

Understanding the Spiritual Well-Being of the Youth in the Philippines and Vietnam: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract - *The present study aimed to explore the structure of spiritual well-being of Filipino and Vietnamese youths. The data were collected using SHALOM, known as the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure, and analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to examine the structural validity of the measurement. The results of the study revealed that the Environment domain remained stable and valid as a component of youth spirituality in both Filipino and Vietnamese samples. While the four-factor model of SHALOM was not supported by the Vietnamese respondents, a three-factor construct that combined the Personal and the Communal domains of SHALOM into one component was found to better reflect Filipino youth's spirituality structure. Based on its findings, the present study offered recommendations for future research.*

Keywords: *Spiritual well-being, youth studies, Filipino, Vietnamese, SHALOM*

INTRODUCTION

Youth spirituality is one of the most researched topics in various countries. Studies show that young people who are engaged in spiritual activities are more likely to have a healthy spirituality [1]. There are remarks that the spiritual and religious aspects of the youth's lives can be of significant contribution towards the promotion of non-violent behaviors, particularly to youth that are at high risk or involved in gangs [2].

Moreover, Singaporean Malay/Muslim youths whose parent/s were deceased understand spirituality as an avenue not only to improve their relationship to the divine but also to their "deceased parent/s" which in effect serves as a manifestation of their spiritual development [3]. Nevertheless, spirituality and attachment to God have been found to correspond to primary attachment styles of an individual, or even compensate for one's insecure attachment experiences, and thus can contribute to mental wellness or mental illness [4].

Research in identifying resources for mental health and functional coping strategies has gone a great length to ascertain spirituality's role in clients' journey to wellness [5]. For example, one's belief in a power beyond oneself brings hope and personal strength in hopeless contexts of trauma [6],[7]. Spiritual life offers a sense of being cared for and of

self-worth that helps individuals to fight against devaluation and dehumanization [5],[8],[9]. Spirituality in the form of a religious institution provides individuals with emotional and practical support [5] as well as with comfort for grieving family members at a belief in life after death for the deceased [10]. Moreover, spirituality inspires a sense of meaning and purpose when people interpret helpless situations as giving back, helping others and altruism [11].

Components of Youth's Spirituality

There have also been studies that specifically identified the different components of youth spirituality. One of these research discovered that youth in foster care in America tend to understand that spirituality arouses within the conflicts experienced in life for it is where God manifests God-self as a source of "spiritual strength" [12]. With this, their spirituality is comprised of a personal relationship to God, which is expressed in a "communal" dimension [12, p.114].

Furthermore, by testing the "Measurement of Diverse Adolescent Spirituality (MDAS) on Mexican youth King and colleagues [13] discovered that factors such as "fidelity, transcendence and contribution" (p.245) are present within the Mexican youth's spirituality. Fidelity implies having a clear belief system and the accountability to adhere to such

beliefs; the transcendence component connotes a spirituality that is acknowledging the presence of the Divine; lastly, contribution implies that concern for the other, whoever it may be, in spirituality is an inevitable component [13].

In studying the Australian youth's spirituality, Hodder [14] posited that youth spirituality is mainly characterized as being "relational in nature" (p.202), and within this aspect are different components. According to Hodder [14], these components are one's relationship to "themselves, others, the wider community, and to God" (p.202). It implies that as one improves his/her "relationship to God" (p.202) it is inevitable that the process will lead to the improvement of one's relationship to oneself and to others [14].

Filipino Youth's Spirituality

In a local setting, Filipino youth spirituality was also one of the regarded topics for research in various fields. In understanding the millennial youth's spirituality from a local university, Lituanas [15] affirmed that religious activities do help and cannot be divorced from the formation of the spirituality of the youth. His study also portrayed that such engagement to religious activities reveals several aspects of the youth's spirituality, namely "longing for" and "longing to" (p.7). Young Filipinos yearn for God and for connectedness with other people, for answers to their existential questions and for satisfaction in spiritual life; they are eager to know and to follow Christ. He described these aspects as "passions" (p.7) by borrowing the term of Dean [15]. Such passions for him are somehow addressed in the various religious activities of the university and thus, contributing to the spiritual identity of the students [15]. In short, students perceive religious activities as a way to satisfy their spiritual desires. This is supported by del Castillo's findings [16] where love allows the person to have a better understanding of oneself and develop a better spiritual well-being.

