



A STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH IN RELATION TO SPIRITUALITY AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

In the present age of science and technology science and spirituality are considered to be two distinct entities. When science is materialistic in its attempt, spirituality lacks materialism. It is noteworthy that the more the wonder when the science does the less importance is given to age old spirituality. Is spirituality really a trivial one? And does it not help us to achieve mental peace and harmony? are the research questions. Hence an attempt was made in the present study to find out the relationship between mental health, a state of psychological well being and spirituality. A random sample of 119 students studying senior secondary course in three higher secondary schools in Puducherry was drawn. The mean age of the students was 16 years. Mental health questionnaire developed by Sharma (2002) was used to assess the level of mental health and Spiritual Index Scale (SIS) developed by Mahendran (2012) was used to measure the level of spirituality. Correlation analysis was employed to find out the association between mental health and spirituality. The results showed evidence that spirituality is associated with mental health. Demographic variables such as gender, residence (rural/urban) and type of school were included in the study. The impact of demographic variables on spirituality was tested through t-test.

Key words: mental health, spirituality, gender, residence, school environment



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Introduction

Spirituality is one of the variables that affect the psychological well being of individuals. It develops throughout the human life span, from childhood to old age, and contributes uniquely to the achievement of a satisfactory life. Spirituality plays a significant role in the lives of people, their thoughts, and behaviors. So, recently the study of spirituality is gaining more and more importance.

Even though psychologists have not yet come to consensus about a common definition for spirituality, it is generally accepted that spirituality refers to a set of guiding beliefs, principles or values that give meaning and purpose to life, especially during difficult

times. Spirituality or spiritualism is considered as something abstract, which is concerned with the higher aspect of life. There are some consistent statements about spirituality in dictionaries and encyclopedia- that spirituality is opposition to materialism- that spirituality is concerned with life of soul-that spirituality is the aspiration and intention to unite with what is called god or self or atman.

Spirituality appears to be preventative of mental disorders (Cohen & Koeing, 2004) and it has a positive correlation with life satisfaction, happiness, and higher morale (Moreira-Almeida et.al.,2006). Brady et.al. (1999) reported that spiritual well-being does not only affect one's quality of life, but also the capacity to enjoy life even when dealing with difficult situations such as experiencing harsh illnesses. Also they noted that spiritual people deal better with symptoms such as pain or fatigue.

These spirituality characters seem to be associated with mental health. Sharma (2002) defines mental health as a condition in which individuals manifests self evaluation, adjustability, maturity, regular life, the absence of extremism and satisfaction. Mental health is not only the freedom from mental disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, but also as frequent experiences of positive emotions such as joy, contentment, and peace (Cohen & Koeing, 2004). Hence there may be positive relationship between spirituality and mental health. To test this hypothesis empirically the present study is conducted.

Objectives:

- To examine the relationship between mental health and spirituality
- To examine the impact of gender on spirituality
- To examine the impact of residence on spirituality
- To examine the impact of school environment on spirituality

Hypotheses:

1. There is a significant positive correlation between mental health and spirituality.
2. There is no significant difference between boys and girls with regard to spirituality
3. There is no significant difference between urban and girls with regard to spirituality
4. There is no significant difference between students of government school and private school with regard to spirituality.

Methodology:

Research Design:

Survey method is adopted in the present study. Data have been collected to questionnaires. The responses were scored according to scoring procedure and treated statistically to test the hypotheses.

Participants

A random sample of 119 students pursuing the first year of study of senior secondary course in three Higher Secondary Schools in Puducherry region. There was one Private school (co-ed school) and two government schools (one boys school and one girls school). The mean age of the subjects is 16 years. They belong to Arts and Science disciplines.

Tools: Spiritual Index scale (Mahendran, 2012)

Mental Health scale (Sharma, 2002).

Findings and Conclusion

The present study is an attempt to find out the relationship between spirituality and mental health. At the outset, Descriptive statistics was computed for the mental health and spirituality scores. Descriptive statistics was computed for males and females on mental health scores for there are separate norms for males and females with regard to mental health scale. The results are presented below.

Table-1 showing the descriptive statistics of the scores on mental health and spirituality scales

	N	Mean	SD	min	Max	Median	skewness	kurtosis
Mental health	119	65.37	10.74	36	93	64	0.035	0.104
Males	52	66.69	10.26	40	93	67	0.333	0.527
Females	67	64.34	11.07	36	89	63	-0.103	-0.213
Spirituality	119	132.30	15.84	70	166	134	-0.769	1.72

The result shows that the mean of mental health score is 65.37 (SD=10.74; median=64), the skewness value is 0.035 and kurtosis value is 0.104. This reveals that the mental health scores are distributed normally. The same pattern of normal distribution is observed for males and females separately. The mean of spirituality score is 132.30 (SD=15.84; median=134). The skewness value is -0.769 and kurtosis value is 1.720. This reveals that the spirituality scores are distributed normally.

