

SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING AND ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENTS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Juniven Claudes¹, Fransisca Iriani R. Dewi², Pamela Hendra Heng³ & Cutie B. Canesares⁴

¹Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: juniven.705210021@stu.untar.ac.id

²Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: fransiscar@fpsi.untar.ac.id

³Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta, Indonesia
Email: pamelah@fpsi.untar.ac.id

⁴Faculty of Psychology, Adventist University of Philippines, Philippines
Email: cbcanesares@aup.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by numerous changes and challenges that increase vulnerability to various mental health disorders. Among these, the prevalence of anxiety disorders in adolescents is notably rising, which can lead to the development of other severe mental health issues such as depression. The impact of anxiety disorders extends beyond the individual, contributing to a substantial global burden on health systems and societies. In recent years, several studies have explored the potential protective factors that can mitigate anxiety symptoms, and spiritual well-being has emerged as a significant one. Spiritual well-being involves a sense of purpose, connectedness, and inner peace, which can provide individuals with psychological strength. This protective role of spiritual well-being has been observed in diverse populations, ranging from the elderly to adolescents. Despite this, research focusing specifically on the adolescent population remains limited. Thus, there is a need for more comprehensive research methods, such as systematic literature reviews, to better understand the relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety in adolescents. Analysis of six studies included in this review indicates a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety. This suggests that spiritual well-being helps adolescents manage anxiety by enhancing resilience, fostering a more positive mindset, and promoting effective coping behaviors. Consequently, this study highlights the importance of spiritual well-being as a vital element in supporting adolescent mental health and recommends further investigations to explore its role across different developmental contexts and diverse populations.

Keywords: adolescence, spiritual well-being, anxiety, systematic literature review

1. PREFACE

Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood characterized by a number of biological, cognitive, and socioemotional changes (Fatimah et al., 2020; Hartini, 2017; Nasution et al., 2023; Santrock, 2014). The World Health Organization (WHO) categorizes individuals aged 10-19 as adolescents (2024), but the age range can be extended to 24 years due to the adjustment of developmental tasks with the times (Sawyer et al., 2018).

Individuals in adolescence experience an identity crisis, prompting them to develop their identity through self-exploration and interaction with their environment (Erikson, 1968; Nadiyah et al., 2021; Rusuli, 2022). Adolescents who successfully navigate this identity crisis will develop a stable sense of identity (Marcia, 1966), while an unstable identity can lead to a number of behavioral and psychological problems (Branje et al., 2021; Kumari et al., 2022; Rusuli, 2022; Utomo & Luluk, 2019).

The numerous changes, pressures and challenges that occur during adolescence make adolescents vulnerable to various problems (Membride, 2016). Research reveals that half of all lifetime mental disorders emerge during adolescence (Kim et al., 2020), especially anxiety disorders (Chen et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Solmi et al., 2022). Data from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2018) shows that around 30% of adolescents aged 13-18

years suffer from anxiety disorders. High rates of anxiety disorders among adolescents have been reported in several countries, such as China (Chen et al., 2022), India (Madasu et al., 2019), and Spain (Canals et al., 2019). This highlights a concerning trend of increasing anxiety disorders among adolescents (Charlson et al., 2019).

Anxiety disorders go beyond ordinary feelings of worry, affecting an individual's thinking patterns, behavior, and physiological responses (Adwas et al., 2019; Al-Yateem et al., 2020; Z. Liu et al., 2021; Remes et al., 2016). Anxiety disorders are particularly concerning in adolescents due to their heightened severity (Gautam et al., 2022), and their significant likelihood of co-occurring with other anxiety disorders and depression (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015; Canals et al., 2019; Madasu et al., 2019). Various aspects of an adolescent's life, including social interactions, academics, health, and more, can be negatively impacted by anxiety disorders (Al-Yateem et al., 2020; Covert & Fraire, 2019; Pantis et al., 2015). Studies have also revealed associations between anxiety disorders and alcohol and substance abuse, suicidal behavior, and other serious problems (Chen et al., 2022; Covert & Fraire, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Therefore, anxiety disorders in adolescents need to be anticipated and treated so that the quality of life of adolescents can be better ensured (Ozdemir et al., 2020).

On the one hand, various studies have highlighted the positive influence of spiritual well-being on individuals as a whole, encompassing physical health, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, and quality of life (Chen et al., 2021; Vaezipour et al., 2021; Yoo et al., 2022). Spiritual well-being is a condition where individuals use aspects of spirituality to find value, meaning, and purpose in life (Aydın et al., 2020; Ellison, 1983; Yoo et al., 2022). Therefore, spiritual well-being not only has a religious dimension called the transcendental dimension, but also incorporates personal, communal, and environmental dimensions that interact with one another (Fisher, 2021; Juškauskienė et al., 2023).

