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SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON COGNITIVE EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract
This study aims to investigate the relationship between spiritual intelligence (SI) and cognitive emotion regulation (CER) among undergraduate students in Karachi. Employing a quantitative research approach, the study utilized a convenience sample of 220 undergraduate students from various universities in Karachi within a correlational research design. Data were collected using the Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI) and the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) to assess the association between the two constructs. The study further examines whether spiritual intelligence significantly predicts cognitive emotion regulation using linear regression analysis, while correlational analysis is employed to explore the strength and direction of the relationship between SI and CER.

INTRODUCTION

Background and significance of the study

Spiritual Intelligence is defined as a set of mental capacities which contribute to the awareness, integration, and adaptive application of the nonmaterial and transcendent aspects of one's existence, leading to such outcomes as deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent self, and mastery of spiritual states (King & DeCicco, 2009).

It is made up of two words, 'spiritual' and 'intelligence' (Srivastava, 2016). In Latin, the term *spiritualis* meant pertaining to spirit, while the term *spirit* in Latin meant breath, as well as, disposition, character; high spirit, vigor, courage; pride, arrogance (Douglas R. Harper, n.d.). But, how are the two words; spiritual and intelligence, related to each other? The question stands. Is spiritual intelligence (SI) simply a measure of spirituality? If so, then why is it linked with the word intelligence? To answer this question, spiritual intelligence was defined as the use of spiritual information in an adaptive manner, such that it contributes to problem solving and achievement of goals in everyday life (Emmons, 2000).

Emmons (2000) deemed spirituality as a search for the sacred. A search for experience of meaning, both within oneself and of oneself. At the same time, Emmons (2000) defined Intelligence as a set of tools to foster a productive, effective, happier, and meaningful life. Hence, the word spiritual in spiritual intelligence is the determination of an individual's capacity to create meaning in their

own life. Supported by current literature, it is expounded that spiritual intelligence as a term that can be signified as possessing four core components: critical existential thinking, meaning-making, transcendental awareness, and consciousness (King & DeCicco, 2009). This construct is particularly relevant for university-going students in Karachi, who face various emotional challenges during their academic journey. As they navigate the pressures of exploring life in an academic setting, understanding how spiritual intelligence influences their cognitive emotion regulation could provide a deep understanding of how to improve their resilience and well-being while providing educational institutions with valuable insights into the importance of integrating spiritual intelligence into their curricula.

Emotional response to a negative event may be adaptive (McRae, 2016). This refers to emotion regulation, which, in the simplest of terms is the way we try to influence which emotions we possess, the situation that elicits them, and how we experience them in a way specific to us (Gross 1998b, as cited in Lewis, 2008). According to Gross (2001), emotion regulation is the interplay of conscious and unconscious strategies individuals use to increase, maintain, or decrease emotional responses. To regulate one's emotions, an individual might opt for different strategies – one of which is through cognitively regulating emotions. It is when an individual reevaluates, cognitively, a potentially charged emotion in a manner that reduces the impact of the situation that elicited the emotion. Hence, Cognitive Emotion Regulation (CER), as measured by the CER Questionnaire (CERQ) is a measurement of how the cognitive process of regulating emotions may impact emotional development and alter the perception of an individual's encounter of an adversity (Jermann et al., 2006).

The CER involves nine emotion regulation techniques, both adaptive and maladaptive, including, *Acceptance*, which refers to the cognitive process of acknowledging and coming to terms with an experience, often rooted in resignation and acceptance; *Positive refocusing* refers to redirecting attention toward pleasant, happy, and positive rather than dwelling on threatening or stressful thoughts; *Refocus on planning* encompasses concentrating on actionable steps to respond the experience encountered; *Positive reappraisal* refers to interpreting a negative situation in a way that sheds light on its potential for learning leading to personal growth; *Putting into Perspective* minimizes the seriousness of the situation by comparing it to other, more intense events. *Self-blame* involves the attribution of responsibility for negative event to oneself while also focusing on the feelings of guilt and regret; *Catastrophising* refers magnifying the negativity of the experience. *Rumination* refers to the repetitive focus on the thoughts and feelings associated with negative experiences. Lastly, *Blaming others*, is the act of attributing the cause of negative event to others (Jermann et al., 2006).