Based on the mental health scores the students were categorized in accordance with the norms of the mental health scale. The results are presented hereunder.

Table-2 showing the frequency of students on mental health category

Mental health category	Frequency	
	Females	Males
Very good	7	6
Good	19	20
Moderate	32	21
Poor	7	4
Very poor	2	1

N=119

The table reveals that only 2 female students and 1 male student fall under very poor mental health category and 7 female students and 4 male students fall under poor mental health category. Others fall under moderate to very good level of mental health category. The result shows that most of the students are mentally healthy. In general the result shows that the distribution of students on the mental health category is normal.

After having ascertained the normal distribution of the spirituality and mental health scores, the relationship between spirituality and mental health was examined through correlation statistics. The results are presented in the table-4.

Table-3 showing the correlation coefficients between mental health scores and spirituality scores

	Transcendence	Belongingness	Self Esteem	Naturalness	Religiosity	Spirituality
Mental health	0.054	0.157	0.362*	0.242*	-0.134	0.274*
N=119		**p<0.01		*p<0.05		

The result shows that there is a significant positive correlation($r=0.274$; $p<0.01$) between spirituality scores and mental health scores. So there is evidence that there is a positive association between spirituality and mental health of individuals. Hypothesis-1 was accepted.

The result indicates that low spiritual group scored low in mental health scale and high spiritual group scored high in mental health scale. More precisely there is conclusive evidence that spirituality leads to mental health. The results of correlation analysis indicate that higher level spirituality leads to higher level of mental health. In other words spirituality of individuals promotes mental health. Spiritual individuals enjoy better mental health status.

Probably spiritual People may draw strength, comfort, and confidence from their personal relationship with God and feel less loneliness, depression, and stress in their lives (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Moreover Such closeness to God can give them benefits including

higher self-esteem (Maton,1989) greater maturity in relationships (Hall & Edwards,2002), and a better psychological competence (Pargament et.al.1988) which could lead them towards better mental health.

It was noted that there were not significant correlations between mental health and dimensions of spirituality like religiousness, transcendence and belongingness. Even though religiousness is closely associated with spirituality, spirituality correlates with mental health but religiousness does not correlate with mental health. Spirituality and religiousness behave differently with regard to mental health. Similar results were already reported by David et.al. (2013). They found no significant relationship between religious coping styles and the psychological variables (anxiety and depression), but significance was observed in the relationship between spiritual well-being and both the psychological variables.

The impact of gender, school environment and residence on spirituality was also examined in the present study. The school environment was classified into private and government schools and residence is classified into rural and urban categories. The spirituality scores (and the dimensions of spirituality scores) of these groups were compared through t-test separately.

Gender effect on spirituality:

Gender gap is gradually reduced in the recent times. Males and females take equal participation in various fields. More recently females tend to excel males on certain aspects like academic achievement. But, traditionally in Indian culture, males and females have distinct role to play in the family and in the society. Studies show inconsistent results with regard to gender effect. The study of gender difference is by no means complete. This field is constantly changing. In order to test whether gender exerts any significant influence on spirituality of individual, gender was included in the present study and males and females were compared on spirituality scores through t-test. The results are as follow.

Table-4 showing the results of t-test comparing males and females on spirituality

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	t-value	L.S
Transcendence	Males	26.10	5.16	0.352	NS
	Females	25.75	5.52		
Belongingness	Males	29.77	4.34	-0.704	NS
	Females	30.31	4.06		
Self-esteem	Males	25.23	5.26	-1.983	0.05
	Females	27.07	4.84		
Naturalness	Males	26.94	4.13	0.880	NS
	Females	26.21	4.78		
Religiousness	Males	24.35	5.63	1.327	NS
	Females	22.90	6.13		

Spirituality	Males	132.90	15.83	-0.124	NS
	Females	133.27	16.05		

N(Males)=52; N(Females)=67

The mean of spirituality score of males is 132.90 and females is 133.27. The obtained t-value ($t=-0.124$; $p>0.05$) is not statistically significant. The results show that males and female students do not differ in their spiritual qualities. That is there is no significant gender difference with regard to spirituality. But it was observed that males and females differ in self esteem dimension of spirituality. The mean self-esteem score of males (25.23) is significantly lower than the mean score of females (27.07). More precisely females have higher level of self esteem when compared to males. Similar results of the gender effect on self esteem have also been reported in earlier studies. These studies revealed that males are superior in self esteem as a decision maker than females (Amalor,2012; Mann et.al.1989; Cheryl Ormond et al.1991).

