

# SPIRITUAL WELLBEING OF YOUNG FEMALE ADULTS

## A Psychologist's Perspective

Elizabeth C. S.♦

### 1. Introduction

The concept of wellness or wellbeing has been evolving in various disciplines, and attempts have been made to develop a description of an individual's total wellbeing. Every human person yearns within oneself to lead a good life and even desires for a life that is peaceful, happy and meaningful. Several authors and researchers have attempted definitions of wellbeing. According to Clinebell, "you are whole or have wellbeing to the degree that the centre of your life is integrated and energized by love and healthy spirituality."<sup>1</sup> For him the whole person's wellbeing includes: Loving oneself by developing one's unique gifts of body, mind and spirit as fully as one can, at each stage of one's life, loving other people by encouraging them to develop their unique gifts; loving one's work, and one's play, i.e., one's vocation and avocation; loving the planet Earth, our mother, and her wonderful network of living things, caring for her and helping her, healing her wounds, and loving the Divine Spirit, the source of all healing and wholeness.

The constitution of the World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing, and not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity. Sushruta, a prominent proponent of the traditional system of Indian medicine defines it as a state characterized by a feeling of spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing (*Prasanna atman Indiraya mana*). Thus, wellbeing is a conglomeration of several dimensions or aspects of psychological, spiritual, social, and physical.

---

♦**Dr. Elizabeth C. S.**, a specialist in clinical psychology, holds a Ph.D. in psychology from Bangalore University, and is the principal of Jyoti Nivas Pre-University College, Bangalore.

<sup>1</sup>H. Clinebell, *Wellbeing: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life*, Quezon City: People's Wellbeing Center Inc., University of Philippines, 1995.

## 2. Spiritual Wellbeing

Spiritual wellness is a field of emerging interest today. Over the past few decades, research on spirituality and its relation to wellbeing has increased substantially. A substantial number of research studies suggest the significant role of spiritual aspects in the enhancement of wellbeing. Spirituality is viewed as the motivational and emotional foundation of a life long quest for meaning. This approach is strongly suggested by the work of Frankl (1959), who depicted spirituality as the drive for meaning and purpose. This motivation can be associated with a variety of experiences, which lie outside the realm of both, in substance and function. Thus, spirituality cannot be equated with religion. A cornerstone of the concept of spiritual wellbeing is that people have a need for transcendence. A human person's sense of wellbeing depends in part upon seeing purposes for which to live that lie beyond oneself, goals to pursue, or other transcendent meanings to life's activities. People fulfil this need in many ways, both religious and non-religious or existential. High spiritual wellbeing, therefore, could be understood as a type of happiness or contentment that is a by-product of attending to meanings that lie in a realm beyond oneself. Low spiritual wellbeing could be seen as distress caused by an unfulfilled need for transcendence. In general, the scientific study of religion employs two types of definitions, substantive and functional.<sup>2</sup> Substantive approaches to define religion focus on the belief in an illuminating dimension of experience and on efforts to relate human to the divine. Functional definitions emphasise a religious role in providing meaning in the face of unknown and its stabilising effects upon social groups. Substantive definitions depict religiosity as an end in itself, whereas functional definitions portray religion as a means to some end, be it social control or psychological succour. These two perspectives have been associated with two types of religious motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity.<sup>3</sup> Because of its many research applications,<sup>4</sup> Allport's

---

<sup>2</sup>Berger, cited in D. A. Mathews, D. B. Larson, and C. P. Berry, *The Faith Factor: An Annotated Bibliography of Clinical Research as Spiritual Subjects*, vols. 1-4, Rockville, MD: National Institute of Healthcare Research, 1974.

<sup>3</sup>G. W. Allport, and J. M. Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967), 432-443.

<sup>4</sup>R. L. Gorsuch, "Psychology of Religion," *Annual Review of Psychology* 39 (1988), 201-221.

model of religiosity has been widely studied and concretized.<sup>5</sup> Paragament argued that by polarizing religious means and ends, researchers have distorted the very phenomenon they are trying to study. He suggested that religion be defined “as search for significance in ways related to the sacred.”<sup>6</sup> In both its personal and social dimensions, religion provides directions describing pathways to significance. Psychologists and philosophers who are in the area of religion have shown little importance in agreeing upon a universally acceptable definition.<sup>7</sup> Instead, most conclude that religion is multifaceted and they seek to understand how aspects of religion relate to various psychological functions and behavioural outcomes. In short, the term “spirituality” may be defined as a sense of relatedness to a transcendent dimension. Spirituality extends beyond religion and can include almost any human experience. The term religion refers to beliefs, practices and rituals related to a specific established religious tradition.

The research related to various aspects of spiritual wellbeing can be divided into: 1) Self reports by research subjects about the effects of religious commitment on their ability to adapt to life’s stresses; 2) Objective examinations of the relationship between religiousness and emotional health in epidemiological survey and treatment studies that have integrated religious beliefs and behaviours into traditional therapies for depression and stress related disorders.

