Our Heritage

ISSN: 0474-9030

Vol-68-Issue-1-January-2020

Impact of Spirituality on Perceived Stress- An Empirical Study on Youths

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Abstract

The modem world is plagued by social, economic, and environmental problems that are the result of human greed and a lack of love and compassion. These large-scale problems have camouflaged the essence of life among youths and have triggered in humankind a renewed search for harmony and peace, a search that is essentially a spiritual journey. This paper was to study the impact of spiritual orientation as a de stressor on the youths.A questionnaire survey was conducted to collect research data. A total of 230 questionnaireswere distributed among two groups- control and experimental and 200 valid responses were obtained. Research findings suggested thatthat spirituality really does have an impact on stress level. Practice of the course and inculcation in each and every sphere of life over a period of time eliminates stress enabling the practitioner to become more skilled at achieving the kind of mindfulness that leads to a sense of meaning in life, compassion, and transcendence.

Keywords: Stress, Spiritualism

INTRODUCTION:

"Desire for instant success, name & fame but the fear of being failure; openings of innumerable new vistas to realize one's dream but ever increasing cut-throat competition; unprecedented speedy life style but the feeling of being part of a rat race; freedom to lead unrestricted, unrestrained life but the *sanskar* to conform to traditional practices; ecstasy in hope but fragile in

ISSN: 0474-9030

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despair; preoccupied with mundane materialism but far away from spiritualism; just a click away from globalized world but remotely distant from inner self….."

The above descriptions perhaps best characterize the position of youths in modern world.They are full of hope and desire, surrounded by opportunities; constrained by fear and ignorant about the possibility as well as relative worth of the outcome. The confrontation among all-opportunities, constraints and ignorance- is continuous, inevitable. The result is stress. The resultant outcomes are alienation, stagnation, depression. And the panacea is spiritualism-the innate capacity to, and tendency to seek to, transcend one's current focus of centricity, which with transcendence involves increased knowledge and love.

The term spirituality comes from the Latin word *spiritus,* meaning vapor, breath, air or wind. Webster's Dictionary defines spirituality as: of, relating to, consisting of or affecting the spirit; of relating to sacred matters; concerned with religious values; of, related to, or joint in spirit. Mitroff & Denton (1999) defined spirituality as the desire to find one's ultimate purpose in life, and to live accordingly. Although no widely accepted definition of workplace spirituality exists (Kinjerskiand Skrypnek 2004), there seems to be an emerging consensus that spiritualityis a multifaceted construct that is about finding a connection to something meaningfulthat transcends our ordinary lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Previously considered as outside of the sphere of research for the perceived impossibility in using any scientific method to study it, spirituality is now prominent in scientific studies that investigate its influence on health (Miller & Thorensen, 2003). Research has supported spirituality as relevant to both physical and mental health. Cooper (2003) found the measurement of spiritual and religious involvements to be positively related to health and inversely related to physical disorders, mental disorders, and substance use disorders (Simpson & Starkey, 2006). According to Simpson (2005) an increasing number of studies indicate that those who are more spiritual experience a greater sense of well-being and life satisfaction, are able to cope better

ISSN: 0474-9030

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with stress, and less likely to complete suicide. Also relative to mental health, Simpson and Starkey (2006) state similar results have been reported by Koenig (1998) who found spirituality associated with higher self-esteem and lower depression

A large number of previous researches have discovered and found personal spirituality predicting better health and lower levels of stress (Calicchia & Graham 2006; Lustyk, Beam, Miller & Olson 2006). Moreover, studies have found that individual spirituality may have a moderate effect on the relationship between stress; well-being and well-being (eg, Elem 2000; Hong 2008; Youngmee & Seidlitz 2002). Wachholtz, A. & Rogoff, M. (2013) examined the relationship between spirituality and fatigue among students and found that students with higher levels of spiritual well-being and daily spiritual experiences were more comfortable with their lives, while students with lower grades on spiritual well-being and daily spiritual experiences. There were higher levels of psychological distress and fatigue.A 2012 Gallup Poll has shown that spiritual practices are in associated with positive health outcomes, and improves one's ability to cope with stress.A study published in the 2004 Annals of Family Medicine asked respondents whether they would engage in a spiritual discussion under certain circumstances. Of the respondents who sometimes or always want to discuss spirituality with service providers, 62% welcome a spiritual conversation when talking about chronic pain.Ramya K R and Jose Neethu studied Stress and Spiritual Behavior among Staff Nurses to assess the work stress and spiritual behavior among them and found a negative correlation between work stress and spiritual behavior (r = -.219).Winterowd and Harrist explored the relationship of spiritual beliefs and involvement with anger and stress in college students. The study found the spirituality scales to benegatively related to perceived stress and most of the anger subscales. Pawinee & Duchamp reports two studies on how an organization can achieve more productive work practices by encouraging employees to express their spiritual self in an Eastern environment. Study 1 shows that people who meditate often score higher in the workplace than those who do not regularly meditate. Study 2 reported a quasi-experimental study in which people practiced insightful meditation. The data does not show a direct impact on meditation, but spirituality is indeed related to work performance. The paper also reports that the practice of meditation partially mediates the

