



Differences in Religiosity across age and Gender

Nisha Jaiswal

Assistant Professor, Zakir Hussain Delhi College, Delhi University, New Delhi, India

Abstract

The study was aimed at finding out the age and gender difference in religiosity among the youth and the elderly. Four aspects of religiosity were studied. They were Daily Spiritual Experience, Values and Beliefs, Forgiveness and Private Religious Practices. The sample consisted of 100 elderly (50 males and 50 females) and 100 youth (50 males and 50 females) living in Delhi, the capital city of India. The age group of the elderly sample was 60 -75 years. The age group of the youth ranged from 20-30 years. It was seen that the elderly were significantly higher than the youth on Daily Spiritual Experience, Values and Beliefs and Private Religious Practices. On Forgiveness the elderly were higher but the difference was not significant. No gender difference was found on any of the domains of religiosity. Implications of religiosity on health and wellbeing are discussed.

Keywords: religiosity, daily spiritual experience, values and beliefs, forgiveness, private religious practice

Introduction

Religiosity is a very important aspect of people's life. It is a vital reality that can't be ignored. Given the philosophical orientation and the level of religious involvement across Indian society, research on the topic of religion/spirituality are noticeably scarce. However, owing to its non-rational, non-scientific and subjective nature, religion has not yet received enough attention as a psychological variable. It is indeed a complex and multifaceted variable.

Evolutionists have pointed out that religion is adaptive, nurtures morality and social cohesion both of which promote wellbeing (Wright, 2009). According to Pargament (1997) [21] religion is "a search for significance in ways related to the sacred". He explained that significance is "whatever people value in their lives" and individuals search for this in a variety of ways. Searching for significance does not require religion, but religion is distinct in that an individual's search for meaning is accomplished in regard to the sacred, or God. Pargament's definition changed over time, especially when discussing the aspect of the sacred, in that he believed religion was first a reference to God, and later to that which is not strictly God, but that which is outside of the self (Helminiak, 2006) [12]. Pargament primarily studied religious coping (Butter & Pargament, 2003) [15].

More specifically, religion has been investigated from both substantive and functional perspectives. The substantive approach to religion focuses on the beliefs, emotions, practices, and relationships of individuals that are explicitly related to a supreme power or divine being (Bruce, 1996) [4].

The functional approach emphasizes on the purpose that religiousness serves in the life of the individual. Beliefs, emotions, practices, and experiences are examined, but the focus is on how they are used to deal with the fundamental problems of existence such as meaning, death, isolation, suffering, and injustice (Bruce, 1996; Pargament, 1997) [21, 4].

Within research studies, the term "religion" is often limited to

nothing more than church attendance (Pargament, 1997) [21]. This incomplete view of religion often leads to the neglect of important multidimensional aspects of the construct (Pargament, 1999) [22]. For example, Kelly (1995) [16] explained that "religion is not only a system of beliefs and ritual activities for individuals, but also includes the way in which we give meaning to life." This definition not only communicates religion as a complex topic, but also highlights the connection between religion and spirituality.

Spirituality has been commonly defined as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that fuel and arise from the search for the sacred (Hill *et al.*, 2000) [13]. Pargament and Mahoney (2002) [23] also defined spirituality as "a search for the sacred..." and stated that "People can take a virtually limitless number of pathways in their attempts to discover and conserve the sacred." Peterson and Seligman (2004) [25] contend that spirituality is a universal strength of transcendence.

Researches have shown positive relationship between religiosity and subjective wellbeing (Ashkanani, 2009; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar & Hahn, 2004) [2]. Most studies suggest that religiousness and spirituality are associated with increased levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being (Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Koenig *et al.*, 2001; Koenig and Vaillant, 2009; Sawatzky, Ratner & Chiu, 2005) [11, 17, 18, 19, 29].

Several models have been proposed to assist in understanding the multidimensional nature of religion (e.g., Allport, 1953; Fetzer Institute, 1999; Pargament, 1997) [1, 9, 21]. Allport (1953) [1] proposed a model that divided religion into extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity. Pargament (1997) [21] added to Allport's model by adding religion as quest. The Fetzer Institute (1999) [9] proposed a model that acknowledged the overlap between religion and spirituality. Through an extensive literature review, they determined various domains that accurately explain and measure the multifaceted nature of religion.