The important reasons for the emergence of spiritual wellbeing research are: 1) Increasing frequency of involvement of people in spiritual aspects; 2) Increasing research based evidence revealing the influence of spiritual aspects on the enhancement of wellbeing; 3) Increasing cost of mental healthcare; 4) Increasing inability of the authorities to reach their services to large segments of population; 5) The miraculous healing power of spiritual healing methods; and 6) Their preventive value. These factors have drawn the attention of research to the field of spiritual wellbeing.

---

<sup>5</sup>Michael Donahue, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiousness: Review and Meta-analysis,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48 (1985), 400-419; Kirkpatrick L. A., and Hood R. W. Jr., “Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation: The ‘Boon’ or ‘Bane’ of Contemporary Psychology of Religion?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, 4 (1990), 442-462.

<sup>6</sup>K. I. Paragament, “Of Means and Ends: Religion and the Search for Significance,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2 (1992), 204.

<sup>7</sup>Gorsuch, “Psychology of Religion.”

*Shalom*, or wellbeing, may be viewed as the integral experience of a person who is functioning as God intended, in constant relationship with Him, with others, and within one's self. *Shalom* describes the experience of being harmoniously at peace within and without. It presents a picture of the person functioning as an integrated system in proper equilibrium. To the extent that they are living constantly with his design for human functioning, they will experience higher degrees of spiritual wellbeing. A psycho-theological approach to human personality, then, views the person as an integrated and integrative system with overlapping but partially distinct subsystems. From a broader systems view, the person must be understood to be part of a larger life space, or interpersonal and societal system, which also shapes and affects the functioning of the individual.

To the extent that the various subsystems are functioning harmoniously and consistently with the divine design of creation, the result is wellbeing. Although much of modern personality theory has reflected an integrative view of human nature and healthy human functioning, the naturalistic presuppositions, or closed universe view, of contemporary psychology preclude consideration of the supernatural and of the spiritual dimension of human nature. Spirit, then, does not exist, as an elementalistic entity on its own, but is integrally interwoven with the body and soul of the individual, comprising the person. If this conceptualization is correct; it ought to be possible to show positive relationships between healthy spirituality and measures of health and subjective wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is two faceted, with both vertical and horizontal components: the vertical dimension refers to our sense of wellbeing in relation to God, and the horizontal dimension refers to a sense of life purpose and life satisfaction, with no reference to anything specifically religious.<sup>8</sup> Hadaway<sup>9</sup> and Moberg<sup>10</sup> suggested that religion gives hope, optimism, meaning, and security to people. Watson, Morris and Hood found that grace and intrinsic religious orientation were positively related with healthy psychological qualities, and that self actualization and

---

<sup>8</sup>R. F. Paloutzian and C. W. Ellison, "Religious Commitment, Loneliness, and Quality of Life," *CAPS Bulletin* 5, 3 (1979), 1.

<sup>9</sup>C. K. Hadaway, "Life Satisfaction and Religion: A Re-analysis." *Social Forces* 57 (1978), 636-643.

<sup>10</sup>D. O. Moberg, *Spiritual Wellbeing*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979.

intrinsic religious orientation were positively correlated in a study of 250 students from a public university.<sup>11</sup>

In an attempt to move toward a definition of spiritual wellbeing, the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging has suggested that spiritual wellbeing is the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates “wholeness.”<sup>12</sup> This definition does suggest that spiritual wellbeing involves a religious and a socio-psychological component. Moberg has conceptualized spiritual wellbeing as two faceted, with both vertical and horizontal components.<sup>13</sup> The vertical dimension refers to our sense of wellbeing in relation to God. The horizontal dimension refers to a sense of life purpose and life satisfaction, with no reference to anything specifically religious. “To have a sense of existential wellbeing is to know what to do and why, who we are, and where we belong”<sup>14</sup> in relation to ultimate concerns. Both dimensions involve transcendence or a stepping back from and moving beyond what is. According to Opatz, spiritual wellness is evident in the following: “the willingness to seek meaning and purpose in human existence, to question everything, and to appreciate the intangibles which cannot be explained or understood readily. A spiritually well person seeks harmony between that which lies in the individual and the forces that come from outside the individual.”<sup>15</sup> For Maslow, spiritual life is the highest part of our biological life as he asserted: The spiritual life, the contemplative, religious, philosophical, or value life is part of the human essence, a defining characteristic of human nature, without which human nature is not full human nature. It is part of the real self of one’s identity. Maslow

---

<sup>11</sup>P. Watson, R. Morris, and R. Hood, “Antireligious Humanistic Values, Guilt, and Self-esteem,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1988), 535-46.

<sup>12</sup>National Interfaith Coalition on Aging, *Spiritual Wellbeing: A Definition*, Athens, GA: Author, 1975.

<sup>13</sup>Moberg, *Spiritual Wellbeing*.

<sup>14</sup>N. W. H. Blaikie, and G. P. Kelsen, “Locating Self and Giving Meaning to Existence: A Typology of Paths to Spiritual Wellbeing Based on New Religious Movements in Australia,” in D. O. Moberg ed., *Spiritual Wellbeing: Sociological Perspectives*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979.

