

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG KASHMIRI COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students. The study aimed to assess the levels of these constructs, examine their interrelationships and investigate gender differences. A correlational research design was employed and a sample of 311 college students aged 18–24 years was selected from various degree colleges across the Kashmir Valley using purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Hyde, Pethe and Dhar (2001), the Spiritual Well-Being Scale developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) and the 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation and independent-samples *t*-tests were used for data analysis. The findings indicated relatively favourable levels of emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among the participants. Emotional intelligence was positively and significantly correlated with spirituality ($r = .38, p < .01$) and psychological well-being ($r = .56, p < .01$). Spirituality was also positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being ($r = .47, p < .01$). Significant gender differences were observed in emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being with female students reporting higher scores than male students. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence and spirituality are important correlates of psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students. The study highlights the potential relevance of emotional and spiritual resources in promoting positive psychological functioning among young adults in higher education.

KEYWORDS: Emotional intelligence, Spirituality, Psychological well-being, College students, Gender, Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being has emerged as a central construct in positive psychology, referring not merely to the absence of mental illness but to an individual's capacity to function optimally, experience life satisfaction and realize their potential (Ryff, 1989; Diener, 1984). Among college students, a population undergoing significant academic, social and identity-related transitions, psychological well-being assumes particular importance, as it shapes academic performance, interpersonal functioning and long-term mental health trajectories. Understanding the factors that contribute to or protect this well-being is therefore a matter of both theoretical and applied significance.

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), has been widely recognized as a key determinant of psychological adjustment. Individuals with higher EI tend to demonstrate better coping strategies, more stable interpersonal relationships and greater resilience in the face of stress, all of which are closely linked to enhanced well-being (Schutte et al., 2007; Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2005; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). For college students in particular, EI may serve as a critical resource in managing academic pressures, peer relationships and the uncertainties associated with young adulthood.

Alongside emotional intelligence, spirituality has increasingly been studied as a significant correlate of mental health and well-being. Spirituality, broadly understood as a sense of connectedness to something greater than oneself, a search for meaning and an orientation toward transcendent values (Koenig et al., 2001), has been associated with lower levels of psychological distress, greater life satisfaction and improved coping in the face of adversity (Sawatzky, Ratner, & Chiu, 2005). In many cultural contexts, spirituality provides a framework of meaning-making that buffers individuals against stress and existential uncertainty, contributing positively to overall psychological functioning.

The Kashmir Valley presents a particularly relevant context for examining these relationships. The region's distinctive socio-cultural environment, together with the academic and developmental demands faced by its youth, exposes college students to unique psychosocial stressors (Housen et al., 2017), making the study of protective psychological resources especially pertinent. Within this context, both emotional intelligence and spirituality may function as important internal resources that help college students navigate distress and sustain psychological well-being. Kashmiri culture, deeply rooted in spiritual and religious traditions (predominantly Sufi and Islamic influences), also provides a distinctive cultural backdrop against which spirituality's role in well-being can be meaningfully examined.

Objectives

1. To assess emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students.
2. To study the relationship between emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students.
3. To examine gender differences in emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in three major theoretical strands corresponding to its core constructs, emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being, along with an integrative perspective explaining how these constructs may be interrelated.

Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

The study draws primarily on the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997), which conceptualizes EI as a set of interrelated cognitive abilities involving the accurate perception, appraisal and expression of emotion; the generation of feelings that facilitate thought; the understanding of emotion and emotional knowledge; and the regulation of emotion to promote emotional and intellectual growth. This model positions emotional intelligence not as a fixed personality trait but as a functional capacity that enables individuals to process emotional information effectively and adapt to environmental and interpersonal demands. Goleman's (1995) mixed model of EI, which extends this framework to include competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Bar-On, 2006), is also drawn upon to contextualize EI's broader role in everyday psychosocial functioning, particularly in stress-laden environments such as the one Kashmiri student inhabit.

