

# Understanding the Role of Spiritual Groups on Spirituality, Hope, Resilience and Social Connectedness amongst Indian Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Being part of a faith group aids individuals cope and make meaning during extenuating conditions. Research suggests that social connection to a spiritual group facilitates individuals' and communities' well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic presented various socio-emotional difficulties. The present study aims to understand if being a part of a spiritual group helps cultivate spirituality, resilience, hope, and social connectedness and if these factors helped women cope during the pandemic. The study uses a quantitative comparative design, with two groups of women participants (18-40 years). The first group (30) of women belonged to a spiritual group (WSG), and the second (35) group of women were not a part of any spiritual group (WNSG). The data was collected through snowball sampling in Lucknow, and participants completed online self-report measures on Spirituality (Spirituality Assessment Scale), Resilience (Brief Resilience Scale), Hope (Adult Hope Scale), and Social Connectedness (Social Connectedness Scale). To study the level of participation with the spiritual group and their experiences during the pandemic a few open-ended questions were employed. The findings reveal that WSG was more spiritual, resilient, hopeful, and socially connected than WNSG. The association with the spiritual group provided them the means to utilize various adaptable socio/emotional strategies, helping them cope during the pandemic. The current study has significant implications for spirituality and positive psychology in terms of offering efficient stress-reduction techniques for coping. Mental health practitioners can utilize spiritual practices as therapeutic interventions to enhance hope and resilience while facing stressful situations.

*Keywords:* spirituality, resilience, hope, social connectedness, spiritual gatherings, COVID-19

We all were active witnesses to the havoc caused by the covid-19 pandemic, disrupting every crucial area of our lives. Many people faced psychological distress, leading to mental health issues and disorders. Psychological stress is a state of emotional misery associated with stressors and demands that are hard to cope with in daily life (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016). It can and may vary in intensity over time and range from common, normal feelings of vulnerability, sadness, and fears to problems that might become disabling (Ridner, 2004; Vitek et al., 2007). This has significantly impacted individuals' well-being, as many reported facing anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, and PTSD (Kar, Kar, & Kar, 2021). Many studies conducted during this time across nations, cultures, and communities echoed the same findings.

Social interaction has been associated with enhanced well-being. Under circumstances when one is devoid of this interaction, it may lead to poor mental health concerns, such as suicidal thoughts, self-harm, drug -abuse, and domestic and child abuse (Alradhawi et al., 2020). Because of the nature of the virus, people had to isolate themselves, causing an upsurge in the number of socially isolated people (Murayama, Okubo, & Tabuchi, 2021). Social isolation is

also often accompanied by loneliness, and people reported feeling lonelier since the pandemic (e.g., Ausin, Gonzalez-Sanguino, Castellanos, & Munoz, 2021). Apart from loneliness, the feeling of hopelessness and fear were also very prominent stressors among individuals. Studies reported an increased fear among people for their loved ones (Mertens et al., 2020). Further, anxiety levels were found to be a crucial predictor of hopelessness amongst people during the pandemic (Hacimusalar et al., 2020).

So, where do we seek comfort when things get difficult? Researchers have been studying this question for a long time and continue to explore its multifaceted deeper layers. The trend suggests that it's circumstances like these make people either turn towards a higher power or to those around them. It provides the much-needed strength and hope to face the stressors and feel grounded during such unpredictable times.

Spiritual group is one such resource that helps people develop a deeper relationship with themselves, the universe/supreme power, and the community, helping individuals adaptively cope with stress (Graham et al., 2011). Furthermore, spiritual and faith communities extend a sense of belonging, connection, and a trusting environment that helps people feel grounded (Galloway, 2013). Research has also shown that positive social connection of high quality can enhance resilience to stress, help protect against developing trauma-related psychopathology, and decrease the functional consequences of trauma-induced disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ozbay, Johnson, Dimoulas, et al., 2007). Studies have presented that collective gatherings impact a person's well-being and pro-social behaviour, collective identity, and social connectedness (Paez et al., 2015).

