

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AND HAPPINESS AMONG SENIOR CITIZENS OF KARACHI

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ABSTRACT

Spirituality is one of the most important factors in mankind since his creation. Spirituality affects every aspect of life including happiness in life. The purpose of present study is to assess the relationship between spirituality and happiness among senior citizen, Karachi, Pakistan, using 3 hypotheses to explore the research area. H1: There would be a positive relationship between Spiritual experience and happiness among Senior Citizens of Karachi H2: There would be a significant difference of spiritual experience among male and female senior citizens. H3: There would be difference on level of happiness among male and female senior citizens. This study was based on cross sectional study method. Sample of the study consisted of 100 participants (39 male, 61 females) above age 60 who voluntarily wanted to participate and had no major physical or psychological issue. Data was collected using demographic form, Daily Spiritual Experience scale (Urdu version) and Subjective Happiness scale. SPSS 16.0 was used to analyze the data. The results of the study indicate that there is a moderately significant positive relationship between spiritual experience and happiness. However, no significant difference was found among males and females' senior citizens for spiritual experience and happiness.

Key words: Spirituality, Happiness, Senior citizens, Karachi.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, researchers are taking great interest in religion and spirituality with different disciplines like medicine,

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nursing and mental health (Klitzman, Robert & Daya, 2005). They are specially relating religion/ spirituality with emotional, psychological and physical health (Fabricatore, Handal, & Fenzel, 2000). Spirituality can be defined as a relationship between mind, body and spirit as well as the external world (Hammell, 2001). Spirituality is distinguished from other moral values, mental health and humanism by its connection to the sacred being, the transcendent (beyond human limits). This sacred being is outside of self, but also has strong connection with the inner self, who is called by different names in different cultures as God in western, Allah, Vishnu, Krishna, or Buddha in Eastern regions (Koenig, 2010). Spiritual practices are common over the world and 90 percent population in the world is engaged some form of spiritual practices (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012).

Individuals not only engage in religious practices as a part of their daily routine, but in some cases, occurrence of a traumatic event creates a greater dependence on religion as a coping mechanism. For instance, (Schuster, Stein, Jaycox, Collins, Marshall, Elliott & Berry, 2001), validated that 90 percent of Americans cope with the stress post 11th Sept attack by turning to their spiritual beliefs. Other researchers have also highlighted the role religion can play in creating a sense of liberation among the individuals going through stressful situations (Park, 2005; Perera, Pandey & Srivastava, 2018), while Ahles Mezulis and Hudson (2016) indicated the positive role that religious involvement can play in lowering the depression level.

An important point of consideration is that the spiritual needs of people differ from one age group to another, with the needs of older people being different from the younger individuals, particularly being influenced by the factors of impending bad health and imminent death (Lavretsky, 2010). Engagement in spiritual practices tends to lower the anxiety associated with the declining health and thoughts about death. Research has supported that spirituality has a positive impact on health outcome and welfare of elderly (Fabricatore, 2010). The researchers have further verified that a few groups of elderly individuals with inadequate and troublesome circumstances impart their issues by putting their trust in God, thus coping with the unpredictability of their life (Boswell, Kahana & Dilworth-Anderson, 2006).

Spirituality is one variable that has appeared in the context of aging and well-being, suggesting that it can be a predictor of positive mental state in old age (Bailly, Martinent, Ferrand, Agli, Giraudeau, Gana & Roussiau, 2018; Kirby, Coleman & Daley, 2004; Manning, 2013). These conclusions encouraged clinicians to develop models for managing old age, according to spiritual orientation (Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore & Koenig, 2002).

Saying prayer is a consistent every day assignment for Muslims, which starts at the time of adolescence and proceeds for the duration of the life. It is a period disposing of the material world and moving toward the world past, and, to the internal identity (Rahimi, Anoosheh, Ahmadi & Foroughan, 2013). Believing in support of spiritual/religious source and connectedness with a higher power is helpful and it can influence issues of control, personal satisfaction, spiritual wellbeing, adapting, discouragement, decision making, and conceivably wellbeing outcomes (Tatsumura, Maskarinec, Shumay & Kakai, 2003). For example, it has been reported that healthy older adults and grown-ups trust that a higher power bolsters them and that having an association with God shapes an establishment for their mental prosperity. Therefore, most profound spirituality is an essential part in the lives of healthy individuals (Tuck, Alleyne & Thinganjana, 2006).