ISSN: 0474-9030

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relationship between workplace spirituality and job performance.Youngmee and Seidlitz (2002) examined whether spirituality mitigates the effects of stress on the physical and mental health of college students (positive and negative effects and fitness). The authors demonstrate that spirituality can alleviate the negative effects of stress on health and discomfort. Amanda Bell, Diana Rajendran,Stephen Theiler used a spiritual appraisal model of stress and health to investigate the moderating effects of spirituality at work on job stress, wellbeing, and ill-being amongst 139 Australian academics. Using Bi-variate correlation they demonstrated that spirituality at work, wellbeing, ill-being and the job stress variables are correlated with each other.Schmidt et al. took a group of people from a residential area in Sweden for a three-month yoga and meditation training program and a group of people in the area did not participate in the program. The study found that participants who participated in the three-month course showed lower blood pressure (especially those with elevated blood pressure) compared with those who did not. Sudsuang et al. (1991) examined the effects of the mental process (Falun Zen Buddhist meditation program) on two groups - the experimental group and the control group. They found that the systolic and diastolic blood pressure of the male students who participated in the course was lower than that of the male students who did not participate in the program. The study showed that college students who participated in the meditation program had lower levels of stress hormones (especially cortisol) at the end of the program.

Another study by Wilson and Davidson (1978) also looked at cortisol levels in young people in the control group, who underwent long-term studies (3-5 years) after a 3-4 month of transcendental meditation. Meditative practitioner. The study found no change in cortisol levels for the control group, but decreased cortisol levels for short-term meditation exercises, but did not change significantly. However, for long-term practitioners, cortisol levels are significantly reduced and remain unchanged after meditation. Similarly, Walton, Pugh, Gelderloss, and Macrae (1995) studied a variety of hormones between healthy young adults who did not take any spiritual techniques and adults who did not take any spiritual techniques in a cross-sectional study. The difference in mineral content. Long-term practice of transcendental meditation. Studies have shown that the latter have lower levels of cortisol, aldosterone and norepinephrine.In another study, the levels of cortisol, β-endorphin and adrenocorticotropic

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hormone (ACTH) were analyzed in two groups: one was a practitioner of supernatural meditation and the other was a practitioner of unnatural meditation (Infante et al. 1998), the results showed that the meditation practitioner did not have the circadian rhythm of ACTH and β-endorphin compared with the control group.In another study, the relationship between meditation and oxidative stress was studied to reduce the effects of stress through a priori meditation (Schneider et al., 1998). Lipid peroxide levels in the elderly were measured, some of whom were long-term transcendental meditation practitioners, while others were not. The meditation doctor showed lower levels of lipid peroxide compared to the control group.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES:

Currently there is limited empirical works on the relationship between spirituality and stress in India. This study is designed to determine the strength of the relationship between spirituality, and stress and the impact of moderating variables such as gender, age and course. This study addresses the following two key questions:

1. Is spiritual healing related to reduction in stress?
2. Do moderating variables (gender, specific courses) moderate the relationship between spirituality and stress?

The specific hypotheses are as follows:

H01: There is no relation between spiritual orientation and stress.

H02: There is no relation between spiritual orientation and stress by gender. .

H03: There is no relation between spiritual orientation and stress by specific course.

METHOD:

Design

This study employed the use of survey design. The independent variables are gender, courses and spiritual orientation and the dependent variable is perceived stress level.

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Subjects

The participants in this study were 200 youths studying management courses across various colleges and universities in the state of Uttarakhand, India. 54 percent were males and 46 percent were females aged between 18 and 26.

The students were divided into two categories: Control group (n=100) and Experimental Group (n=100)

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The scale for the study was divided into two sections. Section A measures the demographics; section B is a 20-item scale which measures perceived stress level with reliability coefficient of 0.79 on a five point Likert type scoring format ranging from 0 to 4.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Independent sample t test, paired sample t test, One-Way MANOVA.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

"A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare stress level in students before and after taking spiritual courses. There was a significant difference in the scores for experimental group (M=45.34, SD=18.73) and control group (M=41.61, SD=17.93); t(99)=17.198, p = 0.000. These results suggest that spirituality really does have an impact on stress level. Specifically, our results suggest that when youths attend spiritual courses and attain spiritual orientation, the stress level decreases."

"Like a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare stress level in experimental group's students before and after taking spiritual courses; a paired-samples t-test was also conducted to

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compare stress level in control group students in the gap of ten days . There was no significant difference in the scores for stress level in the beginning (M=45.23, SD=18.64) and after ten days (M=45.37, SD=18.88); t(99)=-0.413, p = 0.312. These results suggest that the stress level of control group's students did not change significantly."

The result of above tests is contained in Table 1.

