

Impact of Self-Enhancement on Spiritually Non-Oriented Young Adults

Sangeeta Trama Shilpa Modi***

Abstract

[Spirituality is an awareness of life which enables us to think about life, who we are and where we come from (Mc Ewan, 2004). Spirituality is the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, and the contributions they are making (Vaill, 1996). Spiritual beliefs, commitments and practices appear to be related to such positive outcomes such as physical, emotional and psychological well-being, positive interpersonal functioning, and enhanced quality of life (Emmons, 2000). No matter how life is right now, there is a part of the self who has all the knowledge and resources to change it. Self-enhancement is thought to be the foremost motive in the perpetual search for self-knowledge (Sedikides, 1993). To clear all the blockages which stop one from experiencing one's true self, to explore the inner being, to access one's highest potential, to learn more about oneself, and to know practical tools and techniques to change one's life, is self-enhancement.

While higher education focuses with new intensity on test scores, grades, persistence, and degrees, it has increasingly come to neglect students' "inner" development — the need of values and beliefs, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding. The present study attempted to develop spiritual orientation in young adults with the help of self-enhancement training. In this study, 70 participants were identified out of a group of 200 participants who scored less on spiritual orientation. These young adults were female students studying in various colleges/universities in and around Patiala. Thereafter, self-enhancement training was rendered to the participants. An attempt was made to explore differences in young adults in areas of inner self-enhancement (viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and mindfulness). t-test (for related samples) was applied to analyze the results. The paper highlights the role of adequate spiritual orientation in individuals right from an early age so that they can make the best use of their potential, and can be an asset for themselves, their families as well as the society.]

Keyword: *self-enhancement, spirituality, positive emotions, emotional regulation.*

About Authors: * Dr. Sangeeta Trama (Professor), Dept. of Psychology, Punjabi University, Patiala.

** Shilpa Modi (Ph.D Research Scholar), Dept. of Psychology, Punjabi University, Patiala.

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is an awareness of life which enables us to think about life, who we are and where we come from (Mc Ewan, 2004). Spirituality is characterized by the experience of the individual whereas, religion is characterized as formal, organized, associated with rituals and

beliefs (Berger, 1997). Spirituality can be said to be the "supporting mechanism" for the cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning domains. According to Carroll (2001), spirituality is a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation that strives for inspirations, reverence, awe, meaning and purpose, even in

those who do not believe in any God. The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the infinite, and comes into focus when the person faces emotional stress, physical illness, or death. In general, spirituality is viewed as beliefs, practices, and experiences that shape and create a way of knowing and living that may or may not be informed by religious rituals, traditions, and doctrine. A person often inherits religion but makes the conscious choice to practice spirituality by seeking answers about the self, universe, and meaning of life. Modern spirituality is centered on the "deepest values and meanings by which people live. It embraces the idea of an ultimate or an alleged immaterial reality (Black, 2010). It envisions an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being. Personal well-being, both, physical and psychological, is an important aspect of spirituality. Spirituality develops inner peace, and forms a foundation for happiness. Ellison and Fan (2008) assert that spirituality causes a wide array of positive health outcomes, including morale, happiness, and life satisfaction. Spiritual experiences lead to psychological well-being - including life satisfaction, affect, feelings of meaning, and life purpose (Koenig and Larson 2001). Other types of experiences of psychological well-being that could be derived from spiritual experiences include feelings of personal growth and self-acceptance.

In 2003, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA revealed that students who are high on spirituality, evidence increased rate of qualities like "helping others who are in difficulty" (63%) and "reducing pain and suffering in the world" (55%) as "essential" or "very important" goals in life. Not only do many students hold these ideals, they act on them: the vast majority (82%) performed volunteer work

while in high school and more than two-thirds (70%) reported that they are actively engaged in "trying to change things that are unfair in the world." Thus, researchers have shown that people having adequate spiritual orientation experience positive emotions, are goal-oriented, and have clear perceptions.

Self-enhancement is thought to be the foremost motive in the perpetual search for self-knowledge (Sedikides, 1993). To clear all the blockages which stop one from experiencing one's true self, to explore the inner being, to access one's highest potential, to learn more about oneself, and to know practical tools and techniques to change one's life, is self-enhancement. People self-enhance in two primary ways. The first way we self-enhance is to talk up the good things while leaving out the bad. The other way to self-enhance is to talk up the negatives associated with other people. It includes many aspects such as self-esteem, emotions, and positive thought process.

