

Spirituality and religiosity as correlates of happiness among elderly : A gender study

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■ **ABSTRACT :** Happiness is a multidimensional construct comprising of emotional and cognitive elements. It is related with positive emotions whereas intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth balance our material pursuits and make us happy. Happiness can be achieved provided one has the wisdom of discovery, the wisdom of contentment, the wisdom of gratitude, the wisdom of giving and wisdom of self-actualization. Spirituality is to some extent an one-to-one communication with the divine without the influence of any organization or a set of dogmatic views. It is based more on personal experiences rather than the experience of others. Religion may be defined as a way of life revealed in emotional expressions and inspired by faith in God or in a “supernatural power” which controls and guides the action of man and the destiny of world. Man often feels that his life is incomplete and imperfect. He longs for perfection. This longing makes him to seek the help of some “supernatural power” which can do for him things that he cannot do for himself. Hence, the objectives of the present research were framed to study the state of happiness, spirituality and religiosity among male and female elderly and to study the relationship and contribution of spirituality and religiosity towards the state of happiness. The sample comprised of 360 elderly persons (180 males and 180 females) in the age group 65 years and above, only those elderly were selected for the sample who were leading a retired life, were not suffering from any deadly disease and belonged to middle socio-economic status families. The sample was equally distributed over the three cultural zones of Punjab naming Malwa, Majha and Doaba. Data were collected through questionnaire-cum-interview method. Results revealed that significantly more happiness was perceived by elderly males as compared to their female counterparts. Positive and significant relation between spirituality and state of happiness but non-significant relation between religiosity and state of happiness among elderly were found. Correlation analysis showed positive and significant relationship of happiness with spirituality but negative and non-significant relationship of happiness with religiosity among elderly.

■ **KEY WORDS :** Happiness, Religiosity, Spirituality, Old age

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Life is full of paradoxes, all that exists in this world, there is always the opposite side still they are all times interrelating and this is the natural way of life. When there is day there will be night, when there is positive there will be negative, where there are strengths there will also be weaknesses, where there are successes, there will be failures, where there are opportunities, there will be adversities, where there are rewards and honours, there will be punishments and insult. Similarly within you, you can be happy or unhappy, enjoying and depressive; satisfied or dissatisfied, it is only

possible when we take ourselves where we will find happiness.

Happiness is a nebulous term, which to date has different meanings to different people. Just as in early days of research in personality development, there was no agreement as to what the term “personality” meant, so there is no agreement as to what “happiness” means. To some it is synonymous with “joy” while others accept the standard dictionary definition that happiness is a state of well being or contentment- a condition dominated by pleasurable

satisfaction (Rahman, 2006).

Happiness is not something that happens, it is not the result of the good fortune or random chance, it is not something that money can buy or power command; it does not depend on outside events but rather on how we interpret them. According to Swami Vivekanand (2000) life is not enjoyment alone, true joy is when we venture inwards. The individual is an agent of his/her own happiness, independent of environmental conditions, the well spring of happiness is within the individual and it is more spiritual enrichment rather than material satisfaction. Happiness can be achieved provided one has the wisdom of discovery, the wisdom of contentment, the wisdom of gratitude, the wisdom of giving and wisdom of self cultivation (Tsou and Lue, 2002). Diener (2002) found that happiness is related with positive emotions whereas intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth balance our material pursuits and make us happy (Kahavari, 2001). Man is creator of his own destiny. As he sows so he reaps. Happy people invite happy situations and happiness in life while sad people attract sad incidents in life. Depending on what state of mind we are, we attract situations and places in the environment accordingly. Every option of joy and happiness is before him and now it depends on the man how he wants to grow (Bhargava, 2006).

Happiness is a multidimensional construct comprising of emotional and cognitive elements (Hills and Argyle, 2001). Argyle (2001) presented a tripartite conceptualization of happiness consisting the average level of satisfaction over a specific time period, frequency and degree of positive effect and the relative absence of negative effect.

The word spiritual comes from latin root "spiritus" which means "breath"-referring to the breath of life. It involves opening our hearts and cultivating our capacity to experience awe, reverence and gratitude. It is ability to see the sacred in the ordinary, to feel the poignancy of life, to know passion of existence and to give ourselves over to that which is greater than ourselves. Its aim is to bring about greater love and compassion for all people and living things. Its effect: good physical and mental health (Elkins, 2010).