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In essence, we can consider that spirituality, hope, resilience and social connectedness are by-products of being a part of a spiritual group. And they, in turn, provide individuals with the ability to deal with stressors effectively. The literature underscores a few core themes that arise at the intersection of spirituality, resilience, hope, and social connection, such as increased awareness, positivity, well-being, pro-social behaviour, meaning-making, enhanced relationships, etc.

The aim of this study is to understand the role of spiritual groups in enhancing spirituality, hope, resilience and social connectedness amongst Indian women during the covid-19 pandemic. Each of the four factors are considered separately in further understanding how they act as coping techniques for the stressors of the pandemic. Hence, the hypotheses of the study are -

### *Hypotheses of the Study*

- *H1*- Women belonging to a spiritual group will be more spiritual than those not belonging to any spiritual group.
- *H2*- Women belonging to a spiritual group will be more hopeful than those not belonging to any spiritual group.
- *H3*- Women belonging to a spiritual group will be more resilient than those not belonging to any spiritual group.
- *H4*- Women belonging to a spiritual group will be more socially-connected than those not belonging to any spiritual group.

## Spirituality

Spirituality is specified by faith, a search for meaning and purpose in life, a sense of connection with others, and a transcendence of self, resulting in enhanced wellbeing and inner peace (Howden, 1992). Spirituality helps people better tolerate stress, psychological distress, and isolation (Yun, Kim, & Awasu, 2019; Roberto et al., 2020). The present circumstances have instilled a sense of anxiety, fear and loneliness, making people shift towards spirituality for coping. Being spiritual allows people to develop faith in some higher power (Gall, Malette, & Guirguis-Younger, 2011) and hone certain skills like mindfulness, resilience etc., that aid in dealing with negative emotions effectively (Zhang et al., 2021)

## Hope

Hope is a cognitive state based on a sense of successful goal-directed determination and planning to meet these goals (Snyder et al., 1991) which allows one to expect positive outcomes (Duggal, Zimmerman, & Liberta, 2016). It's a faith in one's ability to identify the path that leads to one's goals (agency thinking) and having the motivation to follow those paths (pathway thinking) (Snyder et al., 1991). It enables individuals to expect optimistic outcomes and serves as a buffer against life's adversities. This indicates that a hopeful person actively looks out for different ways to cope with difficulties and is motivated to try different ways to overcome the difficulty. During the covid-19 pandemic, hope can serve as a protective factor to help people through such tumultuous times. Hopeful people will believe that the pandemic will eventually end and better times will return. People have developed numerous ways to cope with the pandemic, and hope has been considered a protective agent against the covid-19 (Satici et al., 2020). Hope is also known to have positive associations with subjective happiness (Sarıçam 2015). Many people faced various social, emotional, and physical challenges during the covid-19 pandemic, leading to anxiety, loneliness, anger, along with other

negative emotions. In this context we can speculate hope to act as a protective factor against the stress generated by the covid-19 pandemic.

## Resilience

Resilience is an ability to return to daily functioning after experiencing taxing life situations that have resulted in a functional breakdown (Carver, 1998). It is an ability to stay strong during difficult circumstances, adaptively cope with them and return back to normal functioning. Resilience is an important factor in dealing with stress, anxiety, and fear emerging from the covid-19 pandemic (Satici et al., 2020) and may play a role in protecting mental health, accelerating recovery, and reducing the ramifications of a crisis (Davydov et al., 2010). Hence, we can assume that individuals who were resilient did not face a lot of difficulties dealing with the negativity of the pandemic, because they had better coping abilities than those individuals who were not resilient.

