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Spiritual Well-Being of Senior High School Students in a Non-Sectarian Private High School in Negros Island, Philippines

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Abstract. This study, rooted in spiritual well-being theory, assessed the spiritual well-being of students in a private non-sectarian school in Northern Negros Occidental during the 2024-2025 academic year. It examined religious and existential well-being relative to sex, religion, family monthly income, family structure, and birth order and compared their spiritual well-being across these demographics. Utilizing a quantitative, descriptive-comparative design, the research involved 75 Humanities and Social Sciences students selected through stratified random sampling. A standardized questionnaire with a high, moderate, and low scale was used, with data analyzed using mean, standard deviation, Mann Whitney, and Kruskal Wallis tests. The study adhered to the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) ethical standards. Generally, students reported a moderate overall spiritual well-being, characterized by high religious well-being but moderate existential well-being. Among demographic factors, a significant difference in spiritual well-being was found relative to religion, with Catholics rating significantly higher than non-Catholics. Consequently, fostering a values-based culture by integrating school values into instruction and learning opportunities is essential. The findings partially validated the spiritual well-being theory. Future research should aim for a larger scale and different contexts to further verify these assertions.

Keywords. Social science, spiritual well-being, quantitative, Northern Negros Occidental, Philippines

1.0 Introduction

Spiritual well-being is often understood as encompassing an individual's connection with a higher power, their spiritual essence, and their overall sense of life satisfaction [1]. Far from being an abstract or impractical concept, it is an inherent aspect of human existence akin to the mind and body [2]. Research indicates that spiritual well-being can mitigate emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, with physical well-being linked to personal accomplishment [3]. It appears to foster the development of coping mechanisms and cultivates emotional support, enabling individuals to view challenging situations positively [4]. Furthermore, in a cognitive sense, spiritual well-being is closely related to spirituality, religiosity, and general life satisfaction [5].

In several Asian nations, spiritual well-being is a crucial coping mechanism for students. For instance, final-year students in Malaysia heavily depend on it to manage physical

and mental health stress during their studies [6]. Research involving Thai and Indonesian students also indicates a significant positive correlation between spiritual well-being and quality of life: higher spiritual well-being is associated with a higher quality of life, and vice versa [7]. In Indonesia, students' spiritual well-being has been linked to improved academic performance and successful completion of learning activities. Furthermore, high spiritual well-being and low stress levels can enhance student engagement in academic and non-academic pursuits, fostering more productive and innovative individuals [8]. Within the Philippines, a study by Del Castillo and Alino [9] among Filipino students found that religion can be an important coping resource and contribute positively to mental health.

In the Philippines nowadays, students, specifically in private schools, have the subject Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems. It is a religion-related class that senior high school students take as they learn about the significance of spirituality and religion in their lives as individuals and as students in this course, according to the Department of Education K-12 curriculum objective on holistic development of the learners [10]. However, the rise of secularism and the postmodern and materialistic attitudes of today's students hinder them and diminish their ideals and spirituality [11]. As well as young people are particularly accused of moral relativism and having lax views toward religious activity; nonetheless, they internalize a reflexive spirituality involving a very intimate relationship with God [12].

The senior high school students in a non-sectarian private school in a component city in northern Negros is a learning environment that instills the learnings of various religions via the Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems subject in which to enhance students in relating to religious and spiritual matters. The transformative power of religious teachings may encourage these students to reflect on what they have learned about religion and spirituality. This could allow the subject matter to inspire personal growth within their students. Moreover, spiritual well-being should be enhanced as an additional learning experience for the students that form a part of the holistic development of their extracurricular activities based on the guidelines set by the Department of Education. Also, as observed, the influence of technology has made an impact by providing them with an alternative way of spending their spare time, where technology provides the trend of behaviors and fashion that students follow, neglecting whatever is taught to them in the churches. Hence, as a result, the focus of senior high school students on courses unrelated to spiritual and religious instruction raises concerns about their spiritual well-being.