Spirituality is thought to include a system of beliefs that encompasses love, compassion and respect for life. Spirituality is at the core of all religions. Spirituality is to some extent an one-to-one communication with the divine without the influence of any organization or a set of dogmatic views. It is based more on personal experiences rather than the experience of others. Spirituality is about our existence relationship with others, the universe and us. Spiritual development provides us with the insight and understanding of others and ourselves. Spirituality extends beyond the physical, material and self to a state called transcendence. Spirituality change man's escapist attitude and his aggressive and carnal behavior and gives him a strong will and purity of mind and intellect and control over his desire

and physical organs.

Human beings are essentially spiritual in nature because we are driven to ask fundamental questions about life, for example; Why has this happened to me? What is my purpose on earth? What is the meaning of life? What happens when we die? Is this situation good for me? Why don't I feel happy when my life is so blessed? It is the inner journey of becoming more aware of the big picture, of ourselves, the universe, and our place and purpose in it (Zainuddin and Ahmed, 2010).

Spirituality is now a much talked subject all over the world. Every person has a spiritual dimension and each person's spirituality is unique. To understand the term deeply, it is imperative to make comparison between spirituality and religiosity. Spirituality involves humans search for meaning in life, while religion involves an organized entity with rituals and practices about a higher power eg., God (Tanyi, 2002). Some people express aspect of their spirituality through religion. Others in more personal ways. But spirituality is a broader concept than religion (Astrow *et al.*, 2001). Although not everyone has a religion, who searched for ultimate and have transcendent meaning can be said to have spirituality.

Considering spirituality as an innate characteristic that develops in a manner roughly corresponding to psychological development defined by Freud and Erickson (who said that normal crises precipitated by external or internal changes of life send us from one stage of psychological development to the next), has led Fowler (1981) to propose six stages of spiritual development. The first stage begins with the age of two to seven when a child's spirituality is fantasy based. Next is school age when belief becomes more literal and concretes as in seeing God as anthropomorphic. The third stage is adolescence governed by a community aspect of spirituality. Then comes the stage of early twenties when the individual tend to relocate authority within themselves as rely mostly on rationality. The fifth stage is mid life when there is shift towards a concept of God as a comic flow of life or light within and finally one reaches the sixth stage of universalizing faith with a devotion to a transcendent vision not of one's own making. Further Fowler has also pointed out that in spite of effective articulation there are serious limits to the observations of spiritual states as opposed to the observation of routine or ordinary psychological phenomena. Therefore spirituality may be understood as an innate human capacity to transcend the egocentric perspective from which people experience and evaluate their lives and in the process to attain full enlightenment. They have thoughts and feelings of connectedness with the universe and a sense of moving towards personal wholeness by experiencing transcendence and immanence.

Religion is very widespread significant social and cultural force in the life of human beings. We cannot say at

what stage man has become religious. He is religious from the time immemorial. From the very beginning of human history man is found himself submitting to some unknown powers. Rituals, sacrifices, ceremonies, singing and dancing were some of the expression of his submission. Religion may be defined as a way of life revealed in emotional expressions and inspired by faith in God or in a “supernatural power” which controls and guides the action of man and the destiny of world. Man often feels that his life is incomplete and imperfect. He longs for perfection. This longing makes him to seek the help of some “supernatural power” which can do for him things that he cannot do for himself.

Erikson (1950) is best known for theory of psychosocial development, which has its roots in the psychoanalytic importance of identity in personality. His biographies of Gandhi and Martin Luther reveal Erikson’s positive view of religion. He considered religions to be important influences in successful personality development because they are the primary way that cultures promote the virtues associated with each stage of life. Religious rituals facilitate this development.

According to Clerk (1958) religion is the inner experience of the individual when he senses it beyond. This experience has some effect on behaviour, when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with this “beyond”. The word beyond here stands for a supernatural or supersensible force, which is felt and known. Religious beliefs and behaviors have the power to moderate emotion; many religious persons turn to religion as resource in coping. Research indicates that many older persons employ religious coping in response to illness, the death of loved ones, and in anticipation of their own deaths (McFadden, 1995).

Becoming religious is a slow and gradual process. It is the result of individual interaction with society. Individual whose internal religious and spiritual beliefs have been internalized, and have an influence on their general behaviour, values and personal world view tend to report less death anxiety, while those whose religion serve a more social than ideological function reported greater death anxiety (Pollak, 1980). Wingrove and Alston (1971) studied religiosity among elderly males and females and found that women were more religious than men on the basis of their greater percentage of attendance of religious services. Princy and Kang (2011) studied religiosity among elderly males and females and found non-significant difference in religiosity among elderly males and females.

