

Spiritual Well-Being in Relation to Spiritual Engagement among Tribal Youth of Indigenous Donyi-Polo Faith

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore relationship between the engagement in spiritual activities and the spiritual well-being of tribal youth practicing indigenous religious faith of Donyi Polo. The tribal youth of indigenous faith practices closeness to nature and believe on spirit in various natural entity and spirituality is considered as closeness to mother nature. The present study aims to explore the concept of spirituality in terms of finding the reason of existence in this world, how to liberate oneself with human limitation. The researchers administered the Spiritual Well-being (SWB) Scale and a self-constructed interview schedule on Spiritual engagement to 103 tribal youth selected randomly from Arunachal Pradesh, ages 18 to 32 who practice indigenous religious faith Donyi-polo. The results found that there was high level of spiritual well-being among the youth. Additionally, individuals who engaged in spiritual practices had considerably higher scores on measures of spiritual well-being than those who did not. Further research findings indicate that those who often read or listened to spiritual content had considerably higher scores for spiritual well-being compared to those who didn't. The finding of the research is able to fill the gap in present knowledge in spirituality among indigenous tribal youth of India in a borderland state.

Keywords: Existential Well-Being, Meditation, Prayer, Religious Well-Being, Spirituality, Tribal Youth, Well-Being.

Introduction

Spirituality is essential in guiding people's lives and giving them a feeling of meaning and connection to the world and is a highly individualized and subjective concept, (1). Spirituality, which is defined as a sense of kinship with the transcendent, has several facets, including religious beliefs, values, and practices (2). Researchers have come to realize its significance in understanding personal resilience and coping mechanisms during trying times, the study of spiritual well-being has attracted a lot of interest recently (3). Research studies have shown a link between spirituality and negative things happening to you, it's important to understand that spirituality and spiritual well-being go beyond any negative thing happening to you and provide unique insights into how to deal with adversity and remain resilient (4). The engagement of youth in spiritual content in terms of verbal and nonverbal material can be related to spiritual wellbeing. Spiritual well-being thrives on engagement, akin to a fire needing fuel to burn brightly. While spirituality encompasses an individual's connection to a higher power,

purpose, or values, engagement translates those beliefs into action (5). Through practices like meditation, prayer, spending time in nature, or connecting with a faith community, individuals actively nurture their spiritual well-being (5). This engagement fosters a sense of peace, meaning, and belonging, strengthening the connection to something greater than oneself. Conversely, neglecting spiritual engagement can lead to feelings of emptiness, disconnection, and a lack of purpose. It's through active engagement that spiritual well-being flourishes, empowering individuals to navigate life's challenges with resilience and find deeper meaning in their existence. Spiritual well-being is intricately linked to spiritual engagement, reflecting a deep, meaningful connection with one's inner self, higher power, or the universe (6). Spiritual engagement, which encompasses practices such as prayer, meditation, communal worship, and personal reflection, acts as a catalyst for nurturing this well-being. Through these activities, individuals often find a sense of purpose, inner peace, and resilience against life's challenges.

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Engaging spiritually can lead to profound insights and a greater sense of interconnectedness, fostering a harmonious balance between mind, body, and spirit (7). Consequently, regular spiritual practices contribute significantly to overall well-being, promoting a life filled with meaning, compassion, and a deeper understanding of one's place in the world. The borderland state of Arunachal Pradesh is home to a variety of indigenous cultures and religions, which contribute to the region's unique spiritual environment (8). The Donyi-Polo religion, practiced by the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India, is a unique belief system that embodies the cultural and spiritual life of the Tani tribes, including the Adi, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi, and Tagin communities (9). The term "Donyi-Polo" translates to "Sun-Moon," symbolizing the omnipresent and omniscient nature of their deities. The Core Beliefs and Deities includes Donyi (Sun) and Polo (Moon) celestial bodies are revered as the chief deities, symbolizing the balance of male and female principles and the sustenance of life. Donyi represents the female aspect, associated with warmth and nurturing, while Polo represents the male aspect, associated with coolness and contemplation (9). Secondly, ancestral Worship where ancestors are highly respected, and rituals are performed to honour them, believing that the spirits of the deceased ancestors influence the living (9). Third core concept is nature worship where the religion emphasizes a deep connection with nature, worshiping various natural elements like rivers, mountains, and forests, which are considered sacred. Donyi-polo indigenous belief system includes community practices such as rituals and ceremonies. The second practice is Shamans (Nyibu) and they play a crucial role in the community, acting as mediators between humans and the spiritual world. They perform rituals, heal the sick, and offer guidance based on spiritual insights (10). The Donyi-Polo religion is rich in oral traditions, with myths, legends, and folklore passed down through generations. These stories often contain moral lessons and explain natural phenomena. This religion fosters a strong sense of community and collective responsibility (11). Festivals and rituals are community-centric, involving collective participation in preparations, ceremonies, and celebrations. The Donyi-Polo