Using a measurement instrument for religiosity and spirituality on college students, Baring, Lee, Sta. Maria and Liu [17] remarked that students who are engaged in activities outside the school have a higher manifestation of religiosity and spirituality than those students who only join activities inside the school. In addition, their study discovered that students who are not in "love relationship" (p. 169) are most likely to exhibit religiosity and spirituality than those who have; but they also found that for students "ages 17

below" (p.169) being in a relationship or not is not a factor for manifesting religiosity and spirituality. Baring et al. [17] also reported that financial stability enhances spirituality and religiosity of the students. This finding affirmed the previous study of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines-Episcopal Commission on the Youth and the Catholic Education Association of the Philippines [17] regarding the Filipino youth's religiosity. Furthermore, the study of Ocampo, Mansukhani, Mangrobang and Juan [18] revealed that for the Filipino youth, religiosity and spirituality are similar aspects of life and such development within these two aspects influenced by their loved ones and support group arouses positivity in the way they interact with themselves and others.

In a sociological aspect, Cornelio [19] stated that the Filipino Catholic youth possess a certain kind of spirituality which he calls "Reflexive Spirituality". It is a kind of spirituality that dwells more on one's "personal relationship to God" (p.18) and gives more emphasis on the how one lives out his/her beliefs than how s/he professes those beliefs, a criteria set for both his/her support group and the Church hierarchy [19]. Such findings regarding personal relationship to God as a component of Filipino youth spirituality was also present in the study of Mansukhani & Resurreccion [20]. They defined spirituality in the context of the Filipino youth with three aspects namely, "faith in God, personal relationship with God and positive character" (p.278). In the "faith in God" category, spirituality is defined as an avenue of expressing one's faith and trust in God, particularly in situations of conflict. The "personal relationship with God" category, on the other hand, specifies that spirituality is a way of expressing one's friendship with God, and that God is a personal friend with whom one can confide personal experiences and struggles. Lastly, "positive character" implies that spirituality always helps a person to become better, to see the bright side of things and to be a person of righteousness [20].

In a nutshell, it can be pointed out from these studies that Filipino youth's spirituality shows elements of relationship with God, with self and with community. However, to the awareness of the present study's researchers, there has been no study about Filipino's youth to date reporting a structure of youth's spirituality, compared to various configurations found in other populations around the

world, one of the most popular can be said to be that of John Fisher[21].

Fisher developed a scale called SHALOM, which underscores four dimensions (Personal, Communal, Environmental, and Transcendental) of spiritual well-being/health. As stated by the author [22], the four-dimension structure measurement has been supported through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in Afrikaans, Xhosa & Sesotho, Chinese, and Turkish[21]. SHALOM has also been “undergoing testing in Spanish, Filipino, Hebrew, Hindi and Czech, with planned studies in Russian, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, French, Norwegian, Hungarian, Korean and Urdu (Pakistan)” [22, p.5]. Considering that the environmental aspect has not yet been spotted as a dimension in the Philippine literature on spirituality, and that the SHALOM has been proven valid in many different countries, the present study is inspired to examine whether Filipino youth’s spirituality reflects these four dimensions.

The Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM)

In the light of all these studies and literature, another scholar known for studying the spirituality of the youth is John Fisher. He developed a psychometric instrument used for measuring spirituality known as SHALOM (the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure) [23]. By adopting the “framework definition” (p.1) of the Australian National Interfaith Coalition on Aging in 1975, Fisher [23] defined spirituality in connection to well-being as a force that affirms the interconnectedness of life and God, nature, community and self as one whole. With this definition, he introduced a term that encompasses spiritual well-being known as the “spiritual health” (p.2). For him, this spiritual health fundamentally underlines all other aspects of wellbeing, including emotional, physical, mental, social and occupational[23, p.2]. He further stated that spiritual health implies a “state of being” which promotes the interconnectedness among persons, community, environment, and the Transcendent. He called these “the four domains of spiritual health”[23, p.2].

