



Spirituality and Mental Health

Paromita M. Bhaumik¹, Sajar Firdaus²

¹Head of the Department, Clinical Psychology, George College, MAKAUT; PhD. Scholar; Director,
Anubhav Positive Psychology

²Pursuing M.Sc. Clinical Psychology, The Gayatri Chetna Foundation, George College, MAKAUT

Abstract

Spirituality is concerned with the transcendent, sanctified, and non-material facets of life and the cosmos. This qualitative review research aims to understand the relationship between spirituality and its effect on mental health and also analyze the factors that contribute to it. Multiple research studies have shown the importance of spirituality in people's lives, attitudes, and actions. Research has shown that engaging in spiritual activities or being spiritually inclined can assist the mind in turning away from sensory objects, allowing the mind and ego to dissolve into an infinite state of happiness. This has been shown to have a favourable impact on mental health. An individual feels filled with love and is free from dread for what lies ahead. In addition, this allows an individual an opportunity to go beyond their zone of security and explore their own identity. As evidenced by different faiths like Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and other religions spirituality has a beneficial correlation with mental health. Spiritual activities like yoga, meditation, prayers, and other divine practices help people to concentrate all of their attention on life's positive aspects. It also instills in people the virtue of righteousness and an altruistic appreciation for the commitment to the well-being of others. Researchers also reveal that spirituality unites people because, despite our differences and individuality, the truth is the same for everyone. This paper further explores how people come together through a variety of celebrations and customs which helps foster a feeling of solidarity and camaraderie. Spirituality is seen to improve mental health by bringing various religious communities together to celebrate different festivals and rituals and by promoting behaviour that improves mental health.

Keywords: Transcendent, happiness, yoga, prayer, meditation, virtue, righteousness, divine, altruistic appreciation

Introduction

Spirituality is transcendental and profoundly a personal experience that unites an individual with divinity. It is being investigated as a phenomenon with implications for both mental and physical health. It has evolved to define well-being, pleasure, and a humanist approach to one's life. Spirituality is an important component of mankind. It unfence individuals to search for meaning and purpose in life which helps them to accept themselves, appreciate others, and be engrossed in humanitarian activities This helps them to cultivate courage and conquest their fear to dive deep down into the whirlpool of positive consciousness and lead a peaceful life ahead.

Some people find spirituality to be a source of solace and curtail stress. Research has shown that spirituality helps to cope with life's obstacles and reap several health benefits. It unfastens us from our fear, insecurity, ignorance, and shame and paves a way to sail into a conscious appreciation and engineer a disciplined life and anchored mind. "He is free from attachment, fear, and anger, is called a sage of stable mind" (Srimad Bhagavad Gita).

Stress and strains are the modern-day enemies that make us mean-minded and produce psychosomatic diseases such as fatigue, insomnia, headache, and lot others. Many findings suggest different ways to elevate several diseases and disorders. These practices are regardless of one's religious belief as they help the mind reverse itself and turn away from sensory objects so that the mind and ego collapse into an endless blissful state.

One can start investigating spirituality by doing the following:

Pay attention to one's feelings- Part of accepting spirituality is accepting what it means to be human, including the good and the bad.

Focus on others- Spirituality requires opening one's heart, feeling empathy, and assisting others.

Meditate- Spend 10 to 15 minutes each morning meditating in some way.

Gratitude journal- in which they can record something they are grateful for each day. This can be a great reminder of what is most important to a person and what provides them the most joy.

Being spiritually oriented or involved in spiritual activities helps a person transcend the fear and suffering of this world and become a realized soul.

Review of Literature

Spirituality is a universally recognized idea. It entails how people fulfill what they believe to be the purpose of their existence, a search for meaning in life, and a sense of connectedness with the universe. Spirituality is a far more personalized approach to worship. A spiritual practitioner may not follow a formal religious practice or affiliate with an established religion.

Research was conducted in 2007 by Jeffrey G. Snodgrass et al., on Religious Ritual Is Good Medicine for Indigenous Indian Conservation Refugees: Implications for Global Mental Health. The study's findings imply that, in high-uncertainty situations, local customs and traditions can serve as a potentially significant source of health resilience, potentially preventing suffering brought on by stress and trauma.

