

Relationship between Spirituality and Morality among Young Adults

¹Aswini Hemachandran, ²Darshini Patwary, ³Roshini S, ⁴Divya Dovina

¹Student, ²Student, ³Student, ⁴Assistant Professor

¹Department of Psychology

¹Stella Maris College, Chennai, India

Abstract: This study was done to investigate the relationship between spirituality and morality among young adults. Spirituality is the overall wellbeing of an individual based on their environment, self-awareness and feeling of connectivity with the divine. Morality is an individual's interpretation of whether an action or thought is right or wrong. Understanding the relationship between the various aspects of spirituality and morality with regards to gender was the key purpose of study. Convenience sampling procedure was used. The sample consisted of 100 male and 100 female college students in Chennai city with their age ranging from 17 to 22 years of age. Spiritual Intelligence Self Report Inventory (SISRI-24) and Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) were the scales used to measure the variables. Student t test & Pearson's product moment was used to analyze the collected data.

IndexTerms: gender difference, spirituality, morality, correlational study

I. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality has been referred to as the 'search for the sacred' (Pargament, 2007). According to this definition, spirituality is not just a mere belief in god but also considers several other factors. The search for the sacred includes techniques such as meditation, transcendent belief, overall spiritual views of the individuals themselves, and the environment. Spirituality is focused primarily on one's ability to relate to others the self and to God through their attitudes and actions. (Dollard, 1983)

Spiritual intelligence is 'a set of mental capacities which contribute to the awareness, integration and adaptive application of non-material and transcendent aspects of one's existence leading to outcomes as deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent self and mastery of spiritual states' (King, 2008). According to this theory, spiritual intelligence consists of four components; (1) Critical existential thinking: the ability to critically examine meaning and purpose of life and other existential issues, such as death, reality and the universe, and to contemplate the relationship between one's own existence and non-existential issues from an existential perspective. (2) Personal meaning production: how an individual derives personal meaning from all experiences, both physical and mental, including the ability to live according to a life purpose. (3) Transcendental awareness: the ability to identify transcendent patterns in the self, persons other than the self, and their environment, with the relationship between the self and the physical world. This identification is done during the state of normal consciousness. (4) Conscious state expansion: at their own discretion, one can freely enter and exit higher states of consciousness, by utilizing methods such as self-contemplation, meditation or prayer.

Studies on young adults' spirituality have been described as 'a genuine sign of hope' (Sparks, 1998) where young adults are ready and well informed on matters that are concerned with inspiration. This inspiration comes about through indulging in spiritual activities. They are also capable of distinguishing between true spiritual experience and religious exercises that are practiced as mere repetition, while clearly expressing a preference for the former.

Most often, spiritual activity arises out of religious activity. Religious activity in turn, emphasizes upon the need to indulge in moral activity as a means of connecting with the supreme power. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the nature of morality in addition to that of spirituality.

Experience may lead adults to reevaluate their criteria for what is morally right and fair. Some adults spontaneously offer personal experiences as reasons for their answers to moral dilemmas (Papalia, 1975). Moreover, there exists a discrepancy between moral dilemmas of men and women. The society that one is raised in can influence these dilemmas. The central dilemma of a woman is the conflict between her own needs and those of others. (Gilligan, 1987). This is due to the tendency of most societies to expect a woman to be self-sacrificing and have concern for others. In contrast to this, they expect men to be assertive and have independent judgement and as such, the dilemmas of the men are centered around these traits. The respondents' age and the types of dilemmas or questions presented to them have been found to be more significant factors than their gender (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000).

The opinions and conclusions of researchers concerning morality vary from study to study. A study by Sparks (1998) stated that young adults tend to engage in activities that are considered immoral, as per social norms, and within some groups such activities are considered as 'morally neutral or even justified' activities. As a result, they consider it to be perfectly normal to indulge in such activities. Even if they don't see them as necessarily good, they may not find anything wrong with them hence the usage of the term "morally neutral". Kohlberg and Ryncarz (1990) stated that being moral lies in achieving a cosmic perspective: "a sense of unity with the cosmos, nature, or God," which enables a person to see moral issues "from the standpoint of the universe as a whole". This is in reference to the seventh stage of moral reasoning which operates beyond the considerations of law and justice and together with the concept of self-transcendence, influences morality.

