

The Relationship Between Spiritual Intelligence and Psychological Well-Being Among Young Adults: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract—Young adults in India face substantial academic, occupational, and social pressures, and many report elevated stress and diminished psychological well-being as a result. This study examined whether spiritual intelligence (SI), defined as the capacity to find meaning, act on personal values, and stay self-aware, is related to, and predictive of, psychological well-being (WB) among young Indian adults.

A total of 111 respondents aged 18–35 completed an online survey comprising an 8-item SI scale, a 5-item WB scale, and four open-ended questions about their day-to-day experience of spirituality. Both scales showed good-to-excellent internal reliability ($\alpha = .90$ and $.91$, respectively). Spiritual intelligence was significantly and positively correlated with psychological well-being, $r(109) = .498$, $p < .001$, and significantly predicted well-being in a simple linear regression, explaining approximately 25% of the variance, $R^2 = .248$, $F(1,109) = 35.88$, $p < .001$. Women scored significantly higher on SI than men, and well-being varied significantly by marital status and age group. Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses showed that participants predominantly experienced spirituality through everyday religious practice, such as prayer, meditation, and temple visits, and described it as a source of inner strength and coping, alongside a smaller, consistent minority expressing skepticism. These findings support spiritual intelligence as a culturally relevant, low-cost psychological resource for young adults navigating a demanding life stage, with implications for counselling, wellness programming, and future longitudinal and intervention research.

Index Terms—India, mixed methods, psychological well-being, spiritual intelligence, thematic analysis, young adults.

I. INTRODUCTION

Being a young adult today is not easy. Academic pressure, an uncertain job market, social comparison amplified by digital media, and the general pace of change have made stress, anxiety, low mood, and dissatisfaction with life common experiences in this age group (18–35 years). Accordingly, there has been growing interest within psychology in identifying internal resources that support coping and sustained mental health, rather than addressing distress only after it emerges.

Spiritual intelligence (SI) is one such resource that has received increasing attention within positive psychology. Distinct from religiosity, SI reflects a person's capacity to find deeper meaning in life, remain at peace with themselves, act compassionately, and live in accordance with their own values [1]. King [2] formalized this construct through a four-factor model, namely critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion, and developed the widely used SISRI-24 to measure it. On the well-being side, Ryff [3] conceptualized psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct spanning autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others [4], a framework further complemented by Seligman's [5] PERMA model and Frankl's [6] existential emphasis on meaning as a central human motivator. Together, these frameworks suggest that meaning, self-awareness, and value-based living,

which are the core ingredients of SI, should be theoretically linked to better psychological well-being. Empirical support for this link is accumulating, though largely outside the Indian context or among older populations. Anwar and Rana [7] found SI significantly predicted well-being among 250 Pakistani university students. Shukla [8] reported significant positive relationships between SI, resilience, and life satisfaction among 100 young adults using the SISRI. Notably, Walter, Kasler, and Routray [9], comparing Israeli and Indian emerging adults, found that only SI (not emotional intelligence) correlated with life satisfaction in the Indian sample, whereas the reverse pattern held in Israel, suggesting SI may carry particular psychological weight in collectivist cultural contexts. Within India specifically, Chettri and Vimala [10] and Deora [11] linked SI to altruism and social competence among young adults, while Sharma et al. [12] examined well-being variation by age in Indian college students. However, measurement remains a persistent concern: Gupta and Nair [13] found that young, urban Indians struggled with the abstract existential and transcendental language of the SISRI-24 and developed an alternative scale organized around more relatable dimensions (adaptability, wisdom, self-discovery, compassion, oneness, inner peace). Similarly, Malla [14] found that Ryff's six-factor well-being structure collapsed into three broader factors when cross-validated on an Indian sample, cautioning against uncritical use of Western instruments in Indian research.

Taken together, the literature reveals several gaps this study sought to address. First, most SI–well-being research targets older adults or Western samples, leaving young adults (18–35) in the Indian context comparatively understudied, despite facing the most acute stress and identity-related transitions. Second, few studies integrate SI and well-being within a single Indian dataset while also testing SI's predictive, and not merely correlational, relationship to well-being. Third, almost all existing research is purely quantitative and self-report; very few studies incorporate qualitative data to understand what spirituality means to people in daily life. Finally, socio-demographic factors (gender, marital status, age) are rarely examined alongside the SI–well-being relationship in Indian samples. The present mixed-methods study addressed these gaps using real survey

data from young Indian adults, testing both the relationship and predictive power of SI on psychological well-being and using open-ended questions to characterize participants' lived experience of spirituality and coping.

