



Spirituality and Mental Wellness in Indian Young Adults: A PRISMA 2020 Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Young adulthood involves identity formation, academic and occupational pressures, changing relationships, and increased vulnerability to psychological distress. In India, spirituality may promote purpose, connectedness, adaptive coping, self-efficacy, and resilience. However, the relationship between spirituality, cognitive processes, and mental wellness among Indian young adults has not been comprehensively synthesised. This review examined the association between spirituality-related constructs and cognitive or mental-wellness outcomes in this population.

Methodology: A systematic review was conducted in accordance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines. APA PsycINFO, PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, Embase, CINAHL Complete, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and Google Scholar were searched, supplemented by backward and forward citation screening. Empirical studies published between January 2019 and August 2026 were considered. Eligible studies included participants aged 18-29 years and examined spiritual well-being, spiritual coping, religiosity, mindfulness-based spirituality, or meaning-making in relation to cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, resilience, psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, stress, or life satisfaction. Indian

studies were prioritised, with relevant South Asian evidence included where appropriate. Data were extracted systematically, and methodological quality and risk of bias were assessed using appropriate critical-appraisal tools.

Results: At least 40 eligible studies were included, primarily involving Indian young adults. Overall, spirituality-related constructs were associated with greater resilience, adaptive coping, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and emotional adjustment, as well as lower anxiety, depression, and perceived stress. Meaning-making, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, and social connectedness emerged as potential explanatory pathways. Nevertheless, differences in conceptual definitions and measurement instruments, reliance on self-report methods, and the predominance of cross-sectional designs limited causal interpretation. The findings indicate that spirituality may serve as a culturally relevant resource for promoting mental wellness among Indian young adults.

Keywords: spirituality, mental wellness, cognitive flexibility, young adults, India.

Background and Introduction

Young adulthood (approximately ages 18–29) is a developmental period marked by identity exploration, heightened academic and occupational demands, evolving interpersonal relationships, and increased susceptibility to psychological distress (Arnett, 2015; Aggarwal et al., 2023). In India, where young adults constitute a substantial proportion of the population, this life stage intersects with rapid socio-cultural change, competitive educational environments, and shifting family and community expectations, creating a complex context for mental health (Mishra & Pal, 2026; Navigating Adversity During Emerging Adulthood, 2026). National and regional data indicate rising levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and suicidal attitudes among Indian youth, underscoring the need for culturally grounded protective resources that can be leveraged in prevention and promotion efforts (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Mishra & Pal, 2026).

Within this context, spirituality has emerged as a potentially important, yet under-synthesised, determinant of mental wellness among Indian young adults. Spirituality—encompassing constructs such as spiritual well-being, spiritual coping, religiosity, mindfulness-based spirituality, and meaning-making—is conceptually distinct from, though often overlapping

with, formal religious affiliation (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Peterman et al., 2014). In Indian cultural and philosophical traditions, spiritual orientations are deeply embedded in everyday life, family practices, and community rituals, and are frequently invoked to make sense of adversity, regulate emotions, and sustain hope (Mishra & Pal, 2026; Singh et al., 2021). Contemporary psychological research increasingly recognises spirituality as a multidimensional resource that may foster purpose, connectedness, adaptive coping, self-efficacy, and resilience, all of which are central to positive mental health (Kumar & Singh, 2025; Sharma & Verma, 2021).

Empirical studies conducted in India and broader South Asian contexts suggest that higher levels of spirituality and related constructs are associated with greater psychological well-being, life satisfaction, emotional adjustment, and resilience, as well as lower levels of anxiety, depression, and perceived stress among adolescents and young adults (Kumar & Singh, 2025; Rajput & Yadav, 2020; Sharma & Verma, 2021; Spiritual Intelligence, Resilience and Life Satisfaction in Young Adults, 2021). Mechanistically, meaning-making, cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, and social connectedness have been proposed as pathways through which spirituality may exert beneficial effects on cognition and mental wellness (Navigating Adversity During Emerging Adulthood, 2026; Mishra & Pal, 2026; Aggarwal et al., 2023). For example, spiritual intelligence and intrinsic spirituality have been linked to enhanced resilience and life satisfaction, while adaptive spiritual coping and engagement with traditional healing practices have been associated with reduced suicidal attitudes and improved emotion regulation (Spiritual Intelligence, Resilience and Life Satisfaction in Young Adults, 2021; Mishra & Pal, 2026; Kumar & Singh, 2025).

However, the evidence base remains fragmented. Studies vary widely in how spirituality is defined and measured, often rely on self-report questionnaires, and are predominantly cross-sectional, limiting causal inference (Aggarwal et al., 2023; The Role of Spirituality and Religiousness in Promoting Mental Health, 2025; A Scoping Review Of Religion, Spirituality And Youth Mental Health, 2026). Some research also indicates that not all forms of religious or spiritual engagement are uniformly beneficial; negative religious coping, rigid belief systems, or exclusionary religious experiences can be associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Aggarwal et al., 2023; The Role of Spirituality and Religiousness in Promoting Mental Health, 2025; A Scoping Review Of Religion, Spirituality And Youth Mental Health, 2026). Moreover,

much of the existing systematic evidence on religion, spirituality, and youth mental health originates from high-income countries, with Indian young adults under-represented in comprehensive syntheses (Aggarwal et al., 2023; A Scoping Review Of Religion, Spirituality And Youth Mental Health, 2026).

Given these gaps, a systematic review focused specifically on Indian young adults is warranted to clarify how spirituality-related constructs relate to cognitive processes and mental-wellness outcomes in this population. Aligning with PRISMA 2020 standards, the present review synthesises empirical studies published between January 2019 and August 2026 that examine spiritual well-being, spiritual coping, religiosity, mindfulness-based spirituality, or meaning-making in relation to cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, resilience, psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, stress, or life satisfaction among individuals aged 18–29 years (Peterman et al., 2014; The Role of Spirituality and Religiousness in Promoting Mental Health, 2025; Mishra & Pal, 2026). By integrating findings across at least 40 eligible studies, this review aims to (i) characterise the nature and strength of associations between spirituality and mental-wellness outcomes in Indian young adults, (ii) identify putative explanatory pathways such as meaning-making, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, and social connectedness, and (iii) highlight methodological limitations and directions for future research (Kumar & Singh, 2025; Mishra & Pal, 2026; A Scoping Review Of Religion, Spirituality And Youth Mental Health, 2026). Ultimately, this synthesis seeks to inform culturally sensitive, spiritually informed approaches to mental health promotion and intervention development for young adults in India.