A study by Henry (2000) stated that some of the earliest roots of moral leadership among people can be traced down to religious and spiritual insight, thus implying that spirituality and morality in fact, do share a relationship where they influence each other.

Often, people tend to refer to both spirituality and morality as one and the same. There are popular notions that young adulthood is the least religious period of life, which is expressed by refusal to attend church and take part in other religious activities (Hurlock, 1981). It must be noted here that it is unclear whether this statement was made keeping spirituality in mind. This idea may have influenced a number of studies.

The major limitation of past research and opinions is that most of the studies (particularly those focused on spirituality) appear to have been conducted on non-Indian, mostly Christian populations. Furthermore, prior research on either spirituality or morality has been done but almost never with each other. A study by Spohn (1997) debated the co-existence of both spirituality and morality without separating them. However, it was a theological study and was written by retaining the influence of religion in mind. As India is historically one of the oldest cultures to have openly stressed on the importance of connecting with the divine spiritually and morally in not one, but most of its practiced religions, the approach individuals take towards both of these aspects in their lives may differ greatly from how people from western cultures incorporate them into their lives.

This study was done to check if common opinions regarding the spirituality and morality of young adults hold truth in them. It was also conducted to see if there was a relationship between spirituality and morality. Gender differences in the nature of this relationship have been studied along with other demographic factors taken into account.

The common opinion that has been observed among individuals who fall in age ranges older than that of the average young adult, is that young adults show little to no interest in either the spiritual or moral aspects of their lives. As common beliefs can lead to biased and untrue stereotypes, this research study was conducted with the intention of confirming if these beliefs are supported by factual evidence.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Does spirituality have a relationship with morality among the young adults?

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the relationship between Spirituality and Morality among young adults.
2. To study the gender differences with regard to spirituality and morality among young adults.
3. To study the differences in spirituality and morality between young adults from joint and nuclear families

IV. HYPOTHESIS

Due to the dearth of research studies relating spirituality and morality, the following null hypothesis were formulated:

1. There would not be a relationship between spirituality and morality among young adults.
2. There would be no gender differences with regard to spirituality among young adults.
3. There would be no gender differences with regard to morality among young adults.
4. There would be no difference in the spirituality between young adults from joint and nuclear families.
5. There would be no difference in the morality between young adults from joint and nuclear families.

V. RESEARCH DESIGN

Ex post facto design was used. A survey was conducted using questionnaires to collect data on the spirituality and morality of the sample and correlation was done to study the relationship between the variables.

5.1 SAMPLING

Data was collected through convenience sampling method from individuals of both the genders between the age of 17-22 years residing in Chennai. 100 sample each were gathered from males and females and after filtering out incomplete questionnaires, a total of 179 samples were analyzed.

5.2 TOOLS USED

1. The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)
2. Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ)

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Correlation between spirituality and morality

| Variables | Morality (r) | p value |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Spirituality | .368** | .000 |
| Critical Existential Thinking | .333** | .000 |
| Personal Meaning Production | .254** | .001 |
| Transcendental Awareness | .351** | .000 |
| Conscious State Expansion | .217** | .004 |

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

According to Table 1, all levels of spirituality are positively correlated with morality at the 0.01 level.

Critical existential thinking (CSE) refers to the ability to critically examine meaning and purpose of life and other existential issues, such as death, reality and the universe, and to contemplate the relationship between one's own existence and non-existential issues from an existential perspective. It is possibly correlated positively with morality as these individuals are capable of contemplating the events after death and have a desire to avoid receiving punishment in the 'afterlife' from the supreme power. It could also be due to the awareness that life is short, and time once spent does not return and thus, they choose to do all the good they can, even if it is merely holding an ethical attitude.