Similar research on spiritual well-being has been made on the seminarians of Antique [13], in a Catholic college in the Philippines [14] on junior high school students [15], on selected Catholic novices [16], and emerging adults in a Catholic college in Central Negros [17]. Also, students in Malaysia [6], Thailand, and Indonesia [7,8] on spiritual well-being, especially in non-sectarian private high schools. This is also a response to the recommendation of Cena and Bual [18] to conduct further studies on the topic in other institutions. This is the research gap that this study would like to fill in.

Thus, this study assessed the spiritual well-being of senior high school students in a non-sectarian private high school in Negros Occidental in terms of religious and existential well-being relative to sex, religion, family income, family structure, and birth order. Also, it checked the significant difference in their spiritual well-being when grouped according to the demographics. The findings of the study may serve as a basis for formulating the proposed values enrichment activities for Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems to continuously improve the spiritual well-being of senior high school students in non-sectarian private high schools.

2.0 Framework of the Study

This paper theoretically assumed that students' spiritual well-being differs based on sex, religion, family monthly income, family structure, and birth order. This assumption is rooted in Paloutzian and Ellison's [1] spiritual well-being theory. This theory conceptualizes spiritual well-being as a "personality attribute conceived of having one vertical dimension connoting one's perception of a relationship to God, and one horizontal dimension connoting one's perception of life's meaning, purpose or satisfaction with one's existence".

Consequently, this framework illustrates spiritual well-being as the affirmation of life through relationships with God, self, community, and the environment, fostering and celebrating wholeness. Beyond mere academic standing, spiritual well-being can significantly enrich the Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems by offering a framework for perceiving religious beliefs as avenues to individual and collective meaning, moving beyond abstract academic study. Within the research context, spiritual well-being, irrespective of demographics, can enhance the study of World Religions and Belief Systems by encouraging a more introspective and receptive learning approach. This helps learners appreciate and comprehend how individuals discover meaning and purpose in life, regardless of their background or personal characteristics.

3.0 Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically the descriptive-comparative approach. The descriptive component assessed the senior high school students' degree of spiritual well-being. Conversely, the comparative approach investigated significant differences in their spiritual well-being when categorized by sex, religious affiliation, family monthly income, family structure, and birth order. The research involved 75 senior high school students from a non-sectarian private school in Northern Negros Occidental. They were selected using a stratified random sampling method combined with the fishbowl technique.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	n	%
Sex		
Male	50	66.7
Female	25	33.3
Religion		
Catholic	72	96.0
Non-Catholic	3	4.0
Family Income		
High	27	36.0
Low	48	64.0
Family Structure		
Intact	54	72.0
Non-intact	21	28.0
Birth Order		
First	39	52.0
Second	20	26.7
Third and up	16	21.3
Whole	75	100.0

To assess the data, Paloutzian and Ellison's [1] spiritual well-being scale (SWBS) was employed in this investigation. The SWBS is a 20-item instrument designed to measure an individual's religious and existential well-being and overall life satisfaction. Questions pertaining to religious well-being incorporate the term "God" and evaluate the extent to which one perceives and articulates the well-being of their spiritual life about God. Conversely, items addressing existential well-being consist of general statements exploring life direction and satisfaction, measuring an individual's perceived and reported adjustment to self, community, and surroundings. Reliability testing, conducted using Cronbach's alpha, yielded reliability scores of .864 and .865, establishing the instrument's reliability.

For data analysis, descriptive-comparative analyses were utilized. The descriptive analysis employed mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage to ascertain the degree of spiritual well-being among senior high school students, specifically in religious and existential well-being. The comparative analysis, conversely, measured differences in spiritual well-being assessments when students were grouped by sex, religion, family monthly income, family structure, and birth order.

The Shapiro-Wilk test determined variable normality, revealing that spiritual well-being ($SW=0.958$, $p=0.014$) was not normally distributed. Consequently, non-parametric tools were used for inferential questions. The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to identify significant differences in spiritual well-being when students were grouped by sex, religion, family income, and family structure. In contrast, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used for groupings based on birth order.

