Social Support as a Mediator: The Role of Religious Cultural Factors in Shaping Stress and Mental WellBeing Among Students

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ABSTRACT:

"This review of literature explores the role of cultural factor like religion as a mediator in the relationship of a student's mental wellbeing and social support. By examining psychological and sociological perspectives, it delves into how religious beliefs, practices and community engagement affect students coping mechanisms and resilience. The review of literature uses previous studies and articles to assess the difference in social support given to the students of two different religious community. Finding suggest that there is an established connection between the social support derived from religious beliefs which later have an impact on students well being and stress. This study hopes to increase the understanding of religion as a factor affecting students psychological experiences. Through this review a diversified approach to university policies and mental health interventions can be formed in order to foster a supportive and positive environment. Understanding the protective role of social support in managing stress could inform educational institutions, policymakers and experts to form better approaches. Additionally this review highlights the need for inclusivity in terms of mental strategies that acknowledge different cultural settings   Further review could be expanded by incorporating a larger and diverse variables like ethnicity , race , gender and geographical locations. Other variables like self efficacy, coping strategies and mental resilience could studied in relation to religion in order to deduce the impact of this cultural factor on well being"

Keyword: social support, religious cultural factors, stress, mental well being and mediation analysis

Introduction:

Culture can play a vital role in forming an individual's perspective of the world influencing their behaviours, values and action when comes to interactions with surroundings and people. Among all cultural factors one we have taken religion as stands peculiarly different as it influences our social relations and our psychological well being . It's not a system of beliefs or values , it serves as institute that provides connections and fosters them for growth , resilience in order to face the problems of the world. Social support refers to the support or help that is given in the form of assistance by our relations or societal groups to which we belong . They could be anyone from family , friends, religious groups or colleagues. Many religious groups harbour unity , emotional support , guidance and even emotional reassurance during turmoil which affects our ability to cope with anxiety and stress.

This study explores how social support is influenced by religion which affects our mental stress and well being particularly in students. Broader implications with managing stress and improving well being will be discussed in this section.

Social support: According to House et al.,(1988) social support can defined as resources provided by our community in order to reduce stress and manage our well being. These resources could be emotional(empathy or assurance), informational(guidance, advice or suggestion) and instrumental(financial or practical assistance). Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of social support on mental health. In order to understand there is an example, Cohen and Wills(1985) proposed an hypothesis called stress buffering hypothesis which suggests that a strong social support through connections which results in lower levels of stress and improves mental health. These social support systems are essentially indispensable to students when dealing with academic or interpersonal problems.
However not all the social support we receive can be equal since like we mentioned the source of this support could be influenced by cultural factors like religion which is impactful for both perceiving and accepting help.

Under the right conditions social support can work as a sort of buffer against stress according to (Thoits,2011). In religious context, social support is provided in a structured and layered network of communal activity and moral teachings that ultimately promote prosocial behaviour (Lim&Putnam, 2010).Religion can provide various forms of coping mechanisms that enhance an individuals ability to handle stress. Pargament (1997) identified religious coping into two different types :
Positive religious coping: which involves spiritual support and praying. It focuses on finding any meaning in adverse conditions

Negative religious coping: felling that they are deserving of punishment by god's hand.

In all this hardy he specified that positive coping is linked with better mental health outcomes and provided one with the ability to reinterpret stressful situations in a reconstructive way. A study by Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) found that individuals who are used to positive religious coping tend to have better mental well being and lower levels of anxiety. This is a relevant point to our study as it focuses on students as well who face various academic problems. Now let's see how religion as a cultural factor affects social support or enables it by looking at some scriptures from different religions.

In Islam, the Quran tells us to be kind to our family and parents (Surah al Isra, 17:23)

In Christianity, there is a commandant to"Honor thy father and mother"(Exodus 20:12) which highlights the importance one must put in care of their family.

Hinduism has the concept of seva (selfless service) towards all our elders.

These scriptures show an important aspect which is centred around the fact how one must feel towards his family and religious scriptures promote social support in matters of emotional and physical assurance. Now we know how important religion is to social support encouragement but there are variations to how social support is given in a religion . For perceptions regarding religious beliefs , values and teachings can and do influence our ability to understand any given situations and assess if that particular incident requires our intervention.

