



Correlation between Spirituality Levels and Anxiety among First-Year Students in Health Science Programs

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Students often face numerous academic demands that must be met within a limited timeframe. These demands can become stressors that trigger anxiety, particularly among new students who are adapting to a new academic environment. Spirituality may play a role in helping students manage anxiety.

Objective: This study aimed to determine the relationship between spiritual level and anxiety among new students in the health study program at the University of Muhammadiyah East Kalimantan.

Method: This was a quantitative study with a cross-sectional design. A total of 271 respondents were selected using a random sampling technique. Data were collected using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) to measure spiritual level and the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to assess anxiety. The Spearman Rank correlation test was used for statistical analysis.

Results: The findings showed that 160 students (59.0%) had a high level of spirituality, while 123 students (45.4%) were in the normal category of anxiety. Statistical analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between spiritual level and anxiety (correlation coefficient = -0.429; p-value = 0.000), indicating a moderate inverse relationship.

Conclusion: There is a statistically significant relationship between spiritual level and anxiety among new students. The higher the spiritual level, the lower the anxiety experienced. These results suggest that spiritual well-being may serve as a protective factor against anxiety in academic settings.

Keywords: anxiety, health study program, mental health, spirituality, university students

Introduction

Spirituality is a fundamental aspect that is inseparable from an individual's quality of life. As stated in the research background, spirituality offers inner peace, patience, and the ability to reduce anxiety, all of which contribute to improving overall well-being (Ratama, 2025). It is defined as a broad and inclusive concept that extends beyond formal religious affiliation, although the two are often interrelated in complex ways. Spirituality reflects the essential human need to connect with a higher power or God, to find meaning and purpose in life, to realize one's potential, and to feel a deep connection with both oneself and the Divine (Wisnusakti & Sriati, 2021). Fulfilling spiritual needs is closely associated with positive psychological states such as peace and patience (Lahimade, Binilang, & Wuwung, 2022). Research has shown that individuals with higher spiritual levels are likely to experience lower stress and greater inner peace (Dilla & Soffa, 2014). The spiritual dimension of well-being encompasses feelings of connectedness, life purpose, and a relationship with a transcendent power, indicating that spirituality is not merely an abstract belief but an active and influential component of mental health and psychological well-being.

Anxiety, in contrast, is a common emotional response to perceived threats, particularly prevalent among university students (Aristawati et al., 2021). It is characterized as a negative and anticipatory emotion experienced when individuals feel worried about failure and uncertain of their ability to influence outcomes (Marthoenis et al., 2018). First-year students are especially vulnerable to anxiety due to the significant transition they face—adapting to a new academic environment, meeting increased academic demands such as intensive schedules, complex assignments, examinations, and laboratory work, and adjusting socially to campus life (Firdaus et al., 2025). Studies confirm that these students frequently encounter stressful situations, excessive responsibilities, and psychological fatigue (Andri, Padila, & Arifin, 2021). This transition from high school to university presents considerable psychological, intellectual, and social challenges, often leading to academic anxiety, which includes fear and worry about academic performance and evaluation. Academic anxiety is marked by concern over potential failure and a lack of confidence in one's ability to control academic outcomes. Additionally, future-related anxiety—defined as a pessimistic view toward one's career and future uncertainty—is also common among students.

According to Marthoenis et al. (2018), anxiety is widespread among university students, with prevalence rates ranging from 15% to 64.3%. Setiyani (2018) further found that students in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FIKES) exhibited higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to those in non-health faculties. This may be attributed to the more intensive academic and practical responsibilities FIKES students face, such as hands-on learning, laboratory work, and skill-based assessments. A preliminary study conducted by the researchers through interviews with 20 new students in the health study program at the University of Muhammadiyah East Kalimantan (UMKT) on August 20, 2024, revealed that 5 students expressed fear of adapting to a new environment, 10 students were worried about choosing the wrong major or not graduating on time, and some experienced physical symptoms like trembling when interacting with peers. Meanwhile, 5 other students reported positive coping strategies, such as maintaining strong peer relationships, praying together, observing fasting rituals on Mondays and Thursdays, and feeling calm during prayer. They stated that they consistently involve God in their decisions and felt fortunate to experience college life.