## Social Connectedness

According to Bel et al. (2009), social connectedness is a sense of belonging and relatedness that can be expressed as a connectedness to self, others, a higher power, the universe, God, nature, or a combination of all (Campbell et al., 2010). The pandemic significantly affected social relationships because of the lockdown. Since social groups are a source of hope and strength, relationships might suffer from a lack of physical contact. In fact, social connectedness is a vital human need, and its promotion plays a notable role in enhancing physical health and well-being (Southwick & Southwick, 2020). Higher levels of social connectedness aid individuals in coping with depression and anxiety by increasing positive and decreasing negative affect (Taylor et al., 2020). We can suppose that social connections enabled people to cope more adaptably given how the pandemic was a big cause of stress and anxiety for most people. A high level of social connectedness was associated with reduced distress and fatigue during the covid-19 (Nitschke et al., 2020). The research has also shown, based on the stress-buffering hypothesis, that social support from different sources can shield the deleterious effect of low levels of resilience on mental health during the covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, social support has also proved to be effective against the damaging biological effects of stress and is associated with more functional or adaptive coping styles (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Therefore, social connectedness can function as a protective factor against the harmful impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside spirituality, adaptability, and hope.

## The Relevance of the Indian Context

While there have been studies considering how spiritual groups enhance social connectedness and resilience against stress (e.g., Roberto et al., 2020; Jerotijevic & Hagovska, 2019) acting as a strong coping resource, the number of such studies is minimal, and most of them have been conducted in the West with the majorly white population. Additionally, these groups have been shown to act as coping resources, but it's still unclear if they will continue to act as coping resources in times of difficulty, much like covid-19.

Secondly, to my knowledge, there is a considerable amount of literature that focuses on how spirituality acts as a coping mechanism in difficult times. Still, very few studies focus on 'spiritual groups'.

The dearth of studies on 'spiritual groups' that can be used as coping resources is quite astonishing from an Indian perspective, as India is considered a collectivist and highly spiritual country. Social relationships are considered highly important and respectable. Simultaneously Indian history has a strong sense of spirituality hidden deep within it, and the spiritual practices hold a sacrosanct place which are emphasized in relation to well-being, happiness, quality of life, etc. The meanings of spirituality and social connectedness can vary depending on the cultural make-up and its ingrained beliefs, therefore it is crucial to take these contextual aspects into account when studying these variables.

Thirdly, this study specifically aims to highlight the experiences of Indian women during the pandemic. It is crucial to study this particular group since they are more likely to experience higher levels of poor physical and mental health during the pandemic. A woman's responsibility in social and personal life is multi-layered, ranging from cooking, doing groceries, taking care of the family, managing household work, her career, etc. With the pandemic emerging, many women had to shoulder multiple responsibilities and within a few days after the lockdown, The National Commission of Women (NCW) reported increased intimate partner and domestic violence. Research also demonstrated the prevalence of mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and stress during the covid-19 (Xiong et al., 2020). The present study aims to understand and explore their coping mechanisms and how the spiritual connections helped them handle the stressful times.

Lastly, these circumstances are rather unique, and their effects on overall psychological outcomes are still being studied, with many aspects remaining open for exploration. The literature points out that spiritual groups enhance social connectedness because people practice together and share their experiences with the group. But since we are facing such a situation for the first time in our life where meeting other people has become significantly difficult, this study tries to intricately understand if the effect of the spiritual groups still exists when people are not meeting each other on a daily basis? . Put simply, do the practices they have been carrying out for over two years have the strength to showcase their effect even when people are not deliberately practicing them?

## Method

### Participants

This study is descriptive-comparative and is quantitative in nature with research design being cross-sectional. Two groups of women (65) between the age of 18-40 years were recruited through snowball sampling from Lucknow, India. The first group consisted of 35 women ( $M= 29$ ) who belonged to a Spiritual group (The Brahmakumaris) and have been affiliated for the last two years with a minimum engagement of 2-3 hours/week. The second group consisted of 30 women ( $M= 25$ ) who did not belong to any spiritual group and had not been affiliated with any spiritual group in the last two years. A total of 4.6% of the participants were currently in 12th standard, followed by 52.3% pursuing a graduate degree and 43.1% pursuing a post-graduate degree. Most participants followed Hinduism (81.5%) and Islam (13.8%). There were also followers of Christianity and Sikhism, representing 1.5% (each) of the total population. The highest percentage (83%) of WSG followed Hinduism, followed by Islam (6.7%), which was followed by Christianity and Sikhism (3% each). WNSG identified with only two

religions which were Hinduism (80%) and Islam (20%).

