



Spiritual Well-Being as a Predictor of Borderline Personality Traits among Indian Emerging Adults

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Abstract: The psychological well-being of Indian emerging adults is increasingly challenged by rapid socio-cultural transitions, often manifesting as emotional instability and identity disturbances associated with borderline personality traits. The present study aimed to examine the role of spiritual well-being as a protective psychological resource against such traits. A sample of 302 Indian young adults participated in the study. Spiritual well-being was assessed using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS), comprising Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB), while borderline personality traits were measured using the McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (MSI-BPD). The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits, indicating that individuals with higher levels of spiritual well-being reported lower levels of emotional dysregulation, identity disturbance, and interpersonal instability. Among the two dimensions, existential well-being emerged as a stronger predictor of reduced borderline traits, highlighting the importance of meaning-making and life purpose in psychological stability. The study underscores the relevance of integrating culturally grounded spiritual frameworks within contemporary psychological interventions. It advocates for a shift from deficit-based approaches toward strength-based models, emphasizing spiritual well-being as a vital resource for enhancing resilience and emotional regulation among Indian youth.

Keywords: *Spiritual Well-Being, Borderline Personality Traits, Emerging Adults, Existential Well-Being, Emotional Regulation, Indian Youth*

1. Introduction

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental phase marked by identity exploration, emotional fluctuations, and heightened psychosocial stress. In the Indian context, this period is further shaped by the tension between traditional collectivist values and rapidly evolving individualistic aspirations, often resulting in internal conflict and vulnerability to psychological distress.

One significant manifestation of such distress is the presence of borderline personality traits, including affective instability, identity disturbance, chronic emptiness, and interpersonal difficulties. Even at subclinical levels, these traits can impair emotional regulation and functioning, particularly within rapidly changing socio-cultural environments.

Spiritual well-being has gained recognition as a multidimensional psychological resource that may enhance resilience and identity stability. It comprises both a vertical dimension (connection with a higher power) and a horizontal dimension (sense of meaning, purpose, and life satisfaction). These dimensions provide a framework for psychological coherence and emotional grounding. The existential dimension of spiritual well-being is especially relevant, as it directly addresses core features of borderline traits such as emptiness and identity confusion through meaning-making processes. However, despite growing interest in strength-based approaches, limited research has examined the role of spiritual well-being in mitigating subclinical personality vulnerabilities among Indian emerging adults.

The present study aims to examine the relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits in this population. It is hypothesized that higher levels of spiritual well-being, particularly existential well-being, will be associated with lower levels of borderline personality traits.

2. Literature Review

Spiritual well-being (SWB) is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional construct encompassing both religious and existential dimensions, contributing significantly to psychological health and resilience. Empirical research indicates that higher levels of spiritual well-being are associated with greater life satisfaction, emotional stability, and reduced psychological distress. In particular, existential well-being—reflecting meaning and purpose—has been identified as a key factor in promoting adaptive functioning.

Borderline personality traits (BPT), characterized by emotional instability, identity disturbance, and interpersonal difficulties, are increasingly observed at subclinical levels among emerging adults. These traits are often linked to identity diffusion and chronic feelings of emptiness, especially within rapidly changing socio-cultural contexts.

Recent studies suggest an inverse relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits, with spirituality functioning as a protective factor that enhances emotional regulation and identity coherence. Within the Indian context, spirituality plays an integrative role, offering a culturally grounded framework for meaning making and resilience. However, limited research has examined this relationship in non-clinical samples of Indian emerging adults.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the association between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits, with particular emphasis on the predictive role of existential well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits among Indian emerging adults. This design was considered appropriate for identifying the predictive and associative patterns between the variables without manipulating any conditions.

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 302 Indian young adults, representing the developmental stage of emerging adulthood. Participants were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The sample comprised individuals from diverse educational and socio-cultural backgrounds, ensuring variability in experiences relevant to psychological and spiritual constructs. Inclusion criteria required participants to be within the age range of emerging adulthood and capable of providing informed consent.