The intersection between technology, Islamic values, and student stress is particularly relevant at UMKT, an "Islamic university based on information technology." While educational technology provides numerous advantages, it can also serve as a source of stress. Islamic values promote the responsible use of knowledge and resources, and thus students at UMKT may face unique challenges in navigating the expectations related to both technology and faith-based conduct. Spirituality, consistently linked with enhanced mental well-being, can serve as a buffer against anxiety by offering meaning, coping mechanisms, and inner calm. First-year students, especially those in demanding programs like health sciences, are especially prone to anxiety due to the combination of academic, transitional, and psychosocial pressures. As highlighted in Indonesian research, many students report high levels of anxiety.

This study aims to provide context-specific insights into how spirituality influences anxiety among first-year health sciences students at UMKT. The findings are expected to support the development of culturally appropriate interventions to enhance student mental well-being, aligning with UMKT's vision of fostering "Islamic character" and its commitment to student welfare (Andri, Padila, & Arifin, 2021). Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader academic discourse on spirituality and mental health within non-Western Islamic higher education contexts. It may also offer practical recommendations for UMKT in terms of curriculum development (e.g., integrating Islamic and character education or AIK), student support services, and creating a campus environment that promotes both spiritual and psychological well-being.

Objective

This study aimed to determine the relationship between spiritual level and anxiety among new students in the health study program at the University of Muhammadiyah East Kalimantan.

Method

The research method employed in this study is descriptive correlational, which aims to explore the relationship between two variables. Specifically, this study investigates the relationship between the level of spirituality and anxiety among new students in the Health Study Program at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. The research design used is cross-sectional, which observes the relationship between risk factors and outcomes through an observational approach, with data collection and variable measurement conducted at a single point in time (Herdiani, 2021).

The population in this study includes all new students enrolled in the Health Study Program at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. According to Ali (2022), a population refers to all subjects or objects relevant to the study that possess characteristics in accordance with the research objectives. The total population consists of 836 students across six health-related programs: D3 Nursing with 122 students, S1 Nursing with 149 students, S1 Public Health with 269 students, S1 Environmental Health with 84 students, S1 Pharmacy with 162 students, and S1 Medicine with 50 students.

The sample is a portion of the population that represents its characteristics and is used for data collection and analysis (Ali, 2022). The sample size in this study was determined using the Slovin formula, which calculates the appropriate number of respondents based on a selected level of significance. With a 5% margin of error, which is suitable for populations of

at least 400, the total sample size obtained was 271 students. To reduce potential bias and ensure the representativeness of the results, sample criteria were determined carefully. This included stratification based on each study program so that each was proportionally represented in the sample. The stratified sampling ensured that the data collected accurately reflected the diversity within the overall population.

Table 1. Sample data for each stratum

Study program	Population	Calculation	Number of Samples Perstratum
D3 Nursing	122	$\frac{122}{836} \times 271$	48
S1 Nursing	149	$\frac{149}{836} \times 271$	40
S1 Public Health	269	$\frac{269}{836} \times 271$	87
S1 Environmental Health	84	$\frac{84}{836} \times 271$	27
S1 Pharmacy	162	$\frac{162}{836} \times 271$	53
S1 Medicine	50	$\frac{50}{836} \times 271$	16
Total			271

Research Instruments

Research instruments are tools used to collect, measure, and analyze data in a study. These tools may take the form of questionnaires, checklists, or other measurement tools provided to gather the required information from respondents or research subjects (Agustianti et al., 2022). The instruments used in this study are as follows:

Respondent Demographic Data

Data collection includes information regarding respondents' identities, consisting of name, age, gender, religion, and study program.

Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) – Indonesian Version

This questionnaire measures the level of daily spiritual experience in respondents.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)

This questionnaire is used to assess the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among the respondents.