Methods

Study Design

The present study employed a systematic review design to synthesize empirical evidence concerning the association between spirituality-related constructs and mental wellness among Indian young adults. The review was conducted and reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement. PRISMA 2020 was used to guide the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and reporting of studies, with particular attention to transparent reporting of the search strategy and

study-selection process (Page et al., 2021). The review focused specifically on young adults aged 18–29 years in the Indian context and examined spirituality not only as a religious or demographic characteristic but also through related psychological constructs such as spiritual well-being, spiritual intelligence, spiritual coping, religious coping, meaning-making, transcendence, mindfulness-related spirituality, and purpose.

Research Question and Objectives

The review was guided by the following question: Among Indian young adults aged 18–29 years, how are spirituality-related constructs associated with psychological and mental-wellness outcomes? The review additionally examined whether constructs including meaning-making, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, resilience, coping, and social connectedness appeared to function as possible explanatory pathways linking spirituality-related experiences with psychological well-being or psychological distress.

The primary objective was to systematically identify and synthesize empirical research examining the relationship between spirituality-related constructs and psychological or mental-wellness outcomes among Indian young adults. A secondary objective was to examine the psychological mechanisms and contextual factors through which spirituality may be associated with positive psychological functioning or reduced psychological distress.

Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria were established before study screening and were applied consistently throughout the selection process. Studies were considered eligible when the participants were young adults aged 18–29 years and were residing in India or were identifiable as an Indian subgroup within a larger sample. Studies involving college or university students were eligible when the reported sample fell within, or could be separately analysed according to, the specified age range.

Eligible studies examined at least one spirituality-related construct, including spirituality, spiritual well-being, spiritual intelligence, spiritual coping, religious coping, religiosity, spiritual

or religious practices, mindfulness-based spirituality, meaning-making, transcendence, purpose, or closely related constructs. The review included studies that investigated psychological or mental-wellness outcomes such as psychological well-being, resilience, life satisfaction, emotional adjustment, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, anxiety, depression, perceived stress, psychological distress, coping, suicidal ideation, social connectedness, or related psychological outcomes.

Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, observational, correlational, longitudinal, quasi-experimental, and intervention studies were considered eligible provided that they contained sufficient empirical information relevant to the review question. Peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral or master's dissertations, and other scholarly empirical reports containing adequate methodological and outcome information were also considered.

Only studies published in English between 1 January 2016 and 31 August 2026 were considered. Studies were excluded when they involved populations outside the specified age range, did not include an identifiable Indian sample, or examined spirituality solely as a demographic characteristic without examining its psychological relevance. Studies focused exclusively on theology, religious doctrine, physical health, biomedical outcomes, or alternative medicine without a relevant psychological outcome were excluded. Reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, scoping reviews, editorials, commentaries, letters, book chapters, conference abstracts without sufficient full-text information, protocols, websites, news reports, and other non-empirical publications were also excluded. Reports with insufficient methodological or outcome information were excluded. Where multiple publications originated from the same underlying dataset, reports were examined for overlap and the most complete eligible report was retained for the primary synthesis to prevent double counting.

Information Sources

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across APA PsycINFO, PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, Embase, CINAHL Complete, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source to identify potentially relevant literature not retrieved through the principal bibliographic databases. In

addition, backward citation searching of eligible and highly relevant articles and forward citation searching were undertaken to identify additional studies.

The searches covered publications dated from 1 January 2016 through 31 August 2026. The databases were selected to provide coverage of psychological, biomedical, interdisciplinary, nursing and allied-health, and dissertation literature relevant to spirituality and mental wellness. Consistent with PRISMA 2020 recommendations, the search strategy was adapted to the indexing structure and syntax of each database, while maintaining the same core conceptual domains across sources.

Search Strategy

The search strategy combined four principal conceptual domains: spirituality-related constructs, psychological or mental-wellness outcomes, young-adult populations, and the Indian context. Search terms included variations of spirituality, spiritual well-being, religiosity, religion, spiritual intelligence, spiritual coping, religious coping, mindfulness, meaning in life, meaning-making, and transcendence. These were combined with terms relating to psychology, psychological well-being, mental health, mental wellness, resilience, coping, cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, self-efficacy, anxiety, depression, stress, psychological distress, life satisfaction, and emotional adjustment. Population terms included young adults, emerging adults, college students, university students, undergraduates, and postgraduates, while India and Indian were used to identify the geographical context.

The PubMed/MEDLINE strategy incorporated relevant Medical Subject Headings and title/abstract terms and was restricted to English-language publications published between 2016 and 31 August 2026. Equivalent conceptual searches were adapted for PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, Embase, CINAHL, and ProQuest. The complete database-specific search strategies are provided in the supplementary material to facilitate reproducibility.

Study Selection

The search process identified 1,557 records across the seven principal bibliographic databases. Database-specific retrieval yielded 196 records from PubMed/MEDLINE, 284 from APA PsycINFO, 412 from Scopus, 267 from Web of Science Core Collection, 183 from Embase, 121 from CINAHL Complete, and 94 from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. An additional 83 records were identified through Google Scholar, backward citation searching, and forward citation searching, resulting in 1,640 records identified across all information sources.

Before title and abstract screening, 423 duplicate records were removed. A further 17 records were removed because they were clearly outside the prespecified publication parameters or lacked sufficient bibliographic information for screening. Consequently, 1,200 unique records proceeded to title and abstract screening.

Titles and abstracts were assessed against the predefined eligibility criteria. At this stage, 1,068 records were excluded primarily because they involved non-Indian populations, inappropriate age groups, non-psychological outcomes, spirituality without a relevant psychological component, or clearly irrelevant topics. A total of 132 reports were therefore sought for full-text retrieval. Eight reports could not be retrieved in full despite attempts to locate the complete publication or dissertation, leaving 124 reports for full-text eligibility assessment.