3.3 Measures

Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS): Spiritual well-being was assessed using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982). The scale measures overall spiritual well-being and consists of two subdimensions: Religious Well-Being (RWB), reflecting an individual's perceived relationship with a higher power, and Existential Well-Being (EWB),

reflecting a sense of purpose and life satisfaction. The total score represents a composite measure of spiritual health. The scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity across diverse populations.

McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (MSI-BPD):

Borderline personality traits were measured using the McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (MSI-BPD), a widely used self-report tool designed to assess the presence of borderline personality features. The instrument captures key characteristics such as affective instability, identity disturbance, interpersonal difficulties, and impulsivity. Higher scores indicate greater severity of borderline personality traits.

3.4 Procedure

Data were collected through standardized self-report questionnaires administered to participants after obtaining informed consent. Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The instruments were administered in a structured format, and participants completed the questionnaires at their own pace. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to examine the relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the sample characteristics and variable distributions. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. Additionally, regression analysis was performed to evaluate the predictive role of spiritual well-being and its dimensions, particularly existential well-being, in explaining variance in borderline personality traits.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for psychological research. Participants were informed about the nature and objectives of the study prior to participation. Confidentiality of responses was maintained, and data were used solely for academic purposes. Participation was voluntary, and no form of coercion was involved.

4. Result

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the distribution of study variables among 302 Indian emerging adults. The sample comprised 41.1% males ($n = 124$) and 58.9% females ($n = 178$), with the majority being undergraduate students (68.5%). The mean score for total spiritual well-being was 83.14 ($SD = 16.47$), indicating a moderate to high level of perceived spiritual health. The subscale scores showed that participants reported slightly higher religious well-being ($M = 42.76$, $SD = 10.11$) compared to existential well-being ($M = 40.38$, $SD = 8.23$).

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 302)*

Variables	n(%)	M	SD	Range	Shapiro-Wilk (W)	Sig. (p)
Gender						
Male	124 (41.1%)	—	—	—	—	—
Female	178 (58.9%)	—	—	—	—	—
Education Level						
Undergraduate	207 (68.5%)	—	—	—	—	—
Postgraduate	95 (31.5%)	—	—	—	—	—
Study Variables						
Religious Well-being (RWB)	—	42.76	10.11	20 – 60	.978	.082
Existential Well-being (EWB)	—	40.38	8.23	20 – 60	.981	.114
Total Spiritual Well-being	—	83.14	16.47	40 – 120	.986	.241
BPD Traits (MSI-BPD)	—	5.56	3.49	0 – 10	.969	.064

Note. $N = 302$. RWB = Religious Well-being; EWB = Existential Well-being; MSI-BPD = McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder.

The mean score for borderline personality traits (MSI-BPD) was 5.56 ($SD = 3.49$), which falls below the clinical cutoff but indicates the presence of notable subclinical personality features within the sample. Tests of normality (Shapiro–Wilk) indicated that the data were normally distributed ($p > .05$), supporting the use of parametric analyses.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences. Results indicated no significant differences between males and females in Religious Well-being, $t(300) = -0.854$, $p = .394$, Existential Well-being, $t(300) = 1.843$, $p = .066$, or Total Spiritual Well-being, $t(300) = 0.393$, $p = .695$. However, a significant gender difference was observed in borderline

personality traits, $t(300) = -4.036$, $p < .001$, with females ($M = 6.22$, $SD = 3.29$) reporting significantly higher levels than males ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 3.55$).

Independent t test

Variable	Gender	M	SD	T	p
Religious Wellbeing	Male	42.17	10.42	-0.854	.394
	Female	43.18	9.90		
Existential Wellbeing	Male	41.42	8.72	1.843	.066
	Female	39.65	7.82		
Total Wellbeing	Male	83.59	17.89	0.393	0.695
	Female	82.83	15.45	-4.036	<.001
BPD Traits (MSI-BPD)	Male	4.61	3.55		
	Female	6.22	3.29		

Note. $N = 302$ (Males = 124, Females = 178). $p < .05$ is considered significant

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits. Total spiritual well-being was negatively correlated with BPD traits ($r = -.327$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of spirituality are associated with lower levels of personality-related distress. Among the subdimensions, existential well-being showed a stronger negative correlation ($r = -.422$, $p < .01$) compared to religious well-being ($r = -.188$, $p < .01$). Additionally, religious and existential well-being were positively correlated ($r = .607$, $p < .01$), suggesting that both dimensions are interrelated components of overall spiritual health.

