



A Study on Psychological Distress, Spiritual well-being and Optimism among Young Adults

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Abstract

In the present scenario, we can see that young adults are more prone to have psychological distress, which means having emotional difficulties that involve anxiety, depression etc. Spiritual well-being refers to having a sense of meaning and purpose in life. On the other hand, Optimism refers having a positive expectation towards life. The study aimed to examine the relationship between psychological distress, spiritual well-being and optimism among young adults. A Sample of 30 Participants were taken between the age group of 18-25 and were examined by using standardized scales, The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), Spiritual Well-being Slovak version scale (SWBS-SK) and State Optimism Measure Scale (SOM). The result showed that there is a negative correlation between spiritual well-being and psychological distress and there is a significant positive correlation between optimism and spiritual well-being. However, there is no significant relationship found between Optimism & Psychological distress which indicates the complex dynamics among these factors. The study concludes how spiritual well-being and optimism help an individual to navigate psychological

challenges, leads to improved overall well-being which helps future researchers to investigate further comprehensive research to integrate the relationship between Spiritual well-being, Optimism and Psychological practices which contributes to understanding about Mental health.

Keywords: *Psychological distress, Spiritual well-being, Optimism & Young adults*

Introduction

"When psychological distress weighs heavy, spiritual well-being offers clarity, and optimism gives us the courage to keep moving forward."

During the transitional period of young adulthood, individuals aged 18 to 26 years old usually encounter new responsibilities and challenges that can significantly impact their future. This developmental phase is crucial, as success or failure during this time can have lasting effects. Many young adults face mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal tendencies, which can result from various internal and external factors, leading to psychological distress. Psychological distress encompasses a wide range of symptoms, such as anxiety, impaired functionality, challenging personality traits, and behavioural problems as outlined in the DSM-V. This state can trigger maladaptive coping mechanisms, resulting in symptoms such as sadness, loss of interest, restlessness, tension, and physical health issues like strokes, cardiovascular diseases, and suicidal ideation.

Young adults are more susceptible to psychological distress, especially in higher education settings. Eskin et al. (2016) examined the prevalence of suicidal behaviour and psychological distress in 5,572 university students from 12 countries. The study found that 29% had considered suicide and 7% had attempted it. Psychological distress was strongly linked to both suicidal thoughts and actions. This highlights the need to prioritize mental health

support for young adults in universities and calls for further cross-cultural research to explore variations in suicide behaviour among societies. In conclusion, it is important to prioritize the mental health needs of young adults in higher education and conduct more cross-cultural research to understand the differences in suicide behaviours and psychological distress across societies.

A study by Knapstad et al. (2019) examined trends in self-reported psychological distress among Norwegian college and university students from 2010 to 2018. The study included 6065 students in 2010, 13663 in 2014, and 49321 in 2018, aged 18-34 years. The findings indicated a significant increase in self-reported psychological distress over time among students of all genders and age groups. This suggests a concerning rise in psychological distress among Norwegian students in higher education. Possible factors for the trend include changes in response style and an increase in distress levels.

Optimism and spiritual well-being are important factors in reducing psychological distress in adults. Optimism involves having positive expectations towards life, enabling individuals to better manage stress through problem-solving and planning strategies, and interpreting stressful events in a positive light. Spiritual well-being, on the other hand, involves seeking meaning and purpose, and desiring to connect with something larger than oneself. This helps individuals find inner peace and cope with stress. Additionally, spiritual well-being contributes to a higher quality of life, increased satisfaction with healthcare, and better acceptance of any disorders one may have. A study by Barton and Miller (2015) explored the connection between personal spirituality and positive psychology in two age groups, adolescents/emerging adults (18-25 years) and older adults (26-82 years). The study surveyed 3966 participants who completed assessments on daily spiritual experiences, forgiveness, gratitude, optimism, grit, and meaning. The results indicated that both age groups exhibited high levels of positive psychology traits linked to personal spirituality. Additionally,

depression was found to be inversely related to positive psychology traits and personal spirituality was found to be protective against substance use in individuals of all ages. This suggests that personal spirituality may contribute to positive psychological traits in most people. In a study by Guse and Shaw (2018), the relationship between hope, meaning in life, and well-being among young adults was examined. A sample of 252 young adults from the University was studied, and the results indicated that meaning in life mediated the connection between dispositional and perceived hope and well-being. The study concludes that hope can lead to the establishment of meaningful goals and spiritual experiences, ultimately increasing meaning in life and well-being.