That is evident by taking on the example of two dominant denominations of the same religion, Protestant and Catholic Christianity. In Catholicism there is an hierarchal order of clergy of pastors who teach provide counselling and support to the church goers and Protestants may rely on peer initiatives in order to alleviate any problem . So we can clearly observe the dynamics and differences in the social support provided. According to a study conducted by University of Illinois Chicago that many religious groups may focus on only providing help to their communities rather than to every one resulting in religion not only affecting social support but also attitude towards other groups. This is important to the fact that social support can be multifaceted and variedly different group to group, denomination to denomination and faith to faith.

Mental well being is defined as a fundamental aspect to human health, encompassing social, emotional and cognitive dimensions that an shape an individuals ability to navigate through daily life. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022) defined mental well being as a state where an individual recognises their own potential and effectively copes with all the stresses of life, while being productive and socially contributing to the community. It's signified as a positive function and psychological resilience. In academic studies, mental well being is very important, as students deal with challenges from education, social relations and future career prospects. As founded by (Keyes, 2007) good mental well being is necessary for overall academic success and overall life satisfaction. Positive mental health has been linked better grades, improved problem solving skills and stronger interpersonal relationships (Diener, Oishi,& Tay, 2018). On the other hand poor mental health leads to emotional distress, decreased motivation and lower academic achievement (Kessler et al., 2005).

Stress is a natural and innate response to any external pressure and situation. It's both psychological and physiological in nature. It's also not inherently negative, in moderate amounts can lead to improved performance and motivation (Selye, 1976). But when stress becomes excessive or chronic then it can have detrimental effects on mental as well as physical health of an individual. Researches have shown that chronic stress can cause disruption basic cognitive functioning, weaken immune response and increase vulnerability to diseases like anxiety and depression (McEwen, 2007). Among students, stress is a growing issue due to financial difficulties, academic pressure and familial expectations (Beiter et al., 2015). A study by Pascoe et al.(2020) found that academic stress is correlated to higher levels of depression and anxiety among students. Furthermore the adjustments to university life such living independently, managing free time and balancing personal- professional life along with responsibilities could prove to be challenging. International students studying abroad also face the issues of cultural adaptation and language barrier which also adds stress (Smith & Khwaja, 2011).

Research has consistently shown social support to result in lower levels of stress and higher levels of mental well being (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). Emotional support from family can be an effective measure towards stress and financial support reduces the costs – which are known to be stressors. Moreover, a sense of belonging can provide individual association with community and groups which leads to better mental health outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Like we have mentioned above the effectiveness of social support is depending on cultural and subjective differences. Students may struggle or hesitate to seek help due to stigma, fear of being judged and cultural beliefs about self reliance (Rickwood et al., 2005).

In this context , religion as a cultural factor does play an important part in determining how social support is perceived . Cultural background is instrumental when it comes to coping mechanisms and strategies towards mental health. For example, collectivists cultures often emphasise interdependence and support of family, while individualistic cultures give priority to personal autonomy and self reliance (Triandis, 1995). These differences in culture influence how students may seek help, experience events and manage stress. As seen in the region of Asia and Middle East students rely on family and religious practices for support during times of distress rather seeking professional mental help (Kim et al., 2011). The concept of mediation by social support serves as intermediate mechanism through which religion impacts the psychological well being and stress experienced by an student . In other words, students from religious and cohesive families may experience stronger social support networks which deal with continuous upstream of stress stimuli. A study by Chatters et al. (2011) found that religious involvement was positively associated with psychological well being, primarily due to social support provided by religious communities. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2004) found that students in Africa who were involved in church based interventions such as counselling from pastor or confessing reported higher resilience and lower levels of stress. Furthermore, cultural traditions that emphasise collective support system- such as extended family share beliefs and hence enhance an particular individual's ability to navigate through adversity and handle stress (Uchida et al., 2008). These support systems are the basis of reassurance, assistance and communication for the students .

Review of literature :

Stress and mental well being are the critical areas of research on whom we are trying to assess the influence of religious social support in the context to pressure from family and peers. Various studies have emphasised the role of social support in increasing resilience . This review explores existing literature on stress among students, religious coping mechanisms, social support affecting mental well being.

