



SPIRITUALITY AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG SENIOR CITIZENS IN KERALA: THE ROLE OF GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

***Deepthi P **Dr.H. Sylaja**

*M.Sc Psychology student, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady

**Head of the Department, Psychology, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady

Received: 28/04/2025

Revised: 15/08/2025

Accepted:05/09/2025

Published:01/11/2025

ABSTRACT

Aging is often accompanied by various physical, emotional, and social challenges, which can be influenced by individual life circumstances. Spirituality has been recognized as a significant factor in promoting resilience and life satisfaction among older adults. This study examined the relationship between spirituality and life satisfaction among senior citizens in Kerala, focusing on the roles of gender and socio-economic status (SES). Using a descriptive, comparative, and correlational design, 100 older adults (50 males, 50 females) aged 60–80 years were assessed using the Spirituality Scale (Sreekumar & Sananda Raj, 2002) and the Life Satisfaction Scale (Singh & Joseph, 2012). Data were analyzed using independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation. Results indicated a significant gender difference in spirituality ($p < .05$) and life satisfaction ($p < .01$), with males scoring higher on spirituality and females reporting higher life satisfaction. SES was also significantly associated with life satisfaction ($p < .01$). The findings highlight the need for gender- and SES-sensitive interventions to promote psychological well-being in older adults. Future studies should include larger, more diverse samples and consider qualitative approaches to explore these relationships in depth.

Key Words – Spirituality, Life Satisfaction, Senior Citizens, Gender Differences, Socio-Economic Status

Old age marks the final stage in the human life cycle, typically occurring as individuals approach or surpass the average life expectancy. This phase involves significant physical, cognitive,

emotional, and social changes, often affecting overall well-being. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory (1959), older adulthood requires achieving ego



integrity while coping with loss, mortality, and shifting social roles.

Spirituality—defined as the search for meaning, purpose, and connection with the transcendent—often increases with age, serving as a coping resource for older individuals (Wink & Dillon, 2002; Koenig, 2012). Research has shown that spirituality positively correlates with psychological well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction (George et al., 2000; Krause, 2003). However, the strength and nature of this relationship can vary depending on gender and socio-economic status (SES).

Gender influences coping styles, social roles, and spiritual engagement. Women are often found to participate more in spiritual or religious activities (Miller & Stark, 2002; Levin, 1994), while men may derive meaning from different life experiences. SES also plays a crucial role in shaping life satisfaction, with higher SES often linked to better health, social participation, and psychological well-being (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000). Spirituality may help buffer the negative effects of lower SES by providing meaning and psychological comfort (Krause, 1998). This study explores how gender and SES influence the relationship between spirituality and life satisfaction among senior citizens in Kerala, aiming to contribute to gerontological research and guide targeted interventions.

METHOD

Research Design

A normative survey design was employed to assess differences in spirituality and life satisfaction by gender and SES.

Participants

The study included 100 senior citizens (50 males, 50 females) aged 60–80 years, residing in Kozhikode and Ernakulam districts of Kerala. Participants were selected using simple random sampling.

Inclusion Criteria

- Age between 60–80 years
- Residing in Kerala
- Cognitively and physically able to respond
- Provided informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Below 60 or above 80 years of age
- Severe cognitive impairments
- Severe physical illness preventing participation
- Non-consent

Measures

1. Socio-Demographic Schedule – Collected age, gender, religion, education, occupation, and SES.
2. Spirituality Scale (Sreekumar & Sananda Raj, 2002) – 26-item scale measuring spiritual beliefs and practices, validated for Indian populations (reliability: $r = 0.83$).
3. Life Satisfaction Scale (Singh & Joseph, 2012) – 35-item scale covering five domains of life satisfaction (reliability: $r = 0.91$).

Procedure

Data were collected in person, with questionnaires administered individually. Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was assured. Each session lasted approximately 20 minutes.



Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 25.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation were performed.

Section 1: Comparison of Spirituality and Life Satisfaction Based on Gender

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Spirituality and Life Satisfaction Scores Among Older Adults by Gender

Variables	Male(N=50)		Female(N=50)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Spirituality	96.20	19.01	1.03	19.01	2.28*
Life satisfaction	1.50	11.13	1.41	15.26	3.25**

p < .05, p < .01

RESULT

The table reveals a significant gender difference in spirituality among older adults, with males (M = 96.20) scoring higher than females (M = 1.03). The result is statistically significant at the 0.05 level and is also a highly significant difference in life satisfaction based on gender, with females (M = 1.41) reporting higher life satisfaction than males (M = 1.50), as indicated by a t-value of 3.25 (p < .01).

