

# Impact of spiritual practices on happiness in middle-agers

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## Abstract

At every period of the life span, happiness is influenced by a number of factors. Success in a chosen vocation, which brings with it prestige, financial rewards, and improved social status for the family, goes a long way toward making middle-age a satisfying period of life for men. For women, whose lives have usually been centered around the home, satisfaction in middle-age depends mainly on the success with which they are able to adjust to the changes they must make in the home making role (Gorney & Cox, 1973). Spiritual practices, adopted and exercised by middle agers, also seem to have their say in happiness during middle-age. The authors intended to observe the impact of spiritual practices on happiness of male and female middle-agers. It has been hypothesized that middle-agers adopting spiritual practices would show higher level of happiness than non-adopting middle-agers and also would benefit more from spiritual practices. Thirty subjects were selected incidentally from four sub-groups i.e., high spiritual practicing males, low spiritual practicing males, high spiritual practicing females, and low spiritual practicing females, and were administered happiness scale.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Practices, Happiness

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## INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a mental state of well-being characterized by positive emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy.

Positive psychology endeavors to apply the scientific method to answer questions about what "happiness" is, and how we might attain it.

Philosophers and religious thinkers often define happiness in terms of living a good life, or flourishing, rather than simply as an emotion.

Happiness economics suggests that measures of public happiness should be used to supplement more traditional economic measures when evaluating the success of public policy. Studies have found that things like money, education, or the weather do not affect happiness the way one might expect. There are various habits that have been correlated with happiness. Psychologist Seligman (2002) provides the acronym PERMA to summarize many of positive psychology's findings: Pleasure (tasty foods, warm bath etc.), Engagement (or flow, the absorption of an enjoyed get challenging activity), Relationships (socialites have turned out to be extremely reliable indicator of happiness), Meaning (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger), and finally Accomplishments (have realized tangible goals).

According to Aynrand (1980) happiness is as state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievements of one's values : Broadic (2001 in Aristotle ethics define happiness as the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human

existence. According to Waitley (2008) happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude.

A spiritual practice or spiritual exercise includes any activity that one associates with cultivating spirituality. The Spiritual Science Research Foundation (SSRF) defines spiritual practice as honest and sincere efforts done consistently on a daily basis to develop divine qualities and achieve everlasting happiness as Bliss.

Another way of defining spiritual practice is our personal journey of going inward beyond our five senses, mind, and intellect to experience the soul (the God) within each of us one of the qualities of God is perceptual Bliss and so by tapping into the soul, we too experience bliss.

Some practices like meditation, yoga, and vegetarianism, are undertaken for spiritual purpose. This tends to be thought to characterize eastern religion more than western religion, speaking generally to focus on professed theological ideas more than in east.

There are many types of spiritual practice that people use like meditation, guided visualization, remembrance, prayer, walking meditation, family commitment etc.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The authors intended to observe the impact of spiritual practice on happiness of male and female middle-agers. For the purpose the specific problem and relevant hypotheses are as below:

1. The first problem of research pertains to impact of spiritual practices on happiness of middle agers. More specifically, the problem is whether high and low spiritual practicing middle-agers differ in regard to their happiness.

It has been hypothesized that high spiritual practicing middle-agers would be more happier than low spiritual practicing middle-agers.

2. The second problem of research is whether gender plays any role in happiness of middle-agers?

It has been hypothesized that male middle-agers would show higher level of happiness than female middle-agers.

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3. The last problem of research pertains to joint effect of spiritual practice and gender on happiness of middle agers.

It has been hypothesized that there would exist true joint effect of spiritual practice and gender on happiness of middle agers.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Sample**

A final incidental sample of 120 middle-agers equally drawn from four sub-groups i.e., high spiritual practicing males, low spiritual practicing males, high spiritual practicing females, and low spiritual practicing females, was selected.

**Tools**

Following psychological tests were used:

(i) **Determination of Spiritual Practice:** Spiritual Practice Scale (Ajawani & Purohit, 2011) was used to determine level of spiritual practice of middle-agers. The test is highly valid and reliable, coefficients ranging from .76 to .89. Percentile norms have been used to convert raw scores into standard scores.

(ii) **Assessment of Happiness:** Happiness Scale (Ajawani & Sethi, 2003) was used to assess happiness level of the subjects.

The test is highly valid and reliable. The coefficients ranging from .79 to .90. Percentile norms have been used to convert raw scores into standard score.

**Research Design & Procedure**

A 2x2 factorial design was used to assess independent and joint effect of spiritual practice and gender on happiness of middle-agers. Thirty subjects were studied in each of the four cells of design.