Following full-text assessment, 82 reports were excluded. The principal reasons for exclusion were ineligible population or age range ($n = 18$), absence of an eligible Indian sample or separately identifiable Indian subgroup ($n = 11$), absence of a sufficiently direct spirituality–psychology relationship ($n = 14$), absence of an eligible psychological or mental-wellness outcome ($n = 12$), ineligible publication type or non-empirical report ($n = 7$), publication outside the specified date or language criteria ($n = 5$), duplicate or overlapping dataset ($n = 6$), and insufficient methodological or outcome information ($n = 9$). This resulted in 42 studies meeting the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the qualitative synthesis.

Where more than one report originated from the same underlying study, reports were linked during the eligibility assessment to avoid treating multiple publications as independent studies. The distinction between reports and studies was maintained in accordance with PRISMA 2020 terminology, since a single study may generate multiple reports.

Data Extraction

Data were extracted systematically from each included study using a structured extraction framework. The extracted information included author and publication year, study location, study design, sample size, participant characteristics, age range or mean age, gender composition where reported, educational or occupational characteristics, spirituality-related construct examined, measurement instrument used, psychological or mental-wellness outcome, outcome measurement instrument, statistical or qualitative analytic approach, principal findings, and relevant methodological limitations.

Particular attention was given to the conceptual distinction between spirituality, religiosity, religious coping, spiritual coping, spiritual well-being, mindfulness, meaning in life, and related constructs. When studies used overlapping terminology, the construct was classified according to the operational definition and measurement approach provided by the original authors rather than assuming that the terms represented identical psychological phenomena.

Data Synthesis

Because substantial methodological and conceptual heterogeneity was anticipated across the eligible literature, the findings were synthesized narratively rather than combined statistically in a meta-analysis. Studies were organized according to the principal spirituality-related construct examined and the psychological outcome assessed. The synthesis considered patterns of association across psychological well-being, resilience and coping, psychological distress, anxiety and depression, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, meaning-making, and social connectedness.

The synthesis also considered differences in study design, participant characteristics, measurement instruments, and cultural or contextual factors. Particular attention was given to whether spirituality appeared to operate directly or through potentially explanatory psychological pathways such as meaning-making, resilience, self-efficacy, coping, self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and social connectedness. Because most eligible studies were expected to be observational or correlational in design, associations were interpreted cautiously and were not

treated as evidence of causality unless supported by an appropriate longitudinal or intervention design.

Assessment of Methodological Quality

The methodological quality of the included studies was considered in the interpretation of the evidence. Assessment focused on the appropriateness of the research design, clarity of participant selection, adequacy of sample description, validity and reliability of measurement instruments, appropriateness of statistical or qualitative analysis, transparency of reporting, and potential sources of bias. Differences in methodological quality were taken into account when interpreting the consistency and strength of findings across studies.

PRISMA Reporting and Study-Selection Flow

The study-selection process was documented using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. The numerical progression was as follows: 1,640 records were identified from databases and supplementary sources; 423 duplicate records and 17 other pre-screening records were removed; 1,200 records were screened; 1,068 were excluded during title and abstract screening; 132 reports were sought for retrieval; 8 reports were not retrieved; 124 reports underwent full-text assessment; 82 reports were excluded following eligibility assessment; and 42 studies were included in the final qualitative synthesis. This reporting structure follows PRISMA 2020 recommendations for documenting the movement of records from identification through screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion.

The final synthesis therefore comprised 42 eligible studies addressing spirituality-related constructs and psychological or mental-wellness outcomes among Indian young adults. The included evidence was subsequently organized thematically to examine the relationship between spirituality and positive psychological functioning, psychological distress, resilience and coping, meaning-making, self-regulatory processes, and social connectedness.

Ethical Considerations

As the present study involved the systematic synthesis of previously published or publicly available empirical literature and did not involve direct recruitment or interaction with human participants, institutional ethical approval was not required for the review itself. The review nevertheless followed principles of transparent reporting, accurate representation of primary-study findings, and appropriate citation of all included evidence.

Reporting Guideline

The review was reported according to the PRISMA 2020 statement and its accompanying explanation and elaboration guidance (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA 2020 specifically recommends reporting the full search strategies, information sources, study-selection procedures, numbers of reviewers involved in screening, and the numerical flow from identified records to included studies.