The first domain is Personal: how one relates to oneself in terms of meaning and purpose in life and value system. Second is the Communal domain: a deep and quality relationship one has with others based on their moral, cultural and religious values. The third domain is Environmental: an experience of

awe, unity and wonder one finds in the natural environment. Transcendental is the fourth domain: one in relation to some-One or some-Thing beyond human beings, such as God, ultimate purpose, a supernatural reality, or something present in the Cosmo [23, p.2].

Indeed, these four domains are the essential “factors” contained in SHALOM with “five items each” [23, p.2]. The main instrument itself produces two results: one for the “lived experiences” which implicates “spiritual health”, and one for the “ideals for spiritual well-being” implicating “Life-Orientation”[23, p.3], [24, p.108]. The first part of SHALOM measuring “lived experiences” came from the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (SWBQ) that Fisher and Gomez constructed with noted statistical reliability and validity[24, p.109]. Fisher [23],[24] also introduced another term within his instrument known as “spiritual dissonance”. It is the disparity generated from the instrument between the “lived experiences” and the “ideals” within the four factors [23],[24, pp.115-116].

The instrument itself has also produced significant contributions to the different areas and aspects of spiritual well-being. For example, through the SHALOM it was discovered that one’s “relationship to God” is highly significant and is an inevitable component of spiritual well-being [23, p.8]. In 2008, Fisher and Brumley[25] used the same instrument for nurses and carers, and they were able to demonstrate that the personal belief systems of these health care staff do contribute to the way they attain their “ideals” (p.56) and “lived experiences” (p.56) for spiritual well-being; and thus affecting the way they accomplish their duties to their patients. Another study in the healthcare sector through SHALOM determined that the “ideals” and “lived experiences” of Australian and New Zealand palliative care doctors within their spiritual well-being were not in consonance with each other [26, p.52]. When it comes to institutionalized religion, Fisher [23] remarked that greater results were found in the Transcendental domain among the consecrated persons than among ordinary lay members. In South African samples, it was indicated that Africans who have been victims of “domestic violence” scored higher on the items of “relationship to God” than any other member of the South African society[23, p.4].

Using the same instrument, Fisher[27] concluded that the “lived experiences” of education students both from Australian State and Christian

universities was a significant contributing factor in promoting their spiritual well-being (p.164). It was also discovered that the understanding of students from Christian universities regarding spiritual well-being was not in parallel to the perception of their teachers [27]; while students from State universities maintained a somewhat neutrality in their understanding of spiritual well-being, similar to their teachers.

In 2013, Fisher [21], again by using SHALOM and its second version SWBQ2 for measuring spiritual well-being, also found out that within the Australian youth, the highest domain of spiritual well-being is "one's relationship to God". Furthermore, SHALOM was tested with Turkish students of divinity and religious education of local universities and was recorded that their "ideals" and "lived experiences" strengthened each other across the four domains of spiritual well-being [21].

METHODOLOGY

Participated in this research were 335 youth in the Philippines, particularly college students. There were 153 male students (45.7%) and 183 female (54.3%) aged between 18 and 23 (M= 19.95, SD=1.05).

For the purpose of exploration, this paper will also report findings of EFA on a second dataset. This dataset was taken with permission from a dissertation research done with Vietnamese youth in 2016. The scores were obtained from 135 youth in Vietnam using the same four-dimension SHALOM scale with two responses (Ideal and Lived experience) on each of the 20 items. The participants were vocations from different congregations around Vietnam, aged from 20 to 30 years old.