### Measures

*Spirituality Assessment Scale (Howden, 1992)*: The scale measures spirituality on four dimensions: Purpose and Meaning in Life, Unifying Interconnectedness, Innerness or Inner Resources, and Transcendence. There are 28 items measuring four dimensions on a 6 Likert scale. Each dimension has its indicators. Participants have to mark one response for each of the 28 items on a six-point Likert scale, from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (6) The total score as well as individual scores for each domain are used to determine the final scores. The answers to each of the 28 items must be summed together to get the final score.

The respondent has a high level of spirituality if their overall score is higher than 84. The sub-scale scores are calculated by adding the scores of the items within a particular domain. To interpret this value, the number of items in that domain is multiplied by 3. If that score tends to be above that number, the participant qualifies for that specific domain in spirituality. SAS is a reliable and valid tool for measuring spirituality. Alpha coefficients for the 28-item total instrument were 0.9164. Alpha coefficients for the subscales were: Purpose or Meaning, 0.9117; Innerness, 0.7944; Interconnectedness, 0.8017; and Transcendence, 0.7091. Most item-to-total correlations ranged from 0.30 to 0.70. 70% of inter-item correlations ranged from 0.30 to 0.70. 50% of item-subscale correlations ranged from 0.50 to 0.70. Two-thirds (66%) of subscale-subscale correlations ranged from 0.55 to 0.70.

*Adult Hope Scale (Snyder, 1991)*: The scale is based on Snyder's cognitive model of hope. It measures the respondent's level of hope on two domains: Agency thinking (goal-directed energy) and Pathway thinking (planning to accomplish goals). It has a total of 12-item wherein four items comprise the Agency component (2,9,10, and 12) and 4 comprise the Pathway component (1,4,6, & 8). The remaining 4 are fillers (3, 5, 7, 11). Participants must select one answer from Definitely false (1) to Definitely true (8) on a scale of one to eight for each of the twelve questions (8). The responses to the second, ninth, tenth, and twelfth questions are added to get the score for the agency sub-scale. Higher scores in this domain indicate higher degrees of agency thinking, with scores in this domain ranging from 4-32. Similar to this, the responses to the first, fourth, sixth, and eighth items are added to determine the score for the Pathways sub-scale. Higher scores in this domain indicate higher degrees of pathway thinking, with scores in this domain ranging from 4-32. The overall hope score is calculated by adding the scores for the eight components. Scores might be between 8 and 64, with higher scores suggesting greater levels of hope. The Hope Scale has demonstrated sound internal reliability, with Cronbach alphas ranging from .74 to .88 (Cramer & Dyrkacz, 1998; Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991; Sumerlin, 1997). Both subscales have shown adequate internal reliability. Cronbach alphas have ranged from .70 to .84 for the Agency scale and from .63 to .86 for the Pathways scale (Cramer & Dyrkacz, 1998; Snyder et al., 1991; Sumerlin, 1997). In addition, the Hope Scale has been shown to be temporally stable.

*The Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008)*: It measures the 'ability to bounce back or recover from stress.' It's a reliable scale and associates with personal characteristics, social relations, coping, and health (Smith, Dalen, et al., 2008). It has a total of six-item, wherein the 1st,3rd, and 5th items are positively worded, and the 2nd,4th, and 6th are negatively worded. There are total six items present on a 5

point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly disagree* to (1) to *Strongly agree* (5). Items the 2nd, 4th, and 6th are reverse scores and then the mean of the six items are calculated to obtain the final score with the total scores ranging from 6-30. Internal consistency is good, with Cronbach's alpha between .80-91

*Social Connectedness Scale- revised (SCS-r; Lee & Robins, 1995)*- The scale measures the respondent's social connection levels. The items capture the 'sense of closeness with others', 'maintaining and seeking connections,' and 'one's experience of distance and isolation from others'. There are 20 items on the scale (10 positives & 10 negatives). Each of the 20 questions has an answer that the participants must indicate on a six-point Likert scale, from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (6). The negatively worded items will be summed up with the scores of positively worded items after being reverse scored. The higher scores indicate higher levels of social connectedness with the score range of 20-120. The scale has high reliability with (internal consistency  $\alpha > .92$ ).