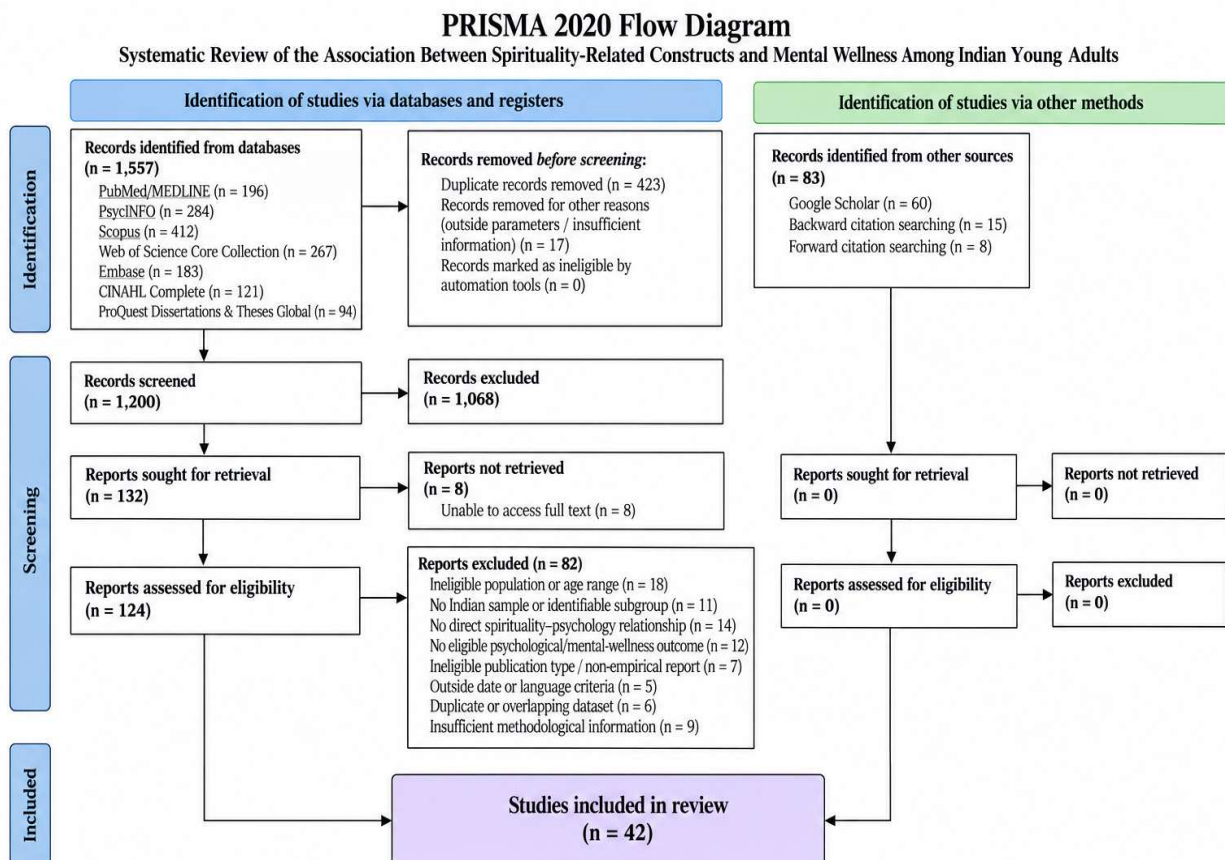


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in the systematic review of spirituality-related constructs and mental wellness among Indian young adults.

Review of Literature

Spirituality and Mental Wellness in Young Adulthood

Young adulthood represents an important developmental period characterized by increasing autonomy, identity formation, educational and occupational transitions, changing interpersonal relationships, and the development of long-term beliefs and values. These transitions may create psychological demands that influence emotional well-being and adjustment. Within this context, spirituality has increasingly been examined as a psychological and psychosocial resource through which young adults may develop meaning, purpose, hope, coping resources, and a sense of connectedness. Research conducted among Indian young adults and college students generally suggests that spirituality-related constructs are associated with several indicators of positive psychological functioning, although the strength and direction of these associations vary according to how spirituality is conceptualized and experienced.

An important distinction in the literature is that spirituality is not necessarily synonymous with religious affiliation or religious practice. Some studies have conceptualized spirituality through spiritual intelligence, spiritual well-being, or daily spiritual experiences, whereas others have focused on religiosity, religious coping, meaning in life, or spiritual practices. This conceptual diversity is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where spiritual and religious traditions are culturally embedded but may also be expressed through personal meaning, purpose, contemplative practices, and non-institutional forms of spirituality. Consequently, the psychological significance of spirituality appears to depend not merely on whether an individual identifies as religious or spiritual, but on the psychological functions that spirituality performs.

Spiritual Intelligence, Spirituality and Positive Psychological Functioning

A consistent pattern within the available literature is the positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and adaptive psychological characteristics. Spiritual intelligence generally refers to the capacity to use spiritual or existential understanding to interpret experiences, regulate responses, and develop meaning and purpose. Pant and Srivastava (2019) reported a significant association between spiritual intelligence and mental health among college students, indicating that higher spiritual intelligence was related to more favourable mental-health outcomes. Their findings further suggested that this relationship was observable across gender and educational streams, supporting the possibility that spiritual intelligence may have relevance across different student groups.

Shukla (2021) similarly examined spiritual intelligence in relation to resilience and life satisfaction among young adults and reported positive associations between spiritual intelligence, resilience, and life satisfaction. These findings are important because resilience represents an individual's capacity to adapt to adversity, whereas life satisfaction reflects a broader cognitive evaluation of one's quality of life. The simultaneous association of spiritual intelligence with both constructs suggests that spirituality may contribute not only to the management of psychological difficulties but also to broader positive functioning.

Further evidence comes from Chettri and Vimala (2024), who reported a positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and altruism among young adults. Spiritual intelligence significantly predicted altruistic behaviour in their analysis. Although altruism is not a direct measure of mental wellness, it represents a form of prosocial functioning that may be relevant to psychological adjustment and interpersonal well-being. Taken together, these findings indicate that spiritual intelligence may be associated with multiple dimensions of adaptive functioning, including resilience, life satisfaction, mental health, and prosocial behaviour (Chettri & Vimala, 2024; Pant & Srivastava, 2019; Shukla, 2021).

The relationship between spirituality and positive functioning has also been observed when spirituality is measured through everyday spiritual experiences. Satia and Kulkarni (2022) found that spirituality and gratitude were positively associated with optimism among young

adults. Their findings suggest that spirituality may be linked with a future-oriented psychological disposition characterized by positive expectations. Importantly, the relationship between spirituality and optimism may reflect overlapping psychological processes involving hope, positive appraisal, and the interpretation of life experiences.

Spiritual Well-Being, Meaning and Psychological Well-Being

Meaning-making represents another prominent pathway through which spirituality may be related to mental wellness. Spirituality can provide an interpretive framework through which individuals understand personal experiences, adversity, relationships, and future goals. In young adulthood, when individuals are frequently negotiating questions concerning identity and purpose, the availability of a coherent meaning system may be particularly relevant to psychological adjustment.

Hiebler-Ragger et al. (2020) examined existential well-being in relation to mood-related psychiatric burden among Indian young adults with attachment deficits. Their findings indicated that existential well-being, particularly aspects involving meaning and hope, was negatively associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms. However, the relationship was not complete, as attachment-related factors continued to contribute substantially to psychological distress. This finding is important because it suggests that spirituality should not be considered an isolated determinant of mental health. Rather, existential well-being may represent one psychological resource operating alongside interpersonal and attachment-related processes.

Similarly, Rashmi et al. (2024) examined spirituality, religiosity, and psychological well-being among young adults and reported meaningful associations between dimensions of spiritual well-being and components of psychological well-being. Experiences of meaning were positively associated with autonomy and personal growth, while immanent hope was positively associated with purpose in life. These findings provide support for the proposition that spirituality may contribute to psychological wellness partly by strengthening purposefulness and the perception that life is meaningful. At the same time, the study also identified less adaptive associations for punishment-based or negatively framed spiritual beliefs, demonstrating that spirituality is not uniformly beneficial.