Old age is usually the period between retirement and death. Chronological age is a poor criterion for marking old age. There are much marked differences between individuals in the age at which they actually begin to age. Due to better living conditions and medical facilities life span has increased and aging does not start till the mid sixties or early seventies. For some, old age is the one of longest

period in the life span, while for others, it is one of the shortest period. Two set of factors *i.e.*, physical health status and changes in social roles eliminate the definition of age identity and transition to old age. Those who perceive their health as good or with high activity levels, continues to perceive themselves as middle aged, for a longer period of time. Often older people can identify a particular incident such as fall, stroke or heart attack which made them feel that they are growing older.

According to Ward (1984) seven factors have been identified in the transition to old age such as specific health problem, retirement, physical and mental deterioration, chronological age, restrictions in physical activity, change in social contacts and illness or death of spouse. Due to industrialization, modernization and the trend towards nuclearization of families aging has now a days a social problem. It is projected that the world will experience a “Gerontic boom” between the year 2010 and 2015 (Myers, 1982).

Old age is an inevitable and universal phenomenon of human life because aging is a natural process. Ageing is more often a process of mental attitude rather than physical changes in the body. “Aging” refers to the regular changes that occur in nature genetically representative organisms living under representative environmental conditions as one in chronological age.

Erikson (1950) has suggested that the value theme in old age is the achievement of “ego integrity” that is the acceptance of oneself and a willingness to defend the dignity of his own life stable against all physical and economical threats. Failure to achieve ego integrity leads to feeling of despair, the feeling of life is too short for an attempt to start another life and try out alternative road of integrity (Perkins, 1975).

Old age is considered to be associated with a number of problems and it was believed that happiness declines with age. Wilson (1967) reported that youth is a strong and consistent predictor of happiness, but recent studies have disputed this eg., Shmotkin (1990) reported that though there was a small decline in happiness scores with age, however it was eliminated when other variables were controlled and according to Haring, *et al.* (1984) men were slightly happier than women. On the contrary Lee, Secombe and Shehan (1991) found that women reported higher level of positive effect on an average and more often reported extremely high level of subjective well being.

Spirituality is a broader concept than religion. Although not everyone has a religion, everyone who searches for ultimate and have transcendent meaning can be said to have spirituality (Astrow *et al.*, 2001). Some people express aspect of their spirituality through religion, other in more personal ways. Spirituality was found to be an important and necessary part of the healthy elderly person’s daily life

(Molinatti, 2005).

The present study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- To study the state of happiness among male and female senior citizens.
- To study the spirituality and religiosity among male and female senior citizens.
- To find out the relationship of happiness with spirituality and religiosity among elderly males and females.
- To assess the contribution of spirituality and religiosity towards state of happiness among elderly.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present study was conducted in different cultural zones of Punjab state naming Malwa, Majha and Doaba. The sample comprised of 360 elderly persons (180 males and 180 females) in the age group of 65 years and above, equally distributed over these three cultural zones. Only those elderly were selected for the sample who were leading a retired life and were not suffering from any deadly disease and were from middle socio-economic status families. One district was purposively selected from each of the three zones. Further, three villages were randomly selected from each selected district. A list of elderly within age range of 65 years and above was prepared from each selected village. A total number of 360 elderly equally distributed over both the genders and three zones, were randomly selected.

Research instruments:

Oxford happiness inventory :

It was developed by Argyle (2001). This inventory was administered to assess the perception of happiness among elderly. This is a 29 item questionnaire measuring the general psychological causes of happiness including its main components: achievement and satisfaction, enjoyment, vigour and health. Subjects were asked to respond to the items by marking anyone of the six response options *i.e* strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree and strongly agree.

Roqan spiritual intelligence test:

It was developed by Zainuddin and Ahmed (2010) and was used to assess the spirituality of the respondents. This inventory comprised of 65 statements well distributed over six dimensions of spirituality namely, The inter self, The inner self, Biostoria, Life perspectives, Spiritual actualization and Value orientation.

Rajamanickam’s religious attitude scale:

It was developed by Rajamanickam (2004). It has been designed to assess religiosity of the respondents. It has six dimensions namely- Nature of God (NOG), Prayer and

worship (PAW), Formal religion (FR), Future life (FL), Priests (P) and spirits and Spirit world (SASW).