Spiritual well-being has a positive relationship with resilience, life satisfaction, and positive emotions in adolescents (Lourebam & Ete, 2021), while showing a negative relationship with negative emotions and risky behaviors often exhibited by adolescents (Vaezipour et al., 2021). Furthermore, spiritual well-being plays a role in adolescent developmental tasks by enhancing self-understanding and life purpose (Kavar, 2015). It also contributes to reducing the occurrence of mental disorders and promoting mental health (Hamka et al., 2020; Tumanggor & Dariyo, 2021).

The relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety in adolescents requires further exploration using more comprehensive methods. A systematic literature review (SLR) on spiritual well-being has been conducted on participants with specific professions. The SLR entitled "The Relationship Between Social Support, Spiritual Well-Being, and Depression in Christian Clergy: A Systematic Literature Review" revealed increased levels of depression in Christian clergy related to perceived social support and spiritual well-being (Edwards et al., 2020). Then another SLR reviewed literature related to health workers. The findings indicated that spiritual well-being had a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Depersonalization refers to a condition where individuals feel detached and indifferent toward others, perceiving them as objects rather than persons (Chirico et al., 2023).

Based on previous research findings and explanations, it can be concluded that spiritual well-being plays a crucial role in the overall well-being of adolescents and their developmental tasks. Additionally, spiritual well-being serves as a protective factor against anxiety disorders

experienced by adolescents, warranting further exploration. Existing studies on spiritual well-being and anxiety have predominantly focused on participants with specific risk factors, such as illnesses, professions, and so on. Spiritual well-being is negatively associated with anxiety in patients with cancer (Chen et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023). It has also been studied in professions with high risk or stress levels, such as healthcare workers and military personnel (Chirico et al., 2023; Jafari et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety, specifically in adolescents. Studies examining the relationship or influence of spiritual well-being and anxiety in adolescents will be reviewed using a systematic literature review.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Search Strategy

The research data will be collected using the software Publish or Perish and various online databases, including Scopus, PubMed, Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, Springer Link, Sage Journals, and BMJ (British Medical Journal). The studies must have been published within the last 10 years, from 2014 to 2024. The keywords used in the search process will include “Spiritual well-being” AND “Anxiety” OR “Mental health” NOT “Death”. The term “Adolescence” will not be used as a keyword to avoid excluding studies that might use alternative terms with similar meanings in their titles or abstracts. This approach ensures a broader and more inclusive search to capture relevant studies for the systematic literature review.

Studies containing the words “spiritual well-being” and “anxiety” will be selected and processed according to The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines using the Covidence website. Once duplicate studies have been excluded, the researchers will begin screening titles and abstracts based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each excluded study will be recorded and reported in detail. The whole process from searching studies to selecting eligible studies will be presented in the PRISMA flow diagram.

Study Selection

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a clear and systematic method of synthesizing findings from multiple studies on a similar topic (Munn et al., 2018). The results of an SLR can be utilized for decision-making within a specific field (Page et al., 2021). To accurately address the research question, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria is necessary to identify eligible literature. The inclusion criteria for the articles to be reviewed are as follows: (a) studies must have been published within the last 10 years (2014–2024); (b) studies written in English; (c) studies must examine the variables spiritual well-being and anxiety using standardized measurement tools; (d) quantitative or qualitative method; and (e) participants aged 10 to 24 years. Conversely, the exclusion criteria consisted of (a) studies published before 2014; (b) studies not published in English; (c) the full text of the study could not be accessed; (d) studies only examined one variable; (e) studies with systematic review or meta-analysis methods; and (f) the age of participants was not included in the adolescent age range.