The researchers further explored the results and found that the 65 students in the high stress level were the most beneficiaries. The result is contained in Table 2.

Taking these results together, we can thus infer that spirituality heals and heals more to those are more in stress!

Having checked the positive impact of spiritual orientation on perceived stress level; the researchers further took into cognizance whether it is the power of a specific spiritual course that has more healing impact. For this the students in the experimental group who were subject to spiritual courses were categorized into two categories on the basis of two specific courses (AOL & Brahmakumari) they had attended for the said period. The result of the test is contained in Table 3.

The result shows that both groups of students in the AOL centre as well as Brahmakumari Centre have been significantly benefited by attending spiritual courses and attaining spirituality orientation. The difference in the extent and extant of benefit is not significant. Thus it can be inferred that the content is more important than the context. Where a youth attains spirituality is not important, he/she attains spirituality that is more important and suffice.

To check whether the impact of spiritual orientation on perceived stress level is more on female than man as is generally said, one way MANOVA was conducted and the result is contained in Table 4.

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"There was no statistically significant difference in reduced stress level based on gender, F (2, 97) = .945, p> .0005; Wilk's Λ = 0.981, partial η^2 = .019.These results suggest that spirituality heals and not discriminate i.e. impact of spiritual orientation on perceived stress level is independent of gender."

CONCLUSION:

The major findings by the researchers can be summarized as follows:

1. When youths attend spiritual courses and attain spiritual orientation, the stress level decreases;
2. Spirituality heals and heals more to those are more in stress;
3. Content is more important than the context. Where a youth attains spirituality is not important, he/she attains spirituality that is more important and suffice;
4. Impact of spiritual orientation on perceived stress level is independent of gender.

The modern world suffers from social, economic and environmental problems caused by human greed and lack of love and compassion. These large-scale problems conceal the essence of the life of young people and have triggered new demands for harmony and peace among human beings. This is essentially a spiritual journey.

However it has to be taken into consideration that one obtainsthe benefits of spiritualism, not quickly, but rather over a period of timethat requirespatience and persistence. Practice of the course and inculcation in each and every sphere of life over a period of time eliminates stress enablingthe practitioner to become more skilled at achieving the kind of mindfulness that leads to a sense of meaning in life, compassion, and transcendence. And the youths need a fundamental shift from a mechanistic paradigm to a spiritual paradigm that values consciousness and understanding. The spiritual paradigm essentially recognizes that one worksnot only with his/her hands and mind, but alsohis/her heartsor spirit. It is only when one will feel an attachment with one's inner self; he/she will have committed spirit and he/shecan find a kind of meaning and

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purpose, a kind of fulfillment which will alleviate all negativities the manifestation of which is the menace stress.

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APPENDIX: **Table 1.**

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Exp1	45.34	100	18.729	1.873
	Exp 2	41.61	100	17.928	1.793
Pair 2	Control1	45.23	100	18.641	1.864
	Control2	45.37	100	18.823	1.882

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Exp1-Exp 2	3.730	2.169	.217	3.300	4.160	17.198	99	.000
Pair 2	control1 - control2	-.140	1.378	.138	-.413	.133	-1.016	99	.312

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Table 2.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Stress1	56.5231	65	11.38956	1.41270
	Stress 2	52.1231	65	11.46940	1.42260

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Stress 1– Stress 2	4.40000	2.08267	.25832	3.88394	4.91606	17.033	64	.000

Table 3

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	aol1	43.61	41	19.508	3.047
	aol2	40.46	41	18.554	2.898
Pair 2	bk1	46.86	59	18.468	2.404
	bk2	42.76	59	17.860	2.325

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Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	aol1 - aol2	3.146	2.032	.317	2.505	3.788	9.916	40	.000
Pair 2	bk1 - bk2	4.102	2.187	.285	3.532	4.672	14.406	58	.000

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics

	GENDER	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PRE	F	43.70	18.814	46
	M	46.74	18.718	54
	Total	45.34	18.729	100
POST	F	40.28	18.135	46
	M	42.74	17.841	54
	Total	41.61	17.928	100

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Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[c]
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.867	316.356[b]	2.000	97.000	.000	.867	632.711	1.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.133	316.356[b]	2.000	97.000	.000	.867	632.711	1.000
	Hotelling's Trace	6.523	316.356[b]	2.000	97.000	.000	.867	632.711	1.000
	Roy's Largest Root	6.523	316.356[b]	2.000	97.000	.000	.867	632.711	1.000
GENDER	Pillai's Trace	.019	.945[b]	2.000	97.000	.392	.019	1.890	.210
	Wilks' Lambda	.981	.945[b]	2.000	97.000	.392	.019	1.890	.210
	Hotelling's Trace	.019	.945[b]	2.000	97.000	.392	.019	1.890	.210
	Roy's Largest Root	.019	.945[b]	2.000	97.000	.392	.019	1.890	.210

a. Design: Intercept + GENDER

b. Exact statistic

c. Computed using alpha = .05