A study conducted in Malaysia reported that as the individuals get older, they become more focused on spirituality and religious practices as a means of achieving inner peace and having a sense of calmness. The key motivator for engagement in spirituality is driven by the religiousness of a person (Tohit, Browning & Radermacher, 2012). Likewise, Labun and Emblen (2007) based the study in Punjabi Sikhs and found that spirituality helped older people to feel at ease despite facing ill health. Moreover, Jahan and Khan (2014) made similar observations after the analysis of the sample from India and concluded that being spiritual heightened a sense of comfort among old people even when facing hardships and poor health. Munawar and Tariq (2018) examined similar themes in Pakistani sample, emphasizing the positive role played by religiosity and spiritual intelligence in creating life satisfaction among old people.

One evident limitation of the previous studies is that the sample used to explore spirituality and happiness comprised

university population (Malik & Naeem, 2011), or focus on job satisfaction (Malik & Tariq, 2016). Moreover, there is a limited number of studies addressing the themes of spirituality and happiness in the context of Pakistan, suggesting the scope of further analysis (Gull & Dawood, 2013). In current study, the aim is to explore spirituality and happiness among senior citizens in Karachi, Pakistan.

1.1 Objective

The research objectives of the present study are:

- To explore relationship between spiritual experience and happiness.
- To rule out gender difference between spiritual experience and happiness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Earlier studies have initiated broad examination, viewing spirituality as a vital, yet understudied, psychological phenomenon (Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, Olsen, Reilly, Van Haitsma & Warren, 1990), while the understanding has been expanded by current researches. The relationship between spirituality and happiness has been examined by different scholars (Bartlett, Piedmont, Bilderback, Matsumoto & Bathon, 2003; Cavazos Vela, Castro, Cavazos, Cavazos & Gonzalez, 2015).

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Happiness

Theoretically happiness is explained by two level bottoms up and top down factors (Diener, 1984). Bottom up means happiness comes through external factors such as demographic, socioeconomic status and top down emphasizes internal factors for happiness which include personality traits, stability and locus of control (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998) Spirituality can be included in internal factors which determine level of happiness,

Like other emotions happiness also have an emotional and cognitive aspects (Hill & Argyle, 2001). It has been further explained that happiness has three elements; having a positive mood most of the time, less painful emotions (such as anxiety and depression), and

satisfaction with life. Cognitive theory explains that happier people see and interpret their daily experience differently than others. They interpret neutral experience as positive and positive experience as more positive. Thus, happiness can be controlled by changing their thought pattern, and thought related to sacred being or higher power and purpose in life accentuate the experience of happiness (Diener, 1984). Such beliefs help individuals to reinterpret psychological pressure in accordance to religious and spiritually established thinking patterns and see these hardships in a positive way, thus instilling hope which helps them to be peaceful internally.

2.2 Spirituality, Life Satisfaction and Happiness

Being spiritual supports a person in experiencing happiness, as seen in the study of Mayers (2000) who reported significant correlation between happiness and spiritual activities. The spiritual activities can be reflected through the involvement in religion based practices. Furthermore, the belief that there exists a higher power that can change circumstances and brings out the best in life facilitates a sense of security, showing how spiritual experience can strengthen sense of happiness and life satisfaction. A survey done in Hungary also indicates a strong relationship between happiness and spiritual health conditions (Spéder & Kamarás, 2008). Apart from spirituality, there are other factors as well which promote satisfaction from life. Sirgy (2001) has found that life satisfaction is predetermined by material wealth however family life and other immaterial elements are determined by happiness.