<sup>15</sup>J. P. Opatz, “Stevens Point: A Long Standing Program for Students at a Midwestern University,” *American Journal of Health Promotion* 1, 1 (1986), 60-67.

labelled those at the top of the hierarchy as “transcendent self actualizers.”<sup>16</sup>

Healthy spirituality can serve as a stabilising force in our lives. A dimension of spirituality involves concern and compassion for others as it frees us to become positively caring human beings. Assagioli asserted that there is a “higher consciousness” or “super consciousness” in all humans, a region of psyche from which we receive our higher intuitions and aspirations in artistic, philosophical, or scientific, ethical, imperatives and urges to humanitarian and heroic action, the source of higher feelings such as altruistic love, of genius and of higher states of contemplation, illumination and ecstasy.<sup>17</sup>

The term spiritual wellness can be considered as a balanced openness to, or pursuit of spiritual development. “Openness to or pursuit of” is meant to imply that spiritual wellness may be, but is not necessarily, a conscious undertaking. The expression “openness to” “addresses especially the concept of repression of the sublime,”<sup>18</sup> in which one denies or defies the spiritual tendency within oneself. This concept includes that of “desacrilization” whereby denial of the reality or importance of higher values defends one against the pain of disillusionment.<sup>19</sup> “Balanced” refers to two dimensions of spiritual wellness. The first is the horizontal dimension, characterized by a continuum with repression of the sublime at one end and spiritual emergency at the other. In spiritual emergency, one is overwhelmed by or preoccupied with spirituality, to the detriment of the other dimensions of wellness. Spiritual wellness, then, is conceptualized as a position at or near the midpoint of this continuum. As Westgate puts it, “Spiritual wellness represents the openness to the spiritual dimension that permits the integration of one’s spirituality with the other dimensions of life, thus maximizing the potential for growth and self-actualization.”<sup>20</sup> Reviewing several authors Westgate presented in a concise form, four broad dimensions of spiritual wellness: (a) meaning and purpose in life,

---

<sup>16</sup>A. Maslow, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, New York: Viking, 1971.

<sup>17</sup>R. Assagioli, *Psycho Synthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1965.

<sup>18</sup>F. Haronian, *Repression of the Sublime*, New York: Psycho-Synthesis Research Foundation, 1972.

<sup>19</sup>Maslow, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 49.

<sup>20</sup>C. E. Westgate, “Spiritual Wellness and Depression,” *Journal of Counselling and Development* 75 (1996), 26-35.

(b) intrinsic values, (c) transcendent beliefs/experiences, and (d) community relationship.

**A. Meaning and Purpose in Life:** It included a sense of, or search for, meaning and purpose in life as one of the dimensions of spiritual wellness.

**B. Intrinsic Values:** Three of the authors reviewed referred to intrinsic values as a component of spiritual wellness. Myers, as well as Hawks, described this as a personal belief system, whereas Banks used the term “principles to live by.” Hawks also used the term “ethical path.” An intrinsic value system is the foundation for one’s behaviour. Maslow, who claimed intrinsic values are necessary “to avoid sickness and to achieve fullest humanness,”<sup>21</sup> viewed an intrinsic value system as the defining characteristic of human nature.

**C. Transcendent Beliefs/Experiences:** A variety of terms were used to describe Transcendence. It included: an awareness and appreciation for the vastness of the universe; a recognition of a dimension “beyond the natural and rational,” and an acceptance of its mystery and an element of faith, an awareness of, or belief in, a force greater than oneself, whether this be God, an infinite being or beings, or a cosmic force. Chandler and others viewed transcendence as a movement of one’s “locus of centricity” from egocentricity to include healthy egocentricity, human-centricity, geo-centricity, and cosmo-centricity. Such a person views oneself to be a vital component of some larger scheme and experiences a sense of awe and wonder when considering the universe.<sup>22</sup>

**D. Community Relationships:** Community includes notions such as relationships with self, God, and others, selflessness and a desire to help others, and a love that involves working toward a greater good. Intrinsic values and a transcendent perspective naturally lead to the living and sharing of those values with others. According to Heintzman, a review done by Westgate suggested that the spiritually well person is one who experiences meaning and purpose in life and has an intrinsic value

---

<sup>21</sup>Maslow, *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 312.

<sup>22</sup>J. W. Travis, *The Wellness Index*, Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1988.

system.<sup>23</sup> A transcendent perspective creates recognition of the sacredness of life and of the mysteries of life and the universe. Such a person lives in community, which offers opportunities for meditating, worshipping or praying with others, in addition to a feeling of identity and shared values, mutual support, and a path for community outreach.

In conclusion, the notions of spirituality though widely accepted differ in each philosophical, religious, or psychological school or tradition. They do not negate each other, but complement each other to provide a more complete description of both the definition of spirituality and the various means to advance in it to eventually reach a state of wellbeing. Thus, each approach though unique in concepts and methods adopted, is necessary to grasp the rich facets of the spiritual dimension of wellbeing that is universally recognized and differently understood.

### **3. Approaches to Enhance Spiritual Wellbeing**

Several studies have been carried out in enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of young female adults. The following section enumerates the empirical studies carried out on the college students to enhance their wellbeing.