Young adulthood is a period in which the foundation for future education, job, major life roles, and working toward long-term productive goals are established. Similarly, it is an important period for the development of preventive interventions which are designed to prevent the development of more serious psychopathology in adulthood. This stage plays a significant role in the study of developmental psychopathology because after this maturational interval, it is difficult to change some behavioral and emotional patterns. This period is especially significant for the occurrence or intensification of different forms of behavioral and emotional disorders, such as many internalizing problems (depression, bipolar illness, and eating disorders), externalizing problems (delinquency, violence), addictive disorders (alcohol abuse, drug abuse and dependency) and suicide. During the last half of the 20th century,

rates of psychopathology among young adults have genuinely increased. Spirituality is applied to help us reach more thoroughly towards the very developed people, the potential of who we have to be. Each of us forms an identity through a combination of experience and vision, as well as the tension between what we really do and the larger better things which we may do. On the level of pure ego, we are selfish, "I" centered, materially ambitious, and so on. Yet, we surely have transpersonal visions of goodness, beauty, perfection, generosity, sacrifice, and so on. And eventually, we may apply our spirituality to deal with our problems. To come into full possession of our spiritual intelligence, sometimes, we have to face hell, to have known the possibility of despair, pain, deep suffering, loss, and to have made our peace with these (Zohar and Marshall, 2000).

According to Parks (2000), individuals between the ages of 17 and 30 develop in their meaning-making abilities and become more aware of their conception of reality. Cook and Oltjenbruns (1982) also observed evidence of significant development in existential skills during high school. This development continues throughout adulthood as abilities deepen and contribute to the awareness of a transcendent self (Helminiak, 1987). In later adulthood, abilities peak in many individuals as death approaches. The idea of youth at risk has become central to a range of discourses, academic and professional. In the regional and global contexts of significant social, economic and technical change, narratives of risk and uncertainty are widespread (Beck et al., 1994; Beck, 1999; Giddens, 1999).

The youth are generally spiritually disconnected. The disconnect occurs between the knowledge that they are receiving and that knowledge translating into meaningful actions, and positive, healthy human and spiritual

development. Youth researchers across the globe acknowledge the war of values taking place inside the hearts and minds of young people. Young adults are in desperate need of the skills, knowledge and competencies to moderate the worldliness of our age with the understanding that can only come from wisdom and spiritual orientation. Due to lack of meaning in life, careless attitude and changing values, youth are facing problems such as being teenage parents, young homeless, addicts, mental health problems, troublesome rather than troubled, offending or simply being offensive. There is a need to prevent young people from taking or being exposed to risk, from becoming socially excluded, deviant, unhealthy or unproductive. Thus, young adults are in need of spiritual re-orientation which means a change in set of attitudes and beliefs that is fresh orientation. Re-orientation is also the act of changing direction in which one is oriented; a turnaround, a reversal or a change of course. A change from idleness to productive work, from despair to hope; a change from fear of youth to love of our youth, change from lack of integrity is required to overflowing flow of integrity because our youth are our future and must be sustained and directed through moral instructions or enlightenment which can be spiritually uplifting.

The present research makes an attempt to address this question, i.e., to design training program to increase spiritual orientation among young adults. The training program is based on self-enhancement training:

Inner self-enhancement- No matter how life is right now, there is a part of self who has all the knowledge and resources to change it. One can access it to shift one's life into the most beautiful and uplifting experience. To clear all the blockages which stop one from experiencing one's true self, to explore the inner being, to access one's highest potential, to learn more

about oneself and to know practical tools and techniques to change one's life, this training program focus on following inner self enhancement aspects: (1) self-acceptance; (2) positive emotions; (3) emotion regulation; and (4) mindfulness.

1. Self-acceptance

We have everything we need within us to make us happy and yet, we often fail to see it. Self-acceptance is part of the journey. It is a large part of being able to discover and then being able to move forward towards fulfilling one's life purpose. If one is not able to truly accept oneself, it will indeed be a challenge to face all that is before one. To facilitate one's spiritual development, one should dedicate 10 to 20 minutes per day to inward exploration. This inward exploration can be done through various spiritual disciplines, including prayer, meditation or journaling. Learning self-acceptance is one of the most important steps to the connection with spirit. Connecting with one's spirit - the greater part of oneself, helps to eliminate sabotage patterns, illuminate relationships, stimulate creative potential and assists through the grace of self-acceptance to find joy, peace, harmony, and a sense of purpose in life.

