



Original Research Article

## Study on Spiritual Dimension of Health among Medical Students in Coastal Andhra Pradesh

M. Santhi Sree<sup>1</sup>, S.K. Mishra<sup>2</sup>, S. K. Jena<sup>3</sup>, S. K. Patnaik<sup>3</sup>, Jarina Begum<sup>4</sup>, N. Samara Simha Reddy<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Student, <sup>2</sup>Prof. & HOD, <sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, <sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor;  
Dept. of Community Medicine, GSL Medical College, Rajahmundry- 533296, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Corresponding Author: M. Santhi Sree

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### ABSTRACT

**Aims & Objectives:** To assess the Knowledge of spiritual dimension among future doctors and their attitude and practice with respect to spiritual dimension of health.

**Methods:** A cross sectional study done among final year medical students and interns of a medical college. 170 students were selected randomly. Predesigned and pretested questionnaire was used as a study tool.

**Results:** 60% of the students were of opinion that they have some knowledge regarding spirituality. 40% said that they do not have idea about spirituality. 50 students practising regular prayers, 40 students are practising meditation. 89% of students agreed that spiritual health care needed in present health care delivery. 11% felt that this is not needed.

**Conclusion:** Maximum number of the students felt that spiritual dimension of health care is needed for better doctor patient relationship. Majority of them agreed that in present era we need spiritual practice for self management and stress free living, so that they can become good doctors. Continuation of this study and some more studies are needed for more clarity in this aspect.

**Keywords:** Spiritual dimension, Health, Knowledge

### INTRODUCTION

There are four important dimensions of health; Physical, Social, Mental/Emotional and Spiritual <sup>[1]</sup> need to be well balanced in order to be healthy. The dimensions of health are interactions between different aspects of life, that balance to produce well being and satisfaction. Physical health means wellness of body & absence of chronic pain/discomfort, efficient functioning of body organs, level of fitness, nutritional

status. Social health means ability to interact with people (family, friends, others) in independent and appropriate way and to maintain personal relationships. Mental health means how we feel about ourselves, how we express our emotions, how we adapt to range of demands and ability to make decisions to resolve problem. Spiritual health means it relates to sense of purpose & meaning in our life & feeling connected with others (family, peers and community) and society. It includes integrity, principles

and ethics, the purpose in life, commitment to some higher being and belief in concepts that are not subject to “State of the Art” explanation.<sup>[2]</sup> It also relates to our ability to set realistic goals, appreciate needs & feelings of others, and have ambitions & aspirations.<sup>[3]</sup> Individual is considered healthy when 4 dimensions of health are in balance. The WHO at its 37th world health assembly has added the ‘spiritual dimension’ to the health. The recognition to this dimension speaks of the importance of multidimensional overall well being<sup>[4]</sup> of ‘*swasthya*’.

Spirituality is more individualistic and self determined where as religion typically involves connections to a community with shared beliefs and rituals. Acts of compassion and selflessness, altruism, and the experience of inner peace are all characteristics of spirituality.<sup>[5]</sup> Spiritual practices tend to improve coping skills and social support, foster feelings of optimism and hope promote healthy behaviour, reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and encourage a sense of relaxation. By alleviating stressful feelings and promoting healing ones, spirituality can positively influence immune, cardiovascular (heart and blood vessels), hormonal, and nervous systems. Spiritual practices lead to relaxation of mind and in turn reduces sympathetic surge, leads parasympathetic dominance and also releases endorphins, so feeling of wellbeing.

Spirituality has been defined in numerous ways. These include: a belief in a power operating in the universe that is greater than oneself, a sense of interconnectedness with all living creatures, and an awareness of the purpose and meaning of life and the development of personal, absolute values. It's the way we find meaning, hope, comfort, and inner peace in our life.

The spiritual health characterizes the understanding and awareness that all the efforts spent on achieving physical health only, when we put focus on mental and spiritual dimensions complete health is achieved.<sup>[6]</sup> Although many studies have been conducted world over, highlighting the importance of spiritual aspect in the total well being of an individual but very few studies have been conducted in India and especially in medical students, being the future doctors if they achieve complete health they can promote it for community. In view of the above facts this study was carried out with objectives: Knowledge of spiritual dimension among future doctors and their attitude and practice with respect to spiritual dimension.