Barcus conducted a study to identify the relationship between religious commitment, spiritual wellbeing, and psychological wellbeing in college students.<sup>24</sup> The Spiritual Wellbeing Scale and Psychological Wellbeing Scale were administered. Frequency of church attendance was also assessed. Canonical Analysis was used to investigate the data from 425 participants to determine if there was a relationship between religious/spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. A statistically significant relationship was found between religious/spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. The following describes the nature of the relationship. First, participants who experience existential wellbeing, on the one hand, tend to be self-accepting and, on the other, have mastery of their environment and a purpose in life only to a lesser extent. Second, participants who experience existential wellbeing and to a lesser degree, religious wellbeing tend to accept themselves, have a purpose in life,

---

<sup>23</sup>Paul Heintzman, "Spiritual Wellness: Theoretical Links with Leisure," *Journal of Leisurability* 26, 2 (1999).

<sup>24</sup>S. M. Barcus, "The Relationship between Religious Commitment, Spiritual Wellbeing and Psychological Wellbeing," *Dissertation Abstract International: Section B, The Science and Engineering* 60(3-B) (1999), 1294.



possess mastery of their environment, positively relate to others, feel they are growing personally, and are autonomous. This study provided evidence of a relationship between religious/spiritual wellbeing and psychological wellbeing.

Maltby, Lewis, and Day examined the role of religious acts between measures of religious orientation and psychological wellbeing, and examined the theoretical view that religion can act as a coping mechanism.<sup>25</sup> Subjects (aged 18-29 years) were administered questionnaire measures of three aspects of religious orientation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest), frequency of personal prayer and church attendance, alongside measures of depressive symptoms, trait anxiety and self-esteem. Though a number of significant correlations were found between measures of religiosity and psychological wellbeing, a multiple regression analysis using identifiable religious components suggests that frequency of personal prayer is the dominant factor in the relationship between religiosity and psychological wellbeing. The results suggest two points: (1) that the correlations between a number of measures of religiosity and psychological wellbeing may be mediated by the relationship between frequency of personal prayer and psychological wellbeing; (2) that personal prayer may be an important variable to consider within the theory of religious coping.

To explore the relationship between measures of spiritual and psychological wellness and perceived wellness in a college student population, Adams and others administered a series of survey instruments to 112 undergraduate students (aged 16-58 years) under quiet classroom conditions. They used the Life Attitude Profile to measure spiritual wellness, the Life Orientation Test and the Sense of Coherence Scale to measure psychological wellness, and the Perceived Wellness Survey to measure overall wellness.<sup>26</sup> Path analysis performed with a proposed theoretical model revealed that the effect of life purpose on perceived wellness was mediated by optimism and a sense of coherence, which had

---

<sup>25</sup>J. Maltby, C. A. Lewis, and L. Day, "Religious Orientation and Psychological Wellbeing: The Role of the Frequency of Personal Prayer," *British Journal of Health Psychology* 4, 4 (1999), 363.

<sup>26</sup>T. B. Adams, J. R. Bezner, Mary E. Drabbs, R. J. Zambarano, and Mary A. Steinhardt, "Conceptualization and Measurement of the Spiritual and Psychological Dimensions of Wellness in a College Population," *US Journal of American College Health* 48, 4 (2000), 165-173.

independent effects on perceived wellness beyond that of life purpose. The findings suggest that an optimistic outlook and sense of coherence must be present for life purpose to enhance a sense of overall wellbeing.

The interests of studying human wisdom from a psychological perspective have been a recent form of inquiry in developmental psychology. The purpose of Huang's study was to explore self-transcendence as an important aspect of oriental wisdom and to investigate its relationship with psychological wellbeing.<sup>27</sup> The current study identified five major dimensions of self-transcendence: Zen trait, compassion, mindfulness, emotional serenity, and content-and-simple life. Self-transcendence had positive relations with four measures of psychological wellbeing (personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and life satisfaction) and had negative relations with three measures of psychological wellbeing (anxiety, hopelessness, and depression). The middle-age group appeared to be the most self-transcendent, compared to the young and old age groups. Males and females did not differ in self-transcendence. The Buddhist group did not have higher self-transcendence than the non-Buddhist samples. Buddhist group only had higher score on the dimension of content-and-simple life than the non-Buddhist samples. People who had religious belief had higher self-transcendence than people who did not have religious belief. For those who had religious belief, the degree of religiosity did not make a difference on their self transcendence.

Gray, in his study, attempted to substantiate and augment previous findings indicating that spiritual wellbeing is positively related to reasons for living and then suggest ways of implementing these findings in intervention and therapy.<sup>28</sup> The Spiritual Wellbeing Scale, Reasons for Living Inventory, Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, Duke University Religion Index, and the Indiscriminate Irreligiousness Scale Pro-P Form were administered to 100 students enrolled in a private Christian graduate university. Correlation results indicated that spiritual wellbeing was strongly related to reasons for living, with the religious

---

<sup>27</sup>B. H. Huang, "Exploring Oriental Wisdom: Self-Transcendence and Psychological Wellbeing of Adulthood in Taiwan," *Dissertation Abstracts International*: Section B, The Sciences and Engineering 61(2-B), 1111.

