolve into either mature coping mechanisms or compulsive behaviours in adulthood, like nail-biting or pen-chewing.

Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby, is another psychological theory on self-soothing behaviour. This theory suggests that our earliest relationships with caregivers shape our ability to regulate emotions. This means that if a caregiver is consistently responsive to an infant's needs, the child will develop a secure attachment and learn to manage distress properly. However, when care is inconsistent or unavailable, an infant grows into a child who relies on unhealthy self-soothing behaviours like thumb-sucking to cope with the resulting stress and anxiety.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### ***Review of literature related to contemporary micro spirituality***

Park (scoping / qualitative synthesis) examined digital methods for spiritual and mental-health care among Gen Z and found that Gen Z defines spirituality as autonomous, inclusive, and often "unbundled" from formal religion; many prefer spiritual practices delivered through digital formats (apps, short videos) that support everyday coping and mental-health routines. Large-scale survey evidence cited in the review reported high self-identification with spirituality among Gen Z (e.g., ~77% reporting themselves as spiritual), underlining the generation's strong interest in spiritual meaning even where institutional religiosity declines. Missier et al. (MDPI, 2025) conducted 64 in-depth interviews with Gen Y and Gen Z participants in Mumbai to study digital religious influence. Using qualitative thematic analysis, the study reported that digital religious content (influencers, short affective clips) reshapes epistemic authority (who is trusted), produces hybrid social imaginaries, and sometimes fosters selective religious commitment rather than full institutional adherence. Although situated in India, its methodology and findings about digital mediation of faith have broader relevance for Gen Z globally.

Nagabharana et al. (2021) investigated stressors and coping among urban Indian adolescents; self-soothing (prayer, music, routines, relaxation) was treated as one class of coping responses. The investigator adopted a qualitative interview and focus-group method. Purposive sampling of school students was used. The sample included adolescents from

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Mysore schools (N reported in the article). An interview guide was used and content validity procedures were described. Thematic manual analysis identified prayer, family rituals, devotional music and digital distractions as commonly used self-soothing strategies. The study concluded that culturally rooted and modern self-soothing methods co-exist among Indian adolescents.

### ***Review of literature related to self-soothing***

Dundas et al. (2020) examined mindfulness practices as self-soothing strategies among adults undergoing behavioural change. Self-soothing was operationalized as mindful breathing and present-moment awareness used to regulate emotions. The investigator adopted a qualitative interview method. Purposive sampling was used. The sample consisted of adult participants enrolled in a mindfulness program. A semi-structured interview schedule was used. Thematic analysis was applied. Results showed that mindfulness techniques were used for immediate calming and long-term emotional regulation. The study concluded that mindfulness-based practices function as effective self-soothing strategies.

Salihi et al. (2022) investigated meditation as a self-soothing practice among adolescents with chronic illness. Self-soothing was defined as intentional calming practices to manage emotional discomfort. The investigator adopted a qualitative interview design. Purposive sampling was used. The sample consisted of adolescents with chronic medical conditions. A semi-structured interview guide was used. Thematic analysis revealed that meditation improved emotional calmness and coping. The study concluded that meditation supports self-soothing in adolescents with health challenges.

Nagabharana et al. (2021) investigated stress and coping among Indian adolescents. Self-soothing was defined as calming behaviours such as prayer, music and relaxation. The investigator adopted a qualitative interview method. Purposive sampling was used. The sample consisted of Indian adolescents. An interview guide was used. Thematic analysis revealed frequent use of prayer and music for emotional relief. The study concluded that self-soothing strategies are culturally influenced in Indian adolescents

### ***Objectives of the Study***

1. To examine how gen-z do learners describe the role of micro-spirituality practices in managing emotional distress?
2. To examine what the personal meaning attaches to contemporary micro-spirituality practices (universal belief, tarot cards, subliminal, law of attraction etc.)
3. To examine the long-term impact of these practices on emotional well-being?
4. To examine how self-soothing experienced and constructed through these practices?

### ***Need and Significance***

The need for this study arises from the increasing emotional stress among young individuals and the growing use of micro-spiritual practices like affirmations, manifestation, and meditation for self-soothing. Despite their popularity, these practices are not widely studied in research.