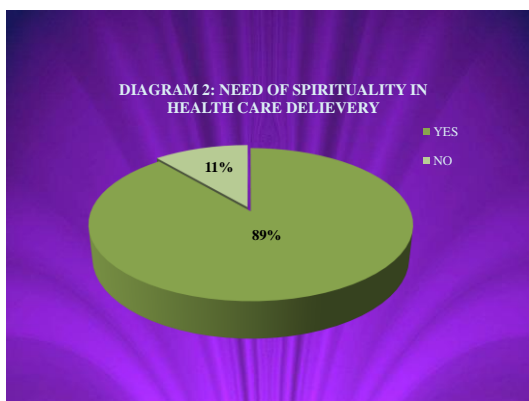
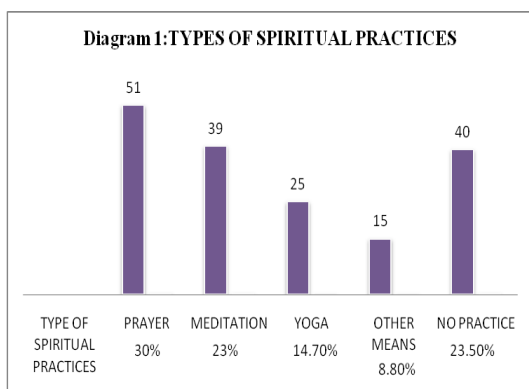
## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This is a cross sectional study done at a medical college in coastal Andhra Pradesh, India. This was carried out among medical students over a period of 2 months. Out of the total sample frame, 170 students from final year MBBS and interns have participated in the study after satisfying the study criteria. Predesigned and pretested questionnaire (Questionnaire taken from spiritual health survey<sup>[7]</sup> and positive psychology from University of Pennsylvania<sup>[8]</sup> and modified as per Indian circumstances) was used as a study tool. The Study Variables are Age, sex, religion, boarding status, knowledge regarding spirituality, types of spiritual practices, frequency of spiritual practices, and response to spiritual practices. Ethical clearance obtained from institutional ethical committee. Statistical analyses were performed by MS-Excel. Results are presented in number and percentages.

## **RESULTS**

**TABLE: 1** Distribution of Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	Number and Percentages		
Males	76(45%)		
Females	94(55%)		
Age	21-23	68 (40%)	
	24-25	102 (60%)	
Religion	H	C	M
	119 (70%)	34 (20%)	17 (10%)
Boarding Status	Hostel		Day scholar
	110(65%)		60(35%)



**Table 2: Feelings of Spiritual Practitioners**

Spirituality & Religion	Percentages (%)	No. (n = 130)
Same	70%	91
Different	30%	39
<b>Frequency of spiritual practice</b>		
Once/week	60%	78
Twice/week	25%	32
Daily	15%	20
<b>Response to spiritual practice</b>		
Feeling relaxed & happy	75%	98
No Feeling	25%	32

## DISCUSSION

In our study, among 170 students 45% are male students, 55% are female students. Among them 40% were between 21-23 yrs, 60% between 24-25yrs (interns). 70% of them belong to Hindu religion, 20% are Christians, and 10% are Muslims, 65% of them were hostlers, 35% of them were day scholars. 35% of them responded that they have idea about spirituality and 65% Of them responded that they do not have any idea about spirituality. This is comparable to a cross-sectional study<sup>[9]</sup> which was conducted among health personnel in the north Indian city of Chandigarh. 78 clinicians and 94 Para-medical personnel participated in the study. Whereas 62% agreed to the existence of a spiritual dimension to health, 20% attached primacy to spiritual health, placing it above medical wellness. 59% of respondents felt that the spiritually healthy coped better with their illness and 86.05%, felt that a spiritual caregiver can provide better patient care.60.47% also believed that it was important for caregivers to have a spiritual orientation.

In another cross-sectional study<sup>[4]</sup> carried out in Govt. Medical College & Hospital, Sector 32, General Hospital, Sector 16, Chandigarh & Community Health Centre, Manimajra, the sample size of 150 health professionals i.e. 75 doctors and other 75 paramedical personnel (who deal with patients in their day to day practice) was sought. Almost 93 (62%) of health professionals think that spiritually healthy person (SHP) can cope with illness in a better way. Majority of the participants 71 (94.66%) doctors and 68 (90.67%) paramedical personnel believe that SHP can even deal better with stress. 66 (88%) doctors and 68 (90.66%) paramedical personnel think that SHP can face death better. 135 (90%) of the participants believe

that spiritually healthy person recover faster from illness and 55 (73.33%) doctors and 59 (78.66%) paramedical personnel believes that such person falls ill less frequently. In our study also 89% (151) of the students felt that there is need of spiritual dimension in health care. Out of these 151 students, 76.47% (130) are having one or the other practices, 75% (98) among these felt that they are relaxed and happy with their practice and able to cope with their stress better.

## CONCLUSION

Spiritual practices like meditation and prayers leads to healthy behaviour, social support, relaxation response, coping with stress, positive psychological state and altruism which ultimately leads to hopeful and meaningful life. <sup>[10]</sup> Majority of the students felt that spiritual dimension of health care is needed for better doctor patient relationship. They need spiritual practice for self management and stress free living, so that they can become good doctors.

### Recommendations:

- Spiritual dimension should be inculcated in regular patient dealing.
- Right kind of knowledge about spirituality and practices help doctors and health care providers in dealing patients.
- Empathetically, patient centered consultation giving appropriate time, not to lose temper.
- Proper self management, Holistic approach.
- To include this dimension in regular curriculum.

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