religion is thus a vibrant and integral part of the cultural fabric of the indigenous tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, embodying their deep connection with nature, community, and spirituality (11). The dynamics of spiritual experiences in multicultural contexts can be better understood by taking into account the spiritual health of young people in this area. The integration of Donyi-Polo's teachings into daily life significantly impacts the spiritual well-being of youth. By fostering a strong connection with nature, community, and ethical living, young practitioners often report enhanced mental health and resilience against social issues such as addiction and despair. The faith's focus on truthfulness and selflessness cultivates a supportive environment that encourages personal growth and collective welfare (11). Hence, current study is a scientific attempt to shed light on young people's spiritual experiences and coping mechanisms by examining the spiritual well-being of young people in Arunachal Pradesh, India. The study also aims to find possible elements that may affect spiritual health, such as partaking in spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and mindfulness as well as being exposed to spiritual material through reading and listening. The current study is extremely important since it adds to existing knowledge on spiritual well-being and its connection to key events in many cultural contexts. This study aims to explore relationship between the engagement in spiritual activities and the spiritual well-being of tribal youth practicing indigenous religious faith of Donyi Polo. Based on theoretical framework and review of literature, four objectives of the study were identified. The first objective is to study the status of spiritual well-being of the youth of Arunachal Pradesh. The second objective is to compare the level of spiritual well-being among participants based on engagement in spiritual activities. The third objective is to explore the relationship among spiritual well-being, degree of engagement in spiritual activities, level of education level and chronological age of youth of Arunachal Pradesh. Based on the identified objectives and review of literature, three hypotheses were formulated to test. Firstly, H₁₁: There will be a significant difference in the level of Spiritual Well-being between participants who engaged in spiritual activities and those who did not. Second, H₁₂:

There will be significant differences in the Spiritual well-being between that who listens or read every day and that who never listens or reads. Third, H₁₃: There will be a positive correlation between the Spiritual well-being and chronological age.

Methodology

Sample

For the present study, the population of tribal youth enrolled colleges and University within the state were selected as they are getting exposed to modern changes as well as traditional system of the tribal communities in the state. The data gathered from 103 adults in Arunachal Pradesh, aged 18 to 28 from various socio-economic status including both gender by purposive sampling from various colleges and Universities in the borderland state of India with tribal communities. The sample represents various sub groups from tribal community who practices indigenous Dony-polo faith. The data was collected through online mode in Google form circulated through various social media platforms. Out of 153 initial responses, 103 applicable responses were finally returned the filled form hence considered for final analysis.

Design of the Study

The present study was a correlational research where spiritual intelligence was correlated with usages of spiritual contents, age and educational level of the youth. The study only aimed to explore the degree and magnitude of relationship among the variables. The study didn't attempt to make comparative analysis between various tribes which faiths on Dony-polo indigenous system.

Tools Used

Self-Structured Interview Schedule: The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview schedule including demographic information, engagement in spiritual activities (Prayer, meditation, Yoga, Mindfulness, etc.) and frequency of reading or listening of Spiritual content.