Apart from the standardized measures, a few qualitative questions were asked to explore the level of engagement (of WSG) with their spiritual group and their experiences (of WSG & WNSG) during the pandemic.

## Procedure

I collected the data online for 65 women participants from Lucknow, India. Thirty-five women belonged to the Brakhmakumaris (a spiritual group). The approval to carry out the study was taken from the head of the Brahmakumaris centre, Lucknow, who further connected me to other organization members for data collection. I contacted all the participants by phone and explained the study's objectives to them. The participants provided written informed consent and completed the survey. I recruited the remaining thirty women who did not belong to any spiritual group through social media advertising, my professional and personal contacts, and with the help of women participants who had agreed to participate in the survey.

## Results

To determine whether there were any significant differences between the two groups on spirituality, resilience, hope, and social connectivity, the Mann-Whitney U test (for testing hypotheses 1, 3, and 5) and the independent samples t-test (for testing hypothesis 2) were employed in the study.

## Spirituality

**Table 1**

*Range, Mean, Standard Deviation and Mann-Whitney U test for Spirituality*

N	WSG			WNSG			U	Z
	R	M	SD	R	M	SD		
	30			35				
Purpose & Meaning in Life	17-24	22.07	1.85	04-24	19.20	4.25	244.5	-3.729***
Innerness/Inner resources	40-45	48.63	4.02	17-53	42.74	8.60	273	-3.326***
Unifying Interconnectedness	38-54	48.77	3.81	15-51	42.71	7.35	201	-4.280***
Transcendence	10-30	21.40	5.34	07-28	21.14	4.54	509	ns

*Note.* U= test statistics for Mann Whitney U test, Z= Z score, R= range, M= mean, SD= standard deviation, \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

The WSG had a mean of 22.07 with SD of 1.85 for 'purpose and meaning in life' while the WNSG had a mean of 19.2 with SD of 4.25. This suggests that even while both the groups evidenced the presence of purpose and meaning in life, the WSG scored higher. WSG were statistically significantly higher than WNSG ( $U = 244.5, p = .0000$ ).

The WSG had a mean of 48.63 and SD of 4.02 for 'Innerness or inner resources' while the WNSG had a mean of 42.74 and SD of 8.60. The findings show that both groups score highly on the 'innerness or inner resources' component, although the WSG rates higher than the WNSG. WSG was also statistically significantly higher than WNSG ( $U = 273.0, p = .001$ ).

The WSG scored a mean of 48.77 with SD of 3.81 on 'Unifying interconnectedness,' and the WNSG scored a mean of 42.71 with SD of 7.35. This indicates that WSG to have higher levels of

interconnectedness than the WNSG. Moreover, WSG was statistically significantly higher than WNSG ( $U = 201.0, p = .000$ ).

The mean and SD for the WSG on 'Transcendence,' are 21.40 and 5.34, and the mean for WNSG is 21.14 with SD of 4.54. The results reveal that there is not much of a difference between the two groups on the 'transcendence' factor, but the WSG scored relatively higher than the WNSG. However, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant ( $U = 509.0, p = .833$ ).

These results specify that overall, the level of spirituality was significantly higher for women who belonged to a spiritual group than the women who did not belong to any spiritual group, except for the component of 'transcendence'.

## Hope

**Table 2**  
Range, Mean, Standard Deviation and Mann-Whitney U test for Hope

N	WSG			WNSG			U	Z
	R	M	SD	R	M	SD		
Pathway Thinking	24-32	28.3	2.08	17-32	26.09	3.91	354.5	-2.258*
Agency Thinking	20-32	27.90	3.53	11-32	25.03	4.56	306.0	-2.894**

Note. U= test statistics for Mann Whitney U test, Z= Z score, R= range, M= mean, SD= standard deviation, \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

The WSG had a mean of 28.3 with SD of 2.08 on the component of 'pathway thinking', while the WNSG scored a mean of 26.08 with SD 3.91, indicating that both the groups were high on this particular component, but the WSG scored comparatively higher than the WNSG. WSG were also statistically significantly higher than WNSG ( $U = 354.5, p = .024$ ).

