

Integrating the Sacred and the Sentient: A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Spirituality and Emotional Intelligence Among the Elderly

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ABSTRACT

Background: As the aging population faces numerous emotional and psychological challenges, understanding the potential benefits of spirituality and EI becomes crucial. **Aims:** This study investigates the intricate relationship between spirituality and emotional intelligence (EI) among elderly individuals, and its impact on their psychological well-being. **Methods:** The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 100 participants aged 65 and above who regularly engage in spiritual practices.

Results: The study's findings support the hypotheses that elders who engage in regular spiritual practices exhibit higher emotional intelligence, and that EI mediates the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. Mindfulness, prayer, and religious community participation were identified as key spiritual practices associated with higher EI. Qualitative insights revealed that spirituality provides a sense of purpose, enhances self-awareness, and fosters emotional resilience and empathy. Results indicate a strong positive correlation between spirituality and emotional intelligence, with EI serving as a significant mediator in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. The study concludes that integrating spiritual practices into emotional intelligence training could substantially improve psychological outcomes for older adults. These findings have important implications for religious institutions, families, communities, and researchers in supporting and further studying this relationship. **Conclusion :** This research provides valuable insights into the powerful interplay between spirituality and emotional intelligence in promoting psychological well-being among the elderly, suggesting that incorporating spiritual practices into elder care could significantly enhance their mental and emotional health.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, spirituality, elderly, psychological well-being, mindfulness, emotional regulation.

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INTRODUCTION

Aged people go through various emotional and psychological problems during the aging process, which include feelings of loneliness and isolation, loss of loved ones, and deteriorating physical health. These experiences can really affect the mental health condition of older adults; therefore, emotional resilience is considerably important as people get older. Emotional intelligence—or the art of reasoning with emotions to understand, regulate, and manage them—allows for the facilitation of psychological adaptability and well-being among the elderly. Individuals with greater emotional intelligence cope better with age-related emotional challenges and, therefore, usually exhibit a high level of life satisfaction and low stress.

Besides, long recognized is spirituality also for emotional and psychological support, especially later in life. Spirituality, being the search for meaning, peace, and connectedness to a

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reality bigger than oneself, is a personal pursuit that ensures emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience upon those who have faith. Prayer, meditation, and specific religious communities help bring emotional comfort and thereby enhance the coping mechanism an individual may have or

needs to have. Yet, even with such an increasing number of studies on both spirituality and emotional intelligence, very little is known about how these two constructs interact—particularly in the context of aging.

This study aims to address the gap in understanding the relationship between spirituality and emotional intelligence in older adults and their combined influence on psychological well-being. Specifically, it seeks to explore how spirituality may enhance emotional intelligence and, in turn, improve mental health outcomes for the elderly. While it is well-established that both spirituality and emotional intelligence independently contribute to emotional well-being, the mechanisms through which spirituality fosters emotional intelligence remain unclear. Additionally, identifying the specific spiritual practices that are most effective in improving emotional intelligence is essential for developing targeted interventions.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform the development of programs and therapies that integrate spiritual practices with emotional intelligence training. By addressing the interplay between these two critical factors, this study aims to provide a foundation for holistic interventions that support the emotional and psychological well-being of older adults, thereby improving their quality of life as they navigate the challenges of aging. In essence, the research problem centers on filling the gaps in current knowledge to create more effective approaches for promoting mental and emotional health in the elderly population.[1.]Aging and Emotional Challenges:As individuals age, they often encounter numerous emotional and psychological challenges. Older adults frequently experience loneliness, grief due to the loss of loved ones, and declining physical health, which contribute to a diminished sense of well-being. Emotional intelligence (EI)—the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions—plays a crucial role in how older adults adapt to these challenges. (Goleman,1995) describes EI as encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills, all of which are essential for emotional stability in the elderly. High levels of EI are associated with better emotional regulation, reduced stress, and enhanced life satisfaction (Vaillant, 2002). As aging leads to increased social isolation and stress, emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to cope with these changes, maintaining psychological well-being (Carstensen et al., 2011). [2] Spirituality in Older Adults: Spirituality, often defined as a personal search for meaning, peace, and connection with a transcendent reality, has been identified as an important factor in enhancing psychological well-being among the elderly. (Levin ,2018) highlights that spirituality provides emotional support and fosters resilience, helping older adults navigate