Quality Appraisal

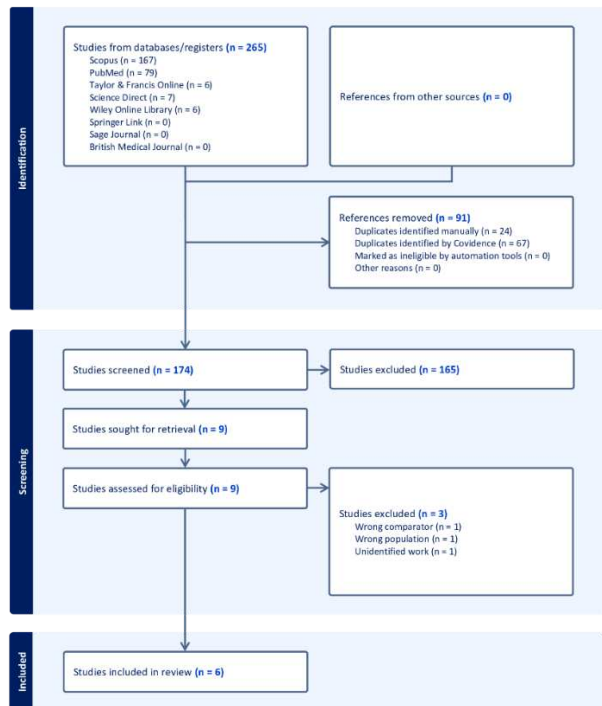
Studies that have been collected and meet the inclusion criteria will undergo quality assessment by four reviewers. The quality assessment method used is the Quality Assessment Tool for Observational Cohort and Cross-Sectional Studies (2014) from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which consists of 14 questions. Based on discussions among the researchers, six questions were eliminated due to irrelevance to the collected studies, leaving a total of eight questions. The final results are categorized as "Good" (studies meet 6–8 questions), "Fair"

(studies meet 3–5 questions), and "Poor" (studies meet 0–2 questions). Studies rated as "Poor" will still have their data extracted but with special notes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines and Covidence website processing, the selection results are as follows (Figure 1).

Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Diagram



The six studies were conducted between 2014 and 2020 across various countries, including Indonesia, the United States, Iran, Brazil, and Korea. The majority of participants (5 out of 6 studies) were students (university or school students) without specific medical conditions. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale developed by Paloutzian and Ellison was used as a measure of spiritual well-being in four studies. To assess anxiety, a variety of measurement tools were employed, one of which was the Beck Anxiety Inventory, used in two studies. These studies not only examined the relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety but also explored its interaction with other variables, such as depression, spiritual intelligence, and others. The characteristics of each article are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of Selected Studies

Article	Participants	Methods	Spiritual Well-Being and Anxiety Measure	Results
Spiritual Well-Being, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in Indonesian Muslim Communities During COVID-19	538 Indonesia's Muslims	Correlational study	Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21) Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)	The relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety is significant and negative. Spiritual well-being has a direct influence on depression and stress, while the variable of anxiety also has a partial mediating effect.
Relationship between spiritual well-being and spiritual intelligence with mental health in students	277 students from Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences	Descriptive-analytical	The Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire The Goldberg and Hiller General Health Questionnaire	Spiritual well-being has a significant relationship with mental health, particularly the "Connection with God" subscale, which shows a negative correlation with anxiety.
Relationship between Neuroticism, Spiritual Well-Being, and Subjective Well-Being in Korean University Students	479 college students	Cross-sectional dan correlational.	Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) NEO Personality Inventory-Revised-Neuroticism Subscale (NEO-PI-R-N)	The subscales of neuroticism, namely vulnerability, hostility, and depression, can predict spiritual well-being. Spiritual well-being serves as a mediator between neuroticism and subjective well-being.
Anxiety and Spiritual Well-Being in Nursing Students: A Cross-Sectional Study	169 nursing students	Cross-sectional dan correlational	Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)	There is a significant relationship indicating that good spiritual well-being is associated with lower levels of anxiety. Existential well-being influences the level of anxiety.
Spiritual well-being among HIV-infected adolescents and their families	40 adolescents with their family	Longitudinal study	Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy-Spiritual Well-Being Scale Version 4 (FACIT-Sp-Ex-4) Back Anxiety Inventory (BAI)	Spiritual well-being has a relationship with depression, anxiety, and quality of life (QoL).
Predicting Students' Test Anxiety Based on Their Spiritual Well-Being and Mindfulness	312 high school students	Correlational study	Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)	Spiritual well-being can predict test anxiety in high school female students. Higher levels of spiritual well-being are associated with lower levels of test anxiety among these students.

