

# Religion/Spirituality and Mental Health of Students

## Review Article

Dr. K. C. Barmola\*

*Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University Rajasthan, India*

**\*Corresponding author:** Dr. K. C. Barmola, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University Rajasthan, H. N. 97-B Indira Nagar, Rishikesh, Dehradun, Uttarakhand 249201, (M): 09649481296, India, E-mail: kailash\_barmola@rediffmail.co

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### Abstract

This paper is intended to find out the role of religion/spirituality in mental health of students. It is a reviews based study. The outcomes of reviews suggest that the religion/spirituality may enrich the mental health of students. Some of the recommendations like freedom of expression of religion/spirituality concerns, inclusion of religion/spirituality generated values/ethics/morals and inculcating religion/spirituality oriented habits in day-today lives of students' may help in their overall mental health.

**Keywords:** Religion; Spirituality; Mental health; Student

Religion/spirituality is a factor which is getting attention more and more in the recent times. If one thinks about why, so number of results proved it qualitatively and quantitatively that it has contributed a lot in different sphere of an individual's life. Whether talk about students' mental health or productivity of an employee. Keeping in view the present scenario, the present study is one step more forward to know the significance of religion/spirituality in mental health of students.

In the process of defining religion and spirituality Koenig, et al. [1] handbook further develop the concepts from the consensus report, giving the following definitions:

**Religion** is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others living together in a community.

**Spirituality** is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community.

**Religion/spirituality and Mental Health:** Religion/spirituality can play a significant role in mental health of an individual. There are some researches which have clearly indicated that individuals who report being more religious and spiritual report better physical and mental health [1]. The specific mechanisms are unclear, although it has been hypothesized that these relationships are likely related to several religious and non-religious factors. It has been argued that spiritual and religious factors are sufficient in and of themselves to improve health (e.g., belief in a loving God, etc.), which is supported by research that suggests that religious and spiritual coping explains variance in health outcomes beyond that explained solely by psychological coping [2]. Conversely, it has been argued that the better health of religious individuals is most likely attributable to their lifestyle behaviours (e.g., less substance use and better dietary habits; [3]), the increased social support that is typically provided by religious congregations and/or a positive worldview, which promotes well-being. In a survey done in Kerala, India, multivariate analysis showed that religious differences are mostly explained by the behavioural restrictions and opportunities for socialisation that religion does or does not provide, with a strong gender overlay [4]. In another study the spirituality level and coping ability for the sample were measured. The results revealed that students who have scored high on spirituality are better able to

cope with their stressors, are better able to adapt and have a positive outlook towards their problem situations [5]. Religion, spirituality, health and medicine have common roots in the conceptual framework of relationship amongst human beings, nature and God. Of late, there has been a surge in interest in understanding the interplay of religion, spirituality, health and medicine, both in popular and scientific literature. A number of published empirical studies suggest that religious involvement is associated with better outcomes in physical and mental health. Despite some methodological limitations, these studies do point towards a positive association between religious involvement and better health. When faced with disease, disability and death, many patients would like physicians to address their emotional and spiritual needs, as well. The renewed interest in the interaction of religion and spirituality with health and medicine has significant implications in the Indian context. Although religion is translated as dharma in major Indian languages, dharma and religion are etymologically different and dharma is closer to spirituality than religion as an organized institution. Religion and spirituality play important roles in the lives of millions of Indians and therefore, Indian physicians need to respectfully acknowledge religious issues and address the spiritual needs of their patients. Incorporating religion and spirituality into health and medicine may also go a long way in making the practice of medicine more holistic, ethical and compassionate. It may also offer new opportunities to learn more about Ayurveda and other traditional systems of medicine and have more enriched understanding and collaborative interaction between different systems of medicine. Indian physicians may also find religion and spirituality significant and fulfilling in their own lives [6]. A literature review on spirituality and performance in organizations reviewed their findings on how spirituality supports organizational performance. Three different perspectives are introduced on how spirituality benefits employees and supports organizational performance based on the extant literature: (a) Spirituality enhances employee well-being and quality of life; (b) Spirituality provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work; (c) Spirituality provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community (Karakas, 2010).

As religion being a potent cultural force. Although sacred writings provide limited guidance regarding child well-being, interpretations of those writings inform many parents and others. Psychologists have discussed the relation between religion and children's well-being since the beginning of the discipline. Empirical studies into children and religion began in the 1950s; however the first study to explicitly examine the religion and children's well-being was published in 1979. The evidence that has accumulated since then is remarkably consistent: Religiosity in families is positively associated with child and youth well-being. In the areas of health behaviors, mental health and internalizing problems, aggression and externalizing problems, and even cognitive development, there are numerous studies documenting the association. Although the strength of the association is not always strong, the evidence almost always reveals a positive relation between religion and well-being. There are two types of exceptions. First, there are circumstances when religious beliefs can be detrimental to youth well-being. The other exception occurs in cases where religious leaders use or religion is used as a

justification to maltreat children. Consequently, a blanket assertion that religion is associated with child well-being cannot be made [7]. Spiritual issues are culturally important for many youth in urban schools. It is described that how spirituality is associated with cultural values, mental health, coping strategies, and adjustment among culturally diverse youth. Using the case of a 17-year-old Samoan high school student, it is demonstrated that how spiritual issues related to faith, meaning making, and cultural identity can be addressed in a school counseling context [8]. A study on the relationship between spirituality and the health of college students reported two findings first, the development of a valid and reliable instrument to measure spirituality and secondly, investigated the relationship between the self-reported level of spirituality and the health status of college students. The significance of the study is that this research is an important step toward understanding the role that spirituality plays in the various dimensions of health in young adults [9].

So the religion/spirituality can play an important role not only in enhancing mental health of students but also in their overall development as a good human being/civilized citizen of a responsible society and nation.

## Conclusion

At the end on the basis of evidences presented in current study it can be concluded that religion/spirituality oriented life may lead to a better mental health of students.

Some of the recommendations are given as follows for enriching the mental health of students:-

1. Promotion of religion/spirituality environment in individual's life and school/college.
2. Freedom of expression of religion/spirituality concerns in lives of students.
3. Inclusion of religion/spirituality generated values/ethics/morals among students.
4. Allowing religion/spirituality development among students.
5. Inculcating religion/spirituality oriented habits in students for the overall development of their lives.

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