Psychological Distress

Lerutla (2000) defined psychological distress “as the emotional condition that one feels when it is necessary to cope with unsettling, frustrating or harmful situation” Another definition was given by Chalfant et al. (1990), psychological distress is defined “as a continuous experience of unhappiness, nervousness, irritability and problematic interpersonal relationship”

According to Jackson and Finney (2002) a study was conducted on the Negative life event and psychological distress among young adults. In which young adults were taken as a sample for the study. The result shows that negative experiences in affiliative opportunities (peer relationship) were most predictive of distress and were vulnerable to negative life events and more likely to be angry/ hostile (rather than consistently depressed or anxious) which concludes that younger adults either lack the psychological resources of maturity or adopt ineffective coping strategies when faced with stressful situations.

According to Richwook and d’Espaignet (1996) a study was conducted on psychological distress among older adolescents and young adults in Australia in which 8350

samples were surveyed in the age range of 16 to 24 for the study. The result showed that high levels of psychological distress were evident, with girls being more distressed than boys at all ages and 41% of girls were classified as moderate cases, as compared with 26% of boys. The study concludes that level of distress peaked at the age 17 for both boys & girls and further decreased with age for girls however it was relatively stable over time for boys.

Spiritual well being

According to Hawks et al. (1995) spiritual well-being can be defined “as a feeling of communicating with others, having meaning in life, having belief and relation with an exalted power”. Additionally, Ellison (1983) states that Spiritual well-being includes “a psycho-social and also a religious element”

According to Alorani and Alradaydeh (2018) a study was conducted on the relationship between Spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and life satisfaction among university students. A total sample of 919 students were taken for the study. The result showed that there is a positive correlation between Spiritual well-being with perceived social support and life satisfaction. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between perceived social support and life satisfaction. The study concludes that there is a moderate level of spiritual well-being and perceived social support among university students, and they are slightly satisfied with their lives.

According to Anye et al. (2013) a study was conducted on the relationship between Spiritual well-being and Health-related Quality of life in college students. A total of 225 samples were taken for the study. The result shows that participants who score higher in SWB (Spiritual well-being) were more likely to participate in religious activities and have better HRQL (Health-related quality Life) as compared with students who reported a moderate sense

of SWB. The study concludes that SWB made a significant contribution to HRQL in a sample of college students that helps to improve the quality of life of young adults.

Optimism

Tiger (1971) defined optimism as “a mood or attitude associated with an interpretation about the social or material one which the evaluator regards as socially desirable to his or her advantage, or for his or her pleasure”. Another definition by Keles (2011) states that optimism can be defined “as a generalised expectation to have a better future.”

According to Thomson and Kavya (2022) a study was conducted to examine the level of life satisfaction, optimism & happiness among young adults. A total of 120 samples were taken in the age range of 18-24 out of which 60 females & 60 males were taken for the study. The result showed that there is a significantly positive correlation between happiness & life satisfaction and in optimism & life satisfaction among young adults which shows that there is no significant difference in the level of life satisfaction, optimism & happiness among young adults across their gender.

Pathak and Lata (2018) conducted a study on 200 young adults (100 Males, 100 Females), in the age 18-25, to examine the relationship between optimism, resilience and perceived stress among young adults. The result showed that there is a Positive relationship between Optimism & resilience and a negative relationship between Optimism & Perceived stress.

Purpose

The Purpose is to study psychological distress, Spiritual well-being and Optimism among Young adults.

Hypothesis

- There will be a significantly positive correlation between Spiritual well-being and Optimism.
- There will be a negative correlation between Spiritual well-being and psychological distress.
- There will be a negative correlation between Optimism and Psychological distress.

Method

Sample

A total sample of 30 individuals was in the age of 18-25 collected from the city Sri Vijaya Puram.