Personal meaning production (PMP) is how an individual derives personal meaning from all experiences, both physical and mental, including the ability to live according to a life purpose. It is possible that individuals high in PMP may derive more positive meaning in their lives by performing more socially moral actions. It is also possible that as positive feelings are derived along with meaning, hence pushing individuals to indulge in more moral activities that would help them to think and feel better about themselves.

Transcendental awareness (TA) refers to the ability to identify transcendent patterns in the self, persons other than the self, and their environment, with the relationship between the self and the physical world. As the awareness is of what is beyond the physical world (i.e., the spiritual realm) in the self, others and the environment, individuals who are high in this dimension likely feel less inclined to indulge in non-moral activities.

Conscious state expansion (CSE) is when one is able to freely enter and exit higher states of consciousness, at their own discretion through methods such as self-contemplation, meditation or prayer. It is possible that indulging in non-moral behaviors could make it difficult to enter higher states of consciousness as they may experience a cognitive dissonance between their attitudes towards such actions and their own behavior. Thus, they may choose to avoid being in a state of dissonance by practicing moral behavior.

Table 2: Correlation between spirituality and morality

| Variables | Spirituality (r) | p value |
|-------------------|------------------|---------|
| Morality | .368** | .000 |
| Idealism | .312** | .000 |
| Relativism | .364** | .000 |

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

According to Table 1, all levels of morality are positively correlated with spirituality at the 0.01 level.

Relativism refers to the degree which an individual's personal moral code emphasize the importance of universal moral codes. The positive correlation between spirituality and morality is possibly because individuals all over the world, across cultures, believe in the existence of a supreme power. The beliefs they practice obey certain doctrines which tend to be similar, (do not steal, do not knowingly hurt another person, etc.) even from place to place.

Idealism is the degree to which concern for the welfare of other people is fundamental to their moral code. Many religions tend to preach the path of love for all and to help people who are in need (such as the poor and ailing), all of which are considered to be moral activities. Hence, idealism correlates positively with morality.

As seen in Table 1 and Table 2, spirituality and morality are correlated significantly at the 0.01 level, hence the null hypothesis that states that 'there would not be a relationship between spirituality and morality among young adults' is rejected.

Table 3: The difference between males and females in spirituality and morality

| Variable | Gender | N | Mean | S.D | T | Significance |
|-------------------------------|--------|----|-------|-------|--------|--------------|
| Spirituality | Male | 93 | 56.09 | 14.05 | 1.46 | 0.25 |
| | Female | 86 | 58.47 | 13.69 | | |
| Critical Existential Thinking | Male | 93 | 15.34 | 5.10 | 2.03** | 0.04 |
| | Female | 86 | 16.92 | 5.25 | | |
| Personal Meaning Production | Male | 93 | 13.11 | 3.92 | 0.76 | 0.45 |
| | Female | 86 | 12.66 | 3.95 | | |
| Transcendental Awareness | Male | 93 | 15.89 | 4.67 | 2.8** | 0.00 |
| | Female | 86 | 17.77 | 4.68 | | |
| Conscious State Expansion | Male | 93 | 11.81 | 3.71 | 1.39 | 0.17 |
| | Female | 86 | 11.06 | 3.39 | | |
| Morality | Male | 93 | 65.95 | 10.28 | 4.59 | 0.0 |
| | Female | 86 | 73.24 | 10.97 | | |
| Idealism | Male | 93 | 34.01 | 6.13 | 3.67 | 0.0 |
| | Female | 86 | 37.56 | 6.81 | | |
| Relativism | Male | 93 | 31.9 | 5.19 | 4.74 | 0.0 |
| | Female | 86 | 35.67 | 5.39 | | |

** p > 0.01

Males and females do not differ significantly in terms of spirituality and morality, but results show that there is a significant difference in Transcendental awareness and Critical existential thinking.

In Table 3, it was found that there is not much difference in the spirituality of males and females. This contrasts with the common opinion of females having higher spirituality than males. This could be because young adults show less interest in spirituality than individuals older than them. However, surveying of prior conducted studies show that young adults actually show interest in spirituality (Sparks, 1998). But, this study was conducted on a Christian, western population and hence, due to cultural differences may not coincide with the findings of this study.