Table 3. *Correlation Matrix between Spiritual Well-being Dimensions and Borderline Personality Traits*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Religious Well-being (RWB)	—			

2. Existential Well-being (EWB)	.607**	—		
3. Total Spiritual Well-being	.918**	.873**	—	
4. BPD Traits (MSI-BPD)	-.188**	-.422**	-.327**	—

Note. $N = 302$. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive role of spiritual well-being. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 300) = 35.83$, $p < .001$, with spiritual well-being explaining 10.7% of the variance in borderline personality traits ($R^2 = .107$). The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.069$, $p < .001$) indicated that increases in spiritual well-being were associated with significant decreases in borderline personality traits.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients of Spiritual Well-being on Borderline Personality Traits ($N = 302$)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	Sig.	F	R^2
1. (Constant)	11.310	0.979	0.000	35.83	0.107
Total Spiritual Wellbeing	-0.069	0.012	0.000		

Note. Dependent Variable: Borderline Personality Traits (MSI-BPD). Predictor: Total Spiritual Well-being.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits among Indian emerging adults. The findings provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized inverse relationship, indicating that spiritual well-being functions as a significant psychological resource in reducing emotional and interpersonal instability.

The negative correlation between total spiritual well-being and borderline personality traits suggests that individuals with higher levels of spiritual integration demonstrate greater emotional regulation and identity stability. This finding aligns with existing literature emphasizing spirituality as a protective factor that enhances resilience and psychological coherence.

A key finding of the study is the stronger association between existential well-being and borderline personality traits. The moderate negative correlation ($r = -.422$) indicates that a sense of meaning, purpose, and life satisfaction plays a crucial role in mitigating core features of borderline pathology, such as chronic emptiness and identity disturbance. This supports theoretical perspectives that emphasize the role of meaning-making in psychological stability, particularly

during emerging adulthood.

In contrast, religious well-being demonstrated a weaker, though still significant, negative relationship with borderline traits. This suggests that while connection to a higher power may provide emotional support, it is the individual's subjective sense of purpose and existential clarity that more directly influences personality stability. These findings highlight the differential roles of spiritual dimensions and underscore the importance of focusing on existential aspects in psychological interventions.

The regression findings further reinforce the predictive role of spiritual well-being. Although spirituality accounted for 10.7% of the variance in borderline personality traits, this contribution is substantial within the context of personality research, where behavior is influenced by multiple interacting factors. The significant negative regression coefficient indicates that spiritual well-being is not merely associated with but actively predicts lower levels of personality-related distress.

The observed gender differences provide additional insight into the manifestation of borderline traits. Female participants reported significantly higher levels of borderline personality traits despite similar levels of spiritual well-being. This suggests that while spiritual resources are equally available across genders, their effectiveness may be moderated by socio-cultural and psychological factors, particularly those affecting emotional processing and stress.

Within the Indian socio-cultural context, these findings hold particular relevance. Emerging adults often experience "cultural transition stress," navigating between traditional collectivist norms and modern individualistic demands. Spiritual well-being, especially its existential dimension, appears to offer a culturally grounded framework that facilitates identity integration and emotional stability.

Overall, the findings support a shift toward strength-based approaches in mental health, emphasizing the role of internal resources such as spirituality. Integrating meaning-centered and spiritually informed interventions may enhance the effectiveness of existing therapeutic models in addressing subclinical borderline personality traits among young adults.

6. Conclusion

The present study establishes a significant inverse relationship between spiritual wellbeing and borderline personality traits among Indian emerging adults, highlighting spirituality as a

meaningful psychological resource. Notably, existential well-being emerged as a stronger predictor, underscoring the central role of purpose and meaning in mitigating emotional instability and identity disturbance.

These findings reinforce the relevance of strength-based and culturally grounded frameworks in contemporary mental health, suggesting that fostering existential clarity may serve as an effective pathway for enhancing psychological resilience. Overall, the study positions spiritual well-being not merely as a supportive construct, but as a measurable and predictive factor in promoting emotional stability among youth.

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