

# SPIRITUALITY WELLBEING AMONG MALAYSIAN YOUTH

**Dzuhailmi Dahalan, Universiti Putra Malaysia**  
**Jeffrey Lawrence D'Silva, Universiti Putra Malaysia**  
**Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, Universiti Putra Malaysia**  
**Nor Aini Mohamed, Universiti Putra Malaysia**  
**Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril, Universiti Putra Malaysia**

## ABSTRACT

*This article examines spiritual well-being among Malaysian youth. The findings presented are a small part of the overall research data on Malaysian youth well-being. This is a quantitative study involving a total of 500 respondents aged 19-30 years from the five zones in Malaysia. Overall, the results depict that youth have a high level of spiritual well-being. Further findings show that there was a significant difference in spiritual well-being based on location, gender, and zones. Even though the study did not examine the relationship between youth spiritual well-being and quality of life, the study recommends that the spiritual well-being of youth need to be given immense attention by all concerned parties based on the mounting challenging environment youths are in.*

**Keywords:** Well-Being, Spirituality, Malaysian Youth.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent figures show that the youth population of Malaysia is around 8 million out of about 27 million citizens (NYP, 2015). This means Malaysian youth constitute 29.52% of the total population. Consequently, the national development agenda should not disregard the well-being of youth from different dimensions since well-being is often associated with quality of life (Umi et al., 2016). Undoubtedly the sovereignty of the nation is dependable upon youth that possesses the optimum quality of life so that they will be able to play the role of effective development partners.

One of the pertinent dimensions of youth well-being is spiritual well-being. This dimension is relevant since youth not only merely embrace beliefs and rituals but regard religion as the cornerstone of community connectedness and unity (IYRES, 2012). Youth spiritual well-being is mandatory in the context of human development. Rapp (2010) in his study has demonstrated that religion and spirituality are the sources of strength. Pierre in Nelson (2009) mentioned that spiritual strength can help one to understand the meaning of his life, encourage human beings to always think to do good, pushing him/her to obey God's commands, nature, the norms of society that affect one's soul and mind, develop fighting spirit, freeing one from the evils of destruction besides guiding one towards a meaningful transformation in life.

The Malaysian Youth Policy (NYP, 2015-2035) depicts the spiritual and religious aspects as among the social challenges that the future generations of youths need to face. Generally, it is agreed that information and communication technology creates an extensive effect on the challenges that youth had to face on the social environment. The creation of a

borderless world is poised to threaten the spiritual well-being of youth if one keeps to the viewpoint that achieving targeted goals are more important compared to the mechanisms on how these goals were achieved. Therefore, the issue of moral decline that occurs among the youth is not a new issue.

NYP (2015-2035) cites several pieces of evidence of moral decline recorded from various sources. For instance, the Malaysian National Registration Department recorded a total of 14,964 illegitimate births in 2011 that involved mothers less than 20 years of age. Meanwhile, The Royal Malaysia Police recorded a total of 709 rape cases in 2010 involving suspects aged below 18 years. In addition, the Malaysian Prisons Department records show that in 2013 there were 4,653 youth prisoners between the ages of 16-30 years. Therefore, Dzuhailmi (2016) stated that although generally Malaysian youth justify the identification of their religion in a positive context, the practice among them is still much to debate.

In summary, the issue of moral deterioration that occurs among the youth is the manifestation of spiritual inequality within them. The basic thing among others that contributes to this problem should be addressed by all parties. In this regard, this paper focuses on the findings of the study on spiritual well-being among youth as part of an important component in measuring the holistic well-being of Malaysian youth.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Spiritual well-being is a manifestation of two distinguished definitions. Atchley (2004) refers to well-being as a feeling free from stress, a happy feeling that overpowers sad feelings in the long run, positive feelings in life as well as achieving the desired goals. Billson (2005) sees well-being as an optimum condition, measured from the point of satisfaction, confidence, endurance, and physical health. In short, well-being is a form of quality of life measurement that can be calculated psychologically or internally involving several important dimensions (Costanza et al., 2007; Bretones & Gonzales, 2011).