Research on spirituality and Resilience in Trauma victims was conducted in 2007 by Julio F. P. Peres et al. According to some clinical and neuroimaging results, a thorough narrative synthesis of the traumatic

experience may be difficult for patients with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to achieve (PTSD). A deep personal search for answers to life's big issues and its purpose is the foundation of both religiousness and spirituality. Therefore, religion and spirituality have an advantageous influence on PTSD victims.

Findings from Abraham Verghese's (2008), research study on Spirituality and Mental Health, there are two elements to mental health, the absence of mental illness and the presence of a well-adjusted personality that contributes effectively to the life of the community. Acceptance of handicaps, tempered self-control, and harmonious relationships to self, and others, including Nature and God are the essential characteristics. Hence, Spirituality is an essential component of mental wellness.

A study on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health conducted by Harold G Koenig et al. (2009), identified a side of spirituality that may function as a psychological and social resource for coping with stress. This study examines research on the relationship between religion and spirituality and mental health, focusing on depression, suicide, anxiety, psychosis, and substance addiction.

James Lake studied Spirituality and Religion in Mental Health in 2012. The study found that spiritual values are strongly associated with mental health-promoting lifestyle choices such as exercise, nutrition, and moderate alcohol consumption. Furthermore, consistent participation in religious activities improves general emotional well-being by providing a supporting network of like-minded believers during stressful times, providing a sense of coherence or meaning to improve coping, and boosting self-confidence.

In 2012, a study was done to determine the Impact of Praying and Fasting on Mental Health by Azita Amirfakhræi and Afsaneh Alinaghizadeh in Iran. It was conducted on a total of 200 undergraduate students (85 girls and 115 boys) who attended the Bandar Abbas Branch of Islamic Azad University in Iran. The study's findings indicate that fasting and prayer help improve students' mental health, as well as reducing depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms while encouraging social functioning.

A study on The Effect of Prayer on Depression and Anxiety: Maintenance of Positive Influence was carried out by Peter A. Boelens et al. A study conducted on 44 women in 2012 found that the subjects' considerable gains persisted for at least a year following the last prayer session. In addition to regular medical care, direct interpersonal prayer may be helpful for people suffering from anxiety and depression

According to a 2016 study done by Gyanesh Kumar Tiwari, spiritual practices such as yoga are significant and beneficial not only for treating physical and mental problems of many types, but also for maintaining, preserving, and promoting a healthy, happy, and prosperous life. This is especially important in light of the growing physical and mental health issues caused by the adoption and practice of material values, stiff competition, the restructuring of family, social, and community relations, and information overload caused by recent advances in computer technology and mass media.

A 2018 study on Mental Health, Religion, and Spirituality by Doug Oman and David Lukoff, shows evidence linking religiosity and spirituality (R/S) to reduced incidence of stress-related illnesses, depression, anxiety,

suicide, dementia, and other mental illnesses. There is also evidence linking R/S to mixed relationships with severe mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Specifically, R/S has demonstrated marginally positive associations with lower levels of anxiety and depression in adults and adolescents in the US as well as in other nations and cultures.

David H. Rosmarin and Harold G. Koenig, *Handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health*, 2020 include specific chapters on the relationship between spirituality and religion and mood, anxiety, OCD, psychosis, eating and feeding disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, behavioural addictions, and pain-related disorders. It also discusses the relationship between spirituality and religion, marriage and family life, suicidality, and end-of-life care. Examines the literature on spiritually integrated psychotherapies and offers fundamental therapeutic recommendations for addressing spirituality and religion in treatment. It examines the relationship between the neuroscience of spiritual and religious experiences and mental health including all of the main world faiths and spiritual identities that are not related to any one religion.

As per a study conducted in 2023 by Shefali Midha and Kamlesh Singh on Well-Being Enhancing Rituals in India, rituals attempt to teach an individual to live a balanced life and embrace desirable behaviours and positive characteristics such as forgiveness, gratitude, and prosociality. Rituals offer members of the community a sense of identification, belonging, and connection, and are accompanied by positive emotions.