The Spiritual Well-being Scale: The scale has also been widely used in Indian settings. The scale consists of 20 questionnaires with 2 subscales where ten items for Religious Well-being (RWB) and ten items for Existential Well-being (EWB). The SWBS has demonstrated strong internal

consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically reported in the range of 0.85 to 0.93 across various studies. This indicates that the items within the scale consistently measure the same underlying construct of spiritual well-being. The scale exhibits good test-retest reliability, with coefficients indicating stability over time. For example, studies have shown test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from 0.88 to 0.96. The SWBS has been validated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, confirming its two-dimensional structure: Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB). These dimensions are conceptually distinct yet interrelated, allowing for a nuanced understanding of spiritual well-being. The SWBS correlates significantly with other established measures of spirituality and well-being, demonstrating its effectiveness in assessing spiritual constructs. For instance, it has shown significant correlations with the General Well-Being Scale and other spirituality indices. It is a reliable and valid tool for assessing spiritual well-being, making it suitable for both clinical and research settings. Its robust psychometric properties ensure that it effectively measures the complex constructs of religious and existential well-being across various populations.

Procedure

The administration of the scale was done through a Google form, whereupon the demographic details were collected along with the informed consent of the participants. The Google form was distributed through social media handle of the researchers in various virtual groups.

Results

The researcher scored the responses obtained from the participants and entered the numerical values along with demographic details in MS Excel sheets. The values were entered in SPSS 20 version and analysis was carried out. The descriptive statistics were applied to find the mean and deviation of the scores in the variables of the study. Further inferential statistics t test was applied to analysis significance of mean difference among various groups. The Pearson correlation product moment method was applied to find the degree and magnitude of relationship among the variables.

Table 1: Mean Scores and SD for Spiritual, Religious and Existential Well-being

Variables	Mean	Sd	Interpretation
Spiritual well-being	79.217	14.464	Slightly High
Religious wellbeing	39.767	10.537	Slightly High
Existential Well-being	39.398	7.118	Slightly High

The results in Table 1 showed the mean scores of the participants on the study variables, Spiritual well-being, Religious well-being and Existential well-being. It was found that the levels of Religious (Mean = 39.767) Existential well-being (Mean = 39.398) and SWB of the participants were slightly high (Mean = 79.217). Table 2 shows that those participants who are engaged in

spiritual practices have higher spiritual well-being scores than those who did not engage in any form of spiritual practice. The obtained t-test value was found to be significant at .01 level of significance indicated that there is significant difference between the mean values and this lead to acceptance of the first hypothesis of the study.

Table 2: Showing Mean Values of Various Education Groups on Spiritual Well-Being and Its Dimensions

Educational Qualification	N	Spiritual Well-being	Religious Well-being Mean	Existential Well-being
Doctorate and above	3	68	30.333	37.667
Post-Graduation	31	78.387	38.322	40.064
Graduation	57	79.297	40.702	38.982
High School	12	81.5	41.416	40.083

