

# Asian Resonance

## Relationship Between Spiritual Well-Being and Attachment to God Among Thai Students

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#### Abstract

Recent theoretical and empirical work done by Lee Kirkpatrick and others has suggested that an attachment framework may provide an interesting line of inquiry in the psychology of religion literature. With this assumption the investigators of the present study examined the relationship between spiritual well-being and attachment to God among Thai male and female students. Spirituality Index of Well-Being (SIWB) and Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) were administered to 49 male and 35 female Thai students studying in Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. All participants were Muslims. The main significant findings of the study were:

1. significant negative relationship was found between the scores obtained on SIWB and AGI among overall Thai sample, male and female students.
2. scores obtained on self-efficacy sub-scale of SIWB correlated negatively with avoidance and anxiety dimensions of ATI among Thai male students.
3. significant negative relationships were between the scores obtained on life scheme subscale of SIWB, avoidance and anxiety dimensions of AGI among Thai male students.

**Keywords** : Spiritual Well-being, Attachment to God

#### **Introduction**

One of the most common mistakes many people make when looking at Thailand is to imagine that it is a homogeneous Thai-Buddhist state, pure and simple. According to Bajunid (1999), Islam is accorded official patronage in Thailand and is the Kingdom's second largest religion. The Thai Muslims consider Thailand as their homeland and feel no less committed to their country than their Thai Buddhist counterparts. They can easily accept the dominant role of Buddhism in the kingdom without forfeiting Islam's claim for space and recognition within their own private and public life. After all, Islam has coexisted harmoniously with Buddhism in the traditional Thai polities for centuries. It is therefore not surprising that the Thai Muslims generally do not see any contradiction between their love for their religion and their loyalty to their nation. In essence, Islam has already become an integral part of the modern Thai state.

Focus on the spiritual aspect of life has a long history. In many ancient traditions, even before institutionalized religion emerged, such focus was expressed in myth; gods became individualized figures, analogous to human personalities and manifesting their relationships (Tillich, 1957). According to Koenig (1999) people have long based their spiritual well-being on their perceived relationship with something beyond themselves; this connection refers to one's relationship with God's Holy Spirit.

Further, there is growing consensus about the need to investigate constructs that may be indicative of high positive psychological functioning. In describing the attachment bond, Ainsworth (1985) described four criteria: maintaining proximity with the attachment figure, seeing the attachment figure as a secure base of explorative behavior, considering the attachment figure as providing a haven of safety, and experiencing separation anxiety when removed from the attachment figure. Using these criteria, Kirkpatrick (1999) has persuasively argued that relationship with God can be described as an attachment bond.

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## Objective of the Study

1. To determine the relationship between the scores obtained on spirituality index of well-being (SIWB) and attachment to God (ATG) among total sample, male and female Thai students.
2. To determine the relationships between the SES/Avoidance SES/Anxiety dimensions of SWIB and ATG among male and female Thai students.
3. To determine the relationships between the LSS/Avoidance, LSS/Anxiety dimensions of SWIB and ATG among male and female Thai students.

## Review of Literature

Previous studies concerning attachment with God and the relationship between attachment styles and religiosity has suggested that attachment perspectives are a fruitful line of investigation in the psychology of religion research. In two studies, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990, 1992) found relationships between attachment style and religious variables such as religious belief, commitment, and involvement; God image; conversion experiences; and experiences of glossolalia. In addition, Kirkpatrick (1997, 1998) in two longitudinal studies, found evidence that God may serve as a compensatory attachment figure for individuals displaying insecure attachment patterns. Granqvist (1998) also found evidence that individuals may use God as a substitute attachment figure; although Granqvist suggested that this process may be more complex than previously thought. Others have found relationships between adulthood attachment and spiritual maturity (Ten Elshof & Furrow, 2000). Beck and Mc Donald's (2004) conceptualizations of the Avoidance and Anxiety dimensions as they apply to relationship with God were straightforward and paralleled Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) descriptions. Specifically, Avoidance of Intimacy with God involves themes such as a need for self-reliance, a difficulty with depending upon God, and unwillingness to be emotionally intimate with God. In contrast, Anxiety over Abandonment involves themes such as the fear of potential abandonment by God, angry protest (resentment or frustration at God's lack of perceived affection), jealousy over God's seemingly differential intimacy with others, anxiety over one's lovability in God's eyes, and, finally, preoccupation with or worry concerning one's relationship with God.

