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

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Spirituality is one of the important aspects in human life that can affect various psychological aspects, including self-esteem. Freshmens often face adaptation challenges that can affect their self-esteem. Understanding the relationship between the level of spirituality and self-esteem is important to support student well-being, especially in the Health Study Program of the Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur.

Objective: This study aims to determine the relationship between the level of spirituality and self-esteem of freshmen in the Health Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur.

Research Method: This study used a cross-sectional design. Measurement of spirituality levels was carried out using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) which has been adapted into Indonesian, while self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The research sample of 271 freshmens was selected using the stratified random sampling technique. Data were analyzed using the Spearman test to determine the relationship between the two variables.

Results: The results of the study showed that out of 271 respondents, high spirituality levels were found in 59% of respondents, moderate in 40.2%, and low in 0.7%. Meanwhile, high self-esteem was found in 60.5% of respondents, moderate in 39.1%, and low in 0.4%. Statistical tests showed a p value = 0.000 (<0.05), which means there is a significant relationship between spirituality levels and self-esteem. The Spearman correlation value of 0.892 indicates a positive relationship with a strong correlation strength.

Conclusion: The study concludes that there is a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between spirituality and self-esteem among freshmen in the Health Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. These findings suggest that higher levels of spirituality are associated with greater self-esteem, highlighting the potential importance of spiritual development in supporting students' psychological well-being.

Keywords: students, self-Esteem, spirituality

Introduction

Spirituality is increasingly recognized as a fundamental dimension of holistic health and well-being. Conceptually, spirituality extends beyond formal religious affiliation and encompasses a multidimensional construct involving the search for meaning and purpose in life, a relationship with a transcendent entity, the internalization of core personal values, and a sense of connectedness with oneself, others, and the universe. According to Park et al. (2013), essential elements of spirituality include transcendence, existential meaning, and life comprehension. Moreover, spirituality is inherently personal, affective, and experiential, often manifesting through values such as honesty, beauty, and happiness (Hodapp & Zwingmann, 2019; Dangel, 2019; Koenig & Al Shohaib, 2019).

In academic discourse, spirituality is frequently distinguished from religiosity. While religiosity typically refers to structured, institutionalized belief systems, spirituality represents a broader, more inclusive concept (Faridah, 2021). Febriyanti (2020) emphasizes that spirituality does not necessarily involve adherence to specific religious practices, allowing it to encompass a diverse range of experiences such as mindfulness, introspection, and connection with nature. These elements are increasingly incorporated into mental health interventions to enhance psychological resilience and well-being.

An expanding body of empirical evidence supports the positive impact of spirituality on mental health. Individuals with higher levels of spirituality often report greater psychological well-being, including enhanced emotional regulation and inner strength to cope with distressing emotions such as sadness and anxiety. Spirituality is also associated with increased life satisfaction, psychological resilience, and health-promoting behaviors (Febriyanti, 2020). Studies by Wahyuni and Bariyyah (2019), as well as classical Islamic scholars such as Imam Al-Ghazali, suggest that spiritual development enhances one's capacity to manage internal and external conflicts, thereby supporting mental and emotional stability.

The significance of spirituality in health is also reflected in the World Health Organization's (WHO) holistic definition of health, which includes spiritual well-being alongside physical, mental, and social dimensions (Febriyanti, 2020). This acknowledgment reinforces the importance of integrating spiritual development into health education curricula—not only to improve future patient care but also to support students' well-being during their academic journey.

Another psychological construct essential to mental health is self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall subjective evaluation of their worth, capabilities, and ethical values. Healthy self-esteem contributes to psychological resilience, optimism, and personal development. Derang and Novitarum (2023) highlight self-esteem as a core component of psychological functioning, closely linked to self-confidence and emotional balance.

The relationship between spirituality and self-esteem is supported both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, spirituality fosters calmness, patience, and adaptive coping mechanisms, which collectively promote higher self-esteem (Jannah, 2023). Empirical studies also support this association. For example, Derang and Novitarum (2023) identified a significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and self-concept among nursing students, where self-esteem constitutes a core dimension. Spirituality may enhance self-esteem both directly—through increased emotional regulation—and indirectly—by reinforcing life purpose and existential meaning (Jannah, 2023).

For first-year university students, especially those enrolled in rigorous health sciences programs, the transition from secondary education to higher education presents substantial

psychosocial challenges. These include adapting to new academic expectations, navigating unfamiliar environments, and establishing new social networks. Operationally, "first-year students" refer to individuals in their first year (semester one or two) of a diploma or undergraduate health sciences program.

These students frequently encounter increased academic demands, complex curricular content, and elevated institutional expectations. These challenges are often compounded by sociocultural adjustments, particularly for students migrating from different regions. Existing research suggests that such stressors can negatively affect academic performance and psychological well-being, potentially leading to increased dropout rates. As a result, the identification of protective psychological factors—such as spirituality and self-esteem—becomes essential for promoting resilience during this critical transition period.