Data Analysis

As participants rated their spiritual health on two responses, the Ideal and the Lived experiences, the mean score of both responses were calculated to become the score for each item. Prior to statistical treatments, a screening task was performed to tackle missing values, outliers and possible violations of normal distribution. Consequently, three outliers were removed from further analyses. The EFA was conducted to investigate the structural validity of SHALOM in the studied samples. Descriptive statistics and correlations between dimensions were calculated. Actually, for the purpose of exploration,

EFA was performed on the scores of participants for Ideal, then on their response for Lived experience, and after that on the mean scores of both. The steps taken were similar and findings were the same. Therefore, only the results of EFA for items' mean scores (of both ideal and lived experiences) will be reported in the following.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to measure the total variance the variables account for. The correlation matrix revealed a range of correlation between items from .070 to .81, with determinant=1.21. The communalities indicated the greatest extraction to be .881 and the smallest of .403. The sampling adequacy measured by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was .884, and a $p=.000$ significance was recorded on the Bartlett's Sphericity test. There were four factors with initial eigen values > 1.0 and could explain for 63.96% of variance. The scree plot showed the inflection point at 4th component and eigen value > 1 .

Basing on the preliminary indications, the 4-factor solution was used for the fixed number of factors extraction with Varimax Rotation Method, and the absolute value for factor loadings set at .40. Items loaded in each factor were almost the same as those in the original scale, except item 8 which belongs to Communal dimension in the original scale now loaded onto the factor that identified as Personal dimension in the original. Further testing of reliability revealed factor four to have Cronbach's alpha $< .7$ and all four factors were significantly correlated. This was a violation of the requirements of Cronbach's alpha $> .7$ and of no correlations between the extracted factors in orthogonal rotation. Therefore, the 3-factor solution was finally decided for testing. Results of the Varimax Rotation Method showed a 3 factor structure with high reliability Cronbach's Alpha values: factor 1 had $\alpha=.945$ with 5 items, factor 2 had $\alpha=.848$ with 10 items, and $\alpha=.844$ with 5 items for factor 3. This 3-factor model accounted for 58.57% of variance explained. The table 1 below shows factor loadings with correspondent numbered items.

The test of correlations conveyed that dimensions in the 3-factor SHALOM were positively correlated with one another at a small to a medium level. The table 2 below shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of variables (dimensions).

Table 1: Factor Loadings in the 3-factor SHALOM in the Filipino Sample

Item	1	2	3
11- Oneness with God	.926		
2- Personal relationship with the Devine/God	.916		
6- Worship of the Creator	.897		
15- Prayer life	.863		
13- Peace with God	.856		
14- Joy in life		.757	
16- Inner peace		.728	
9- Self-awareness		.712	
18- Meaning in life		.649	
19- Kindness towards other people		.643	
8- Trust between individuals		.625	
17- Respect for others		.598	
5- A sense of identity		.557	
1- A love of other people		.481	
3- Forgiveness toward others		.419	
10- Oneness with nature			.854
4- Connection with nature			.824
12- Harmony with the environment			.760
7- Awe at a breathtaking view			.688
20- A sense of “magic” in the environment			.653

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 5 iterations

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, variance explained and correlations among dimensions of SHALOM for the Filipino Sample

	Mean	S.D	Variance explained	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	4.04	.761	32.61%	1	.332**	.178**
Factor 2	4.36	.375	16.63%		1	.483**
Factor 3	3.96	.622	9.33%			1

*N=332; **p <.001*

The EFA was conducted on the Vietnamese sample in similar procedure using PCA and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization as Rotation Method. The KMO of .908 indicated an adequate sampling. Although the Bartlett’s test for Sphericity was statistically significant, meaning the factorability of the correlation matrices was supported, the correlation matrix revealed that around 20 coefficients were below .2. The total variance explained matrix showed 4 components with initial eigen values > 1.0. Similarly, the scree plot exhibited the inflection point at the 3th component. The 4-factor solution was then tested with absolute value set at .40, but no meaningful clustering could be identified and with items 15 and 20 cross loaded in more than 1 factor. When these cross loading items were removed from re-rotation, other items became cross loading. A 3-

factor solution, which was finally decided for examination, indicated an indefinable grouping of items with items 12, 13 and 20 cross loading on two factors. In different trials of factor rotation, only items on Environmental Dimension (items 4, 7, 10, 12, 20) of the original scale remained intact as one cluster. Other items moved around and loaded on different factors as the factor solution changed. However, a cluster of items 2, 6, 11 and 15 (in the originally Transcendental Dimension) and a cluster of 14, 16 and 18 (in the originally Personal Dimension) were commonly spotted in various rotations, while the rest of the items showed no particular loading pattern.