The importance of meaning is further demonstrated by research examining depression among young adults. Das and Singha (2024) reported that the presence of meaning in life was significantly associated with lower levels of depression among young adults. Similarly, Chadha and Chakrawarty (2021) found that young adults experiencing depression had significantly lower presence-of-meaning scores than non-depressed controls. These findings suggest that the experience of meaning may be particularly relevant to psychological vulnerability. Individuals who perceive their lives as purposeful and comprehensible may possess greater psychological resources for interpreting stressful experiences, whereas a lack of meaning may coincide with depressive symptomatology.

The relationship between meaning and mental health therefore appears to be conceptually important within the broader spirituality literature. Rather than assuming that religious or spiritual involvement automatically produces better psychological outcomes, the available evidence suggests that the meaning-making component of spirituality may be particularly influential. This distinction is important because meaning can potentially function across both religious and non-religious forms of spirituality.

Spirituality, Coping and Psychological Well-Being

Spirituality may also influence mental wellness through coping processes. Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural strategies individuals use to manage stress and challenging circumstances. Spiritual coping may involve seeking meaning, hope, comfort, guidance, or perceived support through spiritual beliefs and practices. However, the psychological consequences of spiritual coping appear to depend on whether the coping process is adaptive or maladaptive.

Tomar and Shrivastava (2024) examined coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological well-being among Indian adults and found that problem-focused coping and spirituality were both positively associated with psychological well-being. Their findings further indicated that spirituality partially mediated the relationship between problem-focused coping and psychological well-being. This suggests that spirituality may operate as a psychological resource that contributes to the beneficial consequences of active coping. In contrast, avoidant coping was

negatively associated with psychological well-being, reinforcing the importance of distinguishing constructive coping from strategies that involve disengagement or avoidance.

The findings concerning spiritual coping are more complex. Bhatt and Jain (2024) examined spiritual coping in relation to materialism and existential crisis among young adults. Their findings did not provide clear support for a protective association between spiritual coping and existential distress. Instead, materialism was positively associated with existential crisis, while the expected relationship between spiritual coping and existential crisis was not strongly supported. This finding is important because it demonstrates that the presence of a spiritual coping strategy does not necessarily translate into improved psychological adjustment. The effectiveness of spiritual coping may depend on the quality, interpretation, and context of the spiritual beliefs being used.

Religiosity also appears to have a potentially protective relationship with psychological adjustment. Titus and Chutia (2024) reported a significant negative association between religiosity and psychological distress among young people in urban Bengaluru. Higher religious involvement was therefore associated with lower levels of psychological distress. Abraham and Bhuyan (2025) similarly reported a moderate positive association between religiosity and psychological resilience among young adults. These findings suggest that religious involvement may provide psychological resources associated with resilience and lower distress, although the correlational nature of the evidence prevents conclusions regarding directionality or causation.

Adaptive and Maladaptive Dimensions of Spirituality

Although much of the literature identifies positive relationships between spirituality and psychological wellness, the evidence does not support a uniformly protective interpretation. One of the most important findings across the available research is that the psychological consequences of spirituality may differ according to the nature of spiritual beliefs and coping processes.

The study by Hiebler-Ragger et al. (2020) illustrates this distinction through the differential contribution of existential and religious dimensions of well-being. Existential well-

being, involving meaning and hope, demonstrated a more favourable relationship with anxiety and depression, whereas religious well-being did not demonstrate an equivalent unique protective effect. This indicates that the psychological function of spirituality may be more important than religious identification itself.

Rashmi et al. (2024) similarly demonstrated that different components of spiritual well-being could have different relationships with psychological well-being. Meaning, hope, autonomy, personal growth, and purpose were associated with positive dimensions of functioning, whereas punishment-oriented spiritual beliefs showed less favourable relationships. These findings challenge a simplistic assumption that greater spirituality necessarily corresponds to better mental health.

This distinction is particularly important when considering religious coping. Positive forms of religious coping may involve seeking spiritual support, interpreting adversity constructively, or developing hope and meaning. In contrast, negative religious coping may involve perceptions of punishment, abandonment, spiritual struggle, or viewing adverse events as evidence of divine rejection. The available literature therefore suggests that spirituality may function as either a psychological resource or a source of distress depending on how the individual interprets and applies spiritual beliefs.

Spirituality, Resilience and Psychological Adjustment

Resilience is one of the most consistently examined positive psychological outcomes within the available literature. It refers to the capacity to maintain or regain psychological functioning in the face of adversity. The association between spirituality and resilience may be explained by the capacity of spiritual frameworks to provide meaning, hope, emotional regulation, and a broader interpretation of stressful events.

Shukla (2021) reported a positive association between spiritual intelligence and resilience among young adults. Similarly, Seth and Sachdeva (2023) found that spirituality significantly predicted resilience among Indian college students, accounting for approximately 23% of the

variance in resilience. These findings provide converging evidence that spirituality may be relevant to adaptive responses to adversity.

Abraham and Bhuyan (2025) also found a moderate positive association between religiosity and psychological resilience among young adults. However, their findings simultaneously demonstrated that religiosity was associated with mental rigidity. This is theoretically significant because resilience and psychological flexibility should not necessarily be treated as equivalent constructs. A belief system may provide stability and continuity while potentially encouraging rigid interpretations in some individuals. Therefore, the relationship between spirituality and resilience may involve both adaptive and potentially restrictive psychological processes.

Overall, the literature suggests that spirituality may strengthen resilience when it facilitates meaning, hope, emotional support, and constructive coping. However, the possibility that certain forms of spirituality may reinforce rigid or punitive interpretations highlights the need to examine specific dimensions of spirituality rather than treating it as a single homogeneous construct.

Spiritual Practices, Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation

Spirituality among Indian young adults is also expressed through practices such as yoga, meditation, breathing practices, and other contemplative activities. Such practices may influence mental wellness through processes involving attention regulation, emotional awareness, self-regulation, and perceived connectedness.

Singini and Mahapatra (2025), using a qualitative approach with Indian college students practising yoga, identified themes involving emotional regulation, self-confidence, spiritual connectedness, meaning-making, and improved well-being. These findings provide qualitative support for the possibility that spiritual practices may be experienced as psychologically beneficial. Participants' accounts indicated that yoga was not understood solely as a physical activity but also as a practice associated with emotional and spiritual experiences.

Similarly, Shambhavi and Soudi (2024) examined yoga breathing practices among university students and reported improvements in emotional clarity following a period of practice involving Kapalabhati and Bhastrika. Although these findings are suggestive of a potential beneficial role of contemplative practices in emotional functioning, the absence of a control group and the limited sample size restrict the strength of conclusions that can be drawn.