The significance of the study lies in understanding how micro-spirituality helps in emotional regulation and everyday coping. It provides insight into modern, personalized coping strategies and can be useful for mental health professionals in supporting individuals effectively.

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## METHODOLOGY

### *Study Design*

The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design within an interpretivist - Constructivist paradigm to explore how contemporary micro-spiritual practices are used for self-soothing during emotional distress. Inclusion criteria selected young individuals belonging to the Gen Z age group who actively engage in micro-spiritual practices such as affirmations, manifestation, meditation, tarot, and prayer.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30–40 minutes, conducted via online platforms such as Zoom or audio phone calls. The sample consisted of 15 Gen Z participants who regularly engage in micro-spiritual practices. Non-probability purposive and normative sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were marked using initials. Basic demographic details such as age, gender, education, occupation, and frequency of practice were recorded.

### *Data Analysis*

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was applied. Audio was transcribed, verbatim entered into MAXQDA, manually coded, and similar codes combined to form themes.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethics included informed consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw, debriefing, and voluntary participation. Participants gave consent for audio recording to ensure accurate transcription and were informed of their right to exit the study without consequences.

## RESULTS

The study included 15 Gen Z participants who actively engage in micro-spiritual practices for self-soothing. The participants varied in terms of educational and Age backgrounds. Analysis yielded four themes: (1) Emotional distress and trigger, (2) types and meaning, (3) Practice effect, and (4) Influencing factors.

*Table 1 Themes, sub-themes and codes of the study*

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
<b>Emotional distress and triggers</b>	Loneliness and Isolation	Alone in every stage, difficulty forming connection
	Academic and Work stress	Performance anxiety, conference and assignment stress, leadership stress
	Interpersonal Difficulties	Family health issue, interpersonal conflicts
	Emotional Overload	Mentally overload, Emotionally drained, Low mood
<b>Types and meaning</b>	Belief systems	Affirmation prayer, universe belief, symbolic object belief.
	Meaning	Faith in universe, ms as personal

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		enjoyment.
	Beliefs in universal guidance	makes strong, faith on external thing, gives solution to life
<b>Practice effect</b>	Future and Alternating coping	Future aspiration, sleep as stress coping, creative multiple coping
	Personal and Social Outcomes	become mature, Interpersonal understanding, self-awareness on environment
	Cognitive reframing	improve focus, gratitude response, positive self-reflection
	Emotional and behavioral regulations	self-grounding, reduced emotional reactivity
<b>Influencing factor</b>	Interpersonal dynamics	Relationship harmony desire, lack of social support, not depending others
	Social influence	Movie influence Social media platform, inspiration from books

### ***Emotional distress and triggers***

This theme describes the different emotional challenges experienced by participants in their daily lives. Participants reported feeling psychological distress due to personal, academic, and social pressures. These emotional triggers often affected their mood, relationships, and overall well-being. Over time, this pressure contributed to increased emotional distress and mental fatigue.

**Loneliness and Isolation-**Participants reported feeling alone during difficult phases of life and experiencing a sense of isolation even when surrounded by others. Many expressed that they struggled to form meaningful connections with people. This feeling of being alone at every stage increased their emotional distress. Difficulty in expressing emotions and lack of support further strengthened their sense of isolation.

*‘Sometimes I can’t tell anyone how I feel... I feel somehow or somewhere, I can share with someone whom I can trust more... without sharing anything I feel so heavy inside me’*

**Academic and Work stress-**Participants frequently described experiencing stress related to academic and work responsibilities. Performance anxiety, conference presentations, and assignment deadlines were common sources of pressure. Some participants also reported stress related to leadership roles and expectations placed upon them. These academic and professional demands created feelings of tension and worry.

*‘I was preparing for one conference and also my college is giving so much assignments... the time management thing is difficult for me’*

**Interpersonal Difficulties-**Participants highlighted that interpersonal conflicts were another source of emotional distress. Family health issues and misunderstandings with others often

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created tension in relationships. These conflicts resulted in emotional discomfort and stress. Participants expressed that such interpersonal challenges affected their peace of mind. As a result, relationship difficulties became an important emotional trigger in their lives.

*'My parents are regularly fighting... that situation we are emotionally broken.'*

**Emotional Overload**-Feeling mentally and emotionally overwhelmed due to multiple stressors. They described experiences of feeling mentally overloaded and emotionally drained. Continuous stress from different areas of life contributed to periods of low mood. Some participants found it difficult to manage their emotions during such times.