2.3 Gender, Spirituality and Happiness

The linkages between gender and level of spirituality have also been explored by researchers, analyzing its impact on the level of happiness of males and females. Neill and Kahn (1999) have argued that religious practices play a more profound role in creating a sense of happiness among women who have lost significant other, than spiritual experience. Yuen (2015) proposed the influence gender had on the spiritual inclination, with a higher spiritual engagement reported by females as compared to males. In another study, based on gender, spirituality and experience of happiness, it was found that females had a higher level of happiness, even in cases where no difference was observed between the level of spirituality of males and

females, hinting the effect gender have on spirituality outcomes (Aiding, Seok, Hashmi & Maakip, 2012).

2.4 Hypotheses

H1: There would be a positive relationship between Spiritual experience and happiness among senior citizens of Karachi

H2: There would be a significant difference of spiritual experience among male and female senior citizens.

H3: There would be difference in level of happiness among male and female senior citizens.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample

A Sample of the study consisted of 39 males and 61 females with age above 60 years. Only those participants were included who had no major psychological illness. Data was gathered by convenience sampling.

3.2 Measures

For data collection the measures used were:

3.2.1 Personal Information Form

It would consist of personal information, family related, and education related information. Personal information would be obtained through items focusing the age, gender, number of siblings, education and marital status.

3.2.2 The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSE- Underwood, 2011, Urdu version)

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale comprising of 16 items and designed to measure ordinary daily spiritual experience was used in the study to obtain information about the degree of spiritual experience of the participants. It scores on Likert scale, 6 is the

highest score and 1 is minimum. This scale has been used in different studies and translated in many languages including Urdu. Chronbach's Alpha reported for this scale is .90 (Underwood, 2011).

3.2.3 Subjective Happiness scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)

It is a 4 item scale designed to measure happiness on 7 point Likert scale from 1 very unhappy to 7 very happy. The alpha coefficient for this scale ranges from .079 to .94 ($m=.86$).test retest reliability ranges from .55 to .94.

3.3 Procedure

The participants of the study were selected from, shopping malls, departmental stores, parks and other public places. They were approached by the researcher and requested for the participation in the study. The participants involved in the study were aged 60 and above, having no major physical or psychological issue. Each participant was introduced with the study and its purpose, along with the informed consent to show willingness to participate in the study and maintenance of confidentiality as a part of the research protocol. Those individuals who agreed to be a part of the study were provided with DSE and Happiness Scale. The items that were difficult to comprehend were elaborated by the researcher to ensure that the participants understood the questions and answered accordingly. After getting the questionnaire filled, the participants were thanked for their time and input.

4. RESULT

Correlation and t-test was used to test the hypotheses and the following results have been obtained from data analysis:

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Variables (N=100)

Respondent's Characteristics		f (%)
Gender	Female	61 (61)
	Male	39 (39)
Family structure	Nuclear	42 (50.0)
	Joint	58 (50.0)
Current Education Level	Illiterate	19
	Primary	11
	Middle	25
	Matric	16
	Intermediate	11
	Graduation	8
	Master	10
Marital Stats	Married	90
	Unmarried	10
Income Level	Less than 14 000	17
	14000-30000	55
	30000 Above	28

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation between spiritual experience and happiness variables (n=100)

Variables	Correlation	Interpretation
Happiness Spirituality	.35	Moderately Significant Relationship

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Result indicates that there is moderately significant relationship between spirituality and happiness among senior citizens, thus showing support for H1.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test Used for Comparison of spiritual experience among males and females' senior citizens

Variables	N	Mean	SD	"t"- Value	Sign. (2- Tailed)	Sign. Level
Male	61	74.65	11.62			
				1.04	.297	.05
Female	39	71.97	13.98			

The above table showed that there is no significant difference between male and female on daily spiritual experience, showing lack of evidence to support H2.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test Used for Comparison of happiness experience between males and females' senior citizens

Variables	N	Mean	SD	"t"- Value	Sign. (2- Tailed)	Sign. Level
Male	61	18.8	3.51			
				1.09	.27	.05
Female	39	18.10	3.42			

between level of happiness experienced by male and female senior citizens, therefore H3 has been rejected.