The study assumes that the undergraduate university environment in Karachi present diverse and complex challenges for students making an effort to adjust to a new atmosphere. The university students, especially undergraduate students represent a population navigating significant developmental transitions. Even though the transitions are not entirely evil, they may carry some stressors with the positive developments in students. Understanding how the two variables, namely SI and CER contribute toward emotional well-being, resilience, and enhanced decision-making is essential to understand in this population. Considering the diversity in Karachi's universities, it is crucial to understand the interplay between both variables. Research indicates a significant relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and emotion regulation capacities; individuals with higher SI tend to exhibit better emotion regulation skills (Nurochim et al., 2022). This study aims to further explore this relationship among undergraduate students in Karachi, contributing to the literature on the interaction of spiritual intelligence and cognitive emotion regulation, especially adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies, leading to psychological well-being. It

strives to study the unaddressed predictive relationship of SI and CER. Additionally, it aims to promote holistic personal development, addressing not the traditional measures of intelligence but the crucial aspect of spiritual intelligence.

Hypotheses

H 1: There is a correlation between SI and CER amongst undergraduate students of Karachi.

H 2: Increased SI is positively correlated with adaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation strategies.

H3: There is a correlation between Transcendental Awareness (TA) and positive reappraisal adaptive strategy of CER.

H4: There is a correlation between SI and positive refocusing adaptive strategy of CER.

H5: Spiritual Intelligence significantly predicts Cognitive Emotion Regulation in undergraduate students.

Literature Review

Safara and Bhatia (2013) considers spiritual intelligence as the most essential form of intelligence, which serves as a core from which other intelligences emerge. They highlight that spiritual intelligence involves the capacity to see best in seemingly stressful situations. In this context, spiritual intelligence demonstrates the ability to regulate one's emotions and can also influence emotional intelligence. It is characterized by the ability to act with wisdom and compassion while maintaining both inner and outer peace, regardless of circumstances. The research explores the works of King, who further describes spiritual intelligence as a set of mental capabilities rooted in the non-material and transcendent dimensions of reality. He identifies four core abilities that constitute spiritual intelligence. "The first one includes Critical Existential Thinking (CET), which is defined as the ability to critically contemplate the nature of existence. The second is Personal Meaning Production (PMP), which is an individual's ability to derive meaning and purpose from experiences, both physical and mental. The third is transcendental awareness (TA), which is the capacity to identify the transcendent self during a normal state of consciousness with the ability to recognize the relationship between one's self and the physical world. Lastly, Conscious State Expansion (CSE) explores the ability to enter and exit higher states of consciousness, which may include deep contemplation, meditation, or prayer (King 2009, as cited in Safara & Bhatia, 2013)."

Whereas, there is also a focus on the ability of emotion regulation to down-regulate negative emotions (McRae, 2016). The research infers that reappraisal has the ability to reduce negative emotions reported by individuals, as well as the physiological measures of affect, the magnitude, and the duration of the signal from the amygdala. The study involves assessing different types of reappraisals, including the ones that elicit the realization that the situation may not be as bad as it seems or the hope that it will improve in the future. There is also a focus on fostering reappraisal to bring about positive emotions as it has been proven to be more beneficial than simply reappraising to return to a neutral point.

Moreover, McRae (2016) compares cognitive reappraisal with other emotion regulation strategies, including distraction and expressive suppression. While distraction may be beneficial in high-stress or high-intensity situations, cognitive reappraisal yields long-term benefits. However, distraction may be beneficial in situations where time is limited for cognitive reappraisal. In contrast, expressive suppression mostly proves to be maladaptive. Social and cognitive consequences exist for using expressive suppression, especially in Western cultures. The paper studies effective emotion regulation strategies for both children and adults, especially in the context of education whereby managing emotions can improve learning potential and performance. All in all, the study underscores a nuanced approach to convey the importance of practicing cognitive emotion regulation, particularly in an educational context where healthy management of emotions is crucial for academic success.

Additionally, Faiz et al. (2024) examines the relationship between abuse, spiritual intelligence, and emotional regulation among adolescents in Pakistan. This research covers socioeconomic factors as well as the gender of adolescents while studying the correlation between variables. A positive correlation was found between abuse and spiritual intelligence, suggesting that adolescents who have faced abuse may develop spiritual intelligence as a coping mechanism. Whereas, a significant negative correlation was found between emotion regulation, which is expressive suppression and abuse. The strategy of cognitive suppression, was, however, found not to be correlated with abuse. This shows a complex relationship between the individual's ability to regulate emotions cognitively when faced with a traumatic life experience.