<sup>28</sup>S. Gray, "Spiritual Wellbeing and Reasons for Living: Assessing the Connections," *Dissertation Abstracts International*: Section B, The Sciences and Engineering 61 (8-B) (2001), 4405.

behavioural practice of church attendance appearing to be the most positive factor. Church attendance seems to embody both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal interpersonal relationships that comprise the two spiritual wellbeing subscales.

To sum up, the studies reviewed under this dimension of wellbeing on young male and female college students indicate that spiritual wellbeing is an important dimension of wellbeing. These studies focus on specific areas concerned with spiritual wellbeing. The review gives a direction for the present research as very few of the above studies have made an attempt to study spiritual wellbeing in relation to other significant constitutive dimensions of global wellbeing, namely the social, physical and psychological.

#### **4. Relationship between Different Dimensions of Wellbeing**

##### **A. Psychological Wellbeing with Spiritual Wellbeing**

The current study indicated that psychological wellbeing is closely related to spiritual wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is related to personal fulfilment happiness and a feeling of “sense of belonging,” an affirmation that one is cared for and loved by the Divine Presence in one’s life. Psychological wellbeing included meaning and purpose in life, satisfaction with oneself, self-worth and self-esteem (which are essential to one’s personal happiness), as these are central to one’s psychological wellbeing. In a study by Barcus it was found that those who experience existential wellbeing and religious wellbeing tend to accept themselves, have a purpose in life, possess mastery of their environment, relate positively to others, feel they are growing personally and are autonomous.<sup>29</sup> Ellison affirmed the Spiritual dimension does not exist in isolation from our psyche and soma, but provides an integrative force. It affects and is affected by our physical state, feelings, thoughts and relationships. If we are spiritually healthy, we will feel generally alive, purposeful and fulfilled, but only to the extent that we are psychologically healthy as well. Strategies to promote spiritual wellbeing may be directly aimed at the quality of one’s relationship with God and at one is existential state.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>Barcus, “The Relationship between Religious Commitment, Spiritual Wellbeing and Psychological Wellbeing.”

<sup>30</sup>C. W. Ellison, “Spiritual Wellbeing: Conceptualization and Measurement,” *Journal Psychology and Theology* 11 (1983), 332.

It is also further supported by the findings of Gray that spiritual wellbeing is strongly related to reasons for living.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, spiritual wellbeing is important to an overall life satisfaction. When the person is nourished with spiritual strength through the close communion with God, this strength can sustain the person through problems and difficulties and enable her/him to cope with problems and to find meaning and purpose in life without giving into disappointment or suicidal ideation. When the individual fails to anchor on to that solid spiritual foundation within oneself, she/he may fail to find meaning in personal difficulties and losses that occur in life. Absence of this faith dimension or belief and trust in the Almighty could lead to low self-worth, lack of direction, and dissatisfaction in life. Along with psychological wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing too is important as it contributes positively to sustain wellness in the individuals. The current study has yielded an affirmative correlation between psychological and spiritual wellbeing which indicates that psychological wellbeing is positively strengthened with spiritual wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing is positively strengthened with spiritual wellbeing which, in turn, is related to the global wellbeing of the subject. The current findings confirm the hypothesis that spiritual wellbeing is related to psychological wellbeing. The current study, thus, indicates that psychological wellbeing is closely related to spiritual wellbeing. Personal fulfilment and happiness, and an affirmation that one is cared for and loved by the Divine Presence in her/his life increase a person's wellness. When the person is in close communion with God it increases the person's satisfaction with oneself and she/he comes to possess meaning and purpose in life. The negative trend, i.e., God being not a part of an individual's life is found to be related to lack of self-worth, presence of suicidal ideas and absence of personal control.

### **B. Spiritual Wellbeing with Social Wellbeing**

Spiritual wellbeing includes the individual's closeness with God and the comfort, peace, happiness, and meaning derived from such a communion with God. Existential wellbeing deals, on the one hand, with the individual's meaning and purpose in life and the direction the individual's life has taken and, on the other, dissatisfaction with life, unsettled about the future, and finding no meaning and purpose in life. It has been found that

---

<sup>31</sup>Gray, "Spiritual Wellbeing and Reasons for Living."

spiritual wellbeing, existential wellbeing, and religious wellbeing are related to social wellbeing. The relationship the person has with God, the communion and the closeness experienced with God enables the person to have healthy interpersonal relationships with others. The spiritual strength experienced or the peace, solace, joy, serenity, love, care, understanding, satisfaction, and meaning found with the closeness to God allows the individual to extend this joy, peace, love, care, and understanding to others, i.e., to family, friends, neighbours and people in general. Relationship with God leads to relationship with humanity. The peace and serenity experienced within are emanated outward.