5. DISCUSSION:

The aim of the study was to explore relationship between daily spiritual experience and happiness among people in old age. Result of the study showed that daily spiritual experience and happiness are moderately positively correlated. The findings can be explained that engaging in spiritual experience increase happiness. Our study results are similar with previous researches which reported positive correlation between spirituality and happiness (Ellison, & Fan, 2008; Francis, Katz, Yablon, & Robbins, 2004; Francis, Jones & Wilcox,

2000; Inglehart, 1990). These results can be explained that spiritual people are engaged in various activities such as helping others and having sympathetic attitude for others which might enhance their happiness (Shaw, 2008).

Moreover, spirituality is also a great source of hope which develops purpose in life and makes people happier (Cohen & Koenig, 2003). Further clarification is that spirituality is also great buffer against negative emotions as spiritual beliefs view this world temporary and hardships as a way for achieving self-actualization or close connection with a divine, which makes them stronger enough for bearing hardships and they remain contented. Saleem and Sajid (2015) have further elaborated that individuals who are spiritual also experience higher levels of mental and psychological functioning despite negative life circumstances. It has also been emphasized that spirituality was strongly connected with being hopeful about life, as well as finding meaningful existence rather than viewing life as a miserable phenomenon.

Further support for the findings related to H1 has been observed through the study of Low and Molzahn (2007) who discussed how focus on spirituality can help senior citizens in spending a more meaningful life than those who are not inclined towards religion and spirituality. Moreover, Thauvoye, Vanhooren, Vandenhoeck and Dezutter (2018) have examined spirituality as a multidimensional concept, illustrating that meaningful connection with a higher power as well as the existence of a close relationship with family members and other people in the social circle increases the positive perception about quality of life.

There was no significant difference found among happiness and spirituality within gender (Male, Female), which showed that males and females senior citizens are not different on daily spiritual experience and happiness. Many previous studies conducted in western countries report effect of gender difference on spirituality and happiness (Argyle, 1986; Myers & Diener, 1995). However, when these studies were conducted to explore gender difference in Taiwan and Kuwait results were not consistent (Ahmed, 2006), therefore it can be seen that cross-cultural differences can influence the role of spirituality for males and females. In addition, Lun and Bond (2013) reported that social interaction prompted by religious activities

increased the spiritual experience, ultimately leading to higher satisfaction from life as compared to cultures that are not dominated by such social interaction. Cross cultural differences among gender and spirituality were also evaluated by Maselko and Kubzansky (2006) who found that for males, the sense of happiness was derived out of involvement in religious endeavors. On the other hand, women equally relied on religion and spirituality as a means of gaining a positive perspective in terms fulfilment and well-being. However, other studies have shown no association between gender and spirituality and well-being. For instance, Simpson, Cloud, Newman and Fuqua (2008) mentioned how gender didn't have a significant effect on the spiritual experience of individuals, suggesting that the influence of gender on spirituality and meaningful life and well-being is not as clearly established, lending support to the rejected H2 and H3.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was conducted to explore relationship between daily spiritual experience and happiness. It can be concluded that there is a moderately significant positive relationship between spiritual experience and happiness among senior citizens, with no significant role of gender on these variables. The study result is important for mental health practitioners, dealing with senior citizens as they can help them in fostering spiritual wellbeing and finding meaning in life through spirituality and religion. People in old age are likely to experience despair and religion and spiritual support can lower their level of despair and improve their overall quality of life.

Even though the study has made contribution in depicting how spirituality can enhance happiness among senior citizens, there are some limitations of the study. The analysis of the present study focused on the demographic variable of gender with spirituality and happiness. Future researchers can conduct a comparative analysis of spirituality and happiness with other demographic factors such as educational level, income, marital status etc. In addition, qualitative interviews can be conducted to get more detailed information from senior citizens to understand their spiritual experience and how they use spirituality to cope with life changes accompanied by old age and rising health concerns.

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