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Role of Spiritual Activities to Strengthen Mental Health and Well Being of Adolescents**Dr. Ram Kalap Tiwari***K.S. Saket P.G. College, Ayodhya, Faizabad (UP), India***Abstract**

The present study was conducted to examine the role of spiritual activities in strengthening mental health and well-being of adolescents. 150 male adolescents of 15-20 years of age have been selected from Faizabad city of Uttar Pradesh. They were requested to participate continuously and regularly in spiritual activities (practices) in morning at their school prayer Asthal. Mental health and well-being of participants were measured by using mental health and well-being scales. It was found that adolescents of post test group showed significant positive relationship between spiritual practices and various dimensions of their mental health and well-being. Continuous and regular participation in spiritual activities played a significant facilitative role in strengthening the mental health and well-being of adolescents.

Keywords: Spiritual activities, Mental Health, Well-being, Adolescents.

Spirituality is a part of human experience as any other normal form of thought and behavior, until recently it has not given due importance by researchers in psychology. Mental health professionals, infact, have often viewed spiritual content as pathological. Researchers have witnessed encouraging development in research interest in the interaction of spirituality and mental health and this interest is currently growing. Spirituality has many implications for mental health in particular and psychology in general.

Spirituality can refer to an ultimate or an alleged immaterial reality (Ewert, 1992); an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being; or the "deepest values and meaning by which people live" (Philip, 2007). Spirituality is often experienced as source of inspiration or orientation in the life (Kees, 2002). It can encompass belief in immaterial realities or experiences of the transcendent nature of the world. Spirituality emphasizes humanistic qualities like love,

honesty, sense of detachment, faith and hope, compassion, patience, tolerance forgiveness, contentment, responsibilities, harmony and a concern for others (Dalia Lama, 1999). Spiritual practice of some kind is essential for personal well-being. Spiritual practice moves a person along a path towards a goal. Some practices, like meditation, Yoga, prayer are under taken for a Spiritual purpose. Spirituality help a person to clarify his/her values and focus on related goals that are important, rather than becoming consumed by material thing or circumstances that are truly unimportant. Spirituality is about an individual's relationship with a spirit (which can be higher power like a God or is a simply a representations of human being's connection to metaphysical reality greater than oneself).

Spirituality is a globally acknowledged concept. It involves belief and obedience to an all-powerful force usually called God, who controls the universe and the destiny of man. It involves the ways in

which people fulfill what they hold to be the purpose of their lives, a search for the meaning of life and a sense of connectedness to the universe. The universality of Spirituality extends across creed and culture. At the same time, Spirituality is very much personal and unique to each person. It is a sacred realm of human experience.

Spirituality has positive influence on health (Curtin et al., 2007; Barnes and others, 2008). Complex social, psychological and biosocial factors influence how spiritual practices affect mental health. Most published studies have examined the effect of participation in spiritual practices on physical and mental health. Majority of studies calculated that people who are more spiritually involved are healthier, lead healthier life styles and require fewer health services (Koenig, 2002). The role of spirituality in health is more difficult to study because of the highly subjective and idiosyncratic nature of spiritual belief and experiences (Thoresen and Harris, 2002).

The concept of spirituality is inclusive and affects everybody. Comprehensive research evidence (Ellison and Fan, 2008) shows that spiritual belief and practices help to prevent many physical and mental illness, reducing both symptoms severity and relapse rate, speeding up and enhancing recovery, as well as rendering distress and testability easier to endure (Underwood, 1999, 2007, Idler, et al., 2003).

Spiritual practices are:

- Belonging to a faith tradition.
- Ritual practices and other forms of worship.

- Mediation and prayer.
- Reading wisdom literature and scripture seared music.
- Maintain stable family relationship and friendship.
- Team activity.

Participation in-group spiritual practices have both protective and healthy promoting effect on mental health. Social and psychological benefits of spiritual involvement are achieved through regular contact with a supportive group in a safe and encouraging environment. Epidemiological studies suggest that spiritual beliefs have a primary protective effect on mental health (Levin, 1996). Spiritual values are highly correlated with mental health promoting life style/well being, including exercise, diet and moderate alcohol use (Hamburg, 1982). Regular involvement in spiritual activities has beneficial effect on general emotional well-being (Ellison, 1998). There is emerging evidence that prayer and other forms of spiritual healing may have direct beneficial effect on health (Astine and others, 2000).