Effect of residence on spirituality:

The environment in which the students live has an important role to play in the psychological makeup of individuals. In this study students’ environment is classified into two viz. rural and urban. Rural and Urban environment widely differ. Economic status, infrastructure and, social exposure of rural students are different from that of urban students. It was expected that this difference would reflect on the spiritual characters of the students. Hence rural and urban students are compared on spirituality through t-test. The result is as follow.

Table-5 showing the results of t-test comparing rural and urban students on spirituality

Variable	Residence	Mean	SD	t-value	L.S
Transcendence	Rural	27.67	4.13	2.275	0.05
	Urban	25.22	5.63		
Belongingness	Rural	30.24	3.86	0.269	NS
	Urban	30.01	4.31		
Self-esteem	Rural	24.91	5.28	-1.822	NS
	Urban	26.79	4.95		
Naturalness	Rural	25.61	4.69	-1.390	NS
	Urban	26.88	4.41		
Religiousness	Rural	23.03	4.67	-0.567	NS
	Urban	23.72	6.37		
Spirituality	Rural	131.24	11.52	-0.793	NS
	Urban	133.83	17.28		

N(Rural)=33; N(Urban)=86

From the table it observed that the mean of spirituality score of rural students is 131.24 and that of urban students is 133.83. The obtained t-value is -0.793 is not statistically significant which indicates that the difference is not significant. The result indicates that rural students have equally spiritual tendency with the urban students or vice versa. Generally the

difference between rural and urban students is found in the economic status, infrastructure and the way of living. The obtained result shows evidence that spirituality is more than the economic status infrastructure and even the way of living. However it was observed that there was significant difference between rural and urban students with regard to transcendence. Rural students show higher level of transcendence when compared to urban students.

Effect of school environment on spirituality:

Generally there exists some differences between private and government schools. Private and government schools differ in the administration, funding etc. Sometimes they also differ in principles. So a different pattern of spirituality is expected between private and government school students. The effect of school environment on spirituality is examined through t-test. The results follow.

Table-6 showing the results of t-test comparing private and government school students on spirituality

Variable	Type of school	Mean	SD	t-value	L.S
Transcendence	Private	26.12	6.30	0.442	NS
	Government	25.68	4.26		
Belongingness	Private	29.54	4.05	-1.388	NS
	Government	30.60	4.26		
Self-esteem	Private	25.56	4.98	-1.515	NS
	Government	26.97	5.15		
Naturalness	Private	25.42	4.25	-2.726	0.01
	Government	27.62	4.52		
Religiousness	Private	22.36	5.82	-2.173	0.05
	Government	24.68	5.86		
Spirituality	Private	129.58	15.43	-2.457	0.05
	Government	136.58	15.68		

N(Private)=59; N(Government)=60

The mean spirituality score of private school students is 129.58 and government school students is 136.58. The obtained t-value is -2.457. It is significant at 0.05 level. The result shows that there is significant difference between private and government school students with regard to spirituality. More precisely government school students have higher level of spirituality status when compared to private school students. Probably private schools may be more inclined towards the Grade Point Average (GPA) the students obtain in public examinations and may not give much importance to social skills, moral and spiritual qualities. This may be one of the reasons for the private school students scoring less on spirituality scale than the government school students.

Conclusions

1. There is a significant positive correlation between spirituality and mental health.
2. There is no significant difference between boys and girls with regard to spirituality.

3. There is no significant difference between urban and rural students with regard to spirituality.
4. There is significant difference between students of government schools and private schools with regard to spirituality. That is government school students have higher spiritual qualities when compared to private school students.

Implication:

The results showed evidence that spirituality promotes mental health of students. The result suggests that in order to enhance mental health, student's spiritual qualities and moral values may be given importance on par with the GPA that students obtain in the public examinations. Even the evaluation procedure in schools may be revamped so as to assess the level of morality and spirituality of students along with their academic achievement. A strong foundation of spirituality among the students population would help them to withstand life in the context of globalization. Developing moral values and spiritual qualities among the school students is the need of the hour. Demographic influences like gender, residence and school environment on spirituality were also studied. The result showed that gender and residence do not show any impact on spirituality of students. But the school environment shows an impact on spirituality. Students studying in Government schools have higher level of spiritual qualities when compared to students studying in private schools. When gender and residence do not show an impact on spirituality, the school environment only has an impact on spirituality. Future researches may be conducted to examine as to why this demographic variable shows an impact on spirituality. Questions such as is it because of the independent effect of school environment or is it because of any confounding variables are to be studied.

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