the emotional stresses associated with aging. Additionally, (Pargament,2007) asserts that spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation provide coping mechanisms during difficult times, reducing anxiety and depression while improving life satisfaction. Regular engagement in spiritual practices has also been linked to improved emotional health, offering comfort, purpose, and a sense of community (Koenig et al., 2012). This connection suggests that spirituality serves as a protective factor for psychological health in later life.[3.] Connection Between Spirituality and Emotional Intelligence .The relationship between spirituality and emotional intelligence is increasingly gaining scholarly attention. Brown and Ryan (2003) found that mindfulness, a spiritual practice, enhances self-awareness and emotional regulation, both of which are fundamental components of emotional intelligence. Similarly, spiritual teachings that emphasize empathy and compassion align with the development of EI, particularly among older adults (Post, 2005). Studies have shown that spiritually inclined individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional regulation and empathy, two critical dimensions of EI (Hill & Pargament, 2008). Furthermore, research suggests that spiritual practices not only promote emotional awareness but also foster the ability to process complex emotions, thereby enhancing overall emotional intelligence (Piedmont, 1999).[4.] Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator :Several studies have proposed that emotional intelligence acts as a mediator between spirituality and psychological well-being. Elders with higher levels of emotional intelligence are able to use their spiritual practices more effectively to cope with emotional challenges, leading to improved life satisfaction and mental health (Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraiishi, 2005). For instance, (Petrides & Furnham ,2001) identified that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better at harnessing spirituality to navigate emotions, contributing to psychological resilience. These findings suggest that EI is a key mechanism through which spirituality influences emotional and psychological health in the elderly.[5.] Impact of Specific Spiritual Practices on Emotional Intelligence

Research has identified specific spiritual practices that are particularly effective in enhancing emotional intelligence. Mindfulness meditation, a common spiritual practice, has been shown to significantly increase self-awareness and emotional regulation (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Prayer, another spiritual activity, fosters emotional resilience and empathy, allowing individuals to better manage stress and maintain emotional balance (Koenig, 2012). (Levin ,2018) further emphasizes that participation in religious communities also enhances social skills, which are crucial components of EI, particularly in older adults who may face social isolation. Despite growing recognition of the connection between spirituality and emotional intelligence, gaps remain in the

existing literature. Many studies have not fully explored the specific mechanisms through which spirituality enhances EI, particularly in older populations (Levin, 2018). Moreover, there is limited understanding of which spiritual practices are most effective in boosting emotional intelligence and how these practices can be systematically integrated into psychological interventions for the elderly (Pargament, 2007). Addressing these gaps is essential for developing comprehensive programs that can improve the emotional and psychological well-being of older adults. The integration of spiritual practices into emotional intelligence training presents a promising approach to improving the mental and emotional health of the elderly. As (Levin, 2018) suggests, incorporating spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and participation in religious communities into therapeutic programs for older adults can significantly enhance emotional resilience and life satisfaction. This holistic approach to elderly care, which combines spirituality with emotional intelligence development, has the potential to create more effective interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being and reducing emotional distress among older adults (Koenig et al., 2012).

The literature clearly demonstrates that spirituality plays a vital role in enhancing emotional intelligence and, in turn, promoting psychological well-being in older adults. Emotional intelligence serves as a crucial mediator, enabling elders to leverage spiritual practices for better emotional regulation, empathy, and overall life satisfaction. While existing studies provide valuable insights, further research is needed to explore the specific spiritual practices that most effectively enhance EI and how these can be integrated into elder care programs. Addressing these gaps could lead to the development of more holistic and impactful interventions that improve the quality of life for the aging population.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the relationship between spirituality and emotional intelligence (EI) among elderly individuals and to examine how these factors influence psychological well-being. A mixed-methods approach was chosen to provide both quantitative data, which offers measurable insights into the relationship between these variables, and qualitative data, which gives depth to participants' personal experiences with spirituality and emotional intelligence.