Lastly, to fully guarantee the ethical soundness of the study, the researcher adhered to the general principles of respect for persons, justice, and beneficence in accordance with the guidelines established by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB).

4.0 Results and Discussion

Degree of Spiritual Well-being of Senior High School Students

Table 2 presents the degree of spiritual well-being of senior high school students in terms of religious and existential well-being. Generally, they have a moderate ($M=96.65$, $SD=11.41$) spiritual well-being. In terms of the areas, religious was rated high ($M=50.95$, $SD=6.36$) while existential ($M=45.71$, $SD=6.44$) was rated moderate. In terms of religion, the Catholic students ($M=51.47$, $SD=5.66$) rated higher religious well-being than the non-Catholic ($M=38.33$, $SD=10.50$). In family income, those who came from low income ($M=51.65$, $SD=5.70$) rated higher religious well-being than those with high income ($M=49.70$, $SD=7.33$). In birth order, the firstborn ($M=51.85$, $SD=6.05$) and third-born and up ($M=50.94$, $SD=4.71$) students rated higher religious well-being than the second-born ($M=49.20$, $SD=7.86$).

The study found that the respondents' existential well-being across demographics was moderate, with the overall rating indicating that HUMSS students at the non-sectarian private school in a component city in Negros Occidental possess an average affirmation of life in relation to God, spirituality, and religiosity. It is possible that despite a lack of personal experience with their Catholic faith, these students may adhere to it due to fear of discrimination from peers or authority figures like parents, who can influence their children's moral development through pathways such as instilling religious beliefs. Also, being a private, non-sectarian and having limited religious instruction may generally disregard spiritual issues in contrast to Catholic educational institutions. This may account for the moderate result, but most of these pupils' parents are likewise Catholic and devout Christians, which may have encouraged their kids to show a deep love for God [19].

In religious well-being, it is also noted that students who are Catholic, come from low family income backgrounds, and either born as a first child or born as a third and up child are rated high in terms of religious well-being, in contrast to those students who are non-Catholic, came from high family incomes, and being born as the second child in the family, their overall religious well-being is rated as moderate [36]. The possible reason might be due to the students in a non-sectarian private school in a Negros Occidental component city who may be conscious of God and exhibit their religious practices and beliefs, which could be the cause of having a high religious well-being as Sen et al. 's [20] study on students demonstrated that household religious practices impacted the growth of spiritual wellness.

The high religious well-being is also likely due to most students in the school being Catholic, with non-Catholics in the minority, as Catholicism is the predominant religion among Filipinos, 80 percent of whom profess the faith [12]. Furthermore, coming from religious households may also impact the student's religious well-being because the household practices the religion. One of these practices is participation in church services, which can also help adolescents to internalize or adopt the religious rationales for engaging in social services or prosocial behaviors [21].

In existential well-being, personal and academic life pressures may cause them to reflect on where they are now. Hence the moderate rating as the study of Lazar [22] noted that expressions of spirituality are associated with a sense of positive existentiality: a sense of meaning and purpose, self-competency, and coping with life difficulties. In addition, major events in their lives, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may remain a lasting influence in their lives, and the transition to the new normal may have caused a disturbance due to the swift pacing that may not provide enough time for adjustment. A study by Klimochkina et al. [23] involving Muscovites observed a moderately high level of existential well-being and a moderate association between existential well-being and COVID-related stressors, even when other variables were controlled. Furthermore, this research revealed that a combination of COVID-19-related stressors, such as encountering a lack of essential goods, medicine, or services while ill or attending to a sick family member, correlated with diminished overall well-being.

Curriculum-based programs and values education can foster students' existential well-being by highlighting the non-material facets of life, focusing on individual insights, values, meaning, and purpose. Values education is a crucial curriculum component that influences both students and society, necessitating that students develop five fundamental skills: understanding, reflection, consultation, decision, and action [24].