Sulaiman et al. (2015) states that well-being can be studied from three main perspectives: (1) objective well-being (wealth, health, education and lifestyle aspects); (2) subjective well-being (economic, social, cultural, environmental, religion or spiritual) aspects; and (3) interaction well-being (social cohesion and social capital aspects). The interaction between these three dimensions contributes to a comprehensive level of well-being or happiness (seen from the perspective of satisfaction with life, happiness, and progression in life). According to them, previous studies have shown that there are other dimensions besides the economic dimension that is instrumental towards human well-being.

Meanwhile, the word spiritual is derived from the root word spirit that means determined, full of hope and optimistic (Vogelsang, 1983). According to Simsen (1988), the word spirit is a view of the human soul and its concern for the meaning and reality of life. The term spiritual in the Malaysian dictionary, Dewan (2000) is referred to as something religion or religious. In Islamic epistemology, the term spirit is referred to spirituality as defined by contemporary scholars (Salleh, 2015).

Burkhardt (1989) describes the spiritual aspects based on the following features, one relates to something unknown or uncertain in life, realizing the meaning or purpose of life, recognizing the ability to use the source and the strength of oneself and to feel the attachment to the supreme power of God. Spiritual is a human aspect that cannot be expressed by human senses and is a dimension of religion (Suriani et al., 2016). According to Sham et al. (2013), there are two elements in the creation of human beings that are mutually interrelated namely the

spiritual and the physical elements. Concurring with Frankl's (1997) view that spiritual as the core of humanity, the source of meaning in life and the creation of extraordinary human nature.

Thus, spiritual well-being describes the dynamic nature of one's personality with its Creator, providing a meaningful life experience and expressing high value in one's life (Ellison, 1983). According to Fisher (2010), spiritual well-being reflects a harmonious life in a person who shows the meaning, purpose, and value of life. While Vaughan (2002) states someone who possesses spiritual intelligence as a person who has a high level of experience in any aspect of human development, whether from cognitive, moral, emotional and interpersonal perspectives. He describes spiritual well-being as a harmonious relationship between a person and his God, fellow human beings, and the environment.

Based on previous explanations, spiritual well-being can be regarded as the level of intelligence of the inner or spiritual aspects of human beings that reveal noble personality to a person whether in relation to the Creator, fellow human beings or the environment. In other words, spiritual well-being is a condition in which a person achieves spiritual happiness and feels close to the Creator and it encourages him to do well to face any difficulties.

Previous studies based on Fowler's Faith Development Theory found that spiritual understanding is important in the process of human development because of human and spiritual development takes place throughout the life of an individual (Andrade, 2014). Therefore, VonDras et al. (2007) in his study found that religious aspects and spiritual well-being could be a medium for the prevention of alcohol use among young people. Failure to apply the spiritual element in youth life causes them not to understand the meaning of life as well as it is difficult to deal with various challenges (Wahl et al., 2008). This means that the inculcating of spiritual elements in human life affects a more positive behavior (VonDras et al., 2007; Christopher & James, 2011).

According to Nor Hanim et al. (2015), greater spiritual values and religious knowledge can be a protector to youths who are looking for a life identity. Youths with high levels of spiritual well-being are seen to be able to live their lives better, as well as to try to avoid any negativistic approach in the opposite of religion or the norms of society. According to them again, the spiritual aspect is an important element to shape the generation of youth so their potential can be unleashed for the benefit of the nation, nation, and nation.

Rohani (2016) who conducted a study of 400 truant youths in three northern states of Peninsular Malaysia found that spiritual well-being had the strongest influence on the formation of self-esteem. However, spiritual well-being is found to have no effect on relationships with living stresses, social resources, skills of self-esteem and self-esteem. Meanwhile, Norazwa (2013) that examined the influence of emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence on youth misconduct in one of the southern regions of Peninsular Malaysia found that there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and respondent misconduct. However, there was a significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and misconduct.