Quality assessment was conducted using the “NIH Quality assessment tool for observational cohort and cross-sectional studies”. The results of the assessment of 6 articles were that all articles were included in the “Good” criteria, each article had fulfilled at least six assessment questions. Details of the quality assessment of each article are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Quality Assessment of Selected Studies

<i>Paper</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Spiritual Well-Being, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in Indonesian Muslim Communities During COVID-19	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Good
Relationship Between Spiritual Well-Being and Spiritual Intelligence with Mental Health in Students	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		Good
Relationship between Neuroticism, Spiritual Well-Being, and Subjective Well-Being in Korean University Students	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Good
Anxiety and Spiritual Well-Being in Nursing Students: A Cross-Sectional Study	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Good
Spiritual Well-Being Among HIV-Infected Adolescents and Their Families	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		Good
Predicting Students' Test Anxiety Based on Their Spiritual Well-Being and Mindfulness	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		Good

Overall, the findings from the six studies support a significant relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety in adolescents. Spiritual well-being was found to have a negative correlation with anxiety (Hamidi et al., 2019; Lyon et al., 2014). It also influences the level of anxiety experienced by adolescents (Hamidi et al., 2019; Hamka et al., 2022; Hosseinbor et al., 2023). Higher levels of spiritual well-being in adolescents are associated with lower levels of anxiety. Other studies highlight that the existential well-being dimension is a key factor influencing anxiety levels (Fabbris et al., 2017). Additionally, anxiety partially mediates the effect on depression (Hamka et al., 2022). Conversely, one study suggests that anxiety can also influence spiritual well-being (Yoo et al., 2022), positioning spiritual well-being as a mediator affecting an adolescent's subjective well-being.

The findings of this study support a significant negative relationship between spiritual well-being and anxiety in adolescents. These results are consistent with previous studies conducted on different participant groups (Leung & Pong, 2021; Oktafia et al., 2021). As a multidimensional variable, spiritual well-being encompasses personal, communal, environmental, and transcendent aspects, providing meaning and purpose in life through religious and spiritual approaches (Ellison, 1983; Fisher, 2013). Expressions of spiritual well-being, such as praying, engaging in worship, or adhering to specific teachings, can foster feelings of peace, forgiveness, and a clear sense of purpose, thereby enhancing individual resilience in facing life's challenges (Leung & Pong, 2021; Mendes et al., 2023).

Connection with God and mindful religious practices provide emotional and spiritual support to individuals, especially during times of hardship (Buchtova et al., 2022; Garssen et al., 2021). A spiritual perspective is often integrated into one's mindset, such as the belief that everything is part of God's plan or that God is present in all situations. This perspective can reshape how individuals interpret problems, thereby reducing anxiety (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Algahtani et al., 2022). Moreover, spiritual well-being supports better coping mechanisms through healthier behavior patterns and increased resilience (Braam & Koenig, 2019; Mendes et al., 2023). Thus, spiritual well-being not only helps individuals find meaning in life but also enhances their ability to manage anxiety arising from various stressors. This is because spiritual well-being facilitates positive management of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. However, the use of negative

religious coping can exacerbate anxiety due to misinterpretations of God (Weber & Pargament, 2014).

In adolescents, spiritual well-being helps provide moral guidance, effective coping strategies, and social connections that support their well-being and developmental tasks (Aggarwal et al., 2023). Through these various mechanisms, spiritual well-being can act as a mediator or moderator in the relationship between stress and anxiety, demonstrating its effectiveness in helping individuals manage emotional and psychological challenges (Mendes et al., 2023).

On the one hand, high anxiety is significantly associated with increased depression, financial burden, hopelessness, feelings of isolation, and similar challenges (Mendes et al., 2023). Anxiety can lead to prolonged, invisible emotional distress, resulting in unhappiness, fear, and confusion. Over time, this can leave individuals feeling restless, powerless, or exhibiting problematic behaviors such as irritability and emotional outbursts (Leung & Pong, 2021). The study findings revealed that only one study (Yoo et al., 2022) reported the influence of anxiety on spiritual well-being. In other studies, anxiety was identified as a mediator in the relationship between spiritual well-being and health promotion behavior (Chehrazi et al., 2021).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the literature review, it was determined that spiritual well-being has a significant negative relationship with adolescents' anxiety. Spiritual well-being is essential in the reduction of anxiety via emotional regulation, cognitive reframing, and positive coping behaviors. Dimensions of spiritual well-being such as connection with God (religious well-being) and meaning in life (existential well-being) help individuals find purpose, enhance resilience, and inner peace. The results indicate that spiritual well-being is associated with better psychological well-being and may help adolescents positively handle developmental challenges.

Considering the important role of spiritual well-being in anxiety management, future studies in Indonesia should use a larger adolescent population to better understand how this well-being impacts different developmental tasks and social contexts. Additionally, the mediating and moderating role of spiritual well-being with other psychological variables may also be explored. Implementing spiritual well-being within community programs, educational efforts, and public health policies might practically arm adolescents with healthy coping mechanisms.

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