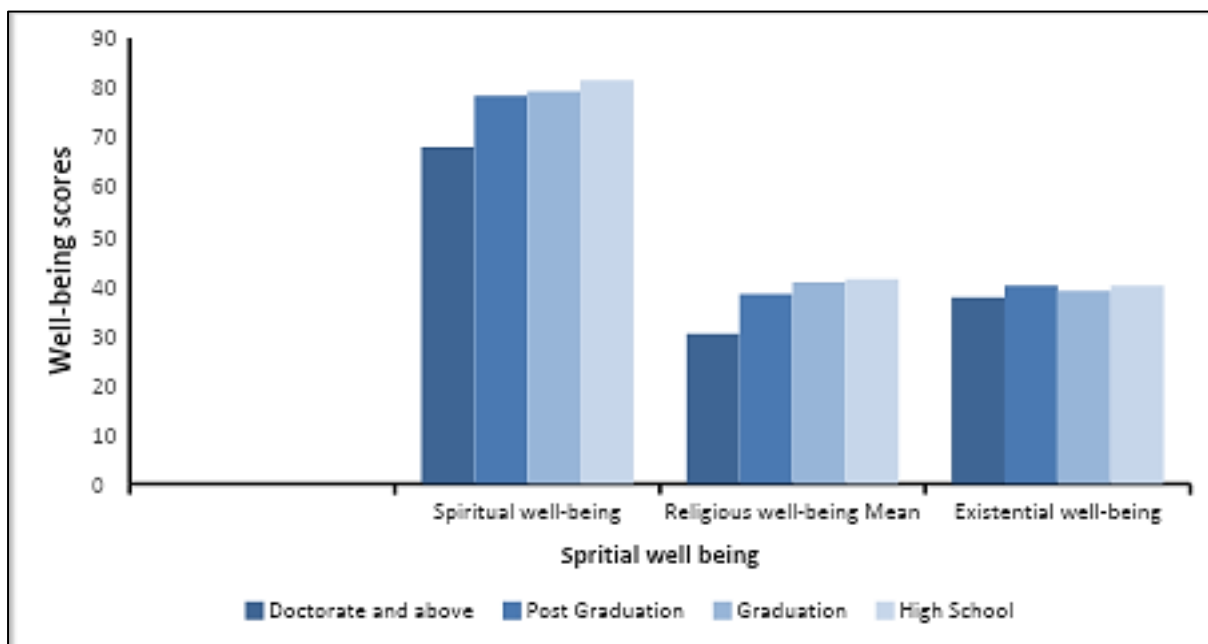


Figure 1: Mean Scores in Spiritual Wellbeing and Its Dimensions among Various Educational Level Groups

The results in Figure 1 and Table 3 showed that mean values are highest for high school students and lowest for doctorate level youth. The results showed an interesting pattern wherein the level of spiritual well-being of the participants is

decreasing successively from high school to Doctorate and above. The same pattern was found to be repeated with the level of religious well-being as well. However, for the existential well-being, this decreasing pattern was not observed.

Table 3: Showing t-values Comparing Group Engaging in Spiritual Practices and Group Not Engaging in Spiritual Practices

Participants	N	SWB Mean	t-test Value
Engaging in some form of Spiritual practices	59	85.613	4.207**
Not at all engaging in any form of Spiritual practices	44	74.355	

**significant at 0.01 level of significance

Table 4: t Value Comparing Mean of Spiritual Well-Being between Never Listening or Reading Spiritual Content and Everyday

Participants Engaging in Reading or Listening To Spiritual Content	N	Mean	t Value
Everyday	53	87.666	3.32**
Never	50	70.705	

*Significant at 0.01 level

Table 4 reveals that spiritual well-being scores found to be larger in participants engage in reading or listening to some form of spiritual content than participants who “never” engaged in listening to or reading spiritual content. The obtained t test score showed that there was significant mean difference at 0.01 levels. This shows that participants engaging in reading or

listening to spiritual content can better perceive the meaning of existence and life. This result indicated that the second research hypothesis stated ‘there will be significant differences in the Spiritual well-being between those who listens or read every day and those who never listens or reads’ found accepted.

Table 5: Pearson coefficient of Correlation between Age and Spiritual well-being

Variables	Spiritual Well-Being
Age	-0.0948

p<.05

The results in Table 5 showed that the correlation coefficient between age and spiritual well-being was found to be -0.0948. This signifies that there is a negligible negative correlation between age and the level of spiritual well-being of the participants which was also not found significant. Thus, the age of a participant was not found to be directly proportional to the level of their spiritual well-being. This result indicated that third hypothesis stated that ‘there will be a positive correlation between the Spiritual well-being and chronological age’ found rejected.

Discussion

The present study found the importance of practicing spiritual activities, educational level and age in the spiritual well-being of a person. The tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh practices spiritual activities on the basis of Donyii-Polo which is indigenous, shamanic and animistic

religion based on the philosophy of harmony between humans, nature and the divine as spirit. The tribal culture practices very close connection to nature which creates an important gap to understand spirituality from the perspective of these tribal youth as they are at the junction of modern and traditional faiths. The finding reported that the young adults of indigenous faith seem to have a fair idea of the meaning of existence and life. The findings of the study showed that the individuals have a moderately high level of existential, spiritual, and religious well-being, deviating from the findings of other research which showed an average level of Spiritual well-being among the university students in Arunachal Pradesh (12). The present study results indicated that the young adults of Arunachal Pradesh seem to have a fair idea of the meaning of existence and life. This can be explained based on core beliefs of the indigenous