Validity and Reliability Test

The 16-item version of the DSES has demonstrated internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's Alpha (Amalia & Dianingati, 2022). An instrument is considered valid if the calculated r-value exceeds the critical r-value. In this case, the calculated r-values ranged from 0.47 to 0.88, which is greater than the table value ($r > 0.444$), indicating that the instrument is valid. As this study used the same type of respondents, no further validity testing was deemed necessary. Previous versions of the DSES have also shown high internal consistency in various translations: the Chinese version reported a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.97, the Spanish version

0.91, and the German version 0.92. Additionally, reliability testing by Khanna reported a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.95. Therefore, with an average Cronbach’s Alpha between 0.90 and 0.97, the DSES instrument can be considered reliable (Fitriyaningrum et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version

Univariate Analysis

This analysis focuses on describing one variable at a time without considering its relationship to other variables. It provides a descriptive overview of each variable through frequencies and percentages (Senjaya et al., 2022).

Bivariate Analysis

This analysis investigates the relationship between two variables—specifically, the level of spirituality and the level of anxiety among new students in the Health Study Program. The statistical method used was the Spearman correlation test, which is appropriate for ordinal data or a combination of ordinal and nominal/ratio data types. This test also measures the strength and direction of the relationship.

The strength of the correlation is interpreted as:

0.00 to 0.25 = No or very weak relationship

0.26 to 0.50 = Moderate relationship

0.51 to 0.75 = Strong relationship

0.76 to 1.00 = Very strong relationship

Result

Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur (UMKT) is a private university located in Samarinda, East Kalimantan Province. The main campus is situated on Jalan Ir. H. Juanda No. 15, while the second campus is located on Jalan Pelita, Komplek Pesona Mahakam. UMKT was established through the merger of two institutions: Muhammadiyah Samarinda School of Health Sciences (STIKES), founded in 2009 and accredited with a B rating, and STIE Muhammadiyah Samarinda, which was established on September 15, 1981. Currently, UMKT consists of four faculties offering a total of sixteen study programs at the undergraduate and Diploma Three levels. The characteristics of the research respondents are presented as follows:

Table 2. Characteristics of the research respondents

Respondent Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
17 Years	18	6.6
18 Years	188	69.4
19 Years	56	20.7
20 Years	7	2.6
21 Years	2	0.7
Gender		

Male	51	18.8
Female	220	81.2
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Religion		
Islam	268	98.9
Protestant Christian	3	1.1
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Study Programs		
S1 Nursing	48	17.7
D3 Nursing	40	14.8
S1 Environmental Health	27	10.0
S1 Public Health	87	32.1
S1 Pharmacy	53	19.6
S1 Medicine	16	5.9
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Total	271	100

Based on table 2, it can be seen that the age of the respondents is mostly 18 years old, as many as 188 people (69.4%). Most of the respondents are female, as many as 220 people (81.2%). The majority of respondents' religion is Muslim, as many as 268 people (98.9%) and the most study programs are in Public Health S1, as many as 87 people (32.1%).

Univariate Analysis

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Spiritual Levels

Spiritual Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	0	0
Medium	111	41.0
High	160	59.0
Total	271	100

Based on the results of the univariate analysis on the spiritual level variable, it was found that the majority of respondents had a high spiritual level, namely 160 people (59.0%) and a moderate spiritual level, namely 111 people (41.0%).

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Closeness to God

Closeness to God	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not at all	0	0
Quite close	16	5.9
Close	135	49.8
Very close	120	44.3
Total	271	100

Based on table 4, it can be seen that the results of the univariate analysis related to statement number 16 were found regarding the aspect of closeness to God. The statement "According to your heart and mind, how close are you to God in your daily life?" adds information that the subject has spiritual beliefs. It was found that most respondents felt close to God as many as 135 people (49.8%), always close to God 120 people (44.3%), and 16 people

(5.9%) felt quite close to God. In this statement, no research subjects chose the option "very not close".

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Anxiety

Anxiety	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Normal	123	45.4
Light	68	25.1
Currently	51	18.8
Heavy	28	10.3
Very heavy	1	0.4
Total	271	100

Based on table 5, it can be seen that the results of the univariate analysis on the anxiety variable showed that most respondents had normal anxiety, namely 123 people (45.4%), mild anxiety as many as 68 people (25.1%), moderate anxiety as many as 50 people (18.8%), severe anxiety as many as 28 people (10.3%) and very severe anxiety as many as 1 person (0.4%).

Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the independent variable, namely spiritual level, and the dependent variable, namely anxiety, using the Spearman rank test and can be seen in the following table:

Table 6. Analysis of the Relationship between Spiritual Level and Anxiety

			Spirituality Level	Anxiety
Spearman's rho	Spirituality Level	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.429**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	271	271
	Anxiety	Correlation Coefficient	-.429**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	271	271
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Based on table 6, it can be seen that the results of the statistical test using the Spearman rank test obtained a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05 indicating that there is a relationship between spiritual levels and anxiety in new students in the health study program at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. The correlation value (r) of -0.429 indicates a moderate correlation strength with a negative relationship direction, which means that the higher the level of spirituality, the lower the anxiety experienced by new students in the health study program.

Discussion

Based on the results of univariate analysis, it was found that out of 271 respondents, the majority were 18 years old, totaling 188 individuals (69.4%). This finding aligns with the study

conducted by Fahrianti & Nurmina (2021), where the majority of 119 new student respondents were aged between 17–19 years. Similarly, Annisa, Dewi, and Zulfikar (2023) reported that the most prevalent age group experiencing anxiety was 19 years. It can be assumed that younger students are more prone to experiencing anxiety compared to older students. As individuals mature, they tend to develop better coping mechanisms and emotional regulation, making them more resilient in managing anxiety. In contrast, younger students may lack such maturity, rendering them more susceptible to anxiety.

In terms of gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female, totaling 220 individuals (81.2%), while males accounted for 51 individuals (18.8%). These findings are consistent with Ramadhan et al. (2019), who reported that male students generally exhibited lower anxiety levels compared to female students, who tended to report higher anxiety. Mustofa et al. (2020) similarly found that among their respondents, females accounted for a larger proportion of those experiencing anxiety (52.5%). The researchers assume that female students may experience higher levels of anxiety due to increased emotional sensitivity and responsiveness to stressors compared to their male counterparts.

The study also found that the overwhelming majority of respondents were Muslim, with 268 individuals (98.9%) identifying as Muslim, and only 3 individuals (1.1%) identifying as Protestant Christians. This suggests that the student population is predominantly religious. Religion and spirituality can play a significant role in shaping an individual's worldview and coping strategies. It is assumed that students with strong religious beliefs are likely to experience spirituality at different levels, which may in turn influence their anxiety levels. Higher levels of spirituality are generally associated with lower anxiety, as individuals tend to feel more connected to a higher power and possess greater inner peace.

Regarding academic background, the largest proportion of respondents came from the S1 Public Health study program, totaling 87 individuals (32.1%). This aligns with the findings of Putri & Sulistyowati (2024), who reported that the D3 Nursing program had the highest number of student respondents in their study. Additionally, Shandy & Khoirunnisa (2022) noted that among 144 medical students, a significant number reported anxiety. Anxiety disorders among students can negatively affect academic performance, including concentration, memory retention, and learning capacity. The researchers believe that students enrolled in programs with a strong religious or spiritual component may benefit from increased spiritual awareness, which could help mitigate anxiety levels.

On the topic of spiritual experience, for the statement related to one's closeness to God, 120 respondents (44.3%) reported feeling "very close," 135 respondents (49.8%) reported feeling "close," and only 16 respondents (5.9%) reported feeling "moderately close." These findings indicate that all respondents possessed some degree of spiritual belief, albeit at varying levels. Participation in religious or spiritual activities is believed to foster a greater sense of faith and trust in a higher power. Rita (2024) notes that spirituality is central to the essence of life, with a sacred element present in all living beings. Kristianingsih & Suryanti (2019) also found that 91.9% of 62 respondents demonstrated high levels of spirituality. Spirituality encompasses various dimensions, including a sense of connectedness, purpose, and meaning in life (Ardian, 2016).

