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IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING ON MENTAL HEALTH AND BURNOUT AMONG DAIVA NARTHAKAS OF TULUNADU.

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Abstract:

Spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout are interrelated psychological variables that play a crucial role in the overall quality of life, particularly among individuals engaged in intense spiritual or ritualistic practices. Studying these variables among Daiva Narthakas, who perform traditional rituals of Daiva Aradhane in the culturally rich Tulunadu region, provides a unique chance to understand the psychological effects of spiritual involvement rooted in culture. These performers, often respected for their spiritual commitment, live a life focused on social responsibility, physical stamina, and deep spirituality. This lifestyle can affect their mental health in both beneficial and harmful ways.

The aim of the study is to examine the impact of spiritual well-being on mental health and burnout among Daiva Narthakas. This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. A total of 90 participants were selected through snowball and purposive sampling methods. Data were collected using standardized psychological scales: Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982), General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Normality tests indicated a mixed distribution, prompting the use of both non-parametric correlation (Spearman's rho) and linear regression analyses. District-wise correlations revealed significant associations between spiritual well-being and general health in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, while Kasaragod showed no significant relationships. Regression analysis indicated that spiritual well-being



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significantly predicted general health (R^2 = .234, p < .001) and burnout (R^2 = .079, p = .007) across the full sample. These findings highlight the protective role of spiritual well-being in promoting mental health and mitigating emotional exhaustion among ritual performers.

Keywords: Spiritual well-being, Daiva Narthakas, Mental health, Burnout, Tulunadu.

Introduction:

Tulu Nadu, a culturally rich and diverse region located in the southern part of Karnataka and the northern part of Kerala, encompasses the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Kasaragod. Among its many unique traditions, Daiva Aradhane stands out as a significant spiritual and cultural practice. This ritualistic form of spirit worship is deeply rooted in the local beliefs and is predominantly performed in this region. The individuals who carry out these rituals are known as Daiva Narthakas (divine performers). The nature of the rituals and practices associated with Daiva Aradhane vary across districts, reflecting regional and community-specific customs. Importantly, these variations, along with the intensity of spiritual involvement, appear to influence the mental health and levels of burnout experienced by Daiva Narthakas in different parts of Tulu Nadu. Understanding these differences is crucial for a comprehensive psychosocial perspective on this community.

Daiva Narthakas, while occupying a sacred and culturally respected role in Tulunadu's ritual landscape, also face several psychological challenges that arise from the complex interplay of tradition, spirituality, marginalization, and modernization. Some of the key psychological issues they may experience are role conflict and identity strain, performance-related anxiety and psychological fatigue, dissociative experiences and trance-induced stress, stigmatization and social marginalization, burnout and lack of support, intergenerational pressure and expectations and existential conflicts and coping challenges etc.



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But Spiritual well-being plays a central role in shaping the psychological and physical health of Daiva Narthakas, the traditional spirit mediums of Tulu Nadu. Their unique cultural and spiritual practices - particularly the ritualistic embodiment of deities during Daiva Aradhane are both a source of strength and a potential source of strain. High levels of spiritual well-being contribute positively to their quality of life by offering a sense of purpose, identity, and community belonging. The reverence they receive during rituals enhances self-worth and provides existential meaning, which can buffer against psychological distress.

However, the same spiritual engagement, when not supported by adequate rest, recognition, or coping resources, can lead to burnout characterized by emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and spiritual depletion. Repeated trance states, community expectations, and the pressure to maintain sacred roles while navigating modern life contribute to this strain. Despite these challenges, those with stronger spiritual well-being often report better general health outcomes, both mental and physical, as their faith and ritual participation serve as coping mechanisms against life stressors.

In conclusion, spiritual well-being acts as a double-edged sword: it enhances the quality of life and offers protection against stress, but when imbalanced or unsupported, it can contribute to burnout and health decline. Culturally sensitive support systems and community awareness are crucial in maintaining the well-being of Daiva Narthakas in a changing world.

Modern mental health research has focused more on the psychological relationship between spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout, especially in relation to culturally based spiritual practices. An essential component of holistic health is spiritual well-being, which is commonly described as a feeling of inner serenity, purpose, and kinship with the transcendent. Improved quality of life, less distress, and increased psychological resilience have all been favourably connected with it (Fisher, 2011; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982).



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Mental health, as conceptualized by the World Health Organization (2004), refers to a state of well-being in which individuals realize their potential, cope with normal stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community. Within spiritually intense cultural roles such as that of the Daiva Narthakas ritual performers who engage in spirit possession and perform sacred dances the experience of mental health may be influenced by both the psychosocial demands of the role and the spiritual framework that supports it.

Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), is often studied in high-demand helping professions. However, emerging literature suggests that individuals engaged in emotionally charged and spiritually immersive roles such as the Daiva Narthakas may also be susceptible to burnout. Factors contributing to this include the physical strain of performances, psychological burden of embodying divine roles, and the social expectations from communities.

This study attempts to bridge this research gap by examining the impact of spiritual well-being on mental health and burnout among Daiva Narthakas of Tulunadu. It hypothesizes that higher levels of spiritual well-being will be associated with better mental health outcomes and lower levels of burnout. Through this investigation, the research aims to contribute to culturally contextualized psychological frameworks and offer implications for mental health interventions tailored to traditional spiritual practitioners.

Review of Literature:

1. Daiva Aradane: Cultural and Spiritual Role

Daiva Narthakas are traditional spirit mediums and ritual performers central to the Daiva Aradhane tradition of Tulunadu. This region includes Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and parts of Kasaragod. These performers embody regional deities, or Daivas, during rituals and festivals. They enact divine possession to connect the community with the spiritual world. Their performances are not just theatrical



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shows; they are sacred acts of spiritual mediation that involve trance, oracular speech, and symbolic justice (Bhat, 1996; Heidemann, 2012).

A study done by Bruckner (1995), Daiva Narthana is closely linked to oral traditions, social hierarchy, and moral governance. The performer is often seen as a representation of divine authority. Study of Shilpa V. Sonawane (2019) focused about on Bhuta/Daiva worship in Tulunadu, detailing its historical roots, ritual variations, and cross-cultural comparisons with Indonesian spirit-deity worship. This was supported by the statement that sociological and anthropological dimensions of Daiva worship have been well-documented (Pekka, 2005). There is a notable lack of psychological studies. Specifically, there is little focus on the mental health, emotional demands, and spiritual well-being of these performers.

2. Spiritual Well-Being and Psychological Functioning

Spiritual well-being, as defined by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982), refers to the sense of life purpose and inner peace that arises from a personal relationship with the transcendent and the harmony it brings to daily existence. It has two dimensions: religious well-being (relationship with God or a higher power) and existential well-being (sense of purpose and meaning in life). Studies suggest that spiritual well-being contributes significantly to psychological resilience and is inversely related to symptoms of anxiety and depression (Koenig, 2012; Fisher, 2011).

In Indian contexts, spirituality is often deeply embedded in daily cultural and religious practices, making it a critical factor in psychological assessment and well-being (Verma & Verma, 2008). Individuals who engage in spiritual rituals tend to report higher levels of emotional balance and coping ability (Seybold & Hill, 2001). This makes spiritual well-being particularly relevant in populations such as Daiva Narthakas, who live and operate within a spiritually immersive framework.



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3. Mental Health in Religious and Cultural Practitioners

According to study of Pargament (2007), shown that spiritual engagement can serve as a buffer against psychological distress. Bilu and Witztum (1993) studied spirit mediums and found that ritual participation provided a socially acceptable outlet for psychological conflicts and emotional expression. However, other studies have also noted instances where such responsibilities may cause dissociative symptoms, fatigue, and role strain when the support systems are weak or expectations are overwhelming (Seligman & Kirmayer, 2008).

4. Burnout in Non-Traditional Helping Roles

Burnout is traditionally studied in occupational settings, especially in caregiving professions. According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), burnout encompasses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Study of Pines and Keinan (2005) reflects on scope to nonformal caregiving and emotionally demanding spiritual roles. Study of Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998), Religious healers, spiritual guides, and indigenous ritual performers may experience burnout due to the continuous demand for emotional labour, role sanctity, and social performance.

A few qualitative studies in India and Africa have noted that ritual healers and spiritual performers experience role fatigue, especially when they are expected to mediate between the divine and the community without adequate rest or emotional support (White, 2006; Kakar, 1982). Such stressors are potentially present among Daiva Narthakas, who are expected to maintain divine comportment, meet community expectations, and suppress personal difficulties.

Gaps in Existing Research

While spiritual well-being has been studied in relation to mental health and burnout among religious leaders, nurses, and caregivers, there is a dearth of research on culturally specific spiritual practitioners such as Daiva Narthakas. Most available studies either focus on mainstream spiritual practices or generalize



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findings without considering the unique psychosocial environment of indigenous performers.

There is an urgent need to study the protective effects of spiritual well-being and the psychological risks associated with ritualistic spiritual labour within local traditions. This study aims to contribute to this gap by empirically examining how spiritual well-being correlates with mental health status and burnout levels in Daiva Narthakas, a unique cultural group from Tulu Nadu whose spiritual labour is both a source of personal transcendence and social obligation.