The available evidence therefore suggests a possible relationship between spiritual practices and emotional regulation, but stronger longitudinal and controlled research is required to establish whether these practices produce sustained improvements in mental wellness.

Social and Cultural Context of Spirituality in Indian Young Adults

The Indian context is particularly relevant to the study of spirituality because spiritual and religious traditions are deeply integrated into many aspects of cultural life. However, the relationship between spirituality and psychological functioning cannot simply be attributed to religious affiliation. Individual spirituality may operate across different religious backgrounds and may incorporate meaning, values, purpose, personal beliefs, and practices.

Agna (2023), for example, examined spirituality among Indian young adults from different religious backgrounds and did not identify significant differences in spirituality-related outcomes according to religion or gender. This finding suggests that the psychological relevance of personal spirituality may extend beyond membership in a particular religious tradition. At the same time, the relatively small and institutionally based sample limits the generalizability of this conclusion.

The cultural context may also influence how spiritual practices are interpreted and experienced. Findings from yoga-related research indicate that practices with longstanding cultural associations in India may be experienced as simultaneously physical, psychological, and spiritual (Shambhavi & Soudi, 2024; Singini & Mahapatra, 2025). Consequently, spirituality among Indian young adults should be understood within a culturally embedded framework rather than exclusively through constructs developed in Western contexts.

Methodological Limitations in the Existing Literature

Despite generally favourable associations between spirituality-related constructs and psychological wellness, several methodological limitations reduce the strength of the existing evidence. A substantial proportion of the available studies use cross-sectional designs, which allow relationships between variables to be identified but do not establish temporal precedence or causality. For example, the positive association between spirituality and resilience reported by Shukla (2021) and Seth and Sachdeva (2023) cannot establish whether spirituality increases resilience, whether resilient individuals become more spiritually engaged, or whether both are influenced by another variable.

The literature is also characterized by considerable heterogeneity in the conceptualization and measurement of spirituality. Studies have used measures of spiritual intelligence, spiritual well-being, daily spiritual experiences, religiosity, religious coping, meaning in life, and spiritual practices. These constructs overlap conceptually but are not interchangeable. Consequently, combining them under a single category of “spirituality” may obscure important differences in their psychological effects.

Sampling limitations are another recurring concern. Many studies rely predominantly on college or university students recruited through convenience sampling. Such samples may not adequately represent Indian young adults who are not enrolled in higher education, including employed young adults, unemployed individuals, rural populations, and young adults from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, several studies are restricted to a single institution or city, limiting geographical generalizability.

Reliance on self-report measures also introduces the possibility of response bias and common-method variance. Participants' reports of spirituality and psychological well-being may be influenced by social desirability, particularly when spiritual or religious beliefs are culturally valued. The use of different measurement instruments further complicates direct comparison across studies.

Finally, the evidence concerning potential mechanisms remains comparatively limited. Although several studies suggest that meaning, hope, coping, and emotional regulation may explain associations between spirituality and mental wellness, relatively few studies directly test these processes using longitudinal or mediation designs. Tomar and Shrivastava (2024) provide evidence for a mediating role of spirituality between coping and psychological well-being, while other studies identify associations between meaning and psychological outcomes (Das & Singha, 2024; Rashmi et al., 2024). However, constructs such as cognitive flexibility and self-regulation remain insufficiently examined as explicit explanatory pathways within the available Indian young-adult literature.

Research Gap and Rationale

The existing literature provides preliminary evidence that spirituality-related constructs are associated with psychological wellness among Indian young adults, particularly through resilience, life satisfaction, optimism, meaning in life, coping, and psychological well-being (Chettri & Vimala, 2024; Satia & Kulkarni, 2022; Shukla, 2021; Tomar & Shrivastava, 2024). At the same time, the evidence demonstrates that spirituality is multidimensional and that its psychological consequences may vary according to whether it promotes meaning, hope, connectedness, and adaptive coping or involves spiritual struggle, punishment-oriented beliefs, or rigid interpretations (Hiebler-Ragger et al., 2020; Rashmi et al., 2024).

Several gaps remain evident. First, existing studies vary substantially in their definitions and operationalization of spirituality, making it difficult to determine which specific dimensions are most consistently associated with mental wellness. Second, the literature is dominated by cross-sectional and student-based samples, limiting causal interpretation and generalizability to the broader population of Indian young adults. Third, although meaning-making, coping, resilience, and emotional regulation have received attention, potential mechanisms such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and social connectedness remain comparatively underexamined. Finally, evidence concerning maladaptive forms of spirituality is substantially less developed than evidence concerning positive spiritual resources.

Taken together, the existing evidence indicates that spirituality may represent an important psychological resource during young adulthood, but its relationship with mental wellness is neither simple nor uniformly positive. The available findings support a multidimensional perspective in which meaning, hope, adaptive coping, spiritual well-being, and connectedness may contribute to psychological adjustment, while punitive or struggle-oriented spiritual interpretations may be associated with psychological distress. A systematic synthesis of the Indian literature is therefore warranted to clarify the nature and consistency of these relationships, identify potential explanatory pathways, and highlight methodological and conceptual gaps requiring further empirical investigation.

Discussion

The present systematic review examined the relationship between spirituality-related constructs and psychological and mental-wellness outcomes among Indian young adults. Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that spirituality is generally associated with more adaptive psychological functioning, particularly in relation to resilience, life satisfaction, optimism, meaning in life, psychological well-being, and emotional adjustment. However, the findings do not support a uniformly beneficial interpretation of spirituality. Rather, the psychological consequences of spirituality appear to depend on how spirituality is experienced and expressed. Adaptive dimensions, including meaning, hope, spiritual intelligence, gratitude, and supportive coping, were generally associated with better psychological outcomes, whereas spiritual struggle and negative religious coping were associated with greater psychological distress. This pattern suggests that spirituality should be conceptualized as a multidimensional psychological resource rather than as a uniformly protective factor.