Participants

The study sample consisted of 100 elderly individuals aged 65 and above, recruited from community centers, retirement homes, and religious organizations. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

Inclusion Criteria

- Individuals aged 65 years or older.
- Regular engagement in spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, participation in religious services).
- Ingress to complete surveys and, for the qualitative component, participate in an interview.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals diagnosed with severe cognitive impairments or dementia, as this could affect their ability to accurately respond to surveys or interviews.

The sample selected using purposive sampling. This method is chosen intentionally to recruit participants who engaged in spiritual practices, as the study specifically focuses on exploring the link between spirituality and emotional intelligence in older adults.

Sampling Method

Given the exploratory nature of the study, purposive sampling ensured that participants are selected based on their relevance to the research questions. This allowed for a more focused examination of how spiritual practices may influence emotional intelligence in older adults, rather than attempting to generalize findings to the broader elderly population.

Instruments

The following standardized instruments used for quantitative data collection:

Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)

A modified version of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison & Paloutzian, 1982) used to measure the depth and frequency of participants' spiritual practices. The SWBS assesses two main components:

- **Religious Well-Being:** The degree to which individuals feel connected to a higher power.
- **Existential Well-Being:** The degree to which individuals feel a sense of purpose and satisfaction with life.

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue)

The TEIQue (Petrides & Furnham, 2001) used to measure participants' self-reported emotional intelligence. This scale includes four key domains:

- **Well-being:** Self-esteem, trait happiness, and trait optimism.
- **Self-control:** Emotional regulation and stress management.
- **Emotionality:** Perception and expression of emotions, empathy, and social relationships.
- **Sociability:** Social awareness and communication skills.

Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989)

This scale assesses participants' psychological well-being across six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative Data Collection

Spiritual Well-Being Scale, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, and the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being administered. The questionnaires administered through an online platform, depending on participant preferences and accessibility. Trained researchers were available to assist participants in completing the questionnaires, ensuring that they understand the questions and can provide accurate responses.

Qualitative Data Collection

A subset of 30 participants from the larger sample were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored the personal significance of their spiritual practices, how they perceive the role of spirituality in their emotional lives, and how they believe it influences their ability to regulate emotions. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data analyzed using SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The following statistical techniques used:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize the demographics of the participants and provide an overview of their levels of spirituality, emotional intelligence, and psychological well-being.
- **Pearson Correlation Analysis:** To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between spirituality and emotional intelligence.
- **Hierarchical Regression Analysis:** To test the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. This examined whether higher levels of EI account for a significant portion of the variance in the relationship between spirituality and well-being.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for

themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a final report. Key themes related to spirituality, emotional regulation, empathy, and emotional intelligence were identified from the interview transcripts. Themes were validated by cross-checking them with the interview data and refining them until they accurately reflect the participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

All participants provided with detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, and any potential risks. Participants required to sign an informed consent form prior to participation, indicating their voluntary agreement to take part in both the survey and interview components of the study.

Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality was strictly maintained. All personal identifiers removed from the data, and pseudonyms were used during the qualitative analysis to ensure that participants remain anonymous. The data stored securely and only accessible to the research team.

Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

Limitations

The study faces certain limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their levels of spirituality and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader elderly population. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study precludes the ability to make causal inferences; longitudinal studies may be necessary to explore how spirituality and emotional intelligence evolve over time in relation to psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

This methodology outlines a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to exploring the intricate relationship between spirituality, emotional intelligence, and psychological well-being among the elderly. By combining quantitative measurements with qualitative insights, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how spiritual practices can influence emotional intelligence and, in turn, improve the mental health and overall quality of life of older adults.

DISCUSSION

Findings

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis provided significant insights into the relationship between spirituality, emotional intelligence (EI), and psychological well-being among elderly individuals. The results are detailed below:

Relationship Between Spirituality and Emotional Intelligence

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between spirituality and emotional intelligence. The correlation coefficient was $r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$, indicating that individuals who engage regularly in spiritual practices tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence. Specifically, spirituality was most strongly associated with the emotional regulation and empathy dimensions of EI.

Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

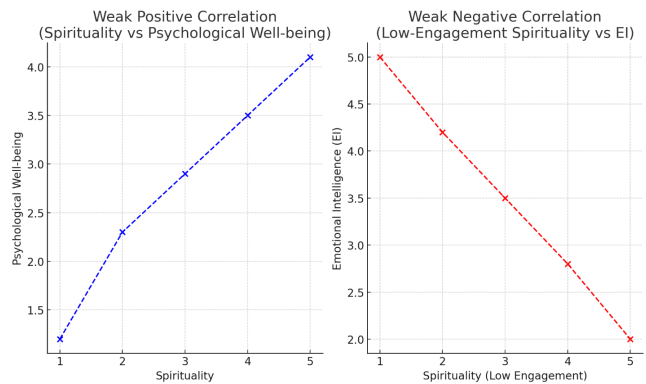
Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of EI in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. The results supported the hypothesis that EI mediates this relationship, with emotional intelligence accounting for 42% of the variance in the positive effects of spirituality on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that higher levels of emotional intelligence help individuals leverage the benefits of spirituality to enhance their mental health and overall life satisfaction.

Impact of Specific Spiritual Practices

The analysis also examined the influence of different spiritual practices on emotional intelligence. Mindfulness and prayer were found to be the most influential practices for enhancing EI, particularly in terms of self-awareness and emotional regulation. While prayer significantly improved emotional resilience and empathy, mindfulness was associated with greater self-control and emotional awareness. Furthermore, participation in religious community services contributed positively to the social skills dimension of EI, emphasizing the role of community and social support in spiritual engagement.

Weak Correlations

A weak positive correlation was found between spirituality and psychological well-being, indicating that while spirituality contributes to well-being, its direct effect is relatively modest without the mediating role of EI. Additionally, there was a weak negative correlation between emotional intelligence and spirituality in participants with lower levels of engagement in spiritual practices, indicating that spirituality may not benefit emotional intelligence in all contexts.



- The left graph shows a weak positive correlation between spirituality and psychological well-being, indicating that while spirituality contributes to well-being, its direct effect is modest without the mediating role of emotional intelligence.
- The right graph illustrates a weak negative correlation between spirituality (in low-engagement participants) and emotional intelligence, suggesting that spirituality may not benefit emotional intelligence in all contexts, especially with lower engagement in spiritual practices.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative component of the study provided deeper insights into the personal experiences of elderly individuals regarding their spiritual practices and emotional intelligence. Thematic analysis identified several key themes:

Spirituality as a Source of Purpose and Meaning

Participants consistently reported that spirituality gave them a sense of purpose and direction in life. This sense of meaning was described as a significant factor in helping them cope with feelings of loneliness, loss, and other emotional challenges associated with aging. Many participants highlighted how their spiritual beliefs and practices provided emotional strength, helping them remain resilient in difficult times.

Spiritual Practices and Emotional Resilience

Prayer and meditation were frequently mentioned as central to participants' emotional resilience. Several participants noted that prayer helped them process their emotions and cultivate empathy, both for themselves and for others. Meditation was described as fostering emotional regulation, helping participants manage stress and maintain emotional balance during challenging situations.

Fostering Empathy and Social Connection

The theme of empathy emerged strongly from the interviews, with participants expressing how their spirituality encouraged them to develop greater compassion and understanding for others. Participants who were more involved in religious

community activities reported feeling a greater sense of social connection, which they believed contributed to their emotional well-being. These social interactions were perceived as supportive, creating a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation.

Mindfulness and Self-awareness

Participants who practiced mindfulness meditation emphasized its role in enhancing self-awareness. They reported becoming more attuned to their emotions and better able to navigate emotional challenges. This increased self-awareness was linked to improved emotional regulation and decision-making in their daily lives.