Essential Features of Mental Health:

Mental health has two dimensions: Absence of mental illness and presence of well-adjusted personality that contributes effectively to the life of community. Ability to take responsibilities for one's own actions, flexibility, high frustration to tolerance, acceptance of uncertainty, involvement activities of social interest, courage to take risks, courage to change the themes which we can change, harmonious relationships to self are the essential features of mental health. Spirituality is an important aspect of mental health. Spirituality generally shows

positive association in the mental health and well-being. Lack of Spirituality can influence with inter personal relationships, which can contribute the genesis of behavioral disturbance. Spirituality is also important in the prognosis of Psychiatric conditions.

Spiritual belief and practice have long been thought to have pathological basis and researcher over a century have understood this in this light. DSM-III portrayed it negatively by suggesting that Spiritual experiences are examples of psychopathology. But recent research reports strongly suggest that too many individuals, spirituality is a resource that help them to cope with the stress in life, including those of their illness. The importance of spirituality in mental health is now widely accepted. Many psychiatrists have also recognized the importance of spirituality in their patients (Turbott, 1996). DSM- IV includes three categories- normal spirituality experiences; spiritual problems leading to mental disturbances; and mental disturbances with a spiritual context. It has been observed that Indian psychiatric community has recognized spiritualin the therapeutic situation.

Mental health and well-being are fundamental to quality of life, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Mental health is an essential component of social cohesion, productivity and peace and stability in the living environment, contributing to social capital and economic development in societies (WHO, 2005). The WHO estimates that up to 20% of children and adolescents worldwide

experiencing a disabling mental health problem.

Mental health describes either a level of cognitive or emotional well-being. It includes an individual's ability to enjoy life and procure a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience (Holmes, 2010). Mental health is an expression of emotions and signifies a successful adaptation to a range of demands. Most recently, the field of global mental health has emerged, which has been defined as the area of study, research and practice that places a priority on improving mental health and achieving equity in mental health for all peoples worldwide (Patel and Prince, 2010).

A positive sense of one's own identity is fundamental to mental health as well as wellbeing. Positive sense of identity can be enhanced when adolescents are offered opportunities to:

- Consider positive relationship and friendship.
- Practice positive self talk.
- Represent culture in curriculum.

Psychological well-being is usually conceptualized as some combination of positive affective states such as happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (Deci and Reyang, 2008). Huppert (2009) stated that psychological wellbeing is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. By definition, therefore, people with high psychological well-being report feeling happy, capable, well supported, and satisfied with life and so on. Psychological well-being includes better physical health,

mediated possibly by brain activation pattern, neurochemical effects and genetic factors. Boehm et al. (2011) reported an association between psychological well-being and a modest but consistent reduction risk of incident.

Mental health is an essential part of well-being. Mental health is a way of describing social and emotional well-being. Good mental health is central to child's healthy development. It is associated with:

- Feeling happy and positive about own self and enjoying life.
- Healthy relationship with family and friends.
- Participation in physical activity and eating healthy diet.
- The ability to relax and to get good night's sleep.
- Community participation and belonging.

Much of the credibility established by the field in the recent years can be attributed to the literature showing the relationship of spirituality with mental health (Ventis, 1995) and physical (Dull and Skokan, 1995; Hill and Butter, 1995) health, which substantially established the link. Though the relationship is complex, with spirituality correlating both positively and negatively with mental and physical health, the positive benefits of spirituality seem to outweigh the negative (Bergin, 1983).

It is thought that adolescence is an especially risky period of mental health problems. If a young person feels sad, irritable or anxious most of the time and for two or more weeks, they might have a mental problem.

Several studies have found positive correlation with psychological well-being and other indicators of positive mental health. Studies found that higher levels of spiritual involvement are positively associated with indicators of psychological well-being (Life satisfaction, happiness, positive affects and higher morale) and with less depression, suicidal thought and behavior, drug/alcohol use/abuse. Usually the positive impact of spiritual involvement on mental health is more robust among people under stressful circumstances (Koeng and others, 2001, Willits, 1998). Other recent studies have also found a positive association between spirituality and other factors associated with well-being such as optimism and hope, self-esteem, sense of meaning and purpose of life, internal locus of control, social support and marital satisfaction (Salsman et al., 2005).

Public and private spiritual practices can help to maintain mental health and prevent mental health disorders. They help to cope with anxiety, fears, frustration, anger, anomie, inferiority feeling, despondency, isolation (Schhmarker, 1992). Personal prayer, confession, forgiveness, blessing may also be effective. Impact of spirituality on mental health of adolescents has been well investigated and positive effect has been documented (Momtaz et al., 2011, Dewelal, 2008).