Moreover, spiritual intelligence is defined in terms of its cognitive aspects (Alam, 2020). The author adds the definition by White (2006), who defined spiritual intelligence in terms of seven cognitive characteristics. Firstly, a higher level of consciousness which plays a role in influencing intellectual development is deemed as a characteristic. Secondly, the ability to observe the relationship between existential ideas and life experiences. It also includes an individual's belief in their capability to complete a task or self-efficacy and their inherent empathy for others. Lastly, such individuals seek existential answers strong enough to support a rational theoretical orientation. The author defines spiritual intelligence by using various definitions, including the one illustrated by Emmons (2000), who deems it as the use of spiritual information aimed at goal attainment. This definition will be consistently used in this research for the purpose of representing spiritual intelligence. Moreover, Alam (2022) argues that spiritual intelligence can serve as a schema that influences an individual's decision-making ability, particularly in leadership roles in the information technology sector. The author proposes that spiritual intelligence may influence cognitive processes and also discusses the interplay of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual quotients. The research provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how spiritual intelligence, proven to function as a schema, may contribute to influencing cognitive emotion regulation strategies among individuals.

In addition to the studies, Aquinas's model of emotion defines emotion as an appetitive response to a cognized object (De Haan, 2014, as cited in Marple et al., 2024). The authors explain it in terms of *objects*, meaning that individuals form mental representations for information about the external world. These objects may be desirable or repulsive. The *object* is a feature of the external environment through which appetite and cognition interact. Note that cognitions are defined as the capacity to form mental frameworks about an individual's external environment. Meanwhile, appetite, according to Aquinas, is defined as the inclinations that individuals may possess that are external to themselves and that they may perceive as desirable or undesirable.

Keeping this knowledge in mind, the interaction between cognition and appetite results in actions, in the form of emotions, behaviours, and motives. Marple et al. (2024) posits that how motivation to act good comes about is crucial in assessing the morality of the act. Hence, the act of self-transcendence is argued to be heavily determined by cognitive reappraisal. Self-transcendent motivations and value prioritization go hand in hand. In moments of conflict, individuals may need to sacrifice their own goals to prioritize their values. This conflict demonstrates what values the individual may prioritize over others. Self-transcendent motivations are essential in developing virtue, which occurs by consistently reframing relevant situations in the light of self-transcendent values. It implies that individuals who see themselves as part of something larger than themselves focus on changing the way they view situations, adding to their valuation systems.

Method

Research Sample and Design

The study follows quantitative research and adopts a correlational research design to explore

the relationship between spiritual intelligence and cognitive emotion regulation among undergraduate students in Karachi's universities. The target population consists of undergraduate students from various universities in Karachi, Pakistan. A convenience sampling method will be employed to select participants. The sample size of (n=220) was drawn with the help of G* Power with the effect size of 0.3, probability of error 0.05 and power 0.95 (Rauf & Rehman, 2025)

Measures

Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI)

The SISRI is a validated instrument designed to measure various dimensions of spiritual intelligence. Individual subscales of CET, PMP, TA, and CSE displayed alpha coefficients of .78, .78, .87, and .91, respectively (King & DeCicco, 2009). The average inter-item correlation was .34, with split-half reliability at .91. These analyses suggest excellent psychometric properties of the SISRI-24 (King & DeCicco, 2009).

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ)

The CERQ assesses cognitive strategies individuals use to regulate their emotions, providing insights into how they cope with stressors. Developed by Garnefski et al. (2001), all subscales showed good internal consistencies ranging from .68 to .86 while the test-retest reliability was found to be between .40 to .60 (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2007). Most Cronbach's alphas were found exceeding .80, and psychometric properties of this scale were tested on adolescent population (Garnefski et al., 2001). Nonetheless, the CERQ has been used in various studies involving adolescents, adults, and the elder population to examine relationship between cognitive emotion regulation strategies and maladjustments (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2007).