The existential wellbeing scale measures the meaning and purpose of one's existence. When individuals experience that their life is coherent and meaningful, and finds fulfilment in life, it leads to meaningful and satisfying relationships with others. An individual can find personal fulfilment in life only in relation with others as others influence their wellbeing. When the individuals fail to accept the things they cannot change, when confronted with difficulties and problems in life it is to this inner source that they turn to find strength, meaning, and purpose. It is this inner source, the transcendent self that instils hope and strength in the individual to enhance one's own social wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing is related to social wellbeing because it helps to sustain and maintain interpersonal relationships; it generates peace and love in individuals enabling them to reach out to the members of family, friends, and others to lend and to receive support.

### **C. Spiritual Wellbeing and Body Image**

A woman's body image encompasses her physical appearance, size and shape, and is formed out of every experience a person has ever had – through parents, role models, and peers who give an idea as to what it is like to love and value a body. The image is formed from the positive and negative feedbacks from people whose opinions matter. It also is determined by the ways a person herself has perceived her body to fit or not fit within the cultural image. Adolescents girls often strive to adopt socially accepted feminine qualities: compliance, taking care of others, and of course, looking good. Since a woman's sense of self is so influenced by how she sees herself in relationships, she puts extra effort in trying to be the person she thinks others want her to be. Society also portrays cultural ideals in the media and in the clothing and cosmetic industry which set a

standard that leaves most young female adults feeling inadequate and unsatisfied, quite unaware that society and, especially, the media portray an image of women that is both unrealistic and potentially unhealthy. Body image involves perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of bodies. It is not static, but ever changing, sensitive to changes in mood, environment, and physical experience. More than being based on fact, it is psychological in nature and much more influenced by self-esteem than by actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. It is learned, not inborn. What is learned and expected culturally is reinforced by learning that occurs in the family and among peers.<sup>32</sup>

In the present study it has been found that spiritual wellbeing and body image are related to each other. Both these, in turn, are also found to be related to global wellness of the subjects. Spiritual wellbeing deals with the individual's satisfaction with life, finding meaning and purpose in one's existence. Spiritual wellbeing also consists of the individual's closeness with God and the comfort, joy and peace derived from a communion with God. People who have scored high on their spiritual dimension of wellbeing indicate that they are also high on their existential wellbeing which implies that they are happy with themselves, with their life, and the direction their life is headed for. The current study indicates that body image, with special reference to satisfaction with the appearance of body parts, is related to spiritual wellbeing. The measure on body image was to indicate if the individual is satisfied or not with reference to one's various body parts. The correlation found between these two dimensions of spiritual wellbeing and body image could be enhancing because when the individual is certain that God loves, cares, and is concerned about one's life and existence, it could foster a positive image of one's body which God has created. The correlation could also imply that when the individual finds satisfaction with life and meets success, finds achievement and experiences contentment in one's personal life, she may also find it natural to accept her body as it is and may not harbour negative feelings about it. Existential wellbeing depends on how an individual perceives and accepts life and rates one's present life as a meaningful one or not. It also indicates the person's satisfaction in her personal life and her hopefulness for the future. The individuals, who have found their priorities or concerns in

---

<sup>32</sup>J. Lightstone, "Index Archives Body Image," <http://www.Psychotherapist.org/Index/archivesbodyimage.htm> 78, (2002).

things that matter to them, may not give into disappointment of their body and its appearance. Their sense of wellbeing may also contribute towards their positive body image.

## **5. Enhancement Techniques for Spiritual Wellbeing**

Spiritual dimension forms one's core, one's centre and it consists of one's commitments to one's value system. It draws upon the sources that inspire, uplift, and tie every person to the timeless truths of all humanity. The exercises in this section help the subjects to retrospect their spiritual journeys and to relive their spiritual sources right from childhood. The subjects are assisted to reflect on areas of life where the divine presence is present or absent. The exercises lead the participants to the "Realm of Wellness" which is the centre of one's life and to experience the divine presence in this inner sanctuary. The exercises also enable the participants to learn to forgive and to settle the issues that inwardly conflict, so as to experience serenity and peace within them.

### **A. "Reliving Sacred Moments"**

Meditation is conducted to help the participants to get in touch with their spiritual life. They are guided to retrospect their spiritual journey. They recall their special prayers, their festivals, moments of deep prayer, and favourite strings of prayer or *mantras*, and the God images they hold. They write down the experience. They share in pairs and in the groups their deep spiritual experiences (if they have experienced them). To enhance their spiritual wellbeing gradually, they recall their spiritual experiences, especially as the past has an effect on the present experiences. The participants are made to get in touch with the different aspects of their spiritual life, to help them to reflect its significance, and to deepen these experiences of their childhood. Sharing is done, as it helps the participants to listen to one another and be enriched by the deep spiritual experiences of one another.

### **B. "Communion with the Divine and Humanity"**

The participants are led by the researcher to enter into their own interior and to recall the times they have experienced the presence of the divine in their daily interactions and the times they have failed to share with others compassion, love, peace, and security which flow from the experience of the divine presence. An attempt is made through this exercise to help the

participants to reflect on the areas of their lives where the divine presence is felt and the areas where this presence is not shared by the individual to others.