Meaning-Making and Transcendence Perspective of Spirituality

Spirituality in this study is framed within the meaning-making and transcendence perspective (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Pargament, 1997), which views spirituality as an individual's search for significance in ways related to the sacred, involving a sense of connectedness to something greater than the self, whether conceived as God, a higher power or a transcendent universal order. This perspective

emphasizes spirituality's role as a cognitive-existential framework through which individuals interpret adversity, derive purpose and sustain hope (Piedmont, 1999), particularly relevant to the cultural and religious context of the Kashmir Valley, where spirituality (predominantly rooted in Sufi and Islamic traditions) has historically served as a cultural resource for coping and resilience.

Ryff's Multidimensional Model of Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is examined through Carol Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model, which conceptualizes well-being as extending beyond the mere absence of distress to encompass six core dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. This eudaimonic approach to well-being, rooted in humanistic and existential psychology, is particularly suited to the present study as it captures well-being as an active, ongoing process of psychological functioning rather than a static emotional state, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how emotional and spiritual resources contribute to students' overall functioning.

Integrative Framework: Stress-Buffering and Broaden-and-Build Perspectives

To explain the interrelationship among the three constructs, the study draws on the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which posits that internal and external resources, such as emotional competencies and spiritual beliefs, moderate the impact of stress on psychological outcomes by providing coping mechanisms during adversity. This is complemented by Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which suggests that positive emotional states (facilitated by high EI) broaden individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires and build enduring psychological resources over time, including resilience and well-being. Within this integrative lens, both emotional intelligence and spirituality are conceptualized as internal psychological resources that, individually and jointly, protect and enhance psychological well-being, especially among youth situated in a culturally and academically demanding environment such as Kashmir.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for hypothesizing positive associations between emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a correlational research design to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students. The study also examined gender differences in the three major study variables.

Sample

The sample consisted of 311 college students aged 18–24 years selected from various degree colleges across the Kashmir Valley using purposive sampling. Participants were included on the basis of their willingness to participate and their ability to provide complete responses to the study measures. Participants who did not provide complete responses were excluded from the analysis. The final sample comprised 311 participants.

Variables

The major study variables were emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being. Gender was considered the primary demographic variable for the analysis of group differences. Information regarding age, locale and stream of study was also collected through the Personal Data Sheet.

Tools

The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) developed by Hyde, Pethe and Dhar (2001) consists of 34 items assessing ten dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, empathy, self-motivation, emotional stability, managing relations, integrity, self-development, value orientation, commitment and altruistic behaviour. It uses a 5-point Likert-type response format, with scores ranging from 34 to 170; higher scores indicate greater emotional intelligence. The scale has reported split-half reliability of 0.88 and content validity of 0.93. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) consists of 20 items measuring Religious Well-Being and Existential Well-Being. It uses a 6-point Likert-type scale, with total scores ranging from 20 to 120. Reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients are .89 for the total scale, .87 for Religious Well-Being and .78 for Existential Well-Being. The 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) assesses six dimensions of psychological well-being using three items per dimension. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, with total scores ranging from 18 to 108; higher scores indicate greater psychological well-being. A self-constructed Personal Data Sheet was used to collect demographic information, including age, gender, locale and stream of study. Prior permission was obtained from the concerned college authorities and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The questionnaires were administered individually or in small groups using standardized instructions.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26). Descriptive statistics, including mean (M), standard deviation (SD), skewness and kurtosis, were calculated to describe the distributions of emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being. Independent-samples t-tests were used to examine gender differences in the three study variables. Where comparisons across demographic variables involving more than two categories were required, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was planned. When age was treated as a continuous variable, its relationship with the study variables was examined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	156	50.2
	Female	155	49.8
	Total	311	100
Domicile	Rural	187	60.1
	Urban	124	39.9
	Total	311	100
Stream of Education	Arts/Humanities	128	41.2