Method

The sample consisted of 200 participants, 100 youth (50 males and 50 females) and 100 elderly (50 males and 50 females). The age group for youth and elderly were 20-30 years and 60-75 years respectively. The participants lived in housing societies in Delhi, the capital city of India. They shared commonality in terms of culture, life styles and socio-economic strata.

The elderly participants consisted of educated people with minimum education up to twelfth class Most of them lived all by themselves with their children either staying abroad or in a separate apartment. Some of them were also bachelor or widowed. The youth sample consisted of graduates, postgraduates, engineers and young entrepreneurs with MBA degrees. Some of them were working and others were students. The non-working youth were studying in Delhi University.

Measures/Tools

The measure used in the study is briefly described below: After a careful scrutiny, it was decided to use a multidimensional tool for assessing religiousness and spirituality. The Fetzer Institute (1999) [9] has developed a tool that captures the different dimensions of religion. The tool is appropriate for the followers of different religious faith

groups. Based on extensive literature review, the tool addresses multiple aspects of religion and spirituality. In this study the *Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS)* version developed by Fetzer Institute (1999) [9] was used. The domains assessed were daily spiritual experience, values and beliefs, forgiveness and private religious practices. The Chronbach alpha values for these domains ranged between .52 to .86.

Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyse the data. Means and standard deviations were calculated and t test was done to find out the significant difference between the two groups.

Results

Mean Scores in the different domains in Religiosity in the youth and elderly

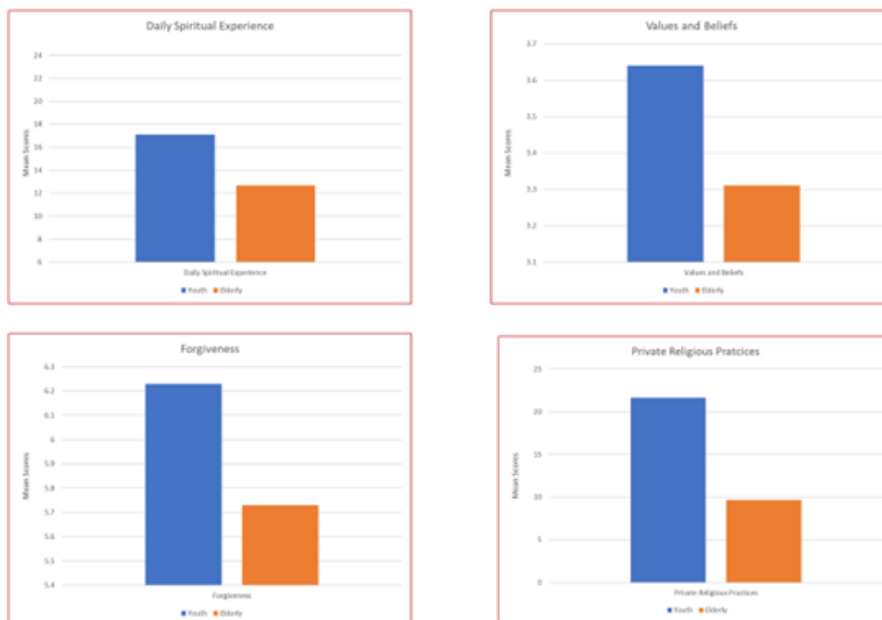
Table 1 presents the scores obtained by the youth and the elderly in the various domains of religiosity. It was found that the elderly have lower scores on all four aspects of religiosity. As low scores mean high religiosity, it indicates that religiosity is greater among the elderly. There was significant difference between the two groups on the measures of *daily spiritual experiences* ($p < .001$), *values & beliefs* ($p < .05$) and *private religious practices* ($p < .001$). The mean scores are also shown in Figure 1.

Table 1: Mean Scores of Different Aspects of Religiosity for the Youth and the Elderly.

Measures	Range	Youth (N=100)		Elderly (N=100)		t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
		Daily Spiritual Experience	6-36	17.10	6.38	
Values and Beliefs	2-8	3.64	1.41	3.31	1.24	3.10*
Forgiveness	3-12	6.23	2.21	5.73	2.23	2.57
Private Religious Practices	5-36	21.65	7.71	9.65	4.59	183.42***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: *Low scores are indicative of high religiosity.