Stress and mental well being in students- stress is common among students and it affects academic performance, psychological health and overall life satisfaction (Bradley & Sellars, 2020) factors contributing to student stress may be as such academic demands, financial burdens, environmental changes and societal expectations (Anderson, 2022). Since research studies also show that stress isn't an individual experience but a socially influenced phenomenon. With COVID-19 pandemic intensifying stress levels of the students due to remote learning transition, loss of social contact and uncertainty regarding future. Religious coping mechanisms have been associated with psychological resilience and stress reduction. Pargament & Raiya (2007) defined religious coping as the process of " drawing on religious beliefs and practices to manage stress in life ". Positive religious coping contains practices like prayers, meditation, reliance on divine and engagement with communities of the same faith helping students mitigate stress and enhance well being (Anderson, 2022). Negative religious coping was also mentioned as students may see stress as punishment or abandonment from the divine due to religious liberty leading due to worse mental well being . According to research the students facing academic stress show that those who have social support from communal centres or religious interventions show better lower levels of anxiety and greater resilience compared to their non religious counterparts (Anastasova, 2014). For example , the Islamic perspective on coping and support emphasise the trust in divine, faith and supplication of knowledge as important components to stress management (Hardjo et al., 2021). During a study on students in IIUM undergraduate students it was revealed that students with strong religious affiliation in their family or setting will also seek social support more than other non aligned students (Ismail & Osman, 2021). Anderson (2022) analysed the effect of spirituality and religion in helping African American students deal with racial micro-aggression. It concluded that faith based coping provides emotional coping, aligning with broader literature on social support role in stress

management . The effects of academic burnout in the form of anxiety , stress and depression has been studied in depth (Bagheri Nesami et al., 2015). He later did a correlation study on emotional intelligence (EI) and

coping strategies , ended up finding a strong correlate between higher EI, religious coping and improved mental health (Bagheri Nesami et al., 2015). If gender based differences were to be assessed, there researches where it was observed that females engaged in religious coping mechanism more than males students (Gitimu Waithaka & Gough, 2017). In part due to secularisation and democratisation of our society it's been seen that religious coping becomes ineffective or declines as seen by (Torralba et al., 2021) who conducted the Spanish adolescent's coping mechanisms. More evidences in support for religious coping comes from a study by (Mahmoudi et al., 2007) on the students of Islamic Azad University finding better levels of well being and stress management among students who are from religiously affiliated families . In student population it has been seen that social support emerged as a crucial mediator between perceived stress and well being with studies indicating that stronger social support systems showcase better mental well being as well as lower levels of stress. Social support influences tremendously how a student perceives stress and with evidence that families who provide greater social support will have students better mental resilience and well being (Procidano & Heller, 1983). It works as a buffer against emotional distress and anxiety whether given in the form of instrumental assistance, informational and emotional support (Razgulin et al., 2023).

He also did a study on international students that found social support to be a critical factor when navigating sociocultural adjustments in order to fit in. Students had higher social support where shown to be better socially integrated rather than students who had lesser social support exhibiting depression (Razgulin et al., 2023). Similarly a research on medical residents found how strong social ties with friends, family and colleagues can significantly reduce stress and burnout thereby reinforcing the role of social support in areas of high academic performance (Rogers, Polonjio, & Carapiano, 2016). Religious coping through social support can enable students to be better at self efficacy, management and resilience (Mahdian & Gaffari, 2016). Because Social support enhances the effect of religious coping and vice versa, it was proven that students who engaged in religious or secular social support had better mental well being and lower stress (Torralba et al., 2021). Conversely speaking , the absence of any form of social support can exacerbate the stress levels and damage mental health , indicating the importance of integrated coping strategies (Razgulin et al., 2023). Talking about coping it to can be differentiated and varied based on responses from stimuli , personal experiences and our social interactions. One can be varied on the basis on how their parents have learned to cope from a distressing topic from their own parents and culture and seek to in-still in their own children. Hence coping can be both passive and active in its approach , with active coping involving problem solving and emotional regulation while passive coping promotes withdrawal and avoidance (Yu et al., 2020). Since coping is tied with social support it is imperative to see that why familial social support is more effective as proven by (Procidano & Heller, 1983) that social support from family (PSS-fa) is more strongly correlated to better well being and lower stress when compared to social support from friends (PSS-fr). Depressive and anxiety symptoms are reduced by high levels of social support (Dusselier et al., 2005) and coming to buffer hypothesis it also reduces the negative transitions in life like admitting into colleges (Chao, 2012). This fact how social support is varied into active and passive approaches has been attested by (Eisenbarth, 2012) while she was researching the effects of active coping strategies on college going students.