The WSG scored a mean of 27.90 with SD of 3.53 on 'agency thinking', while WNSG had a mean and SD of 25.03 and 4.56. For

this subscale, as well, the scores of the WSG are higher than the WNSG, with WSG being statistically significantly higher than WNSG ( $U = 306.0, p = .004$ ).

This demonstrates that women who were members of the spiritual group were more hopeful than women who were not members of any spiritual group. This holds even for the scores on the subscales.

### Resilience

**Table 3**  
Mean, SD, and Independent Samples t-test for Resilience

R	WSG		R	WNSG		t- value
	M	SD		M	SD	
2.83- 4.83	90.86	12.93	2.16- 4.66	76.42	13.53	5.373***

Note. R= range, M=mean, SD= Standard deviation, t-value, \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

The mean score for WSG was 3.81, with a SD of 0.48, while the mean score for WNSG was 3.10, with a SD of 0.56.

Although both the groups of women fall under the category of 'normal resilience', the scores reveal WSG to have higher levels of resilience than the WNSG. The t-test result indicated a significant difference in the scores of both the groups on the BRS,  $t(63) = 5.373$ ,

$p = .000$ . According to the Brief Resilience Scale, the WSG was more resilient than the WNSG. The alternative hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in the mean scores of both groups on the BRS was accepted, while the null hypothesis that there would be no difference was rejected.

### Social Connectedness

**Table 4**  
Mean, SD and Mann-Whitney U test for Social-connectedness

R	WSG		R	WNSG		U	Z
	M	SD		M	SD		
65-107	90.86	12.93	54-104	76.42	13.53	225.0	-3.951***

Note. U= test statistics for Mann Whitney U test, Z= Z score, R= range, M= mean, SD= standard deviation, \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

The mean and SD for social connectedness for the WSG were 90.86 and 12.93, respectively and the mean and SD for the WNSG were 76.42 and 13.53, indicating that the WSG scored much higher on social connectedness than the WNSG. The level of social connectedness for WSG was significantly higher than for WNSG ( $U = 225.0, p = .000$ ). As a result, it may be concluded that women who belonged to the spiritual group were more socially connected than women who did not belong to any spiritual group.

Further, descriptive and content analysis was conducted to better

understand the differences between both the groups in their experiences during the pandemic and the level of engagement of WSG with their spiritual groups.

The analysis revealed that WSG majorly engaged in 5 practices which were- meditation (33%), chanting (13%), healing practice (8%), prayer (5%) and bhajan (5%). The participants also mentioned 5 main philosophies of their spiritual group- connecting with the universe (40%), personal transformation (33%), connecting with oneself (20%), connecting to others (13%) and developing a positive mindset (10%).

Further, analysis revealed some interesting findings when both groups were asked about their experiences during the pandemic.

The most stressful experience for WSG was seeing others suffer and their inability to contribute, and for WNSG it was hearing about deaths. WSG mentioned that they faced the most challenges in the area of their social life, followed by emotional issues and work-related issues. While the WNSG faced most challenges in their physical health, followed by social life. The groups were also asked about what kept them going during the pandemic, and the WSG reported that it was their mindfulness/meditation practice and the support from their community, family and friends that helped them cope. Whereas, the WNSG mentioned that it was their inner strength and social support that kept them going. Lastly, they were also asked if the pandemic had changed their outlook in any way, to which the WSG reported that they have started to value their relationship more, felt a higher connection to the spiritual power, and felt more responsible towards mother earth. The WNSG reported that they have accepted life's uncertainty and had improved relationships.

