

Ageing with Meaning: Spirituality and Psychological Well-Being among the Elderly in Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

Rikhia Sarkar

Research Scholar, Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension, University of North Bengal

Abstract

Population ageing has become a major demographic phenomenon with significant implications for the mental and social well-being of older adults. In this context, spirituality has emerged as an important psychosocial resource that contributes to coping, adjustment, and overall quality of life in later years. The present study examines the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among elderly individuals residing in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area of West Bengal.

The study is based on a quantitative research design using primary data collected from one hundred and ten elderly respondents aged sixty years and above through structured interview schedules. Spirituality was assessed through two dimensions—spiritual belief and spiritual involvement—while psychological well-being was measured using the Psychological Well-being Scale developed by Sisodia and Chaudhury (2012), covering dimensions such as life satisfaction, mental health, sociability, efficiency, and interpersonal relations.

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents exhibit a moderate to moderately high level of spirituality. Spiritual belief is found to be more stable and consistent compared to spiritual involvement. The correlation analysis indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. Higher levels of spirituality are associated with better mental health, increased life satisfaction, improved interpersonal relations, and overall psychological well-being.

The study concludes that spirituality plays a crucial role as a coping mechanism and supportive factor in enhancing the psychological well-being of the elderly. It highlights the need to recognize and promote spiritual dimensions in policies and interventions aimed at improving the quality of life of the ageing population.

Keywords: Spirituality, Psychological Well-being, Elderly, Ageing, Spiritual Belief, Spiritual Involvement

Introduction

Population ageing has emerged as one of the most significant demographic transformations of the twenty-first century, with profound implications for social, economic, and health systems across the world. In India, the proportion of elderly individuals is steadily increasing due to improvements in life expectancy and declining fertility rates. This demographic shift has drawn growing academic and policy attention to the quality of life and well-being of the ageing population. Among the various dimensions of ageing,

psychological well-being has become a critical area of concern, as older adults often face challenges such as declining health, loss of social roles, loneliness, and reduced economic security.

In this context, spirituality has gained recognition as an important psychosocial resource that can enhance the overall well-being of elderly individuals. Spirituality, understood as a sense of meaning, purpose, connectedness, and belief in a higher power, plays a vital role in helping older adults cope with life transitions and existential concerns. It not only provides emotional comfort but also strengthens resilience, promotes positive mental health, and fosters social integration through shared values and practices.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted a positive association between spirituality and psychological well-being, indicating that spiritually oriented individuals tend to experience higher levels of life satisfaction, emotional stability, and interpersonal harmony. However, the nature and extent of this relationship may vary across different socio-cultural contexts, particularly in regions where traditional values and community life continue to shape everyday experiences.

The Jalpaiguri Municipal area of West Bengal represents one such context, where ageing is embedded within a complex interplay of socio-economic conditions, cultural traditions, and changing family structures. Despite the growing elderly population in this region, there is limited empirical research examining the role of spirituality in influencing their psychological well-being.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among elderly individuals residing in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. By examining both spiritual belief and spiritual involvement in relation to various dimensions of psychological well-being, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of ageing, mental health, and the significance of spirituality in later life.

Spirituality

Spirituality in the context of this study refers to a multidimensional construct encompassing both **spiritual belief** and **spiritual involvement**, which together shape the inner and social lives of elderly individuals. Spiritual belief denotes faith in a higher power, moral values, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life, while spiritual involvement reflects participation in practices such as prayer, religious rituals, and community gatherings. For the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area, spirituality functions as a vital coping resource that helps them deal with ageing-related challenges, including loneliness, stress, and declining health. It enhances emotional stability, promotes social connectedness, and contributes significantly to their overall psychological well-being.

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being in this study refers to the overall mental and emotional state of elderly individuals, reflecting their ability to lead a satisfying and meaningful life. It includes dimensions such as life satisfaction, perceived efficiency, sociability, mental health, and interpersonal relations. Additionally, it encompasses factors like family acceptance, emotional support, autonomy, self-esteem, loneliness, and coping ability. In the context of the Jalpaiguri Municipal area, psychological well-being refers to the extent to which older adults adapt to ageing-related challenges. Higher levels of psychological well-being are associated with better mental health, stronger social relationships, and a greater sense of purpose and belonging in later life.