Procedure

After attaining official permission from relevant authorities, authors of the scales and the ethics committee, a Google Form link was shared with participants, who were willing to consent to data sharing. In conducting the study, abiding by the ethical guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA) were ensured. Informed consent of the research participants was gathered before collection of data. The participants were informed about the nature of the study prior to conducting the research. It was assured that the participants have the right to voluntarily commit to the research, and they may withdraw from the study at any time. The author also ensured the confidentiality of the participants and the security of the data was maintained. Moreover, it was also ensured that only reliable and valid scales were used. Collection of data was followed by data analysis and interpretation through SPSS

Results

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Undergraduate Students.

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18 years or less	24	10.9
	19–21 years	81	36.8
	22–24 years	99	45
	25 years or above	16	7.3
Gender	Male	87	39.5
	Female	127	57.7

	Prefer not to say	6	2.7
Undergraduate Status	Undergraduate	220	100
Socioeconomic Status	Upper	17	7.7
	Upper-middle	84	38.2
	Middle	93	42.3
	Lower-middle	22	10
	Lower	4	1.8

Note. Values represent frequencies (n) and percentage (%) and reflect the proportion of the total sample of (N=220).

Table 1 shows the highest range was 22-24 years. The Female gender surpassed in majority in the demographics. Most of the socioeconomic range demonstrated in Table 1 depicted middle-class socioeconomic status.

Table 2
Cronbach's Alpha for Study Scales.

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's α
The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISI-24)	24	0.95
Cognitive Emotion Regulation (CERQ)	36	0.92

Note. Cronbach's alpha values reflect excellent internal consistency reliability for each scale. N = 220.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Main Study Variables.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
SI	220	53.09	18.16	-0.59	0.84
SI TA	220	16.38	5.11	-0.56	0.37
CER	220	102.59	22.74	-0.26	0.52
CER Adaptive	220	60.81	14.59	-0.34	0.13
CER Positive Refocusing	220	10.61	4.23	0.26	-0.61
CER Positive Reappraisal	220	12.86	4.29	0.02	-0.82

Note. Skewness and kurtosis values are based on sample statistics. SI = Spiritual Intelligence; CER = Cognitive Emotion Regulation; TA = Transcendental Awareness. Variable names indicate total scores of each variable collected in the data. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the main study variables and sub variables used in hypothesis testing.

Table 4
Correlations for Main Study Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SI	-	-	-	-	-	0.09
2. SI TA	-	-	-	-	.60**	-
3. CER	.41**	-	.41**	-	-	-
4. CER Adaptive	.61**	-	-	.61**	-	-
5. CER Positive Reappraisal	-	.60**	-	-	-	-
6. CER Positive Refocus	0.09	-	-	-	-	-

Note. $^{**}p < .01$. (two-tailed). N=220. Correlations represent Pearson correlations between variables predicted in the hypotheses. Dashes (-) indicate that correlations were not computed for those variable pairs. Variable names indicate the totals scored for each construct.

Table 5
Simple Linear Regression of SI Predicting CER.

Variable	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*	R^2	F
Constant	75.19	4.33		17.35	<.001		
SI	0.52	0.08	0.41	6.68	<.001	0.17	44.62

Note. A simple linear regression revealed that Spiritual Intelligence significantly predicted Cognitive Emotion Regulation, $R^2 = .17$, $F(1, 218) = 44.62$, $p < .001$. Each unit increase in SI corresponded to a 0.52-unit increase in CER ($B = 0.52$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). SI indicate the total scores of Spiritual Intelligence scale.

Discussion

The present study investigated the role of spiritual intelligence (SI) in shaping cognitive emotion regulation (CER) strategies among undergraduate students in Karachi. A key finding of this research was that spiritual intelligence is a significant predictor of cognitive emotion regulation, accounting for 17% of the variance in CER. In particular, the dimension of transcendental awareness (TA) was significantly correlated with positive reappraisal which is an adaptive CER strategy. These results underscore core insights of students who score higher on spiritual intelligence, especially those with increased transcendental awareness. The findings of this study align well with the literature reviewed earlier. Studies by Safara and Bhatia (2013), and Faiz et al. (2024) reinforce the current study's findings by depicting that individuals with higher SI contribute to adaptive cognitive regulation strategies. While Faiz et al. (2024) suggest that traumatic experiences may indirectly lead to higher SI, the current study suggests that regardless of trauma history, higher SI among undergraduate students is positively associated with adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

Another notable contribution of this study was the observed non-significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and the strategy of positive refocusing. While this finding was not entirely unpredictable, the study aimed to empirically find the relationship of whether undergraduate students higher in SI are more likely to employ positive refocusing, which is a temporary regulatory strategy, over other more permanent CER strategies. This provided evidence that SI is more strongly linked to strategies that require deep reflection like reappraisal than distraction-based strategies like positive refocusing. The outcome can be better understood through a detailed examination of cognitive emotion regulation strategies, especially the difference between *positive refocusing* and *positive reappraisal*.