Despite a growing body of literature examining spirituality and self-esteem independently, there remains a paucity of research exploring their interrelationship within the specific cultural and educational context of Indonesian health sciences students. Systematic reviews highlight the limited availability of studies on spiritual care education in Asia and the Middle East, with much of the existing evidence derived from Western contexts, which may not be directly transferable due to cultural distinctions (Anggraeni, 2024). Furthermore, many existing studies do not adequately consider contextual variables such as stress levels, social support systems, and coping mechanisms, which are particularly relevant to Indonesian student populations (Setyaningsih et al., 2024).

Given these gaps in the literature, the present study aims to examine the correlation between spirituality and self-esteem among first-year students enrolled in the health sciences program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) describe the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, (2) assess their levels of spirituality and self-esteem, and (3) analyze the correlation between these two variables. By addressing this understudied yet critical area, the study aspires to contribute to a culturally contextualized understanding of psychological resilience factors among Indonesian health science students.

Independent Variable Related Variables

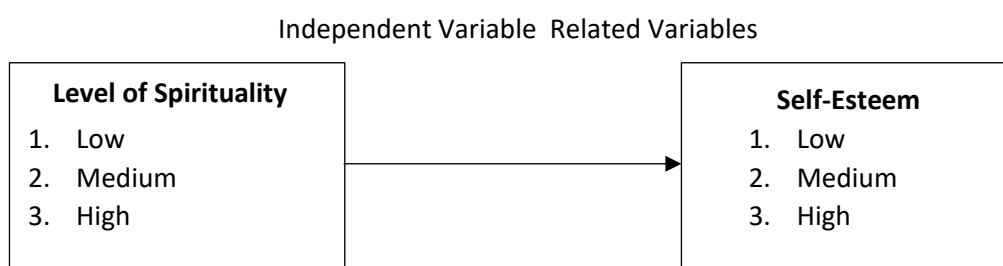| **Level of Spirituality**	**Self-Esteem**
1. Low	1. Low
2. Medium	2. Medium
3. High	3. High

Figure 1. Conceptual Faramework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the hypothesized relationship between spirituality and self-esteem among first-year students in the Health Sciences Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. This framework is structured around two principal variables: spirituality, conceptualized as the independent variable, and self-esteem, defined as the dependent variable. These constructs are assumed to influence one another within the psychological development of university students.

Spirituality is defined as an individual's inner pursuit of existential meaning, connection with a transcendent entity, and alignment with deeply held personal values. In contrast, self-

esteem refers to an individual's overall appraisal of their self-worth, competence, and personal significance. Theoretical perspectives suggest that individuals who possess a strong spiritual foundation are more likely to exhibit higher levels of self-esteem. Spiritual fulfillment can foster emotional resilience, a sense of inner peace, and a clearer sense of life purpose—factors that collectively contribute to enhanced self-regard. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem may experience challenges in forming or maintaining meaningful spiritual beliefs and may struggle with their perceived relationship with the transcendent.

This dynamic interaction is particularly salient for first-year university students, who often face heightened academic, social, and emotional challenges as they adjust to new learning environments and developmental expectations. Understanding the relationship between spirituality and self-esteem within this context may offer valuable insights for designing psychosocial support interventions that promote students' mental well-being and academic adjustment.

Based on this conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed: the null hypothesis (H_o) states that there is no significant relationship between the level of spirituality and self-esteem among first-year students in the Health Sciences Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur (Suryabrata, 2021). Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) posits that there is a significant relationship between spirituality and self-esteem in this population (Suryabrata, 2021).

Objective

This study aims to determine the relationship between the level of spirituality and self-esteem of freshmen in the Health Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur.

Method

This study employed a quantitative research design, which is widely regarded as a traditional method due to its established role in scientific inquiry. Rooted in the philosophy of positivism, quantitative research emphasizes objectivity, measurability, rationality, and systematic procedures for acquiring knowledge (Sugiyono, 2022). As science and technology have evolved, this method has come to be known as a discovery approach, particularly for its utility in identifying patterns through statistical analysis. The specific design utilized in this study was descriptive correlational, which aims to investigate the relationship between two or more variables without any manipulation. This approach is aligned with positivist principles and involves structured data collection through validated instruments, followed by statistical analysis to test hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2022). A cross-sectional design was adopted to measure the variables of spirituality and self-esteem simultaneously at one point in time, making it suitable for identifying potential correlations (Nursalam in Kusuma, 2021).

The population of this study included all first-year students enrolled in the Health Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur for the 2024/2025 academic year, comprising a total of 836 individuals. The population was distributed across six study programs: 162 students in Pharmacy (S1), 50 in Medicine, 149 in Nursing (S1), 122 in Nursing (D3), 84 in Environmental Health (S1), and 269 in Public Health (S1). The sample was drawn using the Slovin formula, a commonly applied method for determining sample size based on population size and a predefined level of significance (Indra Jaya & Media, 2019). For a population of 836, the appropriate margin of error was selected, yielding a sample size of 271 respondents.