Norazri (2015) who studied the inculcation of noble values in the teaching and learning process towards the formation of students' personality in MARA Higher Skills College found that the inculcation of noble values among lecturers was high and there was a significant difference from the perspective of lecturers and students in the inculcation of noble values. His study involved 100 lecturers and 300 students in selected MARA Educational Institutions in the southern zone of Peninsular Malaysia. His research also suggested the importance of applying noble values during the teaching and learning process.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative methodology involving 500 youth aged 19-30 years representing five zones in Malaysia. The findings presented are a small part of the overall research data on Malaysian youth well-being. In other words, the finding responds to the specific research questions, what is the current status of the spiritual well-being among Malaysian youth? The items on the spiritual dimension were based on a 5-point Likert Scale and it was developed based on past studies as well as recommendations by experts in Malaysia. The validation process using the Exploratory Factor Analysis showed that there are nine items to measure the spiritual dimension. The reliability of these items was 0.849 indicating the soundness of the items. The whole data collection process was completed within five months and SPSS was used to describe and infer the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of Respondents

Overall there were 62.2% females and 37.8% of males that participated in this study. While based on age 73.8% are between 18-24 years and the balance of 26.2% are aged between 25-30 years. There was equal representation of 100 respondents from each zone. In terms of ethnicity, 69.3% of the respondents are Malays, 14.9% Chinese and 5.8% are Indians/Others. Based on location, 61.8% are from urban areas while 38.2% are residing in rural areas.

Background	Percentage
<b>Zone</b>	
North	20.0
Middle	19.8
South	20.0
East Coast	20.2
Borneo	20.0
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	37.8
Female	62.2
<b>Age</b>	
19-24 (Middle youth)	73.8
25-30 (Late youth)	26.2
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Malay	69.3
Chinese	14.9
India/lain-lain	15.8
<b>Location</b>	
Urban	61.8
Rural	38.2

### Spiritual Well-Being

The aim of this study is to determine the spiritual well-being of Malaysian youth. 5-points Likert Scale which is (5) strongly agree to (1) Strongly Disagree is used to measure the spiritual well-being of respondents. Subsequently, their level of spiritual well-being is

determined by calculating the overall mean of the measurement of construct, and then dividing with the sum of spiritual well-being item in order to produce the overall mean. The findings revealed that youth have a high level of spiritual well-being ( $M=4.03$ ,  $SD=0.599$ ).

Level	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
			4.0278	0.59932
Low (1.00-2.33)	3	0.6		
Average (2.34-3.66)	134	26.8		
High (3.67-5.00)	363	72.6		

Further analysis revealed that all the items recorded a high mean score ( $M \geq 3.67$ ) except the item “*I do not feel lonely in my life*”. The three items that recorded the highest mean scores are: “*I wish the best for my family/ neighbors*”, “*I pay attention to religious obligations in the different fields that I am involved*” and “*I celebrate the success of my friends with a warm heart*”.

No.	Item	Mean	SD
1.	I accept the test/allegations patiently	3.98	0.836
2.	I'm worried if I'm doing wrong with others	4.16	0.848
3.	I was on time when I promised	3.80	0.856
4.	I wish the best for my family/neighbors	4.39	0.776
5.	I do not hold a grudge against anyone	3.85	1.024
6.	I celebrate the success of my friends with a warm heart	4.19	0.813
7.	I know what is my life goals	4.04	8.98
8.	I pay attention to religious obligations in the different fields that I am involved	4.24	0.832
9.	I do not feel lonely in my life	3.60	1.087

An Independent samples t-test was carried out to determine whether there is a significant difference between: (i) male and female, and (ii) urban and rural. The findings demonstrated that there was a significant difference between male ( $M=3.93$ ,  $SD=0.64$ ) and female youth ( $M=4.09$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ), and, between urban ( $M=4.07$ ,  $SD=0.60$ ) and rural youth ( $M=3.96$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ).

Profile	n	Mean	SD	t	p
<b>Gender</b>				-3.003	.003
	Male	189	3.9253	0.64461	
	Female	311	4.0900	0.56203	
<b>Residential location</b>				2.050	.041
	Urban	309	4.0708	0.60034	
	Rural	191	3.9581	0.59262	

A One-Way ANOVA test was carried out to determine whether there is any significant difference in spiritual well-being among the different zones. The findings showed that there was a significant difference in spiritual well-being based on zones. Further analysis using the Post-

Hoc test displayed that the significant differences in spiritual well-being are between youth in (i) northern and southern zones, (ii) central and southern zones, and (iii) Borneo and southern zones.