The Present Study

This study had two complementary aims. Quantitatively, it tested (a) whether spiritual intelligence is significantly related to psychological well-being, and (b) whether spiritual intelligence significantly predicts psychological well-being, among young Indian adults. Qualitatively, it explored how young adults perceive and experience spiritual intelligence in their daily lives, and how it relates to their coping mechanisms. Formally, the following hypotheses were tested:

H01: There is no significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and psychological well-being.

H02: Spiritual intelligence does not significantly predict psychological well-being among young adults.

II. METHOD

A. Design

This study used a mixed-method, descriptive-correlational design. The quantitative component used a cross-sectional survey to test the relationship and predictive power of spiritual intelligence on psychological well-being. The qualitative component used four open-ended questions, analyzed through thematic coding, to explore participants' subjective experience of spirituality and coping.

B. Participants

The target population was young adults aged 18–35 years in India. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and completed the survey online via Google Forms. A total of 111 valid responses were retained (57% female, 43% male; 52% married, 38% single; 76% urban residents; 51% undergraduate and 41% postgraduate education). Inclusion criteria were age 18–35, willingness to participate, and ability to understand the questionnaire (English).

C. Measures

Spiritual Intelligence Scale. An 8-item Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree;

possible range 8–40), adapted for this study, assessed belief in spirituality, sense of purpose, value-based decision-making, self-reflection, connectedness to something greater, spirituality as a coping resource, respect for others' beliefs, and perceived benefit of spirituality to well-being.

Psychological Well-Being Scale.

A 5-item Likert-type scale (1–5; possible range 5–25), adapted for this study drawing on Ryff's [3] multidimensional conceptualization, assessed life satisfaction, ability to handle stress, quality of relationships, emotional balance, and sense that life is meaningful.

Open-ended questionnaire.

Four qualitative items asked participants what spirituality means to them day-to-day, what practices support their well-being, a coping experience tied to their spiritual beliefs, and an optional final comment. Both scales showed good-to-excellent internal reliability in this sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$ for SI and $.91$ for WB).

D. Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms. Participants were first shown a description of the study and asked for informed consent before proceeding. Consenting participants completed demographic items, the two Likert scales, and the four open-ended questions. Responses were exported to Excel for cleaning and scoring, then analyzed using Python (pandas, SciPy).

E. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized SI and WB scores. Shapiro-Wilk tests assessed normality. Pearson correlation tested H01, with Spearman correlation run as a robustness check given a mild departure from normality. Simple linear regression tested H02. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used for supplementary demographic comparisons (gender, marital status, age, education). Significance was set at $p < .05$ throughout.

Open-ended responses were thematically coded following a Braun and Clarke-style approach, with reporting informed by the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) checklist.

F. Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all 111 respondents before proceeding with the survey. Participants could skip questions or withdraw at any point without penalty.

No personally identifying information was collected, and all responses were anonymized prior to analysis. Given that some open-ended responses touched on personal hardships, care was taken not to quote any individual response in a way that could identify the respondent.

III. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive statistics for both scales are presented in Table 1. The theoretical midpoint of the SI scale is 24 and of the WB scale is 15; observed means for both variables sit clearly above their midpoints, indicating moderately high spiritual intelligence and psychological well-being in this sample.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability for Spiritual Intelligence and Psychological Well-Being

Scale	N	Items	M	SD	Min	Max	α
Spiritual Intelligence	111	8	31.23	6.49	11	40	.895
Psychological Well-Being	111	5	17.19	4.24	7	25	.910

B. Preliminary Checks

Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated a mild departure from normality for both SI total scores ($W = .950$, $p < .001$) and WB total scores ($W = .974$, $p = .028$). Given the reasonably large sample size ($N = 111$), Pearson correlation and regression remain fairly robust to this violation; Spearman correlation was additionally run as a robustness check.