Review of Literature

Several studies have highlighted the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among older adults. Existing studies consistently indicate that spirituality plays a crucial role in enhancing mental health, life satisfaction, and overall adjustment in later life.

Koenig (2012) argued that religious and spiritual involvement can significantly influence emotional health by providing coping resources, social support, and a sense of purpose. Spiritual engagement often helps elderly individuals deal with stress, illness, and life uncertainties.

George, Ellison, and Larson (2002) observed that participation in religious activities strengthens social connections and promotes positive mental health outcomes among elderly populations. Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and participation in community rituals can enhance feelings of belonging and reduce loneliness.

Levin (2009) emphasized that spirituality contributes to improved psychological adjustment by fostering optimism, hope, and emotional resilience. Elderly individuals who maintain strong spiritual beliefs often display greater acceptance of life challenges and maintain better mental health.

Pargament (1997), through his theory of religious coping, explained that spirituality serves as an important coping mechanism during difficult life situations. For elderly individuals, spirituality helps in dealing with ageing-related challenges such as declining health, loss of loved ones, and social isolation.

Krause (2003) observed that a strong sense of spiritual belief enhances emotional well-being and promotes social connectedness among older adults. His findings suggest that participation in religious communities strengthens interpersonal relationships and reduces feelings of loneliness.

In the Indian context, **Singh and Misra (2009)** found that spirituality is positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively related to loneliness and depression among the elderly. Their study indicates that spiritual orientation helps individuals maintain psychological balance in later life.

Similarly, **Chaudhury and Biswas (2010)** reported that elderly individuals with higher levels of spiritual involvement exhibit better psychological adjustment, higher self-esteem, and improved coping abilities.

Sharma and Kaur (2015), in their study on urban elderly populations in India, found a significant positive relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being, particularly in terms of mental health, interpersonal relations, and overall life satisfaction.

The concept of successful ageing proposed by **Rowe and Kahn (1997)** also indirectly supports the role of spirituality by emphasizing the importance of psychosocial factors such as purpose in life, active engagement, and emotional well-being.

The review of literature clearly indicates that spirituality is an important determinant of psychological well-being among the elderly. It enhances resilience, promotes emotional stability, and provides a sense of meaning and connectedness in later life. These findings provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study, which seeks to examine this relationship in the context of the Jalpaiguri Municipal area.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to examine the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among elderly individuals residing in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. The study also aims to assess the levels of spiritual belief and spiritual involvement among the elderly and to analyse how these dimensions relate to different components of psychological well-being.

Hypotheses

The study is guided by the hypothesis that spirituality has a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being among elderly individuals. It is also hypothesized that higher levels of spiritual belief and spiritual involvement are associated with greater satisfaction, sociability, mental health, and interpersonal relationships in later life.

Methodology

The present study is based on a quantitative research design and utilizes primary data collected through a field survey. The research was conducted across different wards of the Jalpaiguri Municipal area in West Bengal. A total of one hundred and ten elderly respondents aged sixty years and above were selected for the study.

Respondents were chosen using purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation of elderly individuals from diverse neighbourhoods and socio-economic backgrounds within the municipal area. Data were collected using structured interview schedules focusing on spirituality and psychological well-being.

Spirituality was measured through two major dimensions: spiritual belief and spiritual involvement. Spiritual belief refers to the level of faith in a higher power and adherence to moral or religious values, whereas spiritual involvement denotes participation in activities such as prayer, temple visits, religious rituals, and community gatherings.

Psychological well-being was assessed through multiple dimensions, including life satisfaction, perceived efficiency (sense of competence), sociability, mental health, and interpersonal relations. It also included aspects such as family acceptance, emotional support, autonomy, experience of abuse, self-esteem, loneliness, sense of importance within the family, and coping mechanisms. Composite scores were computed to represent overall psychological well-being.

For measuring psychological well-being, the Psychological Well-being Scale developed by Dr. Debendra Singh Sisodia and Mr. Pooja Chaudhury (2012) was used.