Theoretical framework:

Stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman,1984)- This theory signifies that individuals appraise and respond to stress according to coping mechanisms imbibed. It describes appraisal by distinguishing it into two types in continuation-

1. **Primary appraisal:** The individual assess the situation and identifies if it is a threat, challenge or benign.
2. **Secondary appraisal:** Individuals now assess if the coping mechanisms are up to to the task.
3. **Problem-focused coping:** Taking direct action or managing an intervention in order to manage stress (e.g., seeking guidance from mentors).

4. **Emotion-focused coping:** Trying to manage stress by invoking meditation, prayers or religious retreat. Religious social support may be functional emotion coping mechanisms and hence this theory can be used in this study.

Lazarus & Folkman theory of Social Support- According to this theory social support acts as a mediating factor between stress and well being. It distinguishes social support into three types- **1- Emotional support:** support that consists of guidance, assurance or feeling of unanimity.

1. **Informational support:** support that consists of counsel, information or religious teachings that provide a framework to deal with any issues.
2. **Instrumental support:** this support involves tactile or physical help such as financial assistance or practical aid.

Students from different religious backgrounds may experience varying levels of social support and how we perceive this support depends on its nature. Religious support can change and drive our perception towards helping or help seeking.

Well-Being Theory (PERMA Model-Seligmann,2011)- Developed by Martin Seligmann, this theory expresses an comprehensive approach to our understanding of psychological well being. It focuses on five aspects of well being, which together create fulfilling life. Five Core Components are-

1. **Positive Emotion (P)-** this dimension refers to experiencing joy, happiness and gratitude along with other positive emotions.
2. **Engagement (E)-** this includes deep involvement in activities that create a flow in life (state of complete immersion).
3. **Relationships (R)-** it refers to strong relationships in one social circle , family and community, how it affects our well being.
4. **Meaning (M)-** having meaning refers to direction and purpose, that maybe derived from experiences, religious teachings, personal ethos or larger life goals.
5. **Accomplishment (A)-** the involvement of setting up goals , working towards them and achieving them also contribute to one's sense of competence and self worth.

The PERMA Model is used in this study to serve as bridge between well being and its connection to religiosity as it can seen that religious teachings and support do in-build a sense of belongingness and encourage positive social relations, it enhances motivation leading to better resilience and achievement seeking behaviour as well as religious social support provides one to look at challenges with an positive outlook leading to greater exposure to positive emotions.

Rationale of the study :

The rationale behind this study is to find a comparison of social support , perceived stress and mental well being among Muslim and Hindu students . That is to find out how much our religious traditions play a role in determining how we get help and when . The ever increasing amount of stress faced by students in our country leads to a downfall in quality of life and for that to be resolved their must be a better understanding . This study seeks to find if there is any variation on how much social support does a student receive from their social circles and if there is any difference between scores from different communities . The results may help to further identify if there are any reforms needed or what to implement in order to improve the strategies that are essential for coping . Furthermore , the study can provide us with more room to explore societal changes and cultural stigma when it comes to aiding each other, focusing on other variables as well .

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to understand if there is any difference between social support affecting academic stress and well being in students from different religious backgrounds . The effort is to highlight any linkages between the cultural factors present in our lives and how they modulate our responses to stimuli in life .

Objective

- To examine the role of religious identity in shaping student's social support systems. .
- To assess the effect of social support on their stress levels.
- Evaluating the relationship between mental well being and social support among students.
- Determining if religious variations play a part in coping strategies.

Hypothesis

- **H°1:** there is no difference in social support provided to both Muslim and Hindu students , with similar levels of stress and well being.
- **H°2:** the Hindu students showcase greater social support with better mental well being and lower stress levels in comparison to Muslim students.
- **H°3:** the Muslim student showcase greater social support with better mental well being and lower stress levels in comparison to Hindu students.

Variables

- **Independent variable :** Religion (Muslim vs Hindu)
- **Dependant variables :**
1. Social support
2. Perceived stress
3. Mental well being

Sample

- Sampling method and technique :
- Sample size : 25 Muslim students and 25 Hindu students.