The relationship between a person and God has been conceptualized as an attachment relationship (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1997, 1998). As such, one's relationship with God is said to serve many of the functions of attachment with, in particular, God perceived as providing a safe haven in times of threat, and a secure base from which to return to the challenges of life. Additionally, the individual may demonstrate behaviours towards God that are characteristic of attachment, such as proximity seeking through prayer or ritual, and separation anxiety (distress and lament) in the case of the perceived absence of God.

## Statement of the Problem

Since attachment to God (ATG) is theorized to be analogous to human attachment, it is reasonable to consider ATG will be foundational for spiritual well-being. The main aim of the present study is to examine whether attachment to God is positively linked with spiritual well-being or rather, lack of relationship with God helps the person to increase his spiritual well-being. Specifically, the present study examined the relationships between spiritual well-being and attachment to God among Thai male and female students.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The SIWB and AGI were administered to 84 Thai students (49 males and 35 females) studying in undergraduate and post graduate courses at Aligarh Muslim University. Students ranged in age from 20 to 28. All participants were Muslims. They were asked to complete of the measures. Participants took 15-20 minutes' time in completing the measures.

### Measures

#### Spirituality Index of Well-Being (SIWB)

Daaleman and Frey (2004) developed the Spirituality Index of Well-Being. It is a 12-item instrument that measures one's perceptions of their spiritual quality of life. The scale is divided into two subscales: (1) self-efficacy subscale and (2) life-scheme subscale. Each item is answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). The SIWB is a valid and reliable instrument that can be used in health-related studies (Frey, Daaleman, & Peyton, 2005). Scoring: Items 1-6 make up the Self-Efficacy Subscale Items 7-12 make up the Life Scheme Subscale.

#### Attachment to God Inventory (AGI)

The AGI (Beck & McDonald, 2004) consisted of 28 items (14 Avoidance items, 14 Anxiety items). Further, good internal consistency estimates were observed for both the AGI-Anxiety (alpha = .80) and AGI-Avoidance (alpha = .84) subscales. The AGI subscales of Avoidance of Intimacy and Anxiety about Abandonment display good factor structure, internal consistency, and construct validity. Scoring: Avoidance = sum of even numbered items Anxiety = sum of odd numbered items. Items 4, 8, 13, 18, 22, 26, and 28 were reverse scored

### Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by means of Pearson Product Moment Correlation method.

## Results and Discussion

**Table1: Indicating relationships between SIWB and AGI.**

Subjects		SIWB/ATG	
		r	p
Total	84	-0.396	<.01
Male	49	-0.619	<.01
Female	35	-0.70	<.01

Significant negative correlation coefficients were found between spirituality index of well-being and attachment to God among Thai male and female students.

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**Table2: Indicating Relationships between the Dimensions of SIWB and AGI**

Subjects	Ses*/Avoidance			Ses*/Anxiety		
	N	r	p	N	r	p
Male	49	-.549	<.01	49	-.543	<.01
Female	35	.000	>.01	35	-.129	>.01

\*SES = Self-efficacy Subscale

The negative correlation coefficients were found between self-efficacy subscale and avoidance (r= -.549) and self-efficacy and anxiety (r= -.543) among Thai male students. Significant correlation coefficients were not found between self-efficacy subscale and avoidance, and self-efficacy and anxiety among Thai female students.

**Table 3: Indicating relationships between the Dimensions of SIWB and AGI**

Subjects	Lss*/Avoidance			Lss*/Anxiety		
	N	r	p	N	r	p
Male	49	-.464	<.01	49	-.373	<.01
Female	35	.213	>.01	35	-.316	>.01

\*LSS = Life Scheme Subscale

Negative correlation coefficients were found between life scheme subscale and avoidance (r= -.464) and life scheme subscale and anxiety (r= -.373) among Thai male students. Significant correlations were not found between life scheme subscale and avoidance, and between self-efficacy and anxiety among Thai female students.

### Discussion

The findings of the present study suggest that the negative relationships exist between spiritual well-being and attachment to God which can be explained that the spiritual well-being does not contribute to attachment to God. That is, attachment to God is not associated with spiritual well-being and insecure attachment to God is associated with less than optimum health and adjustment including deflated religious and existential well-being, neuroticism, and increased negative affect (e.g., Beck & McDonald, 2004; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Similarly factors of spiritual well-being were also found to be associated with factors of attachment to God among Thai students.

### Conclusion

The findings from the study indicates that the significant negative relationships were found between spiritual well-being and attachment to God among male and female Thai students. Thai students' attachment to God is not associated with their spiritual well-being. That is, the main responsibility of Thai students should be to adopt spiritual practices such as prayer, reading scriptures and meditation to develop attachment to God. We propose that it will be helpful in future to study the role of Islamic practices in enhancing attachment to God and spiritual well-being.

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