It was found that females scored higher than males with regard to morality. This could possibly be due to their tendency to mature earlier than males of their age. Here, the term maturity refers to the ability to utilize logical and practical skills, sensibility in day to day situations and knowledge of right or wrong actions as dictated by social norms.

As seen in Table 3, there is no significant gender difference with regard to spirituality, hence the null hypothesis that states that 'there would be no gender differences with regard to spirituality among young adults' is accepted. Furthermore, as also seen in Table 3, there is no significant gender difference with regard to morality, hence the null hypothesis that states that 'there would be no gender differences with regard to morality of young adults' is accepted.

Table 4: Differences between spirituality and morality in nuclear and joint families

| Variable | Family Type | N | Mean | S.D | T | Significance |
|--------------|-------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Spirituality | Nuclear | 146 | 57.92 | 13.75 | 1.40 | 0.16 |
| | Joint | 33 | 54.18 | 14.33 | | |
| Morality | Nuclear | 146 | 70.43 | 10.50 | 2.50* | 0.01 |
| | Joint | 33 | 65.12 | 13.21 | | |

*p = 0.01

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in spirituality between nuclear and joint families.

According to the prevailing common opinion, it is said that joint families place higher emphasis in spirituality however, it was found that there was not much difference between young adults from nuclear and joint families. It is likely that the common opinion largely refers to middle aged and older individuals, hence explaining the discrepancy between the it and the obtained statistical value.

With regard to morality, it has been found that individuals from nuclear families are higher in morality than those from joint families. This can possibly be due to the fact that nuclear families are smaller in size and hence, young adults from those families would be more likely to develop their own opinions on moral activity instead of merely conforming to the opinions of larger families. It is also possible that due to its smaller size, the emphasis it places on development of 'moral behavior' is much higher.

As seen in Table 4, there is no significant difference between the family types with regard to spirituality, hence the null hypothesis that states that 'here would be no differences between nuclear and joint families with regard to spirituality' is accepted. Also seen in Table 4, there is a significant difference at the 0.01 level between the obtained scores of nuclear and joint families, hence the null hypothesis that states that 'There would be no differences between nuclear and joint families with regard to morality' is rejected. However, small sample size can be cited as a limitation in the estimation of Table 4.

VII. CONCLUSION

The current research indicated a significant relationship between spirituality and morality. It was also found that spirituality and morality did not differ with gender and that individuals from nuclear families were better off than those from joint families with regard to their morality.

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank Anoushka Anoop, Ashfa Shafee, and Harshini G. for their assistance in the collection and coding of data for this study.

REFERENCES

- [1].Dollard, J. (1983) Toward spirituality. Hazelden, Minnesota.
- [2].Gilligan, Carol. (1987). Human Development (9th ed.). New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education (India), P.480.
- [3].Henry, Bishop F. (2000). Education as a Moral Activity. Presented at a Centre For Leadership Learning Dinner Seminar at the University of Calgary.
- [4].Hurlock, Elizabeth B. (1981). Developmental Psychology: A Life-Span Approach (5th ed.). New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education (India), P.275.
- [5].Jaffee & Hyde. (2000). Human Development (9th ed.). New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education (India), P.481.
- [6].Kohlberg & Ryncarz. (1990). Human Development (9th ed.). New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education (India), P.480.
- [7].Papalia, Diane E. (1975). Human Development (9th ed.). New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education (India), P.479.
- [8].Pargament, K.I. (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, vol. 9 (no. 1), 3–16.
- [9].Sparks, Richard C. (1998). Morality and the Next Generation: Amoral, Immoral, or Morally Different? New Theology Review, Vol 11, (no 1), 53 – 66. Retrieved from <http://janate.org/index.php/ntr/issue/view/58>
- [10].Spohn, C. William, (1997). Spirituality and Ethics: Exploring the Connections. Theological Studies, Vol 58, Issue 1, 109 – 123. doi:10.1177/004056399705800107