C. Hypothesis Testing

A Pearson correlation tested whether spiritual intelligence and psychological well-being are related. The result was statistically significant, $r(109) = .498$, $p < .001$, indicating a moderate, positive relationship. A Spearman rank correlation, run as a robustness check, was somewhat stronger ($\rho = .590$, $p < .001$) and pointed in the same direction. On this basis, H01 was rejected.

A simple linear regression was then run with SI as the predictor and WB as the outcome (Table 2). Spiritual intelligence significantly predicted psychological well-being, $F(1, 109) = 35.88$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately 24.8% of the variance in WB scores ($R^2 = .248$).

The regression equation was $WB = 7.029 + 0.325 \times SI$: for approximately every 3-point increase in SI, predicted WB increased by about 1 point. On this basis, H02 was also rejected.

Table 2 Simple Linear Regression Predicting Psychological Well-Being from Spiritual Intelligence

Predictor	b	Intercept	R ²	t(109)	p
Spiritual Intelligence	.325	7.029	.248	5.99	< .001

Table 4 Comparison of SI and WB Scores by Gender, Marital Status, and Age Group

Comparison	Groups (M, SD)	Test stat.	p	Result
SI by Gender	Male 28.90 (7.58); Female 33.00 (4.87)	$t = -3.27$	.002	Significant
WB by Gender	Male 16.60 (4.83); Female 17.62 (3.70)	$t = -1.32$	.190	Not significant
WB by Marital Status	Married/Single/Divorced/Widowed	$F = 7.40$	< .001	Significant
WB by Age Group	18–20/21–25/26–30/31–35	$F = 4.65$	.004	Significant
SI by Education	UG/PG/Higher Sec./Diploma/Doctoral	$F = 1.14$	.341	Not significant

E. Qualitative Findings

Responses to the four open-ended questions were thematically coded (Table 5). Across all questions, spirituality was most often described through everyday religious practice, such as prayer, meditation, and temple visits, and framed as a source of inner strength, peace, and purpose.

A smaller but consistent minority of respondents (roughly 5–8% across questions) expressed openly skeptical views. For the coping-experience question specifically, the most common narratives centred on prayer or a sense of divine support during hardship, followed by meditation, acceptance, and leaning on family during difficult life events (illness, bereavement, relationship strain).

Table 3 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Outcomes

Hyp.	Statement	Result	Decision
H01	No significant relationship between SI and WB	$r(109) = .498$, $p < .001$	Rejected
H02	SI does not significantly predict WB	$R^2 = .248$, $F(1,109) = 35.88$, $p < .001$	Rejected

D. Supplementary Demographic Comparisons

Exploratory comparisons by gender, marital status, age group, and education (Table 4) showed that women scored significantly higher than men on spiritual intelligence, $t = -3.27$, $p = .002$, though not on well-being, $t = -1.32$, $p = .190$. Well-being varied significantly by marital status, $F = 7.40$, $p < .001$, and age group, $F = 4.65$, $p = .004$, but SI did not vary significantly by education level, $F = 1.14$, $p = .341$.

Table 5 Themes Identified in Responses to the Open-Ended Questions

Question	Top themes (n, %)
Q1: What does spirituality mean to you day to day?	Religious ritual/way of life (32, 28.8%); Source of strength/purpose (14, 12.6%); Belief in God (11, 9.9%)
Q2: What practices help your well-being?	Meditation/yoga/mindfulness (34, 30.6%); Prayer/religious ritual (22, 19.8%); Self-reflection/gratitude (10, 9.0%)
Q3: A coping experience tied to spiritual beliefs	No response/declined (21, 18.9%); Prayer/temple/divine intervention (20, 18.0%); Family/relationship life event (12, 10.8%)
Q4: Any other comments (optional)	No response (63, 56.8%); Other comment (22, 19.8%); Affirms importance of spirituality/God (17, 15.3%)

IV. DISCUSSION

This study examined whether spiritual intelligence is related to, and predictive of, psychological well-being among young Indian adults, using a mixed-methods design combining validated Likert scales with open-ended qualitative questions. Both null hypotheses were rejected: spiritual intelligence was significantly and positively correlated with psychological well-being, and it significantly predicted well-being, accounting for close to a quarter of the variance.