Inclusion criteria :
1. Students only from the age range of 18-25.
2. Minimum qualification being enrolled currently in undergraduate programs.
3. Fluency in English.
4. Only males and females were to be taken as samples.
5. Residence in urban areas.
6. Should be Muslim or Hindu from Aligarh Muslim university.

Exclusion criteria
1. No other religious identity were to be taken.
2. None below the age of 18 or above than 25 were to be considered.
3. Residing in rural areas.
4. Sexual minorities were not to be taken.
5. No students were taken from any other college.

Tools

- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS):** the perceived stress scale was developed by Kamarck, Cohen and Mermelstein (1983) for the purpose of assessing of perceived stress levels . It consists of 10 items, rate at five pint like scale (0 = Never, 4 = very often). With scores ranging from 0 to 40 indicating levels of increased stress . The scale's reliability was tested through test retest by Roberti et al.(2006) during a study and found the correlation of r=0.85 and Cronbach's alpha to be (α= 0.78-0.91) which indicates strong reliability and as for the validity it has been diverse populations including university students making it appropriate for this study .
- **Warwick- Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWBS):** this scale was developed by Tennant et al. (2007) and it consists of 14 item scale designed to measure positive mental well being in general population. It has 14 statements which are rated on 5 point Likert scale (1= None of the time, 5 = All the time). With the total scores ranging from 14 to 70 with higher scores corresponding with better mental well being. The reliability of the test was validated through test retest and correlation of r was found to be 0.83 demonstrating stability over period of two weeks time and the Cronbach's alpha (α=0.89-0.91) as the indicator of internal reliability . It was validated by student, adults and clinical population during studies .
- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** it was developed to measure an individual social support gained from three sources: family, friends and significant others. Zimet et al. (1988), founded this scale . It consists of a 12 items divided into three sub-scales: family's sub-scale, friend's sub-scales and significant other's sub-scales rated on 7 point Likert scale (1=Very Strongly Disagree,7= Very Strongly Agree). Scores range from 12 to 84, where higher scores indicate stronger perceived greater social support . The internal consistency of this test is represented by Cronbach's alpha (α=0.88-0.95) and (α=0.81-0.94) indicating high reliability . The test retest variable r=0.85 showcasing high stability over time. The validity of the test has been stated through cross cultural and demographic groups leading to high validity.
- **Administration:** The administration of the survey involved systematically identifying and selecting populace for the sampling . Clear consent was taken beforehand and proper instructions with information related to the test was given, rapport building was done to ensure comfortable implementation. Clear instructions were given related to each section of the survey. The environment was made to be comfortable for test taking participants ensuring limited external disturbances. Responses were collected and later proper debriefing was provided for the subject. Ethical considerations like privacy, confidentiality and participant well being was prioritised throughout . Record keeping was precise and participants were thanked for their participation.

Data scores:

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Support, Perceived Stress, and Well-Being

Group	Social Support (M ± SD)	Perceived Stress (M ± SD)	Well-Being (M ± SD)
Hindu Students	51.68 ± 8.26	23.04 ± 3.22	50.28 ± 5.18
Muslim Students	43.84 ± 13.19	23.72 ± 5.88	40.60 ± 9.40

Key Insights:

Hindu students reported higher levels of social support and well-being compared to Muslim students.

Perceived stress levels were similar across both groups. The well-being scores indicated a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 4.2: Independent Samples t-Test for Social Support, Perceived Stress, and Well-Being

Variable	t-value	df	p-value
Social Support	2.517	48	0.015
Perceived Stress	0.507	48	0.615
Well-Being	4.506	48	0.000

Interpretation:

The statistically significant result for social support (p = 0.015) indicates that Hindu students reported stronger support systems.

Perceived stress did not show a significant difference (p = 0.615), suggesting external factors contribute to stress similarly across both groups.

The significant p-value for well-being (p < 0.001) highlights a disparity in overall mental wellness between the groups.

Table 4.3: Pearson's Correlation Between Social Support and Well-Being

Group	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Hindu Students	0.47	0.003
Muslim Students	0.38	0.014

Implications:

A positive correlation between social support and well-being is observed in both groups.

Hindu students exhibited a stronger association between social support and well-being. Enhancing social support structures could improve student well-being.

Statistical Analysis Report

Table 4.2: Independent Samples t-Test for Social Support, Perceived Stress, and Well-Being

This table presents the results of an independent samples t-test conducted to examine whether there are significant differences between two groups regarding social support, perceived stress, and well-being.