All in all, the particular finding contributes to a growing body of evidence indicating that spiritual intelligence is not merely a belief system but also a functional, cognitive resource that can aid emotional resilience in young adults.

Furthermore, this study successfully integrated a philosophical framework with psychological constructs, particularly by examining how transcendental awareness, as a cognitive and spiritual capacity, aligns with positive reappraisal. Drawing on insights from Marple et al. (2024), the study contributes to both psychology and virtue ethics by demonstrating that reappraisal can be a vehicle for cultivating self-transcendent motivation, especially when grounded in rational and volitional processes. Transcendental awareness, a key dimension of spiritual intelligence, involves an individual's perception of themselves as part of a greater whole (King & DeCicco, 2009). It is essentially aligned with the emotion regulation strategy of positive reappraisal, which involves cognitively reframing adverse experiences in ways that leads to thoughts about personal growth (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2007). The philosophical underpinnings for this relationship are strongly supported by Aquinas's model of emotion regulation, as discussed by Marple et al. (2024).

Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study reinforce that SI is not a matter of personal belief but also a cognitive resource that empowers individuals to adaptively regulate emotions. The study also depicted that spiritual intelligence supports deeper cognitive engagement rather than surface-level or temporary emotion regulation. Moreover, the findings revealed SI as a significant predictor of cognitive emotion regulation. The study confirms that spiritual intelligence plays a meaningful role in shaping the cognitive emotion regulation of students. These insights hold relevance for educational, developmental, and clinical interventions aimed at promoting emotional well-being of students undergoing a transition phase in their lives.

Limitations and Recommendations

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations as the use of convenience sampling from a limited number of universities in Karachi restricted the generalizability of the findings. However, the research mitigated this limitation by ensuring a diverse participant pool in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status, allowing for a broader outlook of the study sample. While the limitation still stands, the internal consistency of the scales and the strength of the findings suggest robust core relationships. Secondly, the study used a cross-sectional design, which restricted causal interpretation of SI and CER. Although the research observed that SI predicts CER, it cannot definitively claim that SI causes improved cognitive emotion regulation. However, this is a common limitation in correlational research. Nevertheless, the research addressed this issue by grounding hypotheses in established theoretical and empirical literature, thereby reinforcing the plausibility of the proposed relationships. Future studies may adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to build on this foundation.

Thirdly, the research did not account for moderating. However, the study of moderating variables was beyond the scope of the current research, which focused on establishing a foundational link between SI and CER, especially focusing on the adaptive strategies of CER that may be predicted by increased SI in undergraduate students of Karachi. Future studies may incorporate these variables for a greater insight into the relationship between the two components.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for both future research and practice. In terms of research, there is a visible need for longitudinal and mixed-methods studies to assess how spiritual intelligence and its relationship with cognitive emotion regulation strengthen or weaken over time, taking into account moderating and mediating variables that the test sample might encounter. In regards to

this, future studies could examine the role of contextual variables, such as family environment, cultural identity, and trauma history, personality of the individual, etc. In practical settings, this study offers direction for mental health professionals, educators, and curriculum developers. Programs designed to strengthen spiritual intelligence, through reflection, community engagement, or spiritual education workshops, may simultaneously improve students' cognitive emotional regulation abilities. This is particularly relevant in settings that have constrained resources where traditional counselling services may be less accessible. Educational institutions can integrate SI-strengthening practices into personal development and resilience-building curricula.

Contributions of Author

Rania Shahid: Conceptualization, Data Collection, Data Curation, Methodology, Investigation, Writing.
Dr. Khalida Rauf: Reviewing and Editing, Supervision.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The dataset of the research is not available publicly due to ethical reasons. However, they are available with the author [Rania Shahid][1] upon reasonable request.

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