### *Types and meaning*

**Belief systems**-Participants described different belief systems that shaped their engagement with micro-spiritual practices. Many reported practicing affirmations, prayers, and believing in the power of the universe. Some participants also used symbolic objects that represented hope or protection. These beliefs provided a sense of comfort and reassurance during stressful situations. As a result, belief systems played an important role in supporting their emotional well-being.

*'Whenever I see repeated numbers like 1111, 222, 255 any repetitive numbers, I used to make a wish and whenever I drink water I used to have thoughts in my mind which I wish to happen in real life. So, these are some manifestations which I practice'*

**Meaning**-Participants explained that micro-spirituality held personal meaning in their everyday lives. Many described having faith in the universe and viewing these practices as a source of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Some participants felt that engaging in such practices made them mentally stronger. These practices also helped them interpret life situations more positively. Overall, participants viewed micro-spirituality as a meaningful personal experience.

*'I feel that you are never alone... the universe is listening to you.'*

**Beliefs in universal guidance**-Several participants expressed the belief that a universal force or external power guides their life. They felt that trusting this guidance helped them cope with uncertainties and challenges. Participants believed that faith in external forces provided solutions during difficult moments. This belief also encouraged hope and optimism in stressful situations. Therefore, universal guidance was perceived as a supportive psychological resource.

*'These practical I just one thing to share. We are just trusting the process of universe. Because the trust universe will I think universe will never faith our thought. If it is your means, if it is yours, that's come back for you. If it is not your means, you just try. Of course, you are trying will give you a solution of your life.'*

### *Practice effect*

**Future and alternating coping**-Participants explained that micro-spiritual practices helped them cope with stress and uncertainty about the future. Some described focusing on their future aspirations as a motivational factor. Others mentioned using sleep or relaxation as a way to reduce stress. Creative and multiple coping strategies were also reported. These approaches helped participants manage challenges more effectively.

*'Before I joined this college, I just prayed for it. I was going with the boldness that I would get a job. Just like that, I got a job in the first cut-off. At that point, I was confident that I would get a job. I was going with the boldness that I would get a job. Just like that, I got a*

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*job. I never thought that I would not get a job. I was going with the confidence that I would get a job.'*

**Personal and Social Outcomes**-Participants reported several positive personal and social outcomes from engaging in these practices. Many felt that they became more mature and emotionally balanced. They also developed better interpersonal understanding in their relationships. Increased self-awareness about their environment and emotions was commonly reported. These outcomes contributed to personal growth and improved social interactions.

*'these kind of practices actually influences my trust by actually like by increasing the trust in myself ma'am. Like when I'm able to pass and I am able to like ground myself then I and when I'm able to regulate my emotions during stressful situations it automatically reinforces the belief inside of me that I can handle difficult moments without falling apart completely like that. Eventually it helps me to build self-trust over time and when it comes to inner strength these kind of practices actually don't make problems disappear totally but they actually help me to face challenges with more emotional stability.'*

**Cognitive reframing**-Participants described that micro-spiritual practices helped them change the way they think about stressful situations. They reported improved focus and the ability to reflect on their thoughts more positively. Some participants also mentioned practicing gratitude regularly. Positive self-reflection helped them reinterpret challenges in a constructive way. This process helped them develop a healthier cognitive perspective.

*'Instead of blaming myself... I think something good is on the way'*

**Emotional and behavioral regulations**-Participants reported that engaging in micro-spiritual practices helped them regulate their emotions and behaviour's. Many described feeling more grounded and calm during stressful situations. These practices reduced their emotional reactivity and helped them respond more thoughtfully. Participants also experienced better emotional control in daily life. As a result, these practices supported emotional stability and behavioural balance.

*' I will get it so it feels like I'm doing something to get towards my goal listening to the subliminal also helps me calm down and if it is a subliminal for solving my problems I will feel calm and I can feel my anxiety going down if I'm crying or if I feel really sad if I listen to a subliminal for you know problem solving or mental health it does help me calm down and persist in the desired reality then this builds up self-confidence or inner strength in yourself yes especially if I'm using a subliminal or manifestation to build my self-image and try to build my confidence it does help me'*

### ***Influencing factor***

Participants reported that both interpersonal experiences and social influences shaped their interest in these practices. Personal relationship experiences and lack of support sometimes motivated them to seek alternative coping strategies. In addition, exposure through media and books also played an important role in shaping their awareness and engagement with micro-spirituality.