Note: Low scores are indicative of high religiosity

Fig 1: Mean scores for youth and elderly on various domains of religiosity

Mean scores on various aspects of religiosity across gender

Table 2 presents the scores obtained by the male and female groups on different aspects of religiosity. Women were found to be higher on *Values and Beliefs* only. The males have been

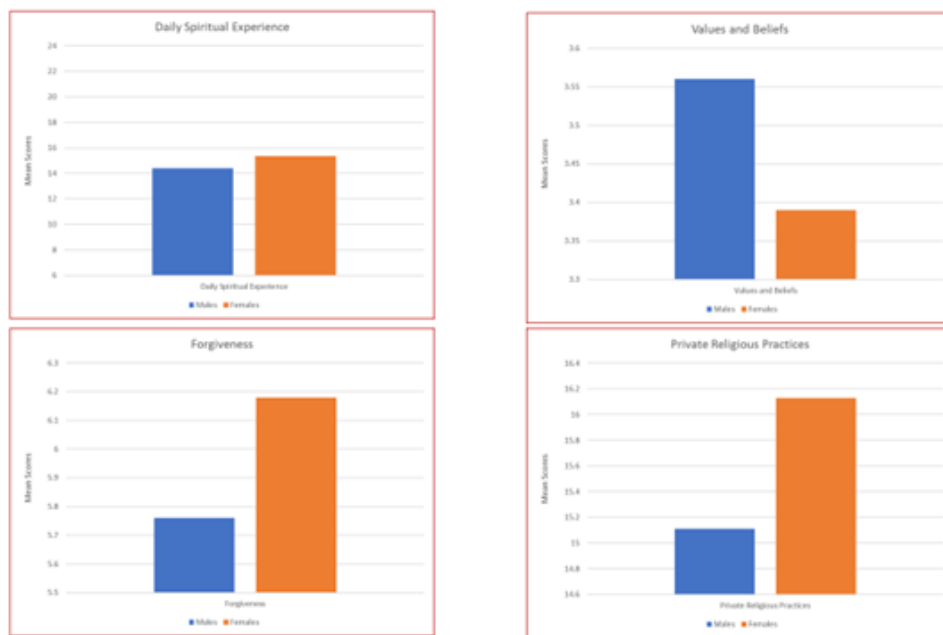
found to be higher on daily spiritual experience, forgiveness and private religious practices. No significant difference was found between the two genders on any domain of religiosity. Fig 2. Also shows the mean scores.

Table 2: Mean scores of Different Aspects of Religiosity across Gender.

Measures	Male (N=100)		Female (N=100)		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
	Daily Spiritual Experience	14.38	5.63	15.35	
Values/Beliefs	3.56	1.38	3.39	1.29	0.84
Forgiveness	5.76	2.12	6.18	2.32	1.83
Private Religious Practices	15.11	8.04	16.13	9.37	0.70

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: *Low scores are indicative of high religiosity



Note: Low scores are indicative of high religiosity

Fig 2: Mean scores for males and females on various domains of religiosity

Discussion and Conclusion

In the present research several dimensions of religiosity were studied. They included Daily Spiritual Experience, Values and Beliefs, Forgiveness and Private Religious Practices. An attempt was made to see how these various aspects of religiosity vary in the youth and the elderly as also among the males and females. The following section would discuss the variations in the different aspects of religiosity in the present study. An overall picture emerged in which the elderly were significantly higher on most aspects of religiosity except Forgiveness. On all the dimensions of religiosity, there were non-significant differences between the males and females.

The first dimension of religiosity studied was Daily Spiritual Experience. This domain measures the individual’s perception of the transcendent in daily life. It attends to the experience rather than cognitive constructions. It assesses aspects of day-to-day spiritual experience of an ordinary person. On this dimension the older people were significantly higher than the youth. There were no significant difference between the men and women. As we age, our daily experience, connection and

interaction with the transcendent increases. The results obtained suggest that as we grow old, our frequency of interaction with the transcendent on a daily basis increases. Looking to the Almighty for strength, asking for help, and feeling guidance from the transcendent in specific circumstances also grow as we age. Two best predictors of wellbeing among older persons are health and religiousness. Elderly people tend to be happier and more satisfied with life if religiously committed and engaged.