This finding is consistent with prior work. It aligns with Shukla [8], who found a comparable positive relationship between SI, resilience, and life satisfaction in young Indian adults, and with Walter et al. [9], who found SI, rather than emotional intelligence, tracked with life satisfaction specifically in an Indian sample. This pattern suggests something distinct may be occurring in Indian or collectivist cultural contexts, where spirituality is woven into daily life through family, ritual, and community in ways that Western, more individualist contexts do not always replicate. At the same time, an R^2 of .248 indicates SI is one meaningful predictor among several rather than the whole picture of well-being, consistent with multidimensional frameworks such as Ryff's [3] six-dimension model and Seligman's [5] PERMA framework, both of which treat well-being as shaped by many interacting factors.

The gender difference in SI (women scoring higher) mirrors patterns reported by Gupta and Nair [13] and Walter et al. [9]. This may reflect socialization patterns around empathy, caregiving, and relational responsibility more commonly emphasized for women in Indian culture, though this study cannot confirm that mechanism directly and it warrants further investigation. The qualitative responses added texture the quantitative results alone could not provide for most respondents, spirituality was not an abstract philosophical construct but a concrete, ritual-based, and often family-embedded practice, such as prayer, meditation, temple visits, or leaning on faith during hardship. This is consistent with Gupta and Nair's [13] finding that young Indians engage poorly with the abstract existential language of Western SI scales such as the SISRI-24 and supports the case for culturally adapted measurement in future work. The presence of a small but consistent skeptical minority is also noteworthy and should not be treated as noise; not all

participants experienced spirituality as beneficial, and acknowledging this diversity of experience more accurately represents the data.

A. Implications

For mental health practitioners working with young Indian adults, these findings suggest that spiritually informed coping strategies, such as meditation, prayer, value-based reflection, are not merely culturally comfortable additions but appear measurably linked to better well-being outcomes and could reasonably be incorporated into counselling or wellness programming rather than treated as separate from psychological intervention. For educators and university wellness programs, creating space for reflection, meaning making, and value clarification (not necessarily religious instruction) may offer a low-cost avenue for supporting student mental health. For researchers, the demographic patterns identified here, namely gender differences in SI, and age and marital-status differences in WB, suggest socio-demographic factors deserve more sustained attention in this line of research.

B. Limitations

This study has several limitations. The sample was recruited through convenience sampling and skewed urban and educated, limiting generalizability to rural or less-educated young adults, even though rural communities are where much everyday spiritual practice in India occurs. The SI and WB scales used were simplified, study-specific instruments (8 and 5 items, respectively) rather than the full standardized SISRI-24 or Ryff instruments, which kept the survey brief but means direct score comparisons with studies using full instruments should be made cautiously. Finally, the cross-sectional, self-report design precludes causal inference: it is possible that spiritually inclined individuals are predisposed to better well-being through other mechanisms, or that individuals already experiencing higher well-being find it easier to engage in spiritual practice. This study demonstrates association and predictive value, not causation.

C. Future Directions

Future research could adopt a longitudinal design to test whether spiritual intelligence predicts changes in well-being over time. Larger, more geographically and

educationally diverse samples, including rural young adults, would help establish how far these findings generalize. Intervention studies examining whether deliberately cultivating spiritual intelligence (e.g., through meditation training or values-clarification workshops) causally raises well-being would help disentangle cause from pre-existing trait overlap. Finally, given how differently participants described spirituality relative to Western SI instruments, there is a strong case for adopting or further developing India-specific SI measures, such as that proposed by Gupta and Nair [13], in future quantitative research.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined whether spiritual intelligence relates to, and predicts, psychological well-being among young Indian adults. Spiritual intelligence and psychological well-being were significantly and positively related, and spiritual intelligence significantly predicted well-being, explaining roughly a quarter of its variance. Both scales demonstrated reliable measurement, and qualitative responses provided a grounded, culturally specific account of spirituality among this age group, rooted primarily in everyday ritual, family, and inner strength, alongside a smaller but genuine thread of skepticism. Taken together, these findings support treating spiritual intelligence as a genuine, culturally relevant psychological resource for young adults navigating a demanding life stage, though not the whole story of well-being, but rather a real and usable part of it.

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