## Discussion

The current study aimed to understand the role of spiritual gatherings on spirituality, hope, resilience, and social connectedness amongst Indian women during the pandemic. The pandemic elicited multiple psychological and emotional distress. One in three adults in the general population had covid-related mental health distress. People were more prone to anxiety and depression due to the danger of infection and longer media exposure (Wang et al., 2020). Studies revealed women to be at a higher risk of psychological issues (Marzo et al., 2021). As they are considered to be the primary caretakers, and managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously, can lead to increased stress. Secondly, research has also shown women to be more susceptible to domestic violence, thereby increasing the chances of physical and emotional abuse (Jennings et al., 2021). According to Jerotijević and Hagoovská (2019), based on collective rituals and shared emotions theories, spiritual gatherings can positively affect levels of well-being and act as a type of social and emotional resilience. Being involved with collective ritualized activities helps reduce the impact of trauma (Villagran, Reyes, & Włodarczyk, 2014) and can promote interpersonal, intrapersonal, and positive social responses. The results revealed that women who were a part of a spiritual group were statistically significantly higher on the scales of spirituality, hope, resilience, and social connectedness than the group of women who were not a part of any spiritual group. These results implies that WSG were more spiritual, hopeful, resilient, and socially connected than WNSG. The study's findings highlighted that spiritual groups contributed to and served as a barrier and a protective factor against the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, being a part of a spiritual group enabled higher levels of spirituality, hope, resilience, and social connectedness, which were also factors that acted as a shield against such difficult times. The findings can be attributed to the notion that since India is a collectivist country, social support can serve as a protective factor for coping with difficult situations and enhancing well-being. Based on the qualitative analysis, both groups faced challenges during the pandemic, but the WSG had a broader range of coping strategies, were more optimistic, and faced fewer difficulties than the WNSG. This difference could be attributed to the idea that the WSG had developed and honed certain skills by being a part of a spiritual group which enabled them to tackle the stressors of the pandemic. In a study

by Copolla et al. (2021) religious and spiritual practices are shown to provide meaning and purpose along with providing a supportive community. Chirico (2021) also discusses the usefulness of spiritual practices for positive coping as they have been linked with higher levels of hope and lower levels of fear, worry, and sadness. The findings of this study underscore that women's spiritual affiliations have helped them cope better with the pandemic. These factors and spiritual activities, like meditation, yoga, spiritual studies, affirmations, etc., have strongly acted as protective agents against the ramifications of Covid-19. It was also emphasized that being affiliated to a spiritual group allowed women to develop a range of coping strategies that enabled them to rely on their inner strength and social support. It was associated with having an optimistic attitude about negative circumstances, a faith in a better future, and a desire to do something meaningful for fellow members and the environment.

## Implications of the Study

Spiritual practices like meditation, positive affirmations, deep breathing, yoga, etc., can be effective in reducing stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and fear and help in adaptively dealing with negative emotions. Hence, it can be used as a therapeutic modality along with the principal therapy. The respondents in the current study reported that practising meditation and mindfulness helped them stay calm, positive, and grounded. Social connections have been one of the strongest coping mechanisms for dealing with the pandemic. People can be encouraged to join spiritual groups, which may help them practise these skills more effectively and establish deeper social relationships with others, themselves, and God.

## Future Directions and Limitations of the Study

The present study's sample size was comparatively small (65) which was collected from Lucknow, India. For future studies to be more representative of the Indian population, a bigger sample size with diverse gender identities from different cities in India can be used. Furthermore, it can also be adopted as a cross-cultural study between Eastern/Western cultures to examine if social and cultural structures play any role in how spiritual groups function and if the interpretation of spirituality and social connectedness differs. Thirdly, this study focused on a single spiritual group. Future research can aim to include other spiritual groups to investigate how their spirituality, hope, and social connectedness vary. It's also crucial to consider that the present study was executed in the Indian context, and marriage is a crucial factor that might affect women's level of spiritual participation. Future studies can take into account the marital status of the women, the number of children they have, and the motivation behind them joining a spiritual group, which could make the study more robust. Last but not least, the qualitative methodology can be used in future research to better understand participants' experiences with spiritual groups.

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