Methodology:

Aim:

To explore the impact of spiritual well-being on mental health and burnout among Daiya Narthakas of Tulunadu.

Research Question:

- Is there any relationship between spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout among Daiva Narthakas in the Tulunadu region, which includes Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Kasaragod?
- How much does spiritual well-being predict mental health and burnout among Daiva Narthakas?

Objectives:

- To examine the levels of spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout among Daiva Narthakas in the Tulunadu region.
- To analyze the relationship between spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout in this population.
- To evaluate the predictive role of spiritual well-being in determining mental health outcomes among Daiva Narthakas.



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• To investigate whether higher levels of spiritual well-being are associated with reduced levels of burnout among Daiva Narthakas.

Hypotheses:

- H1: There is a significant positive correlation between spiritual well-being and mental health.
- H2: There is a significant negative correlation between spiritual well-being and burnout.
- H3: Spiritual well-being significantly predicts mental health among Daiva Narthakas.
- H4: Spiritual well-being significantly predicts burnout levels among Daiva Narthakas.

Research Design:

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the impact of spiritual well-being on mental health and burnout among Daiva Narthakas of Tulunadu. This design was chosen to assess the strength and direction of relationships among the key psychological variables using standardized psychometric tools.

Sample:

The sample consisted of 90 Daiva Narthakas from the Tulunadu region (Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala). Participants were selected using snow ball and purposive sampling.



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Table1: Distribution of Daiva Narthakas by District

District	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Dakshina Kannada	24	26.7
Udupi	24	26.7
Kasaragod	42	46.6
Total	90	100.0

Inclusion criteria:

- Minimum 3 years of experience in performing Daiva Narthana.
- Actively involved in at least two public rituals per year.
- Willing to give informed consent for participation.

Exclusion criteria:

- Participants with a known diagnosis of severe psychiatric disorders.
- Individuals currently undergoing intensive medical or psychological treatment

Research Tools:

1. Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS): Developed by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982), this scale measures both religious well-being and existential well-being. The scale consists of 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate higher spiritual well-being. This scale has high internal consistency,



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with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 for the overall scale. In terms of validity, the SWBS has demonstrated construct validity through correlations with measures of life purpose and self-esteem, and concurrent validity through inverse relationships with indicators of psychological distress.

- 2. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28): A widely used screening tool for assessing mental health status. It includes 28 items across four subscales: somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. It exhibits excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.95 across diverse populations. The scale's test-retest reliability is also high, typically ranging from 0.78 to 0.90. The GHQ-28 has well-established criterion validity, with sensitivity and specificity rates between 70% and 90%. Its construct validity is supported by its four-factor structure (Somatic Symptoms, Anxiety/Insomnia, Social Dysfunction, and Severe Depression), and it correlates significantly with clinical diagnostic interviews, supporting its concurrent validity.
- 3. Maslach Burnout Inventory: This inventory was developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), this tool assesses burnout across three domains: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. The scale demonstrates strong internal consistency, with alpha coefficients of 0.90 for Emotional Exhaustion, 0.79 for Depersonalization, and 0.71–0.80 for Personal Accomplishment. Test-retest reliability values range from 0.60 to 0.82, depending on the time interval and sample characteristics. The MBI has robust construct validity, confirmed through factor analysis, and shows good convergent and discriminant validity, distinguishing burnout from depression



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and job dissatisfaction while correlating with work-related stress and psychological well-being.

Procedure:

Permission was obtained from the Daiva Narthakas. After establishing rapport, the purpose of the research was explained to the participants in their native language (Tulu/Kannada), and informed consent was taken. Participants completed the questionnaires individually. Researcher assisted participants when required, especially in interpreting items where language or literacy posed a barrier. The data collection was carried out over a period of 5 months during the non-festival season to ensure minimal ritual interruptions.

Ethical Considerations:

- The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee.
- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Anonymity and confidentiality of responses were ensured.
- Participants were given the right to withdraw at any point without consequences.

Statistical Analysis:

Data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Spearman's rho test was used to examine the relationship between spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout.
- Multiple regression analysis to determine the predictive role of spiritual well-being on mental health and burnout dimensions.



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• Normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov/Shapiro–Wilk) were conducted before applying parametric tests.

Result and Discussion:

Table 4.1: shows the result of normality test for Spiritual Well-Being (SW), Mental Health (MH), and Burnout (B) Scores across Districts.