Pre-testing of research instruments was done to find out the nature of the responses and clarification of statements. These instruments were translated to Punjabi and Hindi language for the easy comprehension of the respondents and they were pretested on 40 elderly people, 20 males and 20 females. It was found that elderly did not face any difficulty in understanding Punjabi and Hindi and capable of answering independently except few small queries. For the purpose of the data collection, the elderly males and females were approached in the rural areas. Questionnaire-cum-interview approach was used to collect the data from the elderly. For better understanding, the data were collected in small groups of 2-4 respondents. After giving the questionnaires, necessary instructions appearing on the first page were read out to the respondents. The respondents were assured that their truthful answers would be kept strictly confidential. They were given sufficient time to fill the questionnaires. Queries and doubts were answered simultaneously. In the case of respondents who were manually unable to fill the questionnaire, questions were read out in the form of interview and the choices were filled by the investigators.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents gender differences in mean scores of happiness among elderly. It reveals that the elderly males perceived more happiness as compared to females and t value revealed gender differences to be significant. Non-significant differences existed in the level of religiosity among males and females as calculated t- value was found to be 0.32. Whereas, Wingrove and Alston (1971) studied religiosity among elderly males and females and found that women were more religious than men on the basis of their greater percentage of attendance of religious services. Princy and Kang (2011) in a similar study found non-significant difference in religiosity among elderly males and females. Non-significant differences existed in the level of spirituality among males and females as calculated t-value was found to be 1.24. Saundra and Hughey (2003) found non-significant difference in case of spirituality with respect to age and educational level. According to them, women reported higher levels of religiosity than spirituality.

Mean±S.D.	Male	Female	t-value
Happiness	8.06±1.07	7.72±1.08	3.00**
Spirituality	51.88±4.22	51.19±6.18	1.24
Religiosity	24.92±4.26	24.77±4.38	0.32

** indicate significance of value at P=0.01 (males:n=180; females:n=180)

Table 2 displays gender differences in mean scores of various dimensions of religiosity. It is very much clear from the table that non significant differences existed in all the dimensions *i.e.* nature of God, prayer and worship, formal religion, future life, priests, spirits and spirit world and overall religiosity. But a critical look at mean values shows that males were scoring slightly higher mean values than females in all the dimensions of religiosity except priests and future life.

Table 3 represents association between religiosity and state of happiness among elderly. In the low category of religiosity, 30 per cent of respondents had low state of happiness followed by 43.80 in medium and 34.20 per cent were in the high state of happiness. In case of medium category, 45 per cent of respondents had low state of happiness, followed by 65.70 in average and 51.30 in high category.

In high category of religiosity, 25 per cent of respondents had low state of happiness. Whereas 36.50 had

medium and 28.50 per cent had high state of happiness. A non-significant association between religiosity and happiness was found.

Table 4 reveals comparison of mean scores of elderly males and female respondents on various dimensions of spirituality. Results revealed that significant differences existed in inner self, value orientation and overall spirituality. Whereas, non-significant differences existed in the dimensions of inter self, biostoria, life perspectives and spiritual actualization. A critical look at the mean values showed that males were scoring slightly higher mean values than females in all the dimensions except biostoria.

Table 5 depicts association between spirituality and state of happiness among elderly. In low category of spirituality, 20.15 per cent of respondents had low state of happiness, followed by 37.05 in medium and 20.80 per cent in high category. In case of medium category, 52.70 per cent of respondents had low state of happiness, followed by 96.90 per cent in average and 54.40 per cent in high category. In

Table 2: Gender differences in mean scores (Mean±S.D.) of various dimensions religiosity

Sr. No.	Dimensions of religiosity	Male	Female	t-value	Overall
		Mean ± S.D.	Mean ± S.D.		Mean ± S.D.
1.	Nature of god	20.78±5.28	20.45±4.44	0.64	20.62±4.87
2.	Prayer and worship	19.22±4.88	18.91±5.03	0.59	19.06±4.95
3.	Formal religion	24.04±4.92	23.4±4.85	1.25	23.72±4.89
4.	Future life	28.74±5.98	29.3±6.35	0.85	29.02±6.16
5.	Priests	26.9±5.78	27.04±6.25	0.22	26.97±6.01
6.	Spirits and spirit world	29.87±5.90	29.55±6.51	0.49	29.71±6.21
7.	Overall religiosity	24.92±2.13	24.77±2.19	0.32	24.85±2.15

(males: n=180; females: n=180)

Table 3 : Association between religiosity and state of happiness among elderly

Religiosity	State of happiness			Chi-square
	Low	Average	High	
Low	24(30.00)	56(43.80)	28(34.20)	8.431
Average	50(45.00)	56(65.70)	56(51.30)	
High	26(25.00)	34(36.50)	30(28.50)	
Total	100	146	114	