Spirituality shows the stronger influences on well-being and confidence in one's ability and more spiritual individuals reported a more positive overall health status than participants who did not report regular spiritual practices. There was a stronger association between spirituality

and mental and psychological health (Johnston, et al. 2012).

Recent studies show that spiritual belief and practices are supportive to cope with stress in life and are beneficial to mental health. Brody (2003) found that parents who were more involved in spiritual activities at their worship place were more likely to have harmonious relationships and better parenting skills. That in turn enhanced children's competence, self-regulation, psychosocial adjustment and school performance. Miller et al. (2000) also reported similar findings.

Tonigar (2003) reported that spirituality predicts behaviors such as honesty and responsibility which in turn promoted better mental health and spiritual practices helped their respondents to cope better.

Larson and others (1992) concluded that 72% of the religious commitment variables were beneficial to mental health; participation in spiritual services, social supports, prayer and relationship with God were beneficial in 92% of respondents. Similar findings were reported in a review of the journal of family practice (Craigie and others, 2000). Verghese and others (1989, 1990) have also found that who spent more time in spiritual activities tended to have better prognosis.

Krishna Mohan (1999) in a study on adolescents' spirituality found that after the spiritual experiences respondents become happy, cheerful, and peace most of the time and rarely downhearted or depressed. They reported that need to achieve personal growth and maintaining close relationship with level ones who are important gave them a purpose in life. Respondents reported that they have excellent health and were satisfied with

meaning and purpose they found in their lives. Respondents told that spiritual experiences they had were valuable or beneficial to them.

Tiwari (2011) studied role of spiritual practices and Yoga exercises on mental health and behavioral activities of 50 male adolescents of 12-17 years of age. Results indicated that spiritual practices (prayer) and Yoga exercise influenced mental health of the adolescents. These activities have shown facilitative effects on adolescents' mental health.

Considering the view that spiritual practices are beneficial for the mental health and well-being of adolescents, the present study was conducted to examine the relationship of spiritual practices with mental health and well-being.

Objectives: The main objective of the study was to investigate the effect of spiritual practices on adolescents' mental health and well-being.

Hypothesis: Spiritual practices have significant effect on mental health and well-being of adolescents.

Variables:

Independent - Spiritual practices

Dependent - Mental health and well-being

Method: This study was an experimental research, single group, pre-test, post-test design was used.

Sample: A purposive sample of 50 adolescent of Gurukul College, Faizabad was selected for the present experimental study.

Tools: For measuring mental health and well-being, Mental Health test for adolescents developed by Francisca and

Jasmine (2011) and Well-being test developed by Donatelle and Davis (2000) were chosen as they have highest reliability as well as validity. Hindi translated version of these scales was provided to the participants.

Statistical Techniques: The differences in pre test and post test scores were calculated to yield the increments in scores of the students. The mean increments scores, S.D. of the pre test and post test were calculated. The t- test was used to find out whether there is significant difference in the mental health and well-being of pre test and post test.

Procedure:

Results: Mean, S.D. and t-value of Mental health and its various dimensions of pre test and post tests is presented in table 1

Table 1: Mean, S.D. and t-values of pre test and post test on various dimensions of mental health

Dimensions	Pre test		Post test		t-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Attitude towards Self	28.75	4.49	30.87	5.12	2.23*
Perception of reality	27.39	5.87	29.60	2.15	2.48*
Social Competence	28.74	5.56	30.47	4.25	1.82
Regularity of Habits	25.25	6.60	27.27	4.43	1.98*
Emotional Stability	19.49	3.13	21.77	3.94	3.21**
Autonomy	26.66	5.73	27.85	6.03	0.75
Overall Mental Health	156.28	5.07	167.85	4.19	12.57**

**p<.01, *p<.05

The results in the table 1 indicate that there is a significant difference among adolescents in their mental health and its dimensions - Attitudes towards Self, Perception of reality, Regularity of habits and Emotional stability. Results clearly indicates that spiritual practices have significantly affected various dimensions

Phase I: Pre test – Mental health and well-being was measured using Mental health and well-being questionnaire.

Phase II: Experimental phase – Spiritual practices were organized continuously in morning at (prayer) college Sabha Asthal for one month of period. Students were requested to participate and perform for spiritual practices (Prayer, ‘Om’ recitation) at Sabha Asthal, one hour daily for one month.

Phase III: Post test – Mental health and well-being of students was again measured using mental health and well-being questionnaires.

and over all mental health of adolescents. After participating in spiritual practices adolescents scored higher on various dimension of mental health. Higher mean scores are the indication of influence of spiritual practices, which were performed by the adolescents for one month continuously.