Students with high levels of spirituality are assumed to possess better coping mechanisms, which foster resilience, self-confidence, and belief in God. In contrast, low levels of spirituality may lead to unresolved anxiety, which could escalate into more severe

psychological conditions. Symptoms of severe anxiety may include cognitive impairments, a narrowed focus, reduced problem-solving abilities, and learning difficulties. Physiological symptoms may include headaches, vertigo, nausea, tremors, sleep disturbances, palpitations, shortness of breath, and gastrointestinal issues—all often accompanied by fear and heightened self-awareness.

Based on bivariate analysis using the Spearman rank test, a p-value of 0.000 and a correlation coefficient of -0.429 were obtained. These results indicate a statistically significant inverse relationship between spirituality and anxiety among new students in health-related programs at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. Among the respondents, 160 individuals (59.0%) had a high level of spirituality, while 123 individuals (45.5%) reported normal levels of anxiety. This supports the assumption that good spiritual health contributes to positive coping mechanisms and improved mental well-being, enabling individuals to better manage stress and anxiety.

Spirituality serves as a source of strength and purpose, helping individuals navigate challenging and stressful situations. A lack of spirituality may result in emotional distress and a diminished capacity to cope with adversity. Numerous studies corroborate the inverse relationship between spirituality and anxiety. For instance, Alisa (2022) found a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.873$, $p = 0.000$) between spirituality and anxiety among high school students, indicating that higher spiritual levels were associated with lower anxiety. Dayanti & Lestari (2022) similarly concluded that spirituality plays a role in reducing anxiety in students.

The present study also aligns with findings by Timiyatun (2021), who found a significant correlation between spiritual behavior and anxiety among adolescents in Bantul, Yogyakarta ($p = 0.012$, $r = -0.456$). Spirituality is influenced by both internal factors, such as personal beliefs, and external factors, such as environmental support. Individuals with strong spiritual foundations tend to be mentally and emotionally healthier, more resilient to life stressors, and generally happier.

Further supporting this, Suyatno et al. (2024) conducted a study on spirituality and anxiety in vocational high school students and found that among 207 respondents, 71 (34.4%) had low spiritual levels and 200 (96.6%) experienced very severe anxiety. The Kendall-Tau test revealed a significant relationship ($p = 0.018$), confirming that higher spiritual levels are associated with lower anxiety. The researcher assumes that individual spirituality contributes significantly to mental health outcomes. Students with strong spiritual foundations demonstrate healthier cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Given the growing emphasis on mental health in educational contexts, it is clear that mental well-being plays a crucial role in student development and academic success.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study on the relationship between spirituality level and anxiety among new students in health-related study programs, the following respondent characteristics were identified: the majority were 18 years old (188 respondents, 69.4%), female (220 respondents, 81.2%), Muslim (268 respondents, 98.9%), and enrolled in the S1 Public Health program (87 respondents, 32.1%). Regarding the independent variable, spirituality level, most respondents had a high level of spirituality (160 respondents, 59.0%), while the remaining 111 respondents (41.0%) had a moderate level of spirituality. For the

dependent variable, anxiety, most respondents experienced normal anxiety levels (123 respondents, 45.4%), and only one respondent (0.4%) experienced very severe anxiety.

The results of the statistical analysis using the Spearman Rank correlation test yielded a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), indicating a statistically significant relationship between spirituality level and anxiety among new students in health study programs at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. The correlation coefficient (r) was -0.429, reflecting a moderate negative correlation. This suggests that as spirituality levels increase, anxiety levels tend to decrease among new students in these programs.

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Authors' contribution

Each author contributed equally in all the parts of the research. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The researchers stated that there is no conflict of interest related to the implementation and publication of the results of this research. The entire research process, from planning, data collection, analysis, to report preparation, was carried out independently without any influence or pressure from any third party. A commitment to research ethics is upheld throughout the research process, ensuring transparency, accuracy and honesty in reporting results. Respondents' participation was voluntary with informed consent, and their confidentiality and privacy were maintained in accordance with applicable research ethics standards. With this statement, researchers hope that the research results can be trusted and used as a valid reference for the development of science and health practices related to ethnomedicine and reproductive health.

Ethical consideration

Not applicable.

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