Regarding religious well-being, Catholic students reported a higher score than non-Catholics, which may be attributed to Catholics comprising most respondents. This higher rating suggests a positive relationship with God among these Catholic students. The disproportionate number of Catholic students in the sample could also explain their elevated religious well-being assessment, likely stemming from their religious backgrounds, which foster gratitude towards God, commitment to their faith, and an ability to integrate religious aspirations with identity and life purpose. Conversely, the moderate rating among non-Catholics might also reflect their smaller representation in the sample. This highlights that religiousness is a multifaceted construct encompassing beliefs, participation, commitment, and relationships [18, 25].

Despite attending a private, non-sectarian school, both respondents maintain their respective faiths. Consequently, their religious upbringing and participation in their places of worship influenced their comprehension and belief in God. This occurs regardless of the

school's non-sectarian nature, as religious engagement is likely to foster and sustain a strong religious identity, and participation is a key aspect of many religious traditions [26].

Moreover, in terms of family income, it was noted that respondents from low-income families rated higher on religious well-being than those from higher-income families, which was moderate. Furthermore, their relationship with God is strongly affected by how much the family earns. However, even though these students' poor incomes led them to attend a private, non-sectarian school, this does not imply that they are not already devout followers of their faith. One's connection to God and fidelity to their religion are the reasons why low family income is scored highly in religious well-being [27]. When one is struggling financially, one needs comfort. However, the findings of Cena and Bual [18] discovered that even if students have financial constraints, this does not imply that they are religiously devoted.

People from low-income households frequently encounter various life obstacles, such as limited educational access, health issues, and financial hardship. Religion offers a sense of greater purpose and comfort, and it is believed that circumstances will improve, either in this life or the next, as income has been shown to relate to students' perceived meaning in life. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this suggests that students from low-income families may find more meaning in life [27].

In terms of birth order, the first, third, and up students are rated high in religious well-being compared to the respondents who answered second-born, which was rated as moderate. This means they may have yet to develop a positive and satisfied connection with God. This difference in religious well-being is due to the various roles and personalities being developed based on one's birth order; a firstborn may be more religious due to having more responsibilities given to them by their parents in caring for their younger siblings. Individuals who are third-born or later also demonstrate a high level of religious well-being, possibly as they endeavor to forge their distinct path, which often includes a quest for faith and purpose. This contrasts with firstborn children, who were found to be significantly more resilient than their younger siblings, typically assigned greater responsibilities and expected to serve as role models [28].

Conversely, second-born children may experience a sense of being "stuck in the middle," potentially lacking a distinct role or feeling of significance. This "middle child syndrome" might reduce their inclination to engage in religious or family customs and rituals they perceive as primarily belonging to the firstborn. However, middle children can also develop a deeper sense of identity and readily find meaning and support through connections outside their immediate family, particularly with individuals who have entered their lives [13].

The findings suggest that while students feel strongly connected to their faith, there is room to enhance their existential well-being. Strengthening this domain can contribute to a more holistic spiritual development, supporting students' emotional resilience and life satisfaction as they navigate adolescence.

Table 2

Degree of Spiritual Well-Being of Senior High School Students

Variable	Religious			Existential			Spiritual		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Sex									
Male	50.62	5.71	High	45.96	6.42	Moderate	96.58	10.77	Moderate
Female	51.60	7.58	High	45.20	6.58	Moderate	96.80	12.82	Moderate
Religion									
Catholic	51.47	5.66	High	46.14	5.96	Moderate	97.61	10.03	Moderate
Non-Catholic	38.33	10.50	Moderate	35.33	10.21	Moderate	73.67	20.40	Moderate
Family Income									
High	49.70	7.33	Moderate	44.11	5.90	Moderate	93.81	12.18	Moderate
Low	51.65	5.70	High	46.60	6.61	Moderate	98.25	10.75	Moderate
Family Structure									
Intact	50.91	6.26	High	46.31	5.96	Moderate	97.22	10.77	Moderate
Non-intact	51.05	6.76	High	44.14	7.47	Moderate	95.19	13.08	Moderate
Birth Order									
First	51.85	6.05	High	46.21	6.91	Moderate	98.05	11.63	Moderate
Second	49.20	7.86	Moderate	45.30	6.34	Moderate	94.50	12.87	Moderate
Third and up	50.94	4.71	High	45.00	5.59	Moderate	95.94	8.81	Moderate
Whole	50.95	6.36	High	45.71	6.44	Moderate	96.65	11.41	Moderate