Table 4 : Comparison of mean scores (Mean±S.D.) of elderly males and female respondents on various dimensions of spirituality

Sr. No.	Dimensions of spirituality	Male	Female	t-value	Overall
		Mean ± S.D.	Mean ± S.D.		Mean ± S.D.
1.	Inner self	35.6±6.88	34.07±7.35	2.02*	34.83±7.15
2.	Inter self	74.21±8.74	73.03±11.18	1.11	73.62±10.04
3.	Biostoria	23.03±3.48	23.12±4.32	0.21	23.07±3.92
4.	Life perspectives	39.63±4.83	38.75±6.00	1.52	39.19±5.46
5.	Spiritual actualization	90.28±10.93	91.02±13.44	0.56	90.65±12.24
6.	Value orientation	48.54±6.16	47.14±7.34	1.961*	47.84±6.80
7.	Overall spirituality	51.88±2.11	51.19±3.09	1.24*	51.53±3.09

* indicate significance of value at P=0.05

high category of spirituality 20.15 per cent of respondents had low state of happiness, whereas 37.05 per cent and 20.80 per cent had medium and high level, respectively. Hence, there existed a significant association between spirituality and state of happiness indicating that with increase in spirituality happiness also increases. A study conducted by Inang (2002) revealed that optimism, quality of life, satisfaction with life and spiritual health were positively and significantly related with subjective well being and happiness. Diener (2002) found that happiness is related with positive emotions whereas intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth balance our material pursuits and make us happy (Kahavari, 2001).

Table 5 : Association between spirituality and state of happiness among elderly

Spirituality	State of happiness			Chi-square
	Low	Average	High	
Low	21(20.15)	21(37.05)	36(20.80)	47.375**
Average	36(52.70)	117(96.90)	51(54.40)	
High	36(20.15)	33(37.05)	9(20.80)	
Total	93	171	96	

** indicate significance of value at P=0.01

Table 6 gives the correlation between different dimensions of religiosity and happiness among total sample as well as across both the genders. The correlation between happiness and different dimensions of religiosity were found to be non-significant in the total sample as well as across the two genders except in one dimension of future life that is accepting and caring. It shows that respondents who believed in future life, they possessed more happiness. The correlation analysis among males presented positive correlation between happiness and dimensions like nature of God, prayer and worship, future life and spirits and spirit world. While among females, positive correlation was found between happiness and dimension of future life.

Table 6 : Correlation between different dimensions of religiosity with happiness

Dimensions of religiosity	Happiness		
	Male	Female	Total
Nature of god	0.055	-0.030	-0.004
Prayer and worship	0.095	-0.039	0.007
Formal religion	-0.091	-0.087	0.012
Future life	0.003	0.052	0.113*
Priests	-0.071	-0.057	-0.028
Spirits and spirit world	0.059	-0.011	-0.048

* indicate significance of value at P=0.05

Table 7 presents the correlation co-efficient of overall sample between dimensions of spirituality with happiness.

Correlation was found to be significant in inter self-life perspective, spiritual actualization and value orientation. It means if an individual has purpose in his life, identifies the relation with oneself and physical and know the principles of right and wrong then he perceives higher level of happiness.

Table 7 : Correlation between different dimensions of spirituality with happiness

Dimensions of Spirituality	Happiness		
	Male	Female	Total
Inner self	-0.023	0.042	-0.086
Inter self	0.131	0.067	0.161*
Biostoria	-0.086	0.021	-0.083
Life perspective	0.139	-0.102	0.907**
Spiritual actualization	0.055	-0.017	0.157*
Value orientation	0.085	-0.018	0.141*

* and ** indicate significance of value at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

Conclusion:

It could be concluded that significantly more happiness is perceived by elderly males as compared to their female counterparts. Results revealed positive and significant relationship between spirituality with state of happiness but non-significant relationship between religiosity and state of happiness among elderly. Correlation analysis showed positive and significant relationship of happiness with spirituality but negative and non-significant relationship of happiness with religiosity. Happiness of elderly is positively and significantly affected by spirituality. It was ascertained that spirituality was contributing significantly as a protective factor in upgrading the level of happiness among elderly indicating that a happy individual generally have spiritual beliefs in his life, have a positive approach towards life, is mentally healthy and does not allow little anxieties and worries to affect his happiness. Spirituality was found to be yet another factor which was contributing significantly in enhancing the happiness levels of elderly. According to Astrow *et al.* (2001) spirituality is a broader concept than religion. Although not everyone has a religion, everyone who searches for ultimate and have transcendent meaning can be said to have spirituality.

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