DISCUSSION

This difference may be attributed to a greater inclination among males toward seeking meaning and purpose in life. Spirituality, understood as the development of self-awareness and inner growth, is often associated with mental

well-being. Males may also exhibit stronger task concentration, enabling deeper spiritual engagement. The finding that older men scored significantly higher in spirituality may indicate a greater tendency among men to seek existential meaning and personal growth during later life stages. This could be attributed to post-retirement shifts, identity restructuring, or traditional male roles that emphasize autonomy and internal goal setting.

And the life satisfaction encompasses mood, relationships, achievements, and self-concept. While gender may influence certain aspects of well-being, it is also closely linked to factors such as economic status, education, personal experiences, and social roles. The observed gender differences in spirituality and life satisfaction underscore the need for gender-sensitive gerontological interventions. Programs aiming to promote psychological well-being among older



adults may benefit from integrating spiritual development components, particularly for elderly women, and life satisfaction-enhancing strategies for elderly men. The results support the development of public health policies and community-based programs that acknowledge the role of spirituality in healthy aging. Institutions catering to the elderly (such as senior centres and old-age homes) can incorporate structured spiritual and psychosocial activities to enhance life satisfaction. Mental health practitioners working with older populations can use these findings to tailor counselling interventions. For instance, spirituality-focused cognitive strategies and meaning-centered therapy may be beneficial for older adults, especially men coping with role transitions post-retirement. The study contributes valuable knowledge to educational curricula in psychology, gerontology, and social work. It can inform students and professionals about the intricate interplay between spirituality, gender, and subjective well-being in later life.

Conducted in Kerala, India, the study provides insights into how socio-cultural context shapes aging experiences. It highlights the importance of culturally grounded research in understanding spiritual and emotional dimensions of older adults' lives in Indian society. Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the

findings. The sample consisted of only 100 participants (50 males and 50 females), which limits the generalizability of the results to the broader population of older adults. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, which restricts causal inferences. Longitudinal research would be more effective in examining how spirituality and life satisfaction evolve over time. Data were collected using self-reported questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or inaccuracies in personal recall, especially in elderly respondents. The study was conducted in Kerala, a culturally and religiously distinct region of India. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to other ethnic, cultural, or geographic populations, either within or outside India. Factors such as educational background, physical health, religious practices, marital status, or social support were not controlled for, yet they could significantly influence both spirituality and life satisfaction. The study limited gender classification to male and female categories, excluding non-binary identities, thus not fully capturing the diversity of gendered experiences among older adults.

Section 2: Comparison Based on Socio-Economic Status

Spirituality and life satisfaction scores were compared across three socio-economic groups: High, Middle, and Low. One-way ANOVA was conducted to assess significant differences.

Table 2 : One-way ANOVA for Spirituality and Life Satisfaction Based on Socio-Economic Status

Variables	Categories	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F
Spirituality	Between groups	602.870	2	301.435	1.190
	Within groups	24562.840	97	253.225	
Life satisfaction	Total	25165.710	99		
	Between groups	1622.718	2		
	Within groups	17769.872	97	811.359	4.429**
	Total	19392.590	99	183.195	

**p < .01

RESULT

The results show a significant difference in life satisfaction among older adults based on socio-economic status ($F = 4.43, p < .01$). No significant differences were found in spirituality.

DISCUSSION

This suggests that life satisfaction is influenced by socio-economic background, with higher satisfaction observed in individuals from higher socio-economic strata. This may be due to

increased financial security, better access to resources, and social fulfilment.

However, no significant difference was found in spirituality scores across socio-economic groups, indicating that spiritual engagement may be relatively independent of economic conditions.

The significant difference in life satisfaction across socio-economic groups indicates that material well-being, financial security, and access to resources play a crucial role in determining subjective well-being in later life. Older adults from higher SES backgrounds likely experience less financial stress, greater access to healthcare and leisure, and



stronger social engagement, all of which contribute to greater life satisfaction.

The absence of significant differences in spirituality across SES groups suggests that spiritual beliefs and practices may be universal in nature, offering a common coping resource irrespective of economic background. This supports the notion that spirituality is more deeply rooted in personal values, cultural traditions, or existential concerns rather than material conditions

Implications of the Study includes the significant difference found in life satisfaction across SES groups highlights the importance of financial stability, access to resources, and social inclusion in the well-being of older adults. Individuals from higher SES backgrounds reported greater life satisfaction, likely due to fewer financial worries and greater opportunities for fulfilment in later life. The findings suggest a need for social support systems targeting low-income elderly populations to reduce disparities in life satisfaction. Policies ensuring pension security, affordable healthcare, and community engagement programs can enhance quality of life among economically disadvantaged older adults. The lack of significant difference in spirituality across SES groups implies that spirituality may serve as a universal coping mechanism, not necessarily influenced by material conditions. This indicates that spiritual interventions can be equally relevant across all socio-economic strata for

promoting emotional resilience. The study supports models of well-being (e.g., Diener's Subjective Well-Being framework) by demonstrating how external conditions (like SES) influence satisfaction with life, while internal constructs (like spirituality) may remain stable across demographic boundaries.