### **C. “Let Only Love Surround”**

They are led through an exercise to surround those people in their lives with love, respect, and honour (the members of their family and others). Through this exercise the participants are helped to allow the goodness which the divine presence offers to flow to all the areas of their lives and vibrate to others.

### **D. “Accessing the Core”**

The researcher led the participants through a breathing exercise, then gently to get in touch with their depth, the core of their selves where only that which is pure, good, divine love dwells (unconditional love, positive goodness, sacred space, or inner sanctuary). Input is given by the researcher as to access the core within oneself and to savour the goodness that resides therein. This exercise helps the participants to get in touch with the core, and to experience the peace and joy the divine presence offers when one turns to this power in quietness and humble disposition.

### **E. “Forgiveness Flows from Me to You”**

The exercise on “forgiveness and love” is an attempt to help the individuals to learn and experience the art of forgiving one another. With an input session on forgiveness, they are gradually enabled to send out vibrations of peace and love to their families and everyone around them.

## **6. Effects of Multidimensional Wellbeing**

The present research was aimed at studying the multidimensional aspects of wellbeing in young female adults with a view to enhance their wellbeing. The study focused specially upon the psychological, spiritual, social, and physical aspects of wellbeing of young female adults, and to analyse its relation with an intervention programme (some samples given in the previous section) conducted to enhance wellbeing. It had the basic assumption after Cushman: “To have high levels of wellbeing is to be



flourishing in life, to be flourishing, then, is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Ellison, in whichever level or degree one is in the experience of spiritual wellbeing, it can be further enhanced. Ellison stated: “Spiritual wellbeing should be seen as a continuous variable, rather than as dichotomous. It is not a matter of whether or not we have it. Rather, it is question of how much and how we may enhance the degree of spiritual wellbeing that we have.”<sup>34</sup> With this view in mind, the subjects with low scores on spiritual wellbeing were subjected to the intervention programme to enhance their spiritual wellness to a higher level which would assist them to find meaning and purpose in life and to affirm their life in relationship with God, oneself, and community. In view of enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of young female adults various exercises were conducted. They were “Reliving Sacred Moments,” “Communion with the Divine and Humanity,” “Let only Love Surround,” “Accessing the Core,” “Peace *Mantras*,” “Forgiveness Flows,” “Grounding,” and “Synthesizing.” The intervention programme aimed at enhancing the spiritual wellbeing of the subjects, once the sessions on psychological wellbeing were completed, as psychological development is the first stage of spiritual development and the establishment of psychological health is the first task of spiritual life in Buddhist psychology. Advayacitta is also of the view that spiritual development is dependent upon prior psychological health as psychological wellbeing is the fundamental component of global wellbeing.<sup>35</sup> Several techniques have been used by researchers in enhancing the spiritual dimensions of wellbeing. Gawain is of the opinion that growth in spiritual dimensions is stimulated by intentional activity.<sup>36</sup> Persons working with meditation and creative visualization experience enhanced spiritual wellness. Among the guidelines suggested by Borysenko for minding the body and mending the mind in order to cope with the daily stress and to sustain wellness, are increasing experience of positive wholeness generating feelings, practicing the quieting of mind body organism deeply through the process of meditation, telling oneself

---

<sup>33</sup>P. Cushman, “Why the Self is Empty: Toward a Historically Situated Psychology,” *American Psychologist* 45 (1990), 599-611.

<sup>34</sup>Ellison, “Spiritual Wellbeing,” 332.

<sup>35</sup>I. Advayacitta, *Buddhism and Psychotherapy (A Buddhist Perspective): The Impact of Eastern Religion on Psychological Theory and Practice*, London: Wisdom Publication, 1986, 153- 172.

<sup>36</sup>S. Gawain, *Creative Visualisation*, New York: Bantam Books, 1982.

“this too shall pass,” etc.<sup>37</sup> The sessions of this intervention programme were designed to help the subjects to experience peace, joy, serenity, and the divine presence within. The spiritual wellbeing of the subjects was enhanced with a programme designed to awaken the spiritual dimension of wellbeing in the subjects at varying levels. In “Reliving the Sacred Moments,” for example, the subjects were guided in the exercise to integrate their God images into the current stage of life. The subjects expressed their trust and faith in God, as a result of which meaning and purpose of their life were transformed, especially in perceiving God as a very loving person who cares for every human person.

The findings are in line with Tisdale and others who pointed to God image as a positive extraneous variable that affected both psychological wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing.<sup>38</sup> Also, Richter has stressed the view of many researchers that God image closely fostered self-esteem and self-image and these, in turn, appeared to affect religious experience and empathy.<sup>39</sup> The subjects in the study seem to have emerged with a deeper experience of God as a loving person who is interested in their wellbeing. The current findings support the observation of Richter who has in his study found that majority of the subjects viewed God in a positive and loving perspective. During the exercise on “God Images,” the subjects reported serenity and peace in encountering the Divine within themselves: “We felt as if God was so close to us,” is one of the opinions. According to the findings of Pollner, the substance of the image of the Divine would seem to affect the impact of a divine relation on wellbeing.<sup>40</sup> He further stated that the effects of divine relations suggest that divine relations may both foster and reflect a positive framing of all events and discern the positive, benevolent, and promising aspects of self, others and the world.