**Interpersonal dynamics**-Those interpersonal experiences significantly influenced their interest in micro-spiritual practices. Many expressed a desire to maintain harmony in their relationships and avoid conflicts with others. Some participants also reported experiencing a lack of social support during difficult situations. Because of this, they preferred relying on

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themselves rather than depending on others for emotional comfort. These interpersonal experiences encouraged them to explore personal coping strategies such as micro-spiritual practices.

*'I can't trust anyone... so I talk to the universe... it makes me more independent.'*

**Social influence**-The role of social influences in shaping their awareness about micro-spiritual practices. Exposure to movies and social media platforms introduced them to different spiritual ideas and practices. Some participants mentioned gaining inspiration from books related to spirituality and personal growth. These sources helped them understand and experiment with different practices. As a result, media and literature played a significant role in influencing their engagement with micro-spirituality.

*'I guess then the major influence is movies or social media yeah sure and also I watched one movie that like I think that plays a major role in me like believing the universe okay can you share about that yeah that is Jeevi Prakash Adiye movie.'*

### DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study is to understand how contemporary micro-spirituality helps in self-soothing, especially during emotional difficulties. The study identified four important themes: Emotional Distress & Triggers, Types & Meaning, Practice Effect, and Influencing Factors. These themes explain how individuals use small, everyday spiritual practices to manage their emotions and feel better.

Emotional Distress & Triggers, participants explained that they often experience stress, anxiety, loneliness, overthinking, and emotional confusion. These feelings usually come from daily problems, relationship issues, or personal struggles. When they feel like this, they look for ways to calm themselves, and that is when they start using micro-spiritual practices. This shows that such practices are used as an immediate response to emotional discomfort. Participants also shared that these practices give them a sense of control during stressful situations. This finding is supported by Pargament, K. I. (1997) which explains that spirituality helps individuals cope with stress by giving emotional support and meaning during difficult times.

In the theme Types & Meaning, participants reported using different practices like Universal beliefs, Law of attraction, affirmations, meditation, journaling, manifestation, tarot reading, and energy-related activities, etc. Each person used these practices in their own way and gave their own meaning to them. Some participants said it gave them hope, some felt peace, and others felt more confident and in control of their life. This shows that micro-spirituality is not fixed or traditional, but very flexible and personal. People choose what works for them and create their own way of practicing spirituality. This finding is similar to Heelas, P. (2008) which states that modern spirituality is more individual-focused, where people build their own beliefs based on personal experience rather than following strict religious rules.

The Practice Effect theme explains how these practices helped participants in their daily life. Many participants said they felt calm, relaxed, and mentally lighter after doing these practices. Some reported reduced stress, less overthinking, and better emotional control. A few participants also said that it helped them think clearly and feel more positive about their problems. These results show that micro-spiritual practices act as a simple self-soothing method that improves emotional well-being. This finding is supported by Shirodker, A. G.

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(2025), which highlights that new age spiritual practices help in improving mental health, emotional balance, and self-awareness.

In Influencing Factors, participants explained that social media, books, and friends played a major role in introducing these practices. Many of them came to know about micro-spirituality through platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or online content. In addition, personal curiosity and the need to feel better also encouraged them to try these practices. This shows that modern spirituality is strongly influenced by digital media and social environment. This finding is supported by Possamai, A. (2005), which explains that new age spirituality spreads widely through media and popular culture in modern society. Thus, the findings of the present study are supported by previous research, showing that micro-spirituality plays an important role in helping individuals manage their emotions and practice self-soothing in everyday life.

### CONCLUSION

This study emphasised the role of contemporary micro spirituality practices act as a simple self-soothing strategy to manage emotional distress. Simple rituals such as universal prayers, affirmations, and meditative prayers enable individuals to modulate their emotional states, diminish stress, and foster a sense of personal control. The findings further illuminate diverse coping mechanisms and suggest directions for future therapeutic applications of micro-spiritual practices in emotional regulation.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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