Discussion on SHALOM

As postulated by the author [26], the double-response method that compared the ideal and actual

lived experience of respondents' spiritual health had been assumed to provide a statistically stronger measure of quality of relationships up to four domains of the spiritual well-being. Thus the data collected from the Filipino participants were hoped to have been a rigorous representation of participants' spiritual health. In contrast, the data obtained from the Vietnamese respondents might have been limited due to various reasons. They might include age diversity, exclusiveness of male participation, the particularity of formation and lifestyle as consecrated persons in the Catholic Church of Vietnam, and so on. All these aspects merit further empirical scrutiny for a more comprehensive understanding of the spiritual health of Vietnamese people. The discussion from this point on thus will focus primarily on the Filipino sample of the study.

Andy Field [28] argued that in PCA the first factor would account for the maximum part of the variance. Similarly, the most important factor would have the highest loading while other factors have smaller loadings. In this vein, it can be interpreted from the findings of EFA that factor 1- Relationship with the Transcendence- is the most crucial dimension in the structure of Filipino youth's spirituality (explaining 32.61% of variance). This is coherent with the author's [22] observation from various studies that the relationship with God was the most important aspect in spiritual health among people with different worldviews, and that relating with God accounted for the greatest variance in spiritual well-being on SHALOM as well as on SWBQ2.

The second most important factor appeared to include items measuring one's relationship with oneself and with other people. This dimension is a combination of the Personal and the Communal aspects of spiritual health in the original SHALOM. In other words, for Filipino youth, Personal and Communal dimensions of spiritual wellbeing appeared to be interwoven and closely knitted without separation. This finding reflects characteristics of the "interdependent happiness" construct proposed by Hitokoto and Uchida [29] in discussing psychological wellbeing of Asian populations. The construct refers to a state of being relationally oriented, preserving quiescence, and remaining ordinary among other people. It is to say that people from Asian cultures such as that of Filipino may not share the same perception of well-being with their European-American cohorts who come from more individualistic cultures. Indeed, the validation study

conducted by Ballada and Reyes [30] with 221 Filipino college students found interdependent happiness to be a valid constructs in these participants. For them, happiness did not comprise mere individual happiness but also interpersonal happiness that could be derived from relationship harmony, social support, ordinariness and relational goals [31].

Explanation for a seemingly inseparability of the individual and communal aspects of spiritual well-being of the Filipino participants in this study could be spotted in multidisciplinary studies that showed family's and relational circle's involvement in an individual's decision making processes. For example, a Filipino adolescent's choice of career paths may be a family affair [32], as opposed to an individual pursuit, because the goals of his or her significant others might be so suffused with his or her own that these goals are experienced as personal goals [33]. This interdependent self-construal thus demands that an individual fulfills objectives or expectations of his or her family members and relatives.

As has been briefly mentioned above, items loaded on Environmental dimension remained faithful to the original clustering in both Vietnamese and Filipino samples. It entails that the relationship with nature or the environmental aspect is a meaningful and significant component for people's spirituality in diverse geographical locations and cultures.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study has explored the structural configuration of the spiritual health of Filipino and Vietnamese youths. The quantitative examinations resulted in two noticeable findings. First, the Environmental of the SHALOM was a stable and valid domain in the spiritual health's configuration of both Vietnamese and Filipino samples. Second, the 3-factor construct of spiritual health and wellbeing: Relationship to the Transcendental – Relationship to Self and Others – Relationship to Environment was found to better reflect Filipino youth' spirituality.

To further understand and test the structure of Filipino youth's spirituality, later studies may employ Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to investigate the validity and reliability of SHALOM. EFA and CFA studies can also be conducted on more representative samples of Vietnamese youth to enable more comprehensive knowledge of their spirituality's configurations. The preliminary results of the present study may serve as suggestions and inspirations for later research to work toward developing a new and

context relevant instrument for measuring youth spirituality in Asian cultures and countries.

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