	Science	103	33.1
	Commerce	80	25.7
	Total	311	100

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the 311 participants. Regarding gender, the sample consisted of 156 males (50.2%) and 155 females (49.8%), indicating an almost equal representation of both genders. In terms of domicile, 187 participants (60.1%) belonged to rural areas, while 124 (39.9%) belonged to urban areas, showing a higher representation of rural participants. With regard to stream of education, 128 participants (41.2%) were from Arts/Humanities, 103 (33.1%) were from Science and 80 (25.7%) were from Commerce. Thus, Arts/Humanities students constituted the largest group in the sample, followed by Science and Commerce students.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence, Spirituality and Psychological Well-Being among Kashmiri College Students*

Variable	N	Mean (M)	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Intelligence	311	84.36	11.72	-0.24	-0.31
Spirituality	311	68.91	10.46	-0.17	-0.38
Psychological Well-Being	311	76.27	10.63	-0.29	-0.22

The descriptive statistics indicate that the participants obtained a mean score of 84.36 (SD = 11.72) for emotional intelligence, 68.91 (SD = 10.46) for spirituality and 76.27 (SD = 10.63) for psychological well-being. The standard deviation values indicate a reasonable degree of variability in participants' scores across the three study variables. The skewness values ranged from -0.17 to -0.29, while kurtosis values ranged from -0.22 to -0.38, indicating that the distributions were approximately symmetric and did not show substantial departures from normality.

Table 3: *Correlation Matrix of Emotional Intelligence, Spirituality and Psychological Well-Being among Kashmiri College Students.*

Variable	1	2	3
Emotional Intelligence	—		
Spirituality	.38**	—	
Psychological Well-Being	.56**	.47**	—

Note. N = 311. Values represent Pearson's correlation coefficients (r). **p < .01 (two-tailed).

The correlation analysis indicates that emotional intelligence was positively and significantly correlated with spirituality (r = .38, p < .01). This suggests that students with higher emotional intelligence tended to report higher levels of spirituality.

Emotional intelligence also showed a moderate positive and significant correlation with psychological well-being (r = .56, p < .01), indicating that students with higher emotional intelligence tended to have better psychological well-being.

Similarly, spirituality was positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being ($r = .47$, $p < .01$). This indicates that higher levels of spirituality were associated with greater psychological well-being among the students.

Overall, the findings suggest that all three variables were positively and significantly related to one another, with the strongest association observed between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being ($r = .56$).

Table 4: *Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence, Spirituality and Psychological Well-Being among Kashmiri College Students*

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Emotional Intelligence	Male	156	82.41	11.84	-3.020	.003**
	Female	155	86.32	11.34		
Spirituality	Male	156	66.82	10.58	-3.630	<.001**
	Female	155	71.02	9.96		
Psychological Well-Being	Male	156	74.55	10.91	-2.89	.004**
	Female	155	78.00	10.14		

Table 4 presents the gender differences in emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students.

For emotional intelligence, female students ($M = 86.32$, $SD = 11.34$) obtained a higher mean score than male students ($M = 82.41$, $SD = 11.84$). The difference was statistically significant, $t = -3.02$, $p = .003$, indicating that female students reported significantly higher emotional intelligence than male students.

For spirituality, female students ($M = 71.02$, $SD = 9.96$) also obtained a higher mean score than male students ($M = 66.82$, $SD = 10.58$). The difference was statistically significant, $t = -3.63$, $p < .001$, indicating that female students reported significantly higher spirituality than male students.

For psychological well-being, female students ($M = 78.00$, $SD = 10.14$) obtained a higher mean score than male students ($M = 74.55$, $SD = 10.91$). The difference was statistically significant, $t = -2.89$, $p < .004$, indicating that female students reported significantly greater psychological well-being than male students.

Overall, the findings indicate that female students scored significantly higher than male students on emotional intelligence, spirituality and psychological well-being. These findings describe differences within the present sample and should not be interpreted as evidence of inherent or universal differences between male and female students.

Discussion

The present study examined emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students. It also investigated the relationships among these constructs and examined gender differences. The findings showed positive associations among emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being. Significant gender differences were also observed

across all three variables, with female students reporting higher scores than male students. The skewness and kurtosis values indicated that the distributions of the study variables did not show substantial departures from normality.