2. Positive emotions

Our thoughts create the vibrational quality of our reality, as our outer reality is more than anything else, the reflection of our inner self. Our thinking acts like a magnet, attracting to us the vibrations we dwell upon. Spiritual focus is to monitor your thoughts and introduce new patterns of positive and uplifting thinking, and appreciation for life. Positive mental attitude (PMA) is the philosophy that having an optimistic disposition in every situation in one's life attracts positive changes and increases achievement. It employs a state of mind that continues to seek, find and execute ways to win,

or find a desirable outcome, regardless of the circumstances. It opposes negativity, defeatism and hopelessness and thus, helps to develop spiritual intelligence.

3. Emotion regulation

The capacity to control emotion is important for human adaptation. The two most common circumstances in which people regulate their emotions are (1) when their emotions impede goal achievement and (2) when their emotions do not match with the group's emotional display rules. Emotional regulation (ER) refers to the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience or express these emotions (Gross, 1998). Emotional regulation includes a wide range of automatic and controlled physiological, behavioral, and cognitive processes. Efficient emotional regulation is indeed crucial for mental health (Gross, 1998). This is surprising as there are four forms of emotional regulation: down-regulation of negative emotions, down-regulation of positive emotions, up-regulation of negative emotions, and up-regulation of positive emotions (Gross, 2007). Emotional regulation strategies leads to state affectivity, mental and physical health, propensity to experience various discrete emotions, tendency to experience worry, social support, job satisfaction and performance.

4. Mindfulness

The term "mindfulness" has been used to refer to a psychological state of awareness, a practice that promotes this awareness, a mode of processing information, and a characterological trait (Brown et al., 2003). The word mindfulness originally comes from the Pali word sati, which means having awareness, attention, and remembering (Bodhi, 2000). Mindfulness can simply be defined as "moment-by-moment

awareness” (Germer et al., 2005) or as “a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Martin, 1997). The concept of mindfulness revolves around certain psychological states: (1) openness to novelty; (2) alertness to distinction; (3) sensitivity to different contexts; (4) implicit, not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives; and (5) orientation in the present. It is embedded in the following: Become aware of one’s environment. Be aware of oneself within one’s environment. Enjoy the colors and smells of nature around. Enjoy the feel of rain and the wind blowing on face. It will put you in a revitalizing, fresh state of awareness.

Thus, the purpose of the study was to provide students with more opportunities to connect with their inner selves with the help of self-enhancement training. This could help in describing skills and activities that can contribute to enhance spiritual awareness and growth, to develop a balanced self-determined person, solving problems creatively in everyday life. Youth researchers across the globe acknowledge the war of values taking place inside the hearts and minds of young people. Youth are in desperate need of the skills, knowledge and competencies to moderate the worldliness of our age with the understanding that can only come from the wisdom and spiritual intelligence (Abdul Lateef, 2009).

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were framed for the present study:

1. To examine the effect of inner self-enhancement training on spiritual orientation of young adults.
2. To compare the pre- and post-intervention scores of the participants in

various domains of inner self-enhancement, viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and mindfulness.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of review of literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated in the present investigation:

1. Post-intervention scores of participants on spiritual orientation would be higher than their pre-intervention scores.
2. Post-intervention scores of participants on diverse aspects of inner self-enhancement (viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and mindfulness) would be higher than their pre-intervention scores.

METHOD

SAMPLE

Young adult females from middle to upper middle socio-economic status families were included in the study. The sample comprised 70 (college and university female students in the age range 18-25 years) young adult females who would be screened (from around 200 young adults) for spiritual orientation (with those who scored low on spiritual orientation being taken in the study). Thereafter, their consent will be taken to participate in this self-enhancement training program.

TOOLS

1. Spiritual Experience Index - Revised (Genia, 1997): It contains a total of 23 questions which are divided into two separate sub-scales. One of the sub-scales, “spiritual support” (SS), contains 13 questions and, during