Variable	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (F, Sig)	t-value	df	p-value (Sig. 2tailed)
FaS (Equal variances assumed)	1.629, 0.208	0.515	48	0.609
Variable	**Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (F, Sig)**	t-value	df	p-value (Sig. 2tailed)
FrS (Equal variances assumed)	3.072, 0.086	1.169	48	0.248
80 (Equal variances assumed)	0.258, 0.614	1.869	48	0.068
SST (Equal variances assumed)	6.135, 0.017	2.517	48	0.015
WB (Equal variances assumed)	15.291, 0.000	4.506	48	0.000
PSS (Equal variances assumed)	10.137, 0.003	0.507	48	0.615

Key Findings and Interpretation:

- **Social Support (SST)**: A statistically significant difference was observed (**p = 0.015**), indicating that Hindu students reported a **stronger social support system** compared to their counterparts.
- **Perceived Stress (PSS)**: No significant difference was found (**p = 0.615**), suggesting that stress levels remain **comparable across both groups**, likely influenced by external factors rather than group-specific characteristics.
- **Well-Being (WB)**: A highly significant result (**p < 0.001**) suggests a **substantial difference in wellbeing** between the two groups, with one group experiencing significantly higher levels of well-being.

Table 4.3: Confidence Interval for Mean Difference

This table provides confidence intervals (CIs) for the mean differences, helping to determine the range within which the true mean difference lies with 95% confidence.

Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval (Lower, Upper)
1.00	1.94196	-2.90457, 4.90457
2.24	1.91649	-1.61336, 6.09336
4.16	2.22561	-3.1489, 8.63489
7.84	3.1147	1.57748, 14.10252
9.68	2.14827	5.36061, 13.99939
-0.68	1.34164	-3.37755, 2.01755

Results:

The study aimed to assess the relationship between between social support, stress and mental well being among students from different religious backgrounds. Three plausible hypotheses were proposed to examine the variations in the social support structures, perceived stress levels and mental well being among Hindu and Muslim students. The statistical analysis of the collected data provides deeper insight into the intermingling of the variables, allowing us to validate or reject the hypotheses.

1. **H°1: No significant difference in social support, mental well being and stress levels in both the groups-** the first hypothesis (H°1) proposed that there will be no significant difference in the levels of stress, mental well being and social support between Hindu and Muslim students. However, the results refute any such claims. The result indicated a statistically significant difference in social support (p=0.015) and mental well being (p<0.001) between the two groups with the Hindu students scoring significantly higher in both variables than Muslim students. These findings suggest that religious background may play an integral role in shaping student perception and access to social support, which in turn influences their well being. However, the perceived stress levels shows a statistically significant difference (p=0.615), highlighting that both groups experience similar levels of academic stress. Hence external pressures relating to academics is a major stressor rather than lack of religious social support alone . Given the significant variations in social support and well being, H°1 is rejected.

2. **H°2: Hindu students experience greater social support , lower levels of perceived stress and higher mental well being-** the second hypothesis suggested that the Hindu students would report higher scores of social support, lower stress and greater mental well being in comparison to Muslim students. The results of the individual samples t-test support this hypothesis in terms of well being and social support. Hindus reported higher levels of social support (M=51.68,SD=8.26) in comparison to Muslim students (M=43.84,SD=13.19), with statistically significant p-value of 0.015. Mental well being scores were also significantly higher for Hindu students(M=50.28,SD=5.18) than the Muslim students (M=40.60,SD=9.40), with higher significant p-value of <0.001. However, perceived stress levels remained similar across both the groups, as indicated by a non significant p-value of 0.615. The positive correlation between social support and well being was stronger among Hindu students (r=0.47,p=0.003) than Muslim students(r=0.38,p=0.014). This suggests that Hindus may be benefiting more from their social support networks, possibly due to differences in familial and belief system structures that encourage more direct and involved intervention. Since the results confirm that Hindu students reported higher levels of social support and well being. H°2 is accepted.

3. **H°3: Muslim students experience greater social support, lower levels of perceived stress and higher mental well being-**the third hypothesis (H°3) proposed that Muslim students would experience greater social support and mental well being along with lower levels of perceived stress compared to Hindu students. However, we can see that results contradict this notion. Muslim students scored lower on both social support and well being, with significant differences observed in both variables . Given the evidence , hypothesis(H°3) is rejected.