This domain addresses reported ordinary experiences of spirituality such as awe, joy that lifts one out of the mundane, and provides a sense of deep inner peace. Studies using the daily spiritual experiences may identify ways in which this element of life may influence emotion, cognition and behaviour, and health or ways in which this element may be treated as an outcome, a component of wellbeing. The past studies show that daily spiritual experience is related to decrease total alcohol intake, improved quality of life, and positive psychosocial status. The inner experience of spiritual feelings and awareness is an integral part of the everyday

religious lives of many people.

In recent past spirituality/religiousness have received increasing attention in health related research. Daily spiritual experience is one aspect of religiousness that had never been addressed despite its importance in people's lives (Underwood, 2002). Through reflections on the aspects of the religious or spiritual perspective that weave through thought processes and feelings in daily events, this domain elicits those inner qualities as they express themselves at specific moments in the midst of daily life events. Males and females have been found to be similar on this domain of religiosity.

The second domain was Values and Beliefs. This domain assess the influence of faith on everyday life. Values can also be described as goals. There are criteria that people use to select and justify actions. Schwartz (1992) ^[30] found that religiousness correlated negatively with individualistic values of hedonism, achievement, and self-direction, and positively with the collectivist value of tradition, conformity, benevolence, and security. Another central feature of religiosity is the cognitive dimension of belief. Members of religious groups are identified as "believers". Beliefs about the meaning of suffering and death are in some way central to all religions.

The older participants were significantly higher on this aspect of religiosity than the youth. The difference between males and females was nonsignificant. The females were slightly higher on this domain than the males.

Religions encourage people to seek meaning beyond everyday existence, linking themselves to a "ground of being" through belief and worship. In this view, the primary function of religion is to temper self-indulgent tendencies and to foster transcendental concerns and beliefs. Ellison (1992) ^[6] and Pollner (1989) ^[26] argue modelling human relationships after divine ones, provides "godlike" models for behaviour. They found religious people to be generally kind. Religious people may have value of concern for others, specially the less fortunate ones. This may facilitate "downward social comparisons" which enhances feeling of wellbeing. Benson's work (1996) argues that religious faith mobilizes placebo effect.

Forgiveness is an important aspect of religion and spirituality. All religions not only value but also encourage forgiveness. It includes five components: confession, forgiving others, forgiving oneself, feeling forgiven by God and feeling forgiven by others. Forgiveness is overcoming judgement towards the offender, by endeavouring to view the offender with compassion benevolence and love while recognizing that he or she has lost the right to them. Enright *et al.* (1992) ^[7] talked about the development of forgiveness and likened it to Kohlberg's stages of moral development. They said that there is a parallel development of cognitive and moral reasoning. As individuals develop cognitively, they can take perspective of others, empathize with others' weakness and value them despite their faults.

In the present study, there was no significant difference between the youth and the elderly participants on forgiveness. The males and the females also did not differ significantly in forgiveness, although males appeared to be more forgiving on this dimension. Indeed, by forgiving others, we let go the negativity that lies inside us. Forgiveness allows to relax and

loosen the tensions inside us by the "letting go" tendency. The mind becomes lighter, free from burden, at ease and body relaxes along with the minds.

As we grow older so does our cognitive maturity along with our morality and therefore we adapt the "letting go" tendency. With cognitive maturity, we tend to accept the other person with all his drawbacks and thus forgive him for his mistakes. By doing so, we come to peace with our own selves. The revengeful attitude in us is like acid in container which would eventually corrode the container itself.

In therapeutic literature, healing, in the spiritual sense, is linked with forgiveness. Enright (1992) ^[7] has cited other researchers' experimental studies demonstrating correlations between high level of forgiveness, lower blood pressure and fewer negative emotions – Mauger *et al.* (1992) ^[20] found that lower levels of forgiving oneself or forgiving others correlated with higher psychopathology scores on MMPI.