Initially spiritual practice scale was administered on a larger population of 500 middle-agers maintaining male- female ratio as 1:1. On the basis of Q<sub>1</sub> and Q<sub>3</sub> statistics, 60 middle agers were selected from low spiritual practice group (scoring below Q<sub>1</sub>) and 60 adolescents selected form high spiritual practice group (scoring above Q<sub>3</sub>). Male-female ratio was maintained as 1:1.

These finally selected 120 middle-agers were further administered happiness scale.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Hartley test of homogeneity of variance was computed and obtained F-max value in regard to happiness is 1.59. The observed value of F-max is lesser than the critical value of .01 level test, hence, the homogeneity of variance is accepted.

Table # 1: Statistical Description Of Four Sub-Groups Based On Spiritual Practice And Gender In Regard To Happiness

Groups	Gender		Female	Mean
	Male			
High	n	= 30	N	= 30
	M	= 163.7	M	= 161.0667
	Σx <sup>2</sup>	= 943.42	Σx <sup>2</sup>	= 990.38
Low	n	= 30	N	= 30
	M	= 137.2333	M	= 134.53333
	Σx <sup>2</sup>	= 889.3	Σx <sup>2</sup>	= 891.2
Mean	150.4667		147.8	
			149.1333	

Table # 2: Summary of Two-Way ANOVA

Source	SS	df	V	F-ratio	Remarks
Between 2 Gender Groups	213.33	1	213.33	657.9523	P<.01
Between 2 Groups	21067.5	1	21067.5	6.66	P<.01
Interaction Effect	0.033	1	0.033	0.001	NS
Within Sets (Error Term)	3714.3	116	32.0198		
Total	24995.163	119			

**(i) Role of Gender in Happiness**

A perusal of Table 1 reveals that average happiness scores of males

(M = 150.46) is higher than that of females (M = 147.8). The obtained F-ratio

(F = 6.66) is significant at .01 level of significance for 1 and 116 degrees of freedom and provides empirical ground to conclude that male and female middle-agers differed significantly in regard to their happiness.

In later life, it is men (who) come closer to fulfilling their aspirations, are more satisfied with their family lives and financial situations and are more happier than female middle-agers. Women show higher states of depression and anxiety related mood disorders. This suggests that women may experience more negative affect. Nolen et al. (1999) probably due to empty nest phenomenon and feeling useless as children have grown.

**(ii) Effect of Spiritual Practice on Happiness**

It is clear form Table 2 that average happiness score of high spiritual practice group (M = 162.3833) is higher than that of low spiritual practice group (M = 135.8833). The obtained F-ratio for this differences is 657.9523 and is significant at .01 level of significance

for 1 and 116 degrees of freedom and provides sound statistical ground to believe that high spiritual practicing group are more happier than low spiritual practicing group.

Spiritual people are generally happier than people without defined practice. Spiritual practice is an exercise to integrate and deepen our awareness of our own human experience. The purpose of spiritual practices is to realize happiness within – a fundamental purpose of life experienced in every waking moment. Spiritual transformation technology: methods and exercises are the ways to have all of life becomes suffused with spiritual practice

Eventually-even walking, listening to music, and relaxing with mindful motivation could be healing for the heart, body, and mind.

Hackney & Sanders (2003) found that religious and spiritual people report higher level of happiness and mental and subjective well-being. Spiritual practice also provides people with an opportunity to engage in meditative act. Meditation has been shown to have strong link with well-being because it calms the body, reduce stress and anxiety, and also support positive thinking. Spiritual practice can help provide people with perspective, hope and a deeper sense of meaning.

Elizabeth Manual (2011) also found kindness as a spiritual

practice boosts the happiness and also found that practicing kindness for a few minutes everyday helps to train our brain to suppress anger and flow by allowing blood to flow into frontal lobes. Spiritual practices can help you grow new neurons in hippocampus, which is damaged neurochemicals of anger, anxiety, and stress. Deliberate practicing spirituality will help our brain, increase our happiness and have a positive effect in every aspect of life.

### (iii) Joint Effect Of Gender An Spiritual Practice On Happiness

The interaction between gender and spiritual practice yielded F-ratio of .001 which is not significant at any acceptable level of significance for 1 and 116 degrees of freedom. This insignificant F-ratio provides sound statistical ground to conclude that there does not exist any true joint effect of gender and spiritual practice on happiness of middle-agers. Alternatively, it can be concluded that the difference between two gender groups in regard to their happiness does not vary genuinely due to their high or low spiritual practice level or vice versa.

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