Measure

Optimism Scale: State Optimism Measure Scale (SOM) as developed by (Millstein et al., 2019). It is a 7 items self - report measure. Respondents were asked to rate each item on 5 points scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Psychological Distress Scale: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale(K10) as developed by (Kessler & Colpe et al., 2002). It is a 10 items Self-report measure. Respondents were asked to rate each item on 5 points scale ranging from 1(none of the time) to 5 (All of the time)

Spiritual Well-being Scale: Spiritual Well-being Slovak version scale (SWBS-SK) as developed by (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). It is a 10 items Self-report measure. The SWBS contains 2 subscales, religious well-being (RWB) and Existential well-being (EWB). Respondents were asked to rate each item on 6-Points Likert scale ranging from 1(Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree).

Procedure

The purpose of the research was informed to respondents to fill the questionnaire through google form. Each respondent was thanked for cooperation & their kind help. Standardized psychological tests are administered to the respondents.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard deviation*

	Psychological distress	Spiritual well-being	Optimism
N	30	30	30
Mean	24.4	45.4	3.72
Standard Deviation	6.96	10.8	0.765

Table 2: *Correlation of all the variables*

	Psychological distress	Spiritual well-being	Optimism
Psychological distress	—		
Spiritual well-being	-0.120	—	
Optimism	0.011	0.519**	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion of Results

The result found that there is a negative correlation between Spiritual well-being & Psychological distress ($r=-0.120$). Additionally, there is a significant positive correlation

between optimism & spiritual well-being ($r=0.519$, $p<.01$) However, there is no significant relationship found between Optimism & Psychological distress.

The study was conducted to examine the relationship between psychological distress, Spiritual well-being and Optimism among young adults which suggests that spiritual well-being and optimism can act as coping mechanisms to reduce psychological distress among young adults. A research study was done among 200 undergraduate students under the age group of 18-25. The result indicates that there is a negative correlation between spiritual health and the level of depression ($r=-0.458$, $p=0.001$) which stated that as respondents' spiritual health grows then their level of depression lowers. The researcher further states that spiritual health, as expressed through existential well-being and religious well-being is a separate component that leads to explanatory power to mental health well-being prediction (Mangotara & Bangcola, 2022). Another study was done among 30 college students under the age group of 18-25. The result indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between Spiritual well-being and psychological well-being, a significant positive correlation between psychological well-being and existential well-being and a significant correlation between Spiritual well-being and positive relations with others. The results further found that there was a significant positive correlation between existential well-being and environmental mastery and there was a significant positive correlation between existential well-being and positive relations with others (Boora, 2024).

These findings support that Spiritual well-being and Optimism play a key role in reducing psychological distress, especially among young adults and help to excel in psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The current research study focused on the correlation between Spiritual well-being and Optimism which helps to reduce psychological distress among young adults, the respondents who participated in the study were under the age group of 18-25 years old. To collect the data standardized scales were used. The Psychological Distress Scale, containing 10 items, to measure the level of psychological distress of an individual, The Spiritual Well-being Slovak version scale, containing 10 items, measured the level of Spiritual well-being of an individual and The State Optimism Measure Scale, containing 7 items, measured one's level of Optimism of an individual. A total number of 30 samples were taken for the research study. The measured data indicated that there is a negative correlation between Spiritual well-being & Psychological distress and there is a significant Positive correlation between Optimism & Spiritual well-being. However, the result also showed that there is no significant correlation between Optimism and Psychological distress.

The current research study has a few limitations that needs to be studied. First, it had a small sample size (N=30) and a similar age group of the participants (18-25) which may limit the generalization of the result, and it can provide a less accurate estimate and may not precisely represent a larger population. Second, the participant's responses also included a social desirability bias as some respondents adjusted their responses to show themselves in a favourable light.

This current study supports and highlights that spiritual well-being and optimism play a key role in improving the mental health of an individual. While, spiritual well-being helps to reduce psychological distress, optimism seems to enhance spiritual well-being and might not directly reduce psychological distress. This shows that optimism is more prone to improve spiritual well-being which might indirectly reduce psychological distress. This suggests that future researchers must focus on investigating the relationship between optimism and

psychological distress to better understand the vital role of optimism. Additionally, many strategies can be taken to foster one's Spiritual well-being and optimism by engaging in meditation, mindfulness, doing religious works and having a sense of Positive mindset towards life with realistic goals can help to indirectly reduce the psychological distress of an individual.

The present study has improved our understanding of the relationship between spiritual well-being and optimism by engaging together to reduce psychological distress among young adults. It is hoped that the current research study will help further investigation to improve and enhance this important topic.

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