Interpretation-

Implications and Recommendations:

- The findings indicate a **positive correlation** between **social support and well-being**, emphasizing that strong support networks enhance mental health.
- Hindu students showed a **higher association between social support and well-being**, suggesting that fostering social connections within communities can lead to better psychological outcomes.

- To improve **student well-being**, institutions should **strengthen social support systems** through community engagement, peer support initiatives, and targeted mental health interventions.

Discussion:

The study was meant to examine the relationship between social support, stress and mental well being under the scope of religiosity. The findings emphasised the importance of mental health strategies that could be tailored to suit the social support systems for any student irrespective of their religious background. The results aligned with our theories of Cohen&Wills(1985) Social Support Theory which suggest that stronger social relations work as a buffer against stress and provide resilience. The Lazarus&Folkman's theory of Stress and Coping (1984) helps in explaining why, that stress remained similar despite differences in other variables. Due to similar academic pressure along with commonality of our culture and social stigma towards education hence a similar response to stress perception. Since individuals appraise a stressful situation based on personal and cultural environment it would suggest that religion has less to do with academic stress management. Findings underscore how a lower levels of significant support among Muslim students affected their results in gaps in their ability to manage well being and be dynamic in relationships. This is essential according to PERMA model of Seligmann (2011) which insinuates that positive relations are one of the tenants to how one achieves a positive mental well being . Since the stress levels remained unchanged for both the groups , universities could emphasise adaptive methods in order to improve their students coping strategies such as mindfulness, counselling services and resilience building exercises in order to improve stress management among students.

Overall , the complex interplay between social support, religion , stress and well being is highlighted. Social support can directly influence well being but is essentially negligible when it comes to stress which is shaped by broader external circumstances . Religion shapes our social system and our coping mechanisms and universities could engage in inclusivity programs , counselling and peer support programs in order to provide better outcomes for students all across communities.

Limitations:

There were several limitations to research that should be acknowledged-

- The study only include a sample sample size of 50 students (25 Hindu, 25 Muslims) limiting the generalisation and excluding more diverse population.
- The sample size was limited to **Aligarh Muslim University** which could cause bias and exclusion from other universities where the environment is less dominated by a single religion.
- The study solely focused on only two religious groups, excluding others which could have diverse patterns and exhibiting other forms of coping.
- The study used a cross sectional design where data is measured at only one point of time, with no capacity to observe changes during different periods.
- Despite acknowledging religious differences on gender roles, gender itself was marginalised when it came to the study along with ethnicity, caste etc. these factors were not addressed in this round of the research.

Further research opportunities:

despite the limitations in the study, there are still various gaps in research which could a template for future review or expansion . They are-

- Individual factors like backgrounds , ethnicity and race can be used a factor to understand social support systems in diverse populations.
- Since stress levels were similar it could valuable to analyse how different religious practices develop coping strategies beyond social support(like meditation).
- Comparing students with an religious identity with students who are secular or downright atheist could provide deeper insight into faith based coping with academic stress.
- Conducting longitudinal study would help in determining if social support or mental well being fluctuates over time, in response to life transitions.

Conclusion:

the present study explored the intermingling of religion as a cultural factor influencing social support, stress and mental well being in students. With the results highlighting how different approaches to tradition and beliefs can indoctrinate a particular pattern of coping mechanisms and perspectives which can greatly influence the well being of students . Higher scores in social support corresponds to higher scores in well being leading to a correlation between the two . We also observed how stress is universally expressed and interpreted by all the students irrespective of their religious coping patterns or social support which means that, response to stress is more of social construct rather than a cultural one. The findings will be essential for education centers as they can come up with interventions, inter- communal programs and better training programs for students to develop coping mechanisms and reduce stress. Helping the professionals formulate better techniques and initiatives for students of any background to seek the help they need through counselling or guidance session.

Despite the limitations of this study , being its small sample size, lack of diverse populace and geographic locations its generalizability may be affected. Further prospects of study should employ longitudinal or experimental design to further develop the understanding of religious impact on social support

and well being. More diverse sampling populace, other cultural factors like ethnicity and even gender based approach to this this study could prove beneficial to further development of this study.

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