The collected data were analysed using appropriate statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, mean scores, standard deviation, and correlation analysis, in order to examine the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being.

Results and Analysis

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Elderly on the Level of Spirituality

Range of z-scores	Level of Spirituality	(n=123)	Percent
+2.01 & above	Extremely high	1	0.91
+1.26 to 2.00	High	11	10.00
+.51 to +1.25	Above average	22	20.00
-.50 to +.50	Average	37	33.64
-.51 to -1.25	Below average	24	21.82
-1.26 to -2.00	Low	9	8.18
-2.01 & below	Extremely low	6	5.45
	Total	110	100

Source: Primary Survey Data

The table presents the distribution of elderly respondents in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area according to their level of spirituality based on z-scores. It shows that the largest proportion of respondents (33.64 percent) falls within the average level of spirituality, indicating a moderate spiritual orientation among the elderly population. A notable share is also observed in the above average (20.00 percent) and high (10.00 percent) categories, suggesting that a considerable number of elderly individuals possess relatively strong spiritual beliefs and involvement.

On the lower side, 21.82 percent of respondents fall under the below average category, while smaller proportions are found in the low (8.18 percent) and extremely low (5.45 percent) levels, indicating comparatively weaker spiritual engagement among a segment of the population. Only 0.91 percent of respondents exhibit an extremely high level of spirituality.

Overall, the findings indicate that spirituality among the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area is largely moderate to moderately high, with limited representation at the extreme ends, reflecting a balanced and meaningful presence of spirituality in their lives.

Table 2: Mean Differences in Different Components of Spirituality

Components of Spirituality	N=110		z-calculated
	Mean	S.D.	
Spiritual Belief	69.83	8.01	2.37**
Spiritual Involvement	49.41	8.43	5.13*
Composite Spirituality	1214.34	16.23	2.62*

Source: Primary Survey Data

The table shows the mean differences in various components of spirituality among the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. The findings indicate that spiritual belief has a relatively high mean score (69.83) with moderate variation (S.D. = 8.01), and the calculated z-value (2.37) is statistically significant, suggesting that belief systems form a strong and consistent aspect of spirituality among the elderly.

In comparison, spiritual involvement has a lower mean (49.41) but a slightly higher standard deviation (8.43), indicating greater variability in participation in spiritual activities. The higher z-value (5.13) shows a significant difference, implying that while involvement varies, it remains an important dimension.

The composite spirituality score shows a very high mean (1214.34) with relatively low dispersion (S.D. = 16.23), and a significant z-value (2.62), reflecting an overall strong and stable level of spirituality among respondents.

Overall, the data suggest that in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area, spirituality among the elderly is well-developed, with strong belief systems and meaningful, though somewhat varied, levels of involvement contributing to a high overall spiritual orientation.

Table 3: Relationship between Spirituality and Psychological Well-being of Elderly

Correlation Matrix		Components of Spirituality(n=110)					
		Spiritual Belief	Spiritual Involvement	Composite Spirituality	Spiritual Belief	Spiritual Involvement	Composite Spirituality
Comp onents	Satisfaction	0.541*	0.517*	0.565*	0.411*	0.386*	0.427*
	Efficiency	0.511*	0.487*	0.548*	0.390*	0.362*	0.415*

Sociability	0.497*	0.466*	0.525*	0.354*	0.341*	0.388*
Mental Health	0.557*	0.531*	0.578*	0.406*	0.375*	0.420*
Interpersonal Relations	0.562*	0.516*	0.572*	0.418*	0.382*	0.435*
Composite Psychological Well-being	0.588**	0.560*	0.603**	0.433*	0.408*	0.454*

Source: Primary Survey Data

The table presents the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. The results show that all components of spirituality—spiritual belief, spiritual involvement, and composite spirituality—have positive and statistically significant correlations with different dimensions of psychological well-being.

Among the components of psychological well-being, mental health, interpersonal relations, and satisfaction show relatively stronger correlations with spirituality. The highest correlation is observed between composite spirituality and overall psychological well-being (0.603), followed by spiritual belief and overall well-being (0.588), indicating a strong association between higher spirituality and better psychological condition.