Difference in the Degree of Spiritual Well-being of Senior High School Students

Table 3 presents the differences in the degree of spiritual well-being of senior high school students when grouped according to sex, religion, family income, family structure, and birth order. Using Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis, there were no significant differences in the spiritual well-being when they were grouped according to sex [U=587.500, p=0.673], family income [U=531.000, p=0.196], family structure [U=521.500, p=0.591], and birth order [$\chi^2(2)=1.923$, p=0.382]. However, spiritual well-being was significantly different when they were grouped according to religion [U=32.000, p=0.040]. Catholic respondents rated significantly higher than non-Catholics.

The results show that students perceived spiritual well-being is strongly influenced by their religious affiliation, with Catholic students scoring higher than non-Catholics. In line with previous research, this emphasizes the significant influence of religious upbringing and community involvement on spiritual health. Furthermore, students from lower-income families expressed greater religious well-being, indicating that faith may be an essential coping strategy during difficult times, promoting resilience and a sense of purpose. Additionally, the analysis shows that spiritual perceptions are influenced by birth order, with students who are firstborn, third-born, or later displaying higher levels of religious well-being. The roles and responsibilities within the family dynamic may have something to do with this, as they can impact spiritual development. All things considered, these demographic characteristics have a big impact on how students experience spirituality, which emphasizes the need for specialized spiritual guidance and programs that consider each student's unique background to support adolescents' holistic well-being.

In terms of sex, there is no difference, which indicates that both males and females perceive to have similar spiritual well-being assessments. This is supported by the findings of Cena and Bual [18] and Legada et al. [13], claiming that spiritual well-being does not vary according to sex. The result denies the common understanding that females have higher spirituality than males, supported by Agoncillo [29] and Khan et al. [30]. There is no difference in family monthly income, which also indicates congruent spiritual well-being assessment results between the low and high family monthly income. This result is supported by Metilda

and Maheswari [31] and Nunes et al. [32], arguing that spiritual well-being does not differ according to family monthly income. Meanwhile, this defies the common perception that low-family monthly income individuals have higher spiritual well-being, given their hope and trust in the divine being as the last resort to survive [33,34].

In terms of family structure, the no difference result indicates that students who came from both intact and non-intact families have similar assessments of spiritual well-being. This is supported by Calamba and Magallanes [17] and Legada et al. [13], claiming that spiritual well-being does not differ according to family structure. In addition, it also denies the common literature, saying that those with intact families have higher spiritual well-being than their counterparts [15]. Here, one can be spiritually inclined regardless of the type of family one belongs Legada et al. [13]. This also demonstrates that spiritual well-being is ultimately internal, subjective, and experienced to develop and improve spiritually in any setting [25]. In terms of birth order, the no difference signifies that students have similar perceptions of spiritual well-being regardless of their birth order. This is supported by the studies of Oracion and Madrigal [19] and Legada et al. [13], claiming that spiritual well-being does not vary according to family structure. Meanwhile, this denies the usual understanding in the literature that firstborn children are spiritually-inclined than their counterparts as supported by Sultan and Malik [28] and Oracion and Madrigal [19].