- psychometric testing, has been found to be related to formal religious attendance (Reinert & Bloomingdale, 2000). Participants are asked about different aspects of spiritual support, and how much they agree or disagree with each statement on a scale of one to six, one being “strongly disagree” and six being “strongly agree.” The remaining 10 questions are on “spiritual openness” (SO). Scoring was kept continuous. The author of the scale states that, based on the first round of testing, “the analysis provided preliminary evidence for the internal consistency and construct validity for SS and SO” (Genia, 1997).
2. Self-acceptance Scale (Berger, 1952): It is a widely used scale composed of 64 items (36 self-acceptance and 28 acceptance of others), self-acceptance and acceptance of others were operationalized on 16 behavioral dimensions. The scale shows good reliability (0.75–0.89) for self-acceptance and for other acceptance (0.78–0.88), and initial validity based on expected correlations between the self and other item sets (0.36–0.69 across samples) and expected correlations with free writing tasks rated for degree of acceptance (0.78–0.90). It includes both, self and other scales, which may be used alone or in combination. In this program, only self-acceptance scores were calculated.
 3. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988): This is a 20-item self-report mood scale measuring positive affect and negative affect. The positive scale includes 10 adjectives describing positive moods (interested, excited, strong, enthusiastic, proud, alert, inspired, determined, attentive and active). The negative scale includes 10 adjectives describing negative moods (distressed, upset, guilty, scared, hostile, irritable, ashamed, nervous, jittery and afraid). Subjects respond to a five-point scale, indicating the extent the adjective describes their feelings, from “very slightly or not at all” to “extremely” (Frost et al., 1993; Watson et al., 1988). This measure has been shown to be “a reliable, valid, and efficient means for measuring positive and negative affect” (Watson et al., 1988, p. 1069).
 4. Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004): The DERS measures several elements of emotion regulation, including awareness, understanding, and acceptance of emotions as well as ability to act in desired ways regardless of emotional state and access to emotion regulation strategies. Gratz and Roemer (2004) reported internal consistency of 0.93, test-retest reliability of 0.88 during a 4- to 8-week interval, and a clear factor structure and predicted significant correlations with several criterion variables, including experiential avoidance and self-harm. Higher scores on the DERS indicate greater difficulties in emotion regulation.
 5. Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer, 2006): The FFMQ is a 39-item questionnaire that measures five facets of mindfulness: observe (8 items), describe (8 items), act aware (8 items), non-judge (8 items) and non-react (7 items). Participants were asked to rate the degree to which several

statements were true for them. Items were scored on a five-point likert scale ranging from 1 (never or very rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true). Facet scores were computed by summing the scores on the individual items. Facet scores range from 8 to 40 (except for the nonreact facet which ranges from 7 to 35), with higher scores indicating more mindfulness. . The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) has been developed as a reliable and valid comprehensive instrument for assessing different aspects of mindfulness in community and student samples.

PROCEDURE

Scores on spiritual orientation were procured for around 200 female young adults. Out of these participants, those scoring low (mean – 0.5 SD) on spiritual orientation were taken in the present investigation (N=70). Their pre-intervention scores on diverse measures of inner self-enhancement (viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and

mindfulness) were procured. Thereafter, self-enhancement training was rendered. For this research, the researcher had designed a 4-weeks training program. Every week, two sessions focused on each area mentioned earlier. The duration of each session was one hour. Each of the sessions included practice/ activity session and home exercises. Thereafter, their post-intervention scores on spiritual orientation, diverse aspects of inner self-enhancement (viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and mindfulness) were obtained.

RESULTS

In order to determine the effect of training on increasing spiritual orientation, and to draw comparison between pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of participants on spiritual orientation and diverse aspects self-enhancement, t-test (for related samples) was applied. The obtained results revealed that self-enhancement training facilitates the development of spirituality in young adults with remarkable improvement in areas, viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and mindfulness.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY TABLE SHOWING PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION SCORES ON DIVERSE ASPECTS OF SELF-ENHANCEMENT

VARIABLE	M ₁	M ₂	M _D	SE _{MD}	t-RATIO
1.SPIRITUALITY	94.84	111.6	13.02	01.55	10.76*
2. SELF-ACCEPTANCE	104.9	129.6	10.4	01.24	19.74*
3. POSITIVE EMOTION	28.45	46.94	59.96	07.16	02.57*
4. EMOTIONAL REGULATION	86.3	107.7	07.71	0.92	23.19*
5. MINDFULNESS	124.0	133.8	06.18	0.73	13.21*