Donyi-polo faith system as this strongly connect human with nature worship along with practices of embodying their deep connection with nature, community, and spirituality. Donyi-Polo is not merely a religious belief but a comprehensive way of life that nurtures spiritual well-being among youth through its philosophical foundations, community engagement, environmental stewardship, ethical teachings, and cultural identity preservation. The role of community as a agent of socialization to learn indigenous faith in tribal societies is integral to their cultural identity, social cohesion, and resilience. By fostering strong interpersonal connections, facilitating communal healing processes, and preserving ecological knowledge, indigenous faith systems contribute significantly to the well-being and sustainability of tribal communities. The study provided relationship between spiritual intelligence and engagement in spiritual activities among youth of Dony polo faith community. The study findings established the relationship between culture, spirituality, and community life among indigenous peoples. Although globalization and modernization are engulfing the youths with their materialistic tentacles, still youths of present study somehow seem to understand and aspire to achieve spiritual well-being and transcendence. The finding further showed that those who actively engaged in spiritual activities such as prayer, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness demonstrated better levels of spiritual well-being in comparison to those who did not practice any kind of spiritual activity. Thus, the youth engaging in some form of spiritual practices appeared to have a more optimistic approach towards existence and have a sense of meaning and purpose towards life than those who did not engage themselves in any form of spiritual practices. This result is supported by the studies which found that spiritual activities were positively related to spiritual well-being, as well as to psychological well-being (13-15). This finding emphasizes the connection between philosophy of religion and spiritual level of a person and inculcating spiritual activities in daily life to enhance quality of life. The study also found relation between educational level and spiritual well-being contrary to the findings of studies which showed that the education level was positively related to aspects of spirituality or

religiosity (16, 17). In the current study there was a progressive decline in spiritual well-being as participants advanced from high school to doctorate-level. In line with the findings of studies , the present study also showed a link between spiritual well-being and how frequently people engage with spiritual material (18, 19). Comparatively to those who never read or listened to spiritual material, those who did so regularly displayed better levels of spiritual well-being. However, the study found that participants in the "everyday" category experienced higher spiritual well-being than participants when compared to the "Never" category. The study found that age and spiritual well-being did not significantly correlate. Participants' ages did not seem to be inversely related to their level of spiritual well-being. The findings show that one's perception of existence and meaning in life does not depend on one's chronological age. This finding is in line with one study which showed that chronological age was not a significant predictor of spiritual well-being (20). The results highlight how important it is to engage in spiritual activities and to read spiritual literature to increase one's sense of meaning and purpose in life. Postcolonial and decolonial theories highlight the significance of indigenous spirituality as a vital component in combating cultural erasure and present study is an attempt to look into the tribal people through their lenses. The study is quantitative in nature and focused on exploring the variables in present methodology it was identified limitation to deal with these variables only quantitatively. This limitation can be addressed in future research by applying qualitative approach also. The study can explore more narratives on the variables to included postcolonial perspective.

Conclusion

In conclusion of the study, it can be deduced that spirituality supports young adults' spiritual well-being and development of self in tribal youth in their unique religious philosophy. The findings highlight the relationships between academic level, engagement in spiritual activities and spiritual well-being. This paper was able to conclude that objectives of the study were fulfilled and hypotheses were tested. The study was able to conclude the importance of being practice spiritual content in everyday life so enhance

spiritual intelligence, so impact can be tested further with experimental research. Also future research can explore the variable in depth manner by applying qualitative approach.

Abbreviation

Nil.

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Author Contributions

Tadar Amar: Conceptualization, introduction, data collection and analysis; Kakali Goswami: formulation of rationale of the study, design methodology and writing of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of Interest among the authors.

Ethics Approval

The researchers have obtained informed consent from each participants directly before the administration of the tests as they are adult. The Ethical approval is not applicable due to descriptive survey type of research. The researchers have followed all the ethical guidelines of Institutional Ethical Committee of Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

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