	District	Kolmogorov	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Wilk	
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
SW	Dakshina Kannada	.165	24	.089	.939	24	.155
	Udupi	.176	24	.053	.920	24	.059
	Kasaragod	.215	42	.000	.884	42	.000
МН	Dakshina Kannada	.271	24	.000	.812	24	.000
	Udupi	.139	24	.200*	.925	24	.074
	Kasaragod	.161	42	.008	.908	42	.002
В	Dakshina	.128	24	.200*	.936	24	.136
	Kannada						
	Udupi	.111	24	.200*	.963	24	.499
	Kasaragod	.109	42	.200*	.969	42	.296

^{*.} This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the above table normality was not proven for all variables across the groups, especially for spiritual wellbeing and Mental health in Kasaragod and Dakshina Kannada. There for non-parametric statistical tests were used for the data analyses to guarantee the validity and robustness of the results.

Table 4.2: Shows the Spearman's Rank Correlation between Spiritual Well-Being, Mental Health, and Burnout among Daiva Narthakas in Dakshina Kannada District

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Variables	N	1	2	3
1.Spiritual	24	-		
Wellbeing				
2. Mental Health	24	.411*	-	
3.Burnout	24	.147	.072	-

^{*.} Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

a. District = Dakshina Kannada

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout among Daiva Narthakas in the Dakshina Kannada district. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between spiritual well-being and mental health, ρ (24) = .411, p = .046, suggesting that higher levels of spiritual well-being were associated with better mental health. However, the correlation between spiritual well-being and burnout was not statistically significant, ρ (24) = .147, p = .492. Similarly, no significant relationship was found between general health and burnout, ρ (24) = .072, p = .737.

Table 4.3: Shows the Spearman's Rank Correlation between Spiritual Well-Being, Mental Health, and Burnout among Daiva Narthakas in Udupi

Variables	N	1	2	3
1.Spiritual	24	-		
wellbeing				
2.Mental Health	24	474*	-	
3.Burnout	24	229	.083	-

st. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

a. District = Udupi

In Udupi, a significant negative correlation was observed between spiritual well-being and mental health, ρ (24) = -.474, p = .019. This indicates that as spiritual

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well-being increases, mental health difficulties tend to decrease. The correlation between spiritual well-being and burnout was not significant, ρ (24) = -.229, p = .283, nor was the correlation between general health and burnout, ρ (24) = .083, p = .699.

Table 4.4: Shows the Spearman's Rank Correlation between Spiritual Well-Being, Mental Health, and Burnout among Daiva Narthakas in Kasargod, Kerala.

Variables	N	1	2	3
1.Spiritual	42	-		
wellbeing				
2. Mental Health	42	056	-	
3.Burnout	42	.010	.179	-

a. District = Kasaragod

In the Kasaragod district, no statistically significant correlations were found between any of the three variables. The relationship between spiritual well-being and mental health was $\rho(42) = -.056$, p = .726; between spiritual well-being and burnout, $\rho(42) = .010$, p = .949; and between mental health and burnout, $\rho(42) = .179$, p = .256. These results suggest that spiritual well-being in this region may not be directly linked to mental health or burnout levels.

The results indicate that the relationship between spiritual well-being and psychological outcomes varies across districts, with Dakshina Kannada and Udupi showing significant correlations between spiritual well-being and general health, while Kasaragod did not. Across all districts, no significant relationship was found between spiritual well-being and burnout or between mental health and burnout. These findings highlight the potential contextual and cultural differences that may influence how spiritual engagement relates to mental health among Daiva Narthakas.

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Regression Analysis:

Table 4.5: Model Summary for Regression Predicting General Health from Spiritual Well-being

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE Estimate
1	.483	.234	.225	14.00

Note. SE = standard error of the estimate. Predictors: Spiritual Well-being (SW). Dependent variable: Mental Health (MH).

Table 4.6: ANOVA for Regression Predicting Mental Health from Spiritual Wellbeing

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	5255.28	1	5255.28	26.81	< .001
Residual	17248.32	88	196.00		
Total	22503.60	89			

Note. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; F(1, 88) = 26.81, p < .001.

Predictor: Spiritual Well-being (SW). Dependent variable: Mental health (MH).