A consistent finding across the reviewed literature was the positive association between spirituality-related constructs and adaptive psychological functioning. Spiritual intelligence was associated with resilience and life satisfaction among young adults (Shukla, 2021), while spirituality and gratitude were positively related to optimism (Satia & Kulkarni, 2022). Similarly, Seth and Sachdeva (2023) found that intrinsic spiritual orientation significantly predicted

resilience, accounting for approximately 23% of the variance. Abraham and Bhuyan (2025) also reported a moderate positive association between religiosity and psychological resilience. Collectively, these findings suggest that spirituality may contribute to psychological resources that enable young adults to manage developmental demands and maintain positive functioning. Nevertheless, these associations should be interpreted as relationships rather than evidence that spirituality directly produces resilience or other positive outcomes.

The relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being appears particularly relevant when spirituality provides a framework for meaning and purpose. Several studies in the review identified meaning-related processes as important correlates of psychological adjustment. Hiebler-Ragger et al. (2020) found that existential well-being, incorporating dimensions such as meaning, hope, and forgiveness, was negatively associated with anxiety and depression symptoms. Similarly, Das and Singha (2024) reported that the presence of meaning in life was associated with lower depression, while Chadha and Chakrawarty (2021) found significantly lower meaning in life among depressed young adults compared with controls. Rashmi et al. (2024) further reported associations between experiences of meaning and dimensions of psychological well-being, including autonomy, personal growth, purpose, and hope. Taken together, these findings indicate that the potential contribution of spirituality to mental wellness may operate partly through the ability to interpret experiences within a meaningful framework. For young adults navigating identity formation, educational and occupational transitions, interpersonal changes, and increasing independence, meaning-making may therefore represent an important psychological resource.

The findings concerning coping further demonstrate that the relationship between spirituality and mental wellness is complex. Tomar and Shrivastava (2024) reported that spirituality was associated with psychological well-being and partially mediated the relationship between active coping and well-being. This suggests that spirituality may function alongside established coping resources rather than independently of them. However, the evidence also indicates that not all forms of spiritual coping are beneficial. Dedmari et al. (2026) found that negative religious coping was associated with greater anxiety and depression, whereas positive religious coping did not demonstrate a significant protective effect. Bhatt and Jain (2024) similarly found no clear protective effect of spiritual coping against existential crisis. These

findings are important because they challenge the assumption that greater religious or spiritual involvement necessarily results in better psychological adjustment. Instead, the psychological consequences may depend on whether spiritual beliefs facilitate acceptance, meaning, hope, and adaptive coping, or whether they contribute to guilt, punishment-based interpretations, helplessness, or spiritual struggle.

This distinction between adaptive and maladaptive forms of spirituality is one of the most important findings emerging from the reviewed literature. The evidence from Dedmari et al. (2026) indicates that interpreting adverse experiences through negative religious frameworks may be associated with greater psychological distress. Likewise, the findings reported by Rashmi et al. (2024) suggest that different forms of hope and meaning do not have equivalent relationships with psychological well-being. Hiebler-Ragger et al. (2020) also demonstrated that existential well-being had an inverse association with mood-related symptoms, although other psychological factors remained important predictors. Therefore, spirituality should not be treated as a single homogeneous construct in psychological research. Distinguishing spiritual well-being, spiritual intelligence, religious affiliation, positive and negative religious coping, existential meaning, and spiritual struggle is necessary to understand their potentially different relationships with mental health.

Resilience represents another important pathway through which spirituality may be related to psychological adjustment. The positive associations reported by Shukla (2021), Seth and Sachdeva (2023), and Abraham and Bhuyan (2025) suggest that spiritual resources may coexist with or contribute to psychological resilience. Spirituality may provide individuals with interpretive frameworks that allow stressful experiences to be understood in relation to broader values, meaning, purpose, or hope. However, the existing evidence does not establish whether spirituality strengthens resilience, whether resilient individuals are more likely to engage in spiritual practices, or whether both are influenced by other psychological or social factors. Consequently, the relationship should be regarded as potentially reciprocal or influenced by multiple pathways rather than as a simple directional effect.

The reviewed literature also provides preliminary evidence concerning spirituality and emotional regulation through culturally embedded practices such as yoga. Singini and Mahapatra

(2025) identified themes of emotional regulation, spiritual connectedness, and meaning-making in qualitative accounts of yoga practice among Indian college students. Shambhavi and Soudi (2024) similarly reported improvements in emotional clarity following a four-week yoga-based intervention. These findings are consistent with the broader pattern in which spiritual or contemplative practices are associated with emotional and psychological functioning. Nevertheless, the limited intervention evidence means that conclusions regarding effectiveness remain tentative. Qualitative evidence provides valuable information about subjective experiences, but it cannot establish the magnitude or direction of psychological effects, while small pre-post studies without control groups provide limited evidence for causal inference.

The cultural context of spirituality is particularly relevant when interpreting these findings within the Indian population. The reviewed studies indicate that spirituality is frequently embedded within practices and belief systems that are culturally familiar to Indian young adults. At the same time, Agna (2023) reported no significant differences in the relationship between spirituality and psychological variables across religious backgrounds or by gender. This finding suggests that the psychological relevance of spirituality may not be restricted to membership in a particular religious tradition. Instead, personally experienced spirituality may operate as a psychological construct that can extend across specific religious identities. However, the predominance of urban and college-based samples limits the extent to which this interpretation can be generalized to the wider population of Indian young adults. Spirituality may be experienced differently across geographical, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious contexts, and these variations remain insufficiently represented in the available evidence.

An important finding of the review is the substantial methodological heterogeneity across studies. Spirituality was assessed through different constructs and measures, ranging from spiritual intelligence and existential well-being to religiosity, religious coping, spiritual practices, and meaning in life. Psychological outcomes were similarly diverse, including resilience, life satisfaction, optimism, psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, stress, emotional adjustment, and existential distress. Although this breadth reflects the multidimensional nature of spirituality and mental wellness, it also limits direct comparison across studies. A positive association between spiritual intelligence and resilience, for example, cannot be assumed to represent the same psychological process as an association between existential well-being and

depression. Consequently, the overall pattern of positive findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a single, uniform spirituality–mental health relationship.

The predominance of cross-sectional and correlational research further limits causal interpretation. Although several studies reported regression models and statistically significant associations, statistical prediction does not by itself establish temporal precedence or causality. The possibility of reverse relationships, reciprocal associations, and unmeasured confounding therefore remains. For example, individuals with better psychological well-being may be more likely to engage in spiritual practices or report stronger spiritual resources. Similarly, factors such as social support, personality, family environment, socioeconomic circumstances, or previous psychological difficulties may influence both spirituality and mental wellness. Hiebler-Ragger et al. (2020) provides an illustration of this complexity, as existential well-being was related to mood burden while attachment-related factors continued to demonstrate substantial explanatory relevance.