The first objective of the study was to assess emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students. The participants obtained a mean score of 84.36 (SD = 11.72) for emotional intelligence, 68.91 (SD = 10.46) for spiritual well-being and 76.27 (SD = 10.63) for psychological well-being. These values describe the central tendency and variability of the three constructs within the present sample. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, understand and regulate emotional information and may facilitate adaptive functioning in interpersonal and academic contexts (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Similarly, psychological well-being reflects positive psychological functioning across multiple dimensions, including self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Keyes, 2002).

The second objective was to examine the relationships among emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being. The findings revealed significant positive correlations among all three variables. Emotional intelligence was positively and significantly correlated with spiritual well-being ($r = .38, p < .01$), indicating that students who reported higher emotional intelligence also tended to report higher levels of spiritual well-being. One possible interpretation is that greater emotional awareness and understanding of internal experiences may be associated with greater reflection, meaning-making and perceived connectedness. Emotional intelligence may facilitate awareness and regulation of emotional experiences, whereas spiritual well-being may provide a framework through which individuals interpret experiences and develop a sense of meaning and purpose. However, this interpretation remains tentative because the present study did not directly examine these underlying mechanisms. Moreover, the correlational design does not permit conclusions regarding causality.

Emotional intelligence demonstrated a moderate positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being ($r = .56, p < .01$). This was the strongest correlation observed in the study. The finding indicates that students with higher emotional intelligence tended to report higher levels of psychological well-being. Individuals who are better able to recognize, understand and regulate emotional experiences may be better equipped to manage interpersonal difficulties and everyday academic demands. This finding is broadly consistent with previous research reporting positive associations between emotional intelligence and psychological health and well-being (Schutte et al., 2007; Martins et al., 2010).

The relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being can also be considered in relation to Ryff's multidimensional model of psychological well-being. Ryff (1989) conceptualized psychological well-being in terms of six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. Emotional competencies may be relevant to several of these dimensions by helping individuals regulate emotional responses, manage interpersonal relationships and respond adaptively to environmental demands. Thus, greater emotional intelligence may be associated with more positive psychological functioning. Nevertheless, because the present study was correlational, it cannot be concluded that emotional intelligence causes higher psychological well-being.

Spiritual well-being was also positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being ($r = .47, p < .01$). This finding indicates that students reporting higher spiritual well-being also tended to report greater psychological well-being. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale conceptualizes spiritual well-being in terms of religious and existential dimensions, which may relate to a person's sense of meaning, purpose and relationship with a higher power or broader existential framework (Paloutzian & Ellison,

1982). Such resources may be particularly relevant when individuals encounter uncertainty or stressful circumstances.

The positive association between spiritual well-being and psychological well-being is also broadly consistent with literature examining religion, spirituality and psychological functioning. Spiritual beliefs and practices may provide meaning-making frameworks, coping resources, social support and a sense of hope, which may be associated with better psychological adjustment (Koenig et al., 2001; Ellison, 1991). Among college students, spiritual well-being may therefore be associated with positive psychological functioning by providing a framework through which personal and academic experiences are interpreted. However, the present findings demonstrate an association rather than a causal relationship.

The overall pattern of correlations provides support for the expected positive associations proposed in the theoretical framework. Emotional intelligence and spiritual well-being were both positively associated with psychological well-being, while emotional intelligence was also positively associated with spiritual well-being. The strongest association was between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being ($r = .56$), followed by spiritual well-being and psychological well-being ($r = .47$), whereas the association between emotional intelligence and spiritual well-being was comparatively smaller ($r = .38$). These findings suggest that emotional and spiritual resources may be relevant to positive psychological functioning among the students included in the study. However, the correlational design does not establish whether one variable causes changes in another.