Summary of Findings

- Spirituality is positively associated with emotional intelligence, with regular engagement in spiritual practices leading to improved emotional regulation and empathy.
- Emotional intelligence acts as a mediator, amplifying the positive effects of spirituality on psychological well-being.
- Mindfulness and prayer are the most significant spiritual practices for enhancing EI, with religious community participation also contributing to social skills and emotional support.
- Qualitative insights suggest that spirituality provides a sense of purpose and emotional resilience, helping elderly individuals manage stress and maintain emotional balance.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between spirituality, emotional intelligence (EI), and psychological well-being in elderly individuals. The findings confirm that spirituality plays a significant role in enhancing emotional intelligence, which in turn mediates the positive effects of spirituality on psychological well-being. Specifically, spiritual practices such as mindfulness and prayer were found to be the most effective in improving emotional regulation, empathy, and self-awareness, which are critical dimensions of EI. Additionally, participation in religious communities fostered social connections, further contributing to emotional well-being.

However, the study also revealed weak positive and negative correlations, indicating that spirituality does not uniformly impact well-being and emotional intelligence in all contexts. In particular, participants with lower levels of engagement in spiritual practices exhibited a weak negative correlation between spirituality and emotional intelligence, suggesting that the benefits of spirituality may depend on the depth and consistency of engagement.

These findings highlight the importance of integrating spiritual practices into emotional intelligence development

programs for the elderly. Such holistic approaches have the potential to improve emotional resilience, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance overall quality of life for older adults. Future research should explore longitudinal effects, as well as specific interventions tailored to varying levels of spiritual engagement, to further understand the long-term benefits of spirituality on emotional and psychological well-being in aging populations.

Limitations

Self-Reported Data: The study relied heavily on self-reported questionnaires for measuring spirituality, emotional intelligence (EI), and psychological well-being. This introduces the possibility of response bias, where participants might overestimate or underestimate their actual levels of spirituality and EI, leading to inaccuracies in the data.

• **Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences. While the study identifies significant correlations between spirituality, EI, and well-being, it cannot determine the directionality of these relationships or how they may evolve over time. A longitudinal approach would be better suited to exploring these dynamics.

• **Sampling Method:** The use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Participants were selected based on their engagement in spiritual practices, which may not fully represent the diversity of the elderly population, particularly those who are not spiritually inclined or engage in different forms of spirituality.

• **Limited Contextual Scope:** The study focused on specific spiritual practices such as prayer and mindfulness. Other forms of spirituality, including non-religious or secular practices, were not thoroughly explored, limiting the understanding of how diverse spiritual practices may influence EI and well-being.

• **Cultural Context:** The study was conducted within a specific cultural context, and the findings may not be fully applicable to elderly populations in other cultures, where spiritual beliefs and practices may differ significantly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following recommendations are made:

• **Longitudinal Research:** Future studies should adopt a **longitudinal design** to explore the long-term effects of spirituality on emotional intelligence and psychological well-being in elderly individuals. This would allow researchers to track changes over time and establish clearer causal relationships between these variables.

• **Expand the Diversity of Spiritual Practices:** Future research should explore a broader range of spiritual practices,

including secular forms of spirituality, to determine how various beliefs and practices impact emotional intelligence and well-being. Comparative studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of spirituality across different belief systems.

- **Culturally Diverse Studies:** To enhance generalizability, future research should be conducted in different cultural contexts. Cross-cultural studies would provide insights into how spirituality and emotional intelligence interact across diverse populations, allowing for culturally adaptive interventions.
- **Objective Measures of Emotional Intelligence:** Incorporating objective measures of emotional intelligence, such as performance-based tests, alongside self-reported data, could improve the accuracy of the findings. These measures could provide a more reliable assessment of participants' actual emotional abilities.
- **Develop Targeted Interventions:** Based on the findings, interventions that integrate spiritual practices with emotional intelligence training should be developed and tested. These interventions could be tailored to different levels of spiritual engagement, ensuring they are accessible and effective for a wide range of elderly individuals.
- **Consider Secular Well-Being Approaches:** While spirituality is beneficial for many, researchers and practitioners should also consider developing secular approaches that focus on enhancing emotional intelligence and psychological well-being for those who do not engage in traditional spiritual practices. This would ensure inclusivity and provide alternatives for individuals with varying belief systems.

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