Many religious meaning systems prescribe forgiveness as a valued behaviour, encourage emotions like sympathy, compassion and love that facilitate forgiveness. There are scripture and rituals that promote forgiveness and provide exemplars from religious traditions who model virtuous behaviour through forgiveness.

Religious individuals might be more forgiving than non-religious individuals. Many religious meaning systems prescribe forgiveness as a valued behaviour; encourage emotions that facilitate forgiveness such as sympathy, compassion, and love; have scriptures and rituals that promote forgiveness; and provide exemplars from religious traditions who model virtuous behaviour through forgiveness. Forgiveness refers to a victim reducing negative thoughts, emotions, and motivations toward an offender as well as the promotion of positive thoughts, emotions, and motivations. *Unforgiveness* is not merely the lack of forgiveness; it can manifest as grudge-holding or vengeful motives and feelings. Unforgiveness is a combination for negative emotions (i.e., resentment, hatred, bitterness, anger, fear) that the working memory labels as feeling negatively toward an offender (with negative motions often being associated with those negative emotions).

Exline and her colleagues have studied anger at God (Exline *et al.*, 2011) ^[8]. They found that factors that predicted unforgiveness toward a human offender also predicted anger at God e.g. holding God responsible for doing harm. In Self-Forgiveness the forgiver is also the offender. Self-forgiveness is one of many coping mechanisms to deal with the stress.

Believing that the sacred incorporates *samsaric circularity* (a wheel of suffering) that is driven by *karma* (unrelenting justice) and *dharma* (holy duty) might make some indifferent to suffering (as in Hinduism; see Rye *et al.*, 2000) ^[28]. Others might believe that forgiveness is a benevolent act that moves a person closer to *anatta* (release from suffering), which might increase the likeliness of forgiving.

Private Religious Practices was the fourth aspect of religiosity which was examined. It represents a subset of behaviours constituting the larger construct of religious involvement. They are private behaviours that occur at home-individually or in a family setting-rather than as collective experiences in a formal place of worship. Some important practices include praying, watching television programs listening to *Bhajans*

and *Kirtan* and reading religious literature.

There is a significant difference between the youth and the elderly in the domain of private religious practices. The older people are very high on this aspect of religiosity. There is no significant gender difference. Males and females are equal in their practices.

Private religious practices in the Indian context form an integral part of religiosity. In the west, church attendance the major way in which religiosity is expressed and measured. It is not very common practice in India to insist temples, mosques, churches or congregations like ashrams more so as one grows old. Praying to God in one's own house is the most prevalent way of being religious. They also watch religious shows on television.

As one grows old, it is easy to pray at home than going to temples/mosques/churches due to ill health. There is marked difference in the youth and the elderly on this aspect. Practicing yoga and meditation can also be included in their domain. Religious activities, hobbies and social activities may tend to reduce the feeling of loneliness. This is the reason we find the elderly are engaged in different types of private religious practices. This is the very reason we find the elderly to be as high on SWB as the youth.

The elderly generally pray every day. Their frequency of prayer increases in comparison to how much they prayed when they were young. For the elderly, engaging in religious activity is very meaningful and therefore Jackson and Bergeman (2011) ^[14] demonstrate a tie between religious practices, including prayer and worship, with a sense of control that lead to increase in wellbeing.

Prayers and worship correlate positively with personal control which leads to heightened wellbeing (Jackson & Bergeman, 2011) ^[14]. Prayer improves sense of wellbeing. The most frequent religious response to the stress of old age is prayer. Large number of researches have shown that people offer more prayers for than for anything else. Ancient Indian texts prescribe prayer and participation in religious meetings in old age to obtain spiritual liberation. Prayer and meditation are mentioned as a means for ensuring mental peace and securing salvation (moksha) (Jamuna, 1989; Ramamurti, 2004; Singh, 2002) ^[15, 27, 32].

Practice of yoga and yogic relaxation helps elderly overcome many psychological difficulties related to old age e.g. loss of confidence, lowered self-esteem, depression, unmet dependency needs, loneliness, boredom and fear of the future (Fortini *et al.*, 1980) ^[10]. Prayer, rituals, yoga meditation, fasts and other private religious practices are important as they fulfil inherent human needs like positive coping strategies when facing a loss (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) ^[25].