---

<sup>37</sup>J. Borysenko, *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*, New York: Bantam Books, 1987.

<sup>38</sup>T. C. Tisdale, T. L. Key, K. J. Edwards, Brokaw B. Fletcher, S. R. Kemperman, H. Cloud, J. Townsend, and T. Okamoto, “Impact of Treatment on God Image and Personal Adjustment and Correlations of God Image to Personal Adjustment and Object Relations Development,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25 (Fall 1997), 227-239.

<sup>39</sup>Rachel J. Richter, “Correlation of Psychological Wellbeing and Christian Spiritual Wellbeing at a Small Christian Liberal Arts College in the Urban Midwest,” Paper Presented at the First Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium Held at Wisconsin Lutheran College, 2001.

<sup>40</sup>M. Pollner, “Divine Relations, Social Relations and Wellbeing,” *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 30 (1989), 92-104.

The subjects reported that at the end of the spiritual wellbeing exercises, they were left with an experience of connectedness because of the exercise on “Communion with the Divine and Humanity.” They expressed that they felt a sense of closeness with family, friends, and with everyone who were present in the room. The subjects were also particularly overwhelmed by the exercise on “Let Love Surround,” where they had to bring in all the people who are difficult to relate to and to hold them in their heart and to surround them with love and kindness. The subjects felt the inner strength within them in the presence of the Divine to allow love and kindness to reach out to others.

It is noticed that the themes of compassion, selflessness, integrity, honesty, and connectedness with others emerge as vital dimensions of spirituality. The subjects reported that they were left with an experience of connectedness after the exercise on “Communion with the Divine and Humanity,” as they were guided to believe that God is personally interested in them and, therefore, to personally experience the presence of the Divine and, later, to share their peace and harmony with everyone. The meditation on “Accessing the Core,” the inner sanctuary where only peace, harmony, and divinity exist led the subjects to a deeper experience of themselves. The current findings correspond to Hawks who asserted that once faith, hope, and commitment are in place, pursuit of meaning and purpose can lead to personal fulfilment, self-esteem, and connectedness with others.<sup>41</sup> The subjects expressed that they experienced closeness with themselves and felt enthused and strengthened with this affirmation of the divine presence within themselves and experienced kindness and affection towards others. Reece and Brandt have stated that healthy spirituality could bring a higher degree of harmony and wholeness to our lives and move us beyond self-centeredness.<sup>42</sup> Healthy spirituality can serve as a stabilizing force in our lives. A dimension of spirituality involves concern and compassion for others as it frees us to become positively caring human beings. Divine interaction may also bolster individual self-esteem and self-efficacy. Pollner further suggests that interaction may enhance perceived wellbeing by deepening the sense of orderliness and predictability of

---

<sup>41</sup>S. Hawks, “Spiritual Health: Definition and Theory,” *Wellness Perspectives* 10, 4 (1994).

<sup>42</sup>B. L. Reece and R. Brandt, *Human Relations: Principles and Practices*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

events and by investing problematic solutions with new religious meaning.<sup>43</sup>

The subjects were particularly touched by the exercise on “Forgiveness and Love.” This exercise was designed to help the participants to learn and experience the art of forgiving one another. They expressed that the exercise had helped them to forgive the past hurts caused by the members of family and friends and to build healthy relationships with them. “Forgiveness and Love” fosters the overall wellbeing of the individuals. The results of the subjects who were exposed to this intervention programme emerged highly significant on the measure of spiritual wellbeing both in the post and follow up assessment stages indicating its effectiveness. The participants shared their God experiences (significant experience in spiritual life) after the input sessions and the spiritual exercises. In this sharing, the subjects expressed their trust and faith in God, and the meaning and purpose of their lives. The participants reported the experience of serenity and peace within themselves. They reflected upon different areas of their lives, where the divine presence was experienced as the presence of peace, love, harmony, forgiveness, and kindness. They experienced God as a loving person who cares for every human person.

## 7. Conclusion

Finally, the research has drawn the conclusion that spiritual health is the source of all other dimensions and that spirituality is the overarching umbrella covering all of the other aspects of health, representing the essence of who and what the individual is.<sup>44</sup> The intervention programme clearly indicates that spiritual wellness is a central component of wellbeing and that it affects all other dimensions of wellbeing. Moreover, it helps to frame all situations in positive terms and to acquire healthy-mindedness and, thus, to enjoy wellbeing. The findings indicate that the exercises and the input sessions which were given to the subjects during the intervention programme to enhance spiritual wellbeing had left them with deeper experience of God, who is the creator and the guiding force of all human beings. Intervention programme to enhance spiritual wellbeing had a positive impact on all other dimensions of wellbeing.

---

<sup>43</sup>Pollner, “Divine Relations, Social Relations and Wellbeing,” 92-104.

<sup>44</sup>C. A. Kolander and C. K. Chandler, “Spiritual Health: A Balance of All Dimensions,” Paper Presented at the Meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, New Orleans, LA, 1990.