Although spiritual involvement also shows positive relationships, its correlations are slightly lower compared to spiritual belief, suggesting that inner belief systems may play a more influential role than mere participation in activities.

Overall, the findings clearly indicate that in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area, higher levels of spirituality are associated with better psychological well-being, highlighting spirituality as an important factor contributing to the mental and social health of the elderly.

The overall findings from Tables 1, 2, and 3 indicate that spirituality among the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area is predominantly moderate to high, with most respondents falling in the average and above average categories. Spiritual belief emerges as a strong and stable component, while spiritual involvement shows some variability but remains significant.

The analysis further reveals that all dimensions of spirituality have positive and statistically significant relationships with psychological well-being. Higher levels of spirituality—especially spiritual belief and composite spirituality—are strongly associated with better mental health, satisfaction, interpersonal relations, and overall well-being.

In summary, the results suggest that spirituality plays a crucial role in enhancing the psychological well-being of the elderly, acting as an important supportive factor in their mental and social life in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area.

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide important insights into the role of spirituality in shaping the psychological well-being of the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. The results indicate that spirituality is a significant and functional aspect of the lives of older adults, influencing both their inner experiences and external social adjustment.

The distribution pattern of spirituality (Table 1) shows that most elderly respondents fall within the average to above average levels, suggesting that spirituality is neither absent nor extreme, but rather a

balanced and integrated component of everyday life. This moderate positioning reflects the socio-cultural context of Jalpaiguri, where traditional beliefs, religious practices, and community values continue to influence the ageing population. The relatively low proportion of respondents at the extreme ends indicates that spirituality is generally stable and not polarized.

The analysis of different components of spirituality (Table 2) further highlights that spiritual belief is more consistent and deeply rooted compared to spiritual involvement. While belief systems appear strong and uniform across respondents, involvement in spiritual activities shows greater variation, possibly due to differences in health status, mobility, social support, and access to religious or community spaces. This suggests that internalized spirituality (belief) may play a more enduring role than external practices in later life.

Most importantly, the correlation analysis (Table 3) demonstrates that spirituality is positively and significantly associated with all dimensions of psychological well-being, including satisfaction, mental health, efficiency, sociability, and interpersonal relations. The stronger correlations of spiritual belief and composite spirituality with overall psychological well-being indicate that spirituality functions as a psychological resource, helping the elderly cope with stress, loneliness, and age-related challenges. It enhances emotional stability, promotes a sense of meaning and purpose, and strengthens social connectedness.

These findings are consistent with broader theoretical perspectives which argue that spirituality contributes to resilience, coping mechanisms, and life satisfaction in old age. In the context of Jalpaiguri Municipal area, where formal support systems may be limited, spirituality appears to serve as an informal support system, providing comfort, hope, and a sense of continuity.

In conclusion, the discussion underscores that spirituality is not merely a personal belief system but a vital psychosocial factor that significantly enhances the overall well-being of the elderly. Strengthening opportunities for spiritual engagement and recognizing its importance in policy and practice could contribute to improving the quality of life of the ageing population in the study area.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the significant role of spirituality in shaping the psychological well-being of the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. The findings reveal that the level of spirituality among the elderly is predominantly moderate to moderately high, indicating that spiritual orientation is an integral part of their daily lives. Most respondents demonstrate balanced spiritual engagement, with very few at the extreme ends.

The analysis of different components shows that spiritual belief is strong, stable, and deeply internalized, while spiritual involvement, though important, varies among individuals. This suggests that inner faith and belief systems play a more consistent role than external religious practices in later life.

Most importantly, the study establishes a clear and positive relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. Higher levels of spirituality are associated with better mental health, greater life satisfaction, improved interpersonal relations, and overall well-being. Spirituality thus acts as a vital coping mechanism, helping the elderly deal with stress, loneliness, and the challenges of ageing.

In conclusion, spirituality emerges as a crucial psychosocial resource for the elderly in the Jalpaiguri Municipal area. Strengthening spiritual awareness and creating supportive environments for spiritual engagement can significantly contribute to enhancing the quality of life and psychological well-being of the ageing population.

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