It is concluded that there is significant incensement in mental health as well as well-being of adolescents due to spiritual practices.

Analysis of pre test and post test on well-being is presented in table 2.

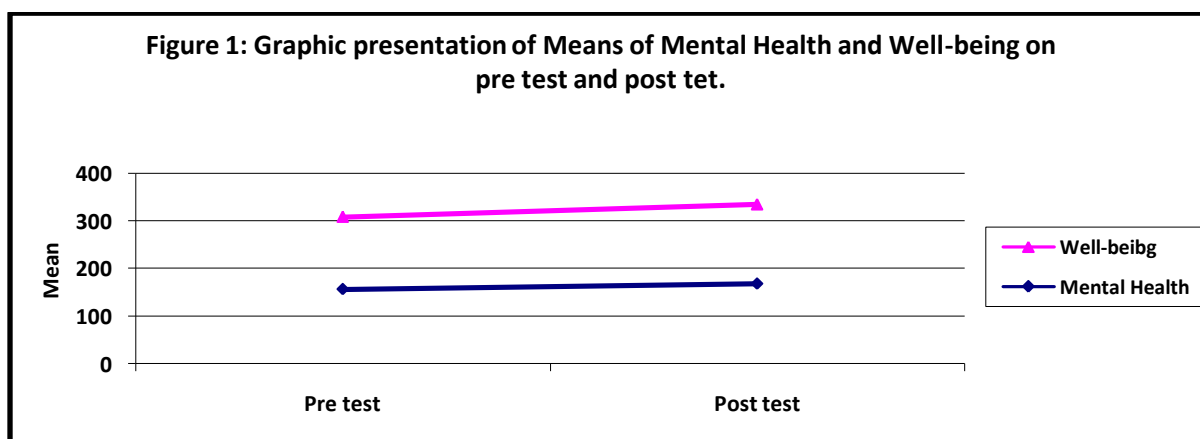
Table 2: Mean, S.D. and t-values of various dimensions of well-being

Dimensions	Pre test		Post test		t-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Physical Health	29.35	3.96	32.16	4.45	3.34**
Social Health	31.14	5.52	32.61	5.04	1.40
Emotional Health	28.82	4.03	33.33	3.91	5.70**
Spiritual Health	32.69	4.77	35.15	4.64	2.72**
Intellectual Health	31.87	5.28	33.05	4.53	1.20
Overall Well-being	151.87	7.07	166.30	7.31	10.35**

**p<.01, *p<.05

The results in the table 2 show that there is a significant difference in adolescents well-being and its various dimensions i.e. Physical, Emotional and Spiritual health. Results clearly indicate that spiritual practices showed significant effect on well-being of adolescents. After participating in spiritual practices continuously for one month adolescents improved their well-being. It means spiritual practices contributed a beneficial effect on their

well-being. However, social and intellectual health dimensions were not significant but there was an improvement in post test conditions. Mean values were higher on post test condition than pre test. Figure 1 confirms the analysis presented in table 1 and 2. It is clear from graphic representation that spiritual practices enhanced mental health and well-being of adolescents.



Discussion: An overall view of the results suggests that a significant difference exists due to spiritual practices on mental health and well-being of the adolescents. Thus the hypothesis that proposes that mental health and well-being of pre test group was likely to be poorer as compared to that of post test group who continuously practiced spiritual activities in the morning at their college campus, was fully supported as a significant difference was found on various dimensions of mental health and well-being between pre test and post test. Continuous spiritual practices enhanced the mental health of the adolescents. It is a clear indication of positive and facilitating effect of spiritual practices in adolescents. These activities have shown clear cut impact on mental health and well-being of adolescents. The findings of the present study are quite similar to that researches in which researcher has found a beneficial role of spiritual practices on mental health and well-

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being of adolescents (Francisca and Jasmine, 2012; Kothari, 2009; Bensley, 1991).

The findings of the present study confirm the views that spirituality has positive association with mental health and well-being of adolescents. Present study requires much more research in this area before it can become conclusive.

The findings of the study have practical implications for the design of educational and training interventions geared to and enhanced mental health and well-being of adolescents, the leaders of tomorrow. It reflects the significance of spirituality in curriculum for strengthening mental health and well-being which plays a positive role in every aspect of life. It should be practiced regularly by students at various levels in order to develop a better understanding of own capability as well as capability of others, paving way for success in chosen careers.

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