* p<0.01

DISCUSSION

Research demonstrates the beneficial effects of spirituality on individual's adaptation, and coping with social pressure and life stressors (Pargament and Smith, 1998; Vannes & Kasel, 2003). Obviously, spirituality has a significant influence on quality of life. While higher education focuses with new intensity on test scores, grades, persistence, and degrees, it has increasingly come to neglect students' "inner" development - the sphere of values and beliefs, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding. Thus, the present research made an attempt to address this question, i.e., to design a training program to improve self-enhancement among young adults. The purpose of the study was to provide students with more opportunities to connect with their inner selves. To clear all the blockages which stop one from experiencing one's true self, to explore the inner being, to access one's highest potential, to learn more about oneself, and to know practical tools and techniques to change one's life, is self-enhancement. The training program had emphasized on inner self-enhancement of students which could facilitate their spiritual development. It included training in domains of self-enhancement (viz., self-acceptance, positive emotions, emotion regulation, and mindfulness). For this research, a 4-weeks training program was imparted. Every week, two sessions had focused on each area mentioned earlier. The duration of each session was one hour. Each of the sessions included practice/ activity session and home exercises. For this, firstly the pre-interventions scored on all variables were taken. After that, in each session the concerned topic was introduced with the help of oral communication. Then, their usefulness in life was discussed, practice activity of the same in real life was done. In the end,

home exercises were given and related problems in practicing that aspect were discussed in the next session. Like this, training on all aspects was imparted and post- intervention scores were obtained and compared which shows significant improvement in spirituality ($t=10.76$, $p<0.01$) and in all areas of self-enhancement, viz., self-acceptance ($t=19.74$, $p<0.01$), positive emotions ($t=02.57$, $p<0.01$), emotion regulation ($t=23.19$, $p<0.01$), and mindfulness ($t=13.21$, $p<0.01$). Literature reviews shows similar findings such as a contributing factor to these positive outcomes may be having a spiritual orientation towards life which protects human beings against undesirable and maladaptive behaviors such as acting in personally or socially destructive ways (Emmons, 2000). Theoretical attention to the influence of spirituality in processes of optimal human development (Maslow, 1971) suggests the importance of examining linkages between spirituality and psychosocial-developmental aspects of psychological well-being. Thus, spiritual beliefs, practices, and commitments do lead to inner self-enhancement.

Self-acceptance and self-esteem have found to play important role in psychological functioning. Self-acceptance works wonders. Once people start accepting oneself, one gradually stop worrying what others think and becomes more spontaneous and natural. One can finally relax, and allow more of the inner, real self to be seen. There is no shame or fear of revealing oneself when one accepts oneself unconditionally. This is the key to intimacy and spiritual relationships, and enables one to accept others. A wide range of literature indicates that high self-acceptance is an important contributor to health and well-being (DuBois and Fray, 2004).

Ellison and Fan (2008) found that spiritual experiences were more consistently associated with positive (e.g., excitement with

life) as opposed to negative (e.g., psychological distress) aspects of mental health. Vaillant (2006) has discussed spirituality as the experiences of positive emotions that result from a sense of connection with others and being transcendent. Such emotions include faith, hope, love, forgiveness, gratitude, and compassion - all which suggest strong linkages between individuals' spiritual experiences and their psychological well-being.

The effects of spirituality on health are mediated via the effect of emotion regulation on physiological processes (Levenson & Aldwin, 2013). Masters (2008) took a more comprehensive approach to the mediators between spirituality and health. For example, spiritual orientation leads to less stress and depression, which in turn, is related to decrease cardiovascular reactivity, which in turn, can result in lower levels of hypertension.

According to many researchers (e.g., Bishop et al., 2002), mindfulness leads to spiritual orientation that reduces critical judgment of ourselves and others, and facilitates compassion for self and others. A significant empirical literature shows religiosity, spirituality, and mindfulness all promote well-being during stressful situations (Brown & Ryan, 2003). A recent randomized study (Shapiro et al., 1998) with medical and premedical students showed substantial and consistent changes across all measures of well-being, including increased spirituality, in those participating in a 7-week mindfulness meditation program, as did a randomized MBSR study (Astin, 1997) with undergraduates.

In 2003, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA survey showed that today's entering college freshmen expect their institutions to play an instrumental role in preparing them for employment (94%) and graduate or advanced education (81%), they also

have high expectations that college will help them develop emotionally and spiritually. About two-thirds consider it "essential" or "very important" that their college enhance their self-understanding (69%), prepare them for responsible citizenship (67%), develop their personal values (67%), and provide for their emotional development (63%). Moreover, nearly half (48%) say that it is "essential" or "very important" that college encourage their personal expression of spirituality. Findings from all these studies on associations between spirituality and multiple dimensions of self suggest that spiritual orientation facilitates different aspects of self-enhancement by ending the war of values taking place inside the hearts and minds of young people. Although there are many institutions that are working on this philosophy and towards similar goals such as Art of living, Satyug Darshan, and Brahma Kumaris, etc., but there is no systematic effort in the realm of psychology to educate and re-orient the young adults towards spiritual orientation. Thus, such re-orientation programs should be imparted at college and university levels.

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