Interestingly, the difference in the spiritual well-being of the students indicates that their assessment varies according to religious affiliation. Particularly, students who are Catholics have higher spiritual well-being than their counterparts. This is supported by Cena and Bual [18] and Madrigal et al. [35], claiming that Catholic students have higher spirituality than non-Catholics. The difference could be attributed to Catholic formation and upbringing of these students starting from their childhood years as supported by Oracion and Madrigal [19]. Studies show that the spirituality of individuals is strongly influenced by the religious affiliation of their families [15]. Aside from that, the study of Oracion and Madrigal [19] also indicated that parental devotion to the Catholic faith is linked to their children's religious identity and practices. Furthermore, it states that if the parents are devout Catholics, their children are likely to follow in their footsteps. Lastly, the result could also be ascribed to the outnumbering respondents coming from the Catholic category, which may also influence the varying results of their spiritual well-being.

A significant difference was observed in spiritual well-being based on religious affiliation, with Catholics reporting higher levels compared to non-Catholics, who rated moderately. This outcome is likely influenced by the demographic composition of the collected data, where Catholics constituted the majority of respondents, potentially impacting the higher assessment in this dimension [18]. The higher religious well-being among Catholic respondents is probably due to their upbringing, fostering devotion to their beliefs and practices. Oracion and Madrigal's [19] study further supports this, indicating that parental devotion to the Catholic faith significantly influences their children's religious identity and practices. This suggests that children of devout Catholic parents are likely to emulate their parents' religious adherence.

Table 3

Difference in the Degree of Spiritual Well-Being of Senior High School Students

Variables	U	z	p
Sex	587.500	-0.422	0.673
Religion	32.000*	-2.057	0.040
Family Monthly Income	531.000	-1.293	0.196
Family Structure	521.500	-0.537	0.591
Birth Order	χ^2 1.923	df 2	p 0.382

Note: *the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

The paper theorized that the students' spiritual well-being varies according to the demographics of sex, religious affiliation, family monthly income, family structure, and birth order. This was anchored on the spiritual well-being theory of Paloutzian and Ellison. Given the results of the study, the theory anchored is only validated in terms of religion. Moreover, this implies that the students' perceived relationship with God is consistent with the theory's religious component. This could also mean that spiritual well-being is affected by factors such as family income, family structure, or Birth order. In other words, spiritual well-being is acquired and affected by one's background and formation throughout life.

5.0 Conclusion

The students possess a high level of religiosity despite only moderate connections to God and life purpose. This suggests a strong alignment between these dimensions fosters greater faith, stable temperament, meaning, and contentment. In order to cultivate a values-based culture, schools should integrate core values into curriculum, encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, and clearly display principles, particularly within the Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems subject, by offering diverse religious programs that teach fundamental values and appreciation for global faiths. Additionally, prioritizing teacher competency in values instruction is crucial for fostering a lasting connection between students' spiritual development and overall well-being, with these insights serving as a basis for proposed values enrichment activities aimed at promoting students' spiritual and existential growth.

6.0 Limitations of the Findings

The study was conducted in a non-sectarian private school. The findings are not generalizable to all private non-sectarian schools nationwide or worldwide. Also, the quantitative research design was limited, which may also limit the depth of analysis and interpretation in terms of their spiritual well-being. Lastly, the demographics employed were limited to sex, religious affiliation, family monthly income, family structure, and birth order.

7.0 Practical Value of the Paper

The findings can be used as the basis for proposed values enrichment activities supported by the results and findings of the study; this can help the teachers of the Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems to continuously improve instruction, which may result in the students' values development. Moreover, this output can be incorporated into the students' curricular activities to establish a better disposition in life regarding their religious and existential well-being. Lastly, the findings are also beneficial to the dearth of literature. This paper can add to the new body of knowledge that future researchers and readers can look into and utilize.

8.0 Directions for Future Research

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct further studies on spiritual well-being on a larger scale of non-sectarian private schools to provide greater generalizability. They may also employ other designs, like qualitative or mixed-method inquiries, to elicit in-depth analysis and interpretations of the student's spiritual well-being. Lastly, they may also employ other variables not covered to provide varied contexts that influence the spiritual well-being of students in private non-sectarian schools.

9.0 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest relating to the research, writing, or publishing of this work were disclosed by the authors, according to their report.

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