The limitations of study include the SES subgroups were unevenly distributed (e.g., only 5 participants from the high SES group and 9 from the low SES group), which may limit the statistical power and generalizability of the findings. This imbalance could skew post hoc results and underestimate or overestimate group differences. The study utilized a cross-sectional method, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships. While SES and life satisfaction are correlated, the study cannot confirm that higher SES directly causes greater life satisfaction. All constructs (life satisfaction, spirituality) were measured via self-reported questionnaires, which are subject to social desirability bias and may not capture deeper experiential or behavioural aspects of spirituality or satisfaction. The study was conducted in Kerala, and findings may not be applicable to older populations in other regions or cultural contexts with different spiritual practices, economic conditions, or social structures. Factors such as physical health, family support, education level, and mental health status were not controlled in the analysis, though they could significantly influence both spirituality and life satisfaction.



Table 3: Post Hoc Test Results for Life Satisfaction and Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status	N	Subset for alpha=0.05	
		1	2
Low	9	133.6667	
Middle	86	147.2442	147.2442
High	5		151.0000
Sig.		.102	.836

RESULT

According to the post hoc results, the highest mean score in life satisfaction was found in the high socio-economic group (M = 151.00), followed by the middle (M = 147.24), and then the low (M = 133.67) group. This further supports the finding that life satisfaction is positively associated with socio-economic status.

DISCUSSION

Financial stability and the ability to meet both social and economic aspirations likely contribute to greater life satisfaction among older adults. The implications of the study highlight the importance of addressing economic disparities in later life. Policymakers should consider expanding financial support programs—such as pensions and healthcare subsidies—to enhance life satisfaction among the elderly, particularly those belonging to lower socio-economic status (SES) groups. Gerontological care should address not only physical and psychological health but also the economic and social well-being of older individuals, ensuring a holistic approach to elder care. Mental health professionals working with

the elderly must recognize the impact of financial stress on overall well-being and incorporate elements such as financial counselling, resource navigation, and support networks into their intervention strategies. Moreover, programs designed to promote social and spiritual engagement among older adults from low-SES backgrounds may serve as protective factors against reduced life satisfaction, especially when material resources are limited. The study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample was not equally distributed across SES categories; the high SES group (n = 5) and the low SES group (n = 9) were considerably smaller than the middle SES group (n = 86). This uneven distribution may have limited the statistical power to detect significant differences between the groups. Although a general trend was observed, the differences among SES groups were not statistically significant. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings, and further studies with more balanced samples are recommended for validation. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single point in time, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences between socio-economic status and life satisfaction. Furthermore, all data were collected using self-report



measures, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability, misinterpretation of items, and recall inaccuracies.

CONCLUSION

Spirituality and life satisfaction among older adults in Kerala are shaped by both gender and socio-economic factors. Culturally tailored, gender-sensitive, and SES-aware programs can play a vital role in promoting psychological well-being in late life.

REFERENCES

- Adams, G. A, King, L.A., & King, D.W. (1996). Relationships of Job and Family Involvement, Family Social Support, and Work-Family Conflict With Job and Life Satisfaction *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 4, 411-420.
- Bailey, T. E., & Frisch, M. (2007). Hope and optimism as related to life satisfaction. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2 (3), 168-69.
- Beaumont, J.G., & Kenealy, P.M. (2004). Quality of life perception and social comparisons in healthy old age, *Ageing and Society*, 24(5), 755-769.
- Beutell, N. (2006). Life satisfaction, a Sloan Network Encyclopaedia Entry. *Journal of Sloan work and Family*, 2(3), 1125-1127.
- Goldbeck, L., & Schmitz, T, G. (2007). *Life satisfaction decreases during adolescence. Quality of Life Research*, 16(6), 969-979.
- Greene, K.V., & Yoon, B, J. (2004). Religiosity, economics and life satisfaction. *Review of Social Economy*, 62(2), 245-273.

Limitations

Small sample size limits generalizability.

Self-report measures may be subject to bias.

Cross-sectional design prevents causal inference.

Future Directions

1. Longitudinal studies to explore causal relationships.
2. Inclusion of qualitative methods to capture lived experiences.
3. Broader sampling across multiple states for comparative analysis.