References

- Allport GW. The individual and his religion. New York: The Macmillian Company, 1953.
- Ashkanani HR. The relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being: A case of Kuwaiti car accident victims. *Traumatology*. 2009; 15(1):23-28.
- Benson H. *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief*: New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Bruce S. *Religion in the modern world: From cathedrals to cults*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Butter EM, Pargament KI. Development of a model for clinical assessment of religious coping: Initial validation of the process evaluation model. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture*, 2003; 6:175-194.
- Ellison CG. Are religious people nice people? Evidence from the National Survey of Black Americans. *Social Forces*, 1992; 71:411-430.
- Enright RD, Gassin E, Wu C-R. Forgiveness: a developmental view. *Journal of Moral Education*, 1992; 21:99-114.
- Exline JJ, Park CL, Smyth JM, Carey MP. Anger toward God: Social-cognitive predictors, prevalence, and links with adjustment to bereavement and cancer. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2011; 100:129-148.
- Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging. *Multidimensional Measurement of religiousness/spirituality for us in health research: A report of the Fetzer 190 Institute/National Institute on aging working group*. Kalamazoo, MI: John E. Fetzer Institute, 1999.
- Fortini K *et al.* Relaxation study in a geriatric hospital.' *Runds Chau Med/ Praxis*. Orig in French, 1980; 69:428-433.
- Hackney CH, Sanders GS. Religiosity and mental health: A meta-analysis of recent studies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2003; 42:43-55.
- Helminiak Daniel A. The role of spirituality in formulating a theory of the psychology of religion. *Zygon*, 2006; 41(1):197-224.
- Hill PC, Pargament KI, Hood RW, Mccullough ME, Swyers JP, Larson DB, Zinnbauer BJ. Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 2000; 30(1):50-77.
- Jackson BR, Bergeman CS. How does religiosity enhance well-being? The role of perceived control. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 2011; 3:149-161.
- Jamuna D. Religiosity, belief in karma and focus of control as related to life satisfaction among elderly men and women. *Proceedings of Workshop on Awareness, Welfare and Productive Utilization of Elder Component of Population*. Rewa Chinmaya Sewa Trust, 1989.
- Kelly EW, Jr. Spirituality and religion in counselor education: A national survey. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1995; 33:227-237.
- Koenig HG. Religion and medicine II: Religion, mental health, and related behaviors. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 2001; 31:97-109.
- Koenig HG, Larson DB. Religion and mental health: Evidence for an association. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 2001; 13:67-78.
- Koenig LB, Vaillant GE. A prospective study of church attendance and health over the lifespan. *Health Psychology*. 2009; 28(1):117-124.
- Mauger PA, Perry J, Freeman T, Grove D, McBridge A, McKinney K. The measurement of forgiveness: preliminary research. *Journal of Psychological Christianity*, 1992; (11):170-180.
- Pargament KI. *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 1997.

22. Pargament KI. The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 1999; 9:3-16.
23. Pargament KI. The bitter and the sweet: An evaluation of the costs and benefits of religiousness. *Psychological Inquiry*, 2002, 13.
24. Pargament KI. *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1997.
25. Peterson C, Seligman MEP. *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
26. Pollner M. Divine relations, social relations, and well-being. *Journal Health Social Behaviour*, 1989; 30:92-104.
27. Ramamurti PV. Psychosocial aspects of ageing in India. In P.V. Ramamurti & D. Jamuna Eds., *Handbook on Indian Gerontology* Delhi: Serials Publications, 2004, 268-327.
28. Rye MS, Pargament KI, Ali MA, Beck GL, Dorff EN, Hallisey C *et al.* Religious perspectives on forgiveness. In M. E. McCullough, Pargament, K. I. & Thoresen, C.E. Eds., *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice* New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2000, 17-40.
29. Sawatzky R, Ratner PA, Chiu L. A meta-analysis of the relationship between spirituality and quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*. 2005; 72(2):153-188.
30. Schwartz SH. Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 1992; 25:145.
31. Seligman MEP, Steen TA, Park N, Peterson C. Positive psychology in progress, Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 2005; 60:410-421.
32. Singh S. Issues of emotional integration, peace and happiness. *The Yedanticview, Journal of Gerontology*, 2002; 17:205-212.