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Table 4.7: Regression Coefficients Predicting Mental Health Scores

Predictor	В	SE	β (Beta)	t	p
(Constant)	70.541	8.081		8.729	< .001
Spiritual Well-being	-0.500	0.097	-0.483	-5.178	< .001

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized beta coefficient. Dependent variable: Mental Health.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether spiritual well-being (SW) predicted mental health (MH) scores among Daiva Narthakas. The analysis revealed that spiritual well-being significantly predicted mental health, F(1, 88) = 26.81, p < .001, accounting for approximately 23.4% of the variance in mental health scores ($R^2 = .234$, Adjusted $R^2 = .225$). The regression coefficient was statistically significant, with spiritual well-being negatively predicting mental health difficulties, B = -0.50, SE = 0.097, $\beta = -.48$, t = -5.18, p < .001. This indicates that as spiritual well-being increases, reported general health issues decrease.

Table 4.8: Model Summary for Regression Predicting Burnout (B) from Spiritual Well-being (SWS)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE Estimate
1	.281	.079	.068	13.36

Note. SE = standard error of the estimate. Predictor: Spiritual Well-being (SWS). Dependent variable: Burnout (B)

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Table 4.9: ANOVA for Regression Predicting Burnout (B) from Spiritual Wellbeing (SWS)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	1346.93	1	1346.93	7.54	.007
Residual	15715.56	88	178.59		
Total	17062.49	89			

Note. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; F(1, 88) = 7.54, p = .007. Predictor: Spiritual Well-being. Dependent variable: Burnout.

Table 4.10: Regression Coefficients Predicting Burnout (B) Scores

Predictor	В	SE	β (Beta)	t	p
(Constant)	77.117	7.714		9.997	<.001
Spiritual Well-being	-0.253	0.092	-0.281	-2.746	.007

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized beta coefficient. Dependent variable: Burnout.

A second linear regression was conducted to evaluate whether spiritual well-being also predicts burnout (B). The model was statistically significant, F(1, 88) = 7.54, p = .007, explaining 7.9% of the variance in burnout scores ($R^2 = .079$, Adjusted $R^2 = .068$). The regression coefficient was significant, B = -0.25, SE = 0.092, $\beta = -.28$, t = -2.75, p = .007, indicating that higher levels of spiritual well-being were associated with lower burnout levels among the participants.

These findings suggest that spiritual well-being serves as a significant predictor in reducing both general health problems and burnout among Daiva Narthakas. While the strength of prediction was more robust for general health, the significant



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association with burnout emphasizes the broader role of spiritual coping mechanisms in supporting psychological resilience within this culturally embedded spiritual profession.

Summary and Conclusion:

The current study aimed to examine the impact of spiritual well-being on general health and burnout among Daiva Narthakas of Tulunadu. Utilizing correlation and linear regression analyses across three culturally distinct districts Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Kasaragod, the results shows the psychological significance of spiritual well-being in promoting mental health outcomes among ritual practitioners.

Key Findings

District-wise correlation analyses revealed significant findings in two of the three regions.

- In Dakshina Kannada, a moderate positive correlation between spiritual well-being and mental health ($\rho = .411$, p = .046) indicated that higher spiritual well-being was associated with better psychological functioning.
- In Udupi, a negative correlation was observed ($\rho = -.474$, p = .019), further supporting the link between elevated spiritual well-being and reduced mental distress.
- In Kasaragod, no statistically significant correlations were observed among spiritual well-being, mental health, and burnout.
- Regression analyses conducted on the total sample indicated that spiritual well-being significantly predicted mental health, explaining 23.4% of the variance (R² = .234, p < .001), and burnout, explaining 7.9% of the variance (R² = .079, p = .007). These findings are consistent with prior literature indicating that spiritual well-being can serve as a protective factor against psychological distress and emotional exhaustion (Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 1997).



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Conclusion

These findings underscore the importance of spiritual well-being as a culturally embedded psychological resource for Daiva Narthakas. As ritual specialists engaged in emotionally and spiritually intensive performances, they draw on spiritual strength not only for divine communication but also for personal resilience. The study supports the inclusion of culturally specific spiritual frameworks in mental health discourse, particularly in non-Western and indigenous contexts (Fernando, 2010; Marsella, 2010).

Specifically, the lack of significant correlations in Kasaragod suggests that spiritual engagement may be influenced by regional socio-cultural variables, possibly including community support, belief systems, or the evolving role of Daiva Narthana in public life.

Limitations

- Limited sample size may affect generalizability across districts.
- Self-report measures could introduce social desirability bias.
- Cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations.
- Standardized tools were not culturally validated for Daiva Narthakas.

Future Implications

Future research should adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to explore the dynamic interplay between spirituality, health, and burnout over time. Culturally grounded qualitative studies such as narrative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, or phenomenological approaches could further illuminate the lived experiences of Daiva Narthakas .Additionally, the development of indigenous or culturally adapted psychometric tools would enhance the validity of future assessments.



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