The third objective was to examine gender differences in emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being. The findings indicated significant differences across all three variables. Female students reported significantly higher emotional intelligence ($M = 86.32$, $SD = 11.34$) than male students ($M = 82.41$, $SD = 11.84$), $t = -3.020$, $p = .003$. This finding indicates that female students in the present sample reported higher emotional intelligence than male students. Previous research has reported gender differences in emotional intelligence, although the magnitude and direction of such differences may vary according to the conceptualization and measurement approach used (Schutte et al., 1998; Martins et al., 2010; Petrides & Furnham, 2000). The present finding should therefore be interpreted as a characteristic of the current sample rather than as evidence of an inherent or universal gender difference.

A significant gender difference was also observed in spiritual well-being. Female students reported higher spiritual well-being ($M = 71.02$, $SD = 9.96$) than male students ($M = 66.82$, $SD = 10.58$), $t = -3.630$, $p < .001$. The difference may potentially be related to factors such as socialization, family environment, personal beliefs or patterns of meaning-making. However, these factors were not measured in the present study and therefore no specific explanation for the observed difference can be established.

Similarly, female students reported significantly higher psychological well-being ($M = 78.00$, $SD = 10.14$) than male students ($M = 74.55$, $SD = 10.91$), $t = -2.890$, $p = .004$. This finding indicates that female students in the present sample reported higher overall psychological well-being. Because Ryff's model conceptualizes psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct, differences in overall scores may reflect variation across specific dimensions of well-being. The present study did not examine gender differences separately across all six dimensions; therefore, conclusions regarding the specific dimensions underlying the observed difference cannot be drawn.

The findings may have particular relevance for understanding psychological functioning among Kashmiri college students. College life involves important academic, interpersonal and developmental

transitions, including academic expectations, peer relationships, career uncertainty and increasing personal responsibilities. Within these circumstances, emotional intelligence may be associated with students' ability to understand and regulate emotional experiences, whereas spiritual well-being may be associated with meaning, purpose and a sense of connectedness. The positive associations observed in the present study suggest that these constructs may be relevant to psychological well-being among college students.

Overall, the findings are broadly consistent with the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), the conceptualization of spiritual well-being proposed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) and Ryff's multidimensional model of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). The findings suggest that emotional intelligence and spiritual well-being are positively associated with psychological well-being among the students included in the present sample. Future studies may examine the mechanisms underlying these relationships using longitudinal, predictive or experimental designs and may determine whether the observed associations are replicated across different student populations and cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being among 311 Kashmiri college students. The findings indicated moderate to relatively favourable levels of the three study constructs and the skewness and kurtosis values suggested that the distributions were approximately normal.

The correlation findings revealed significant positive relationships among emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being. Emotional intelligence showed the strongest relationship with psychological well-being ($r = .56$), followed by spiritual well-being ($r = .47$). Emotional intelligence was also positively associated with spiritual well-being ($r = .38$). These findings suggest that students reporting greater emotional competencies and higher levels of spiritual well-being also tended to report more positive psychological functioning.

The study also revealed significant gender differences across all three constructs. Female students reported higher levels of emotional intelligence, spiritual well-being and psychological well-being than male students. Although these findings provide useful information about gender-related patterns within the present sample, they should not be interpreted as evidence of inherent or universal differences between male and female students.

The findings highlight the potential relevance of emotional and spiritual resources in understanding psychological well-being among college students. Emotional intelligence may assist students in recognizing and managing emotions and navigating interpersonal challenges, whereas spiritual well-being may provide meaning, purpose and a sense of connectedness. These resources may therefore be associated with more positive psychological functioning among young adults in higher education.

From an applied perspective, colleges may consider incorporating activities that promote emotional awareness, emotional regulation, adaptive coping, interpersonal skills, meaning-making and personal growth. However, the effectiveness of such interventions cannot be established from the present correlational findings. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs, larger and more representative samples and additional psychological variables to further examine the factors associated with psychological well-being among college students in Kashmir.

In conclusion, the present findings suggest that emotional intelligence and spiritual well-being are significant correlates of psychological well-being among Kashmiri college students. Understanding

these relationships may contribute to the development of more comprehensive approaches to promoting positive psychological functioning and well-being among young adults in higher education.

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