Profile	n	Mean	SD	F	p
<b>Zone</b>				4.728	.001
North	100	4.1111	0.54639		
Middle	99	4.1077	0.05059		
South	100	3.8111	0.75681		
East Coast	101	4.0088	0.60567		
Borneo	100	4.1011	0.05012		

	(I) Zone	(J) Zone	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Turkey HSD	<b>North</b>	Middle	0.00337	1.000
		South	0.30000*	0.003
		East Coast	0.10231	0.735
		Borneo	0.01000	1.000
	<b>Middle</b>	North	-0.00337	1.000
		South	0.29663*	0.004
		East Coast	0.09894	0.760
		Borneo	0.00663	1.000
	<b>South</b>	North	-0.30000*	0.003
		Middle	-0.29663*	0.004
		East Coast	-0.19769	0.124
		Borneo	-0.29000*	0.005
	<b>East Coast</b>	North	-0.10231	0.735
		Middle	-0.09894	0.760
		South	0.19769	0.124
		Borneo	-0.09231	0.802
	<b>Borneo</b>	North	-0.01000	1.000
		Middle	-0.00663	1.000
		South	0.29000*	0.005
		East Coast	0.09231	0.802

From the above results, it is evident that the overall spiritual well-being of Malaysian youth is high. All the items showed a high mean score except one that recorded a moderate score namely the feeling of loneliness experienced by youth. However, this item is almost reaching the range of a high score and thus needed some attention. For instance, how a youth-adult partnership. For example, how youth-adult partnership in Malaysia can be expanded in a more organized manner by providing adequate space for the youth to make mutual decisions. Studies show that most of the youth in Malaysia do not see themselves as part of the community, where they acclaimed that they are not given a meaningful role in terms of engagement opportunities (Haslinda et al., 2015). Their participation is very much limited in social institutions such as community organizations, associations, places of worship, and others (Dzuhailmi, 2016). Although the study did not see the influence of Malaysian youths on the

quality of their lives, however, based on past studies, aspects of spiritual well-being have had a great influence on the positive development of youth (Andrade, 2014; Vondras et al., 2007; Wahl et al., 2008; Christopher & James, 2011).

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study epitomizes the efforts of youth development programmes in Malaysia across different stakeholders are worthwhile especially toward the spiritual well-being of Malaysian youth. However, youth development efforts, especially in leveraging civil society towards enhancing the spiritual well-being of Malaysian youths, still need to be strengthened. Proper planning regarding this need to be systematically created since the challenges of today's youth environment is so perplexing. The huge penetration of ICT shows that youth are very much exposed to a wide range of social and entertainment linkage. This contributes to the disconnection between youth and family members as well as the community in terms of meaningful contribution. If this is not controlled, this will bring great loss to youth, society, and nation as a whole. Thus, it is again emphasized on the importance of assessing the youth spiritual well-being from time to time taking into account with some of the suggestions that have been put forward. This is aimed at placing youth generation to be in the right position as they endure the current wave of development.

## REFERENCES

- Andrade, A. (2014). Using fowler's faith development theory in student affairs practice. *College Student Affairs Leadership, 1*(2), 2.
- Atchley R.C. (2004). *Social forces and aging: An introduction to social gerontology, (10<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Thompson Learning, United States.
- Billson, J.M. (2005). The complexities and defining female wellbeing. In Billson J.M., Fluehr-Lobban C. (Eds.), *Female Well-Being*. Zed Books Ltd. London.
- Bretones, F.D., & Gonzalez, M.J. (2011). Subjective and occupational well-being in a sample of Mexican workers. *Social Indicators Research, 100*(2), 273-285.
- Burkhardt, M.A. (1989). Spirituality: An analysis of the concept. *Holistic Nursing Practice, 3*(3), 69-77.
- Christopher, A.S., & James, M.D. (2011). Student spirituality and school counselling: Issues, opportunities and challenges. *Counselling and Values, 55*, 130-148.
- Costanza, R., Fisher, B., Ali, S., Beer, C., Bond, L., Boumans, R., Danigelis, N.L., Dickinson, J., Elliott, C., Farley, J., & Gayer, D.E. (2007). Quality of life: An approach integrating opportunities, human needs, and subjective well-being. *Ecological Economics, 61*(2-3), 267-276.
- Dahalan, D., Krauss, SE, Hamzah, A., & Sulaiman, A.H. (2014). Religious standing multi-racial early youth in Malaysia. *Journal of Social Science and Humanities (e-Bangi), 9*(1), 117-130.
- Dzuhailmi, D. (2016). Youth as partners in nation building. Retrieved from: <http://www.utusan.com.my/rencana/utama/belia-jadi-rakan-pembangunan-negara.1.325800#ixzz5NjQtIpr6>
- Ellison, C.W. (1983). Spiritual well-being: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 11*(4), 330-338.
- Fisher, J. (2010). Development and application of a spiritual well-being questionnaire called SHALOM. *Religions, 1*(1), 105-121.
- Frankl, V.E. (1997). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logo therapy*. London: Eight Impression, Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd.
- Hashim, R.C. (2016). *The relationship between life stress, social resources, mental skills and spiritual well-being with a skilled adolescent self-esteem*. Doctoral Dissertation, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Haslinda, A., Wasitah, M.Y., Azimi, H., Krauss, S.E., Dzuhailmi, D., & Abd. Hadi, S. (2015). Study on Malaysian youth asset: Final Report for Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES). Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

- Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES) (2012). *Understanding the anxieties and desires of Malaysian youth*. Ministry Youth and Sports, Putrajaya, Malaysia.
- Kamarudin, N.Y. (2013). *Effect of emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence on adolescent school behavior*. Doctoral Dissertation, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Kamus Dewan (Local Dictionary) (2000). *Institute of language and literature*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Malaysia Government (2015). *Malaysian Youth Policy 2015-2035*. Ministry of Youth and Sports, Putrajaya, Malaysia.
- Nelson, J.M. (2009). *Psychology, religion, and spirituality*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Nor, H.E., Selamah, M., & Ahmad, B.A. (2015). The concepts, issues, challenges and spiritual intelligence of the youth. *Journal of Global Business and Social Entrepreneurship*, 1(2), 89-98.
- Norazri, M.Z. (2015). *Inculcating noble values in teaching and learning towards developing student's personality of MARA higher vocational college*. Master Dissertation, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
- Norazwa, Y.K. (2013). *The influence of emotional and spiritual intelligence on misconduct of secondary school students*. Master Dissertation, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Rapp, M.A. (2010). The practioner's attitude toward religion and spirituality in social work practice. *Journal Learning Disabilities*, 34(1) 66-78.
- Rohani, C.H. (2016). *Relationship between life stress, social resources, reactive skills and spiritual well-being with self-esteem of truant youth*. Doctoral Dissertation, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Salleh, N.M. (2015). *Appreciation of faith, peace of mind and spiritual calm of national high school students in Malaysia. (Faith understanding, peace of mind and spiritual calmness among national secondary schools in Malaysia)*. Phd Thesis, Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Sham, F.M., Hamjah, S.H., & Mohd, J.S. (2013). *Personality from the perspective of al-Ghazali*. Publisher of National University of Malaysia.
- Simsen, B. (1988). Spiritual care. *Nursing Times*, 84(37), 31-33.
- Sink, C.A., & Devlin, J.M. (2011). Student spirituality and school counseling: Issues, opportunities, and challenges. *Counseling and Values*, 55(2), 130-148.
- Sulaiman, Md. Y., Asnarulkhadi, A.S., Jeffrey, L.D.S., Hayrol, A.M.S., & Hamizah, S. (2015). *Well-being revisited: A Malaysian perspective*. Poverty eradication foundation.
- Suriani, S., Fariza, M.S., & Phayilah, Y. (2016). *Spiritual di dalam Al-Quran*. International Conference on Aqidah, Dakwah and Syariah 2016 (IRSYAD 2016).
- Umi, M. S., Mansor, M. N., Wan, S. S., & Wan, S. W. (2016). Well-being index in a diversity society: Study among students of public universities. *Proceeding of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Management & Muamalah 2016, 31<sup>st</sup> October-1<sup>st</sup> November 2016*, 299-304.
- Vaughan, F. (2002). What is spiritual intelligence? *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(2), 16-33.
- Vogelsang, J.D. (1983). Personality, faith, development, and work attitudes. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 22(2), 131-138.
- VonDras, D.D., Schmitt, R.R., & Marx, D. (2007). Associations between aspects of spiritual well-being, alcohol use, and related social-cognitions in female college students. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 46(4), 500-515.
- Wahl, R.A., Cotton, S., & Harrison-Monroe, P. (2008). Spirituality, adolescent suicide, and the juvenile justice system. *Southern Medical Journal-Birmingham Alabama*, 101(7), 711.