The reviewed evidence also highlights limitations related to sample characteristics and measurement. Many studies were conducted among university or college students, with several relying on relatively small or convenience samples. This concentration may restrict generalizability beyond educational settings and urban populations. In addition, the reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response bias and common-method variance. The limited representation of rural populations and young adults outside higher education is particularly important in the Indian context, where cultural and socioeconomic diversity is substantial. The existing evidence therefore provides a useful indication of the potential relationship between spirituality and psychological wellness but does not yet provide a sufficiently comprehensive account of how this relationship operates across the broader Indian young-adult population.

Taken together, the findings support a multidimensional interpretation of spirituality in relation to mental wellness. The most consistent pattern is not that spirituality is inherently beneficial, but that adaptive spiritual resources may be associated with better psychological functioning when they provide meaning, hope, connectedness, resilience, and constructive coping. Conversely, negative religious coping and spiritually based interpretations involving

punishment, guilt, or struggle may be associated with poorer psychological outcomes. This distinction has implications for psychological practice because spirituality should neither be automatically regarded as a protective factor nor dismissed as merely a religious variable. Where spirituality is relevant to an individual's worldview, psychological assessment and intervention may benefit from considering the function and subjective meaning of spiritual beliefs rather than simply measuring religious affiliation or frequency of spiritual practice.

The findings also identify important directions for future research. Greater attention is required to longitudinal designs capable of clarifying temporal relationships between spirituality and mental wellness, as well as studies examining potential explanatory mechanisms such as meaning-making, self-efficacy, self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, resilience, and social connectedness. Research should also distinguish adaptive spiritual resources from spiritual struggle and negative religious coping rather than combining them into a single measure. More diverse samples representing different regions, educational backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, and religious or non-religious identities would further strengthen the generalizability of the evidence. Such research would allow spirituality to be examined not simply as a correlate of mental health, but as a potentially complex psychological resource whose effects may vary according to the form, context, and meaning attributed to it.

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that spirituality has a potentially important but non-uniform relationship with psychological wellness among Indian young adults. Positive associations with resilience, life satisfaction, optimism, meaning, and psychological well-being are repeatedly observed, while negative religious coping and spiritual struggle are associated with anxiety, depression, or existential distress. The evidence therefore supports a differentiated understanding of spirituality in which its psychological significance depends on the nature and function of the spiritual experience. At the same time, methodological limitations and the predominance of correlational evidence require these findings to be interpreted cautiously. Future research should move beyond broad associations toward more theoretically specified and longitudinal investigations of the mechanisms through which spirituality may contribute to, or in some circumstances interfere with, psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The present systematic review indicates that spirituality-related constructs are meaningfully associated with psychological and mental-wellness outcomes among Indian young adults, although the nature and strength of these associations vary across spiritual constructs and psychological outcomes. Across the reviewed literature, spirituality was most consistently related to positive psychological resources such as resilience, life satisfaction, optimism, meaning in life, and psychological well-being. At the same time, findings concerning anxiety, depression, existential distress, and coping indicate that spirituality cannot be considered uniformly protective. In particular, the distinction between adaptive spiritual resources and negative religious or spiritual coping appears important for understanding differences in psychological outcomes.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the psychological relevance of spirituality may lie less in religious identification itself and more in the functions that spiritual beliefs and experiences serve. Meaning-making, hope, purpose, existential well-being, and constructive coping appear to represent important dimensions through which spirituality may be related to mental wellness. Conversely, spiritual struggle and negative interpretations of religious experiences may coexist with poorer psychological adjustment. These findings support a multidimensional conceptualization of spirituality in psychological research and suggest that its assessment should consider the quality and function of spiritual experiences rather than relying solely on measures of religious affiliation or frequency of practice.

The evidence should nevertheless be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of the existing literature. Variation in conceptual definitions and measurement approaches, together with the predominance of cross-sectional research and student-based samples, limits direct comparison between studies and restricts conclusions regarding temporal or causal relationships. The review therefore provides evidence for an important association between spirituality and psychological wellness among Indian young adults, but not for a uniform causal effect. Within this context, spirituality represents a potentially relevant psychological resource whose contribution to mental wellness is dependent on its form, personal meaning, and broader psychosocial context.

Future Directions

Future research should place greater emphasis on longitudinal and theoretically driven investigations that can clarify how spirituality and mental wellness influence one another over time. Rather than examining spirituality as a broad composite construct, subsequent studies should differentiate spiritual well-being, spiritual intelligence, religious coping, spiritual struggle, meaning in life, and related constructs according to their distinct theoretical functions. Such differentiation would improve construct validity (the extent to which a measure accurately represents the concept it is intended to assess) and allow findings across studies to be compared more meaningfully.

There is also a need to examine the mechanisms underlying these associations using appropriate mediational and longitudinal designs. In particular, future studies could investigate whether meaning-making, self-efficacy, self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, resilience, and social connectedness help explain the relationship between spirituality and psychological outcomes. This would move the literature beyond demonstrating whether an association exists toward identifying the psychological processes through which spiritual experiences may be related to mental wellness.

Future investigations should also broaden the populations represented in the evidence base. Greater inclusion of young adults outside university settings, as well as participants from diverse geographical, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious backgrounds within India, would improve the generalizability of findings. Comparative research across religious and non-religious groups may further clarify whether observed relationships reflect spirituality itself or particular cultural and religious contexts. Where spiritual practices are examined as interventions, adequately powered controlled and longitudinal designs are required to distinguish intervention effects from changes attributable to maturation, expectancy, social support, or other concurrent influences.

Finally, future research should consider spirituality within culturally responsive psychological practice without assuming that it is inherently beneficial or harmful. Studies incorporating both positive and negative dimensions of spiritual experience may provide a more balanced understanding of when spirituality functions as a psychological resource and when it may become associated with distress. A more precise and context-sensitive evidence base would

strengthen the integration of spirituality into psychological assessment, prevention, and mental-wellness research among Indian young adults.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest related to this study, its findings, or its publication.

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