According to a study on Ancient Vedic Practices for Psychological Distress undertaken by Saurav Uniyal and Deepak Singh in the year 2023, Yoga and meditation can assist lessen psychological agony. With its holy fire and hymn singing, the Hawan ceremony provides a contemplative and communal experience that can relieve stress, improve emotional regulation, and foster social connection. Mantra chanting, which involves the repetition of holy sounds, relaxes the mind and promotes attention, resulting in less worry and greater emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Spirituality assists us in promoting tranquillity and living a disciplined life. It adds incalculable worth to our lives. The values taken from numerous sacred books foster a constant appreciation of the good fortune we have. Through yoga, meditation, and other spiritual practices we connect with divinity. Having a positive attitude in life allows an individual to make goals that aid in attempts or actions toward bettering one's life and one's overall well-being. Following research, the presence of spirituality in one's life helps alleviate stress, which in turn affects both our physical and mental health.

Reference

- Conquest of Fear, a book by Swami Sivananda (1950)
- George, L. K., Larson, D. B., Koenig, H. G., & McCullough, M. E. (2000). Spirituality and health: What we know, what we need to know. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 19(1), 102-116.
- Rhi, B. Y. (2001). Culture, spirituality, and mental health: The forgotten aspects of religion and health. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 24(3), 569-579
- Leigh, J., Bowen, S., & Marlatt, G. A. (2005). Spirituality, mindfulness, and substance abuse. *Addictive behaviors*, 30(7), 1335-1341.
- Rippentrop, A. E., Altmaier, E. M., Chen, J. J., Found, E. M., & Keffala, V. J. (2005). The relationship between religion/spirituality and physical health, mental health, and pain in a chronic pain population. *Pain*, 116(3), 311-321.
- Cotton, S., Zebracki, K., Rosenthal, S. L., Tsevat, J., & Drotar, D. (2006). Religion/spirituality and adolescent health outcomes: A review. *Journal of adolescent health*, 38(4), 472-480.
- Verghese, A. (2008). Spirituality and mental health. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 50(4), 233
- Carmody, J., Reed, G., Kristeller, J., & Merriam, P. (2008). Mindfulness, spirituality, and health-related symptoms. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, 64(4), 393-403.
- Koenig, H. G. (2009). Research on religion, spirituality, and mental health: A review. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(5), 283-291.
- Nelson, J. M. (2009). Psychology, religion, and spirituality.
- Lake, J. (2012). Spirituality and religion in mental health: A concise review of the evidence. *Psychiatric Times*, 29(3), 34-38.
- Transforming Indians to Transform India, a book by Chinmaya Mission Initiative (2012)
- Boelens, P. A., Reeves, R. R., Replogle, W. H., & Koenig, H. G. (2012). The effect of prayer on depression and anxiety: maintenance of positive influence one year after prayer intervention. *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 43(1), 85-98.
- Amirfakhraei, A., & Alinaghizadeh, A. (2012). The impact of praying and fasting on the mental health of students attending the Bandar Abbas Branch of Islamic Azad University in Iran in 2012. *Life Science Journal*, 9(3), 2179-2184.
- Peace of mind a book by Hari Datt Sharma (2012)
- Sheldrake, P. (2013). *Spirituality: A brief history*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Weber, S. R., & Pargament, K. I. (2014). The role of religion and spirituality in mental health. *Current opinion in psychiatry*, 27(5), 358-363.
- Lepherd, L. (2015). Spirituality: Everyone has it, but what is it?. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 21(5), 566-574.
- Tiwari, G. K. (2016). Yoga and mental health: An Underexplored relationship. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 4(1), 19-31.

- Snodgrass, J. G., Most, D. E., & Upadhyay, C. (2017). Religious ritual is good medicine for indigenous Indian conservation refugees: implications for global mental health. *Current Anthropology*, 58(2), 257-284.
- Bhagavad Gita, PRAKASH; Deluxe edition (1 January 2019)
- Midha, S., & Singh, K. (2023). Well-Being Enhancing Rituals in India. In *Religious and Spiritual Practices in India: A Positive Psychological Perspective* (pp. 273-298). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Uniyal, S., & Singh, D. (2023). ANCIENT VEDIC PRACTICES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS. *Journal of Korean Academy of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 5(4), 240-253.