Stratified proportional sampling was used to ensure equal representation across study programs. The sample distribution is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Samples

Study Program	Population	Calculation	Sample
S1 Nursing	149	149/836 × 271	48
D3 Nursing	122	122/836 × 271	40
S1 Environmental Health	84	84/836 × 271	27
S1 Public Health	269	269/836 × 271	87
S1 Pharmacy	162	162/836 × 271	53
Medicine	50	50/836 × 271	16

The research was conducted between October 7 and 23, 2024, targeting active first-year students in the 2024/2025 academic year. The operational definitions of the study variables are as follows: *Spirituality* is defined as an individual's faith and inner orientation toward meaning and purpose in life, including their relationship with a transcendent being. It was measured using the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES), consisting of 16 items scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (many times a day), and one item measuring closeness to God, scored from 1 (not at all) to 4 (as close as possible) (Underwood, 2006). *Self-esteem* is defined as a person's perception of self-worth, encompassing positive or negative self-evaluations. It was measured using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which consists of 10 items using a Likert scale format (Rosenberg, 1965).

The research instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, which is a widely used method for collecting primary data efficiently. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A gathered demographic information (name, age, gender, religion, and study program); Section B assessed spirituality using the DSES; and Section C measured self-esteem using the RSES. Although the questionnaires used were standardized, validity and reliability testing were not conducted by the researchers in this particular study (Kusuma, 2021).

The research procedure involved systematic stages to ensure the integrity and quality of the collected data. Primary data were obtained directly from student respondents through the online questionnaire (Salim, 2019), while secondary data were sourced from the Academic Administration Division (BAA) at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. The steps of data processing included: editing, which involved verifying the accuracy of the collected responses; coding, where categorical data were assigned numeric codes for statistical analysis and organized into a codebook; data entry, which involved entering coded data into a master table or statistical software; tabulation, which aggregated data into frequency tables; and cleaning, where inconsistencies or errors were corrected to ensure data accuracy.

Following data processing, univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted. Univariate analysis was used to describe the characteristics of individual variables by calculating frequencies and percentages for categorical data (Efendi, 2016). Bivariate analysis aimed to examine the relationship between the independent variable (spirituality) and the dependent variable (self-esteem) among freshmens. The Spearman correlation test was employed, as it is appropriate for ordinal data or data that do not meet normality assumptions, and allows for the testing of hypotheses related to non-parametric relationships.

Result

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between spirituality and self-esteem among freshmens enrolled in the Health Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. Data collection was conducted in November 2024 using structured questionnaires disseminated via online platforms. The findings are presented through descriptive (univariate) and inferential (bivariate) statistical analyses.

The research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur, located at Jalan Ir. H. Juanda No. 15, Samarinda. This institution was officially established in 2017 as a result of the merger between STIKES Muhammadiyah Samarinda (founded in 2009) and STIE Muhammadiyah Samarinda (established in 1981). Currently, the university comprises four faculties with 16 undergraduate and diploma-level programs.

A total of 271 respondents participated in this study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents (n = 271)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	95	35.1
	Female	176	64.9
Age Group	17–19 years	145	53.5
	20–22 years	110	40.6
	>22 years	16	5.9
Religion	Islam	268	98.9
	Christian	2	0.7
	Others	1	0.4
Spirituality Level	Moderate	111	41.0
	High	160	59.0
Closeness to God	Quite Close	16	5.9
	Close	135	49.8
	Very Close	120	44.3
Self-Esteem	Low	1	0.4
	Moderate	106	39.1
	High	164	60.5

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of 271 freshmen respondents at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. In terms of gender, the majority were female (64.9%), while males constituted 35.1%. Most respondents were aged 17–19 years (53.5%), followed by those aged 20–22 years (40.6%), and a smaller group over 22 years (5.9%). The vast majority of students adhered to Islam (98.9%), with very few identifying as Christian (0.7%) or other religions (0.4%). Regarding psychological and spiritual variables, 59.0% of students reported a high level of spirituality, and 41.0% reported a moderate level. In terms of perceived closeness to God, 49.8% felt close, 44.3% felt very close, and only 5.9% felt quite close; notably, none reported feeling not close at all. For self-esteem, most students reported high self-esteem (60.5%), followed by moderate (39.1%), and only one student (0.4%) reported low self-esteem. These characteristics suggest that the respondent

group predominantly consists of young, religiously devout females with strong spiritual awareness and self-regard.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis

Variable	Spirituality Correlation Coefficient	Spirituality Sig. (2-tailed)	Self-Esteem Correlation Coefficient	Self-Esteem Sig. (2-tailed)
Level of Spirituality	1.000	.	0.892	.000
Self-Esteem	0.892	.000	1.000	.

Table 3 presents the results of the correlation analysis between the level of spirituality and self-esteem among freshmen at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur using Spearman's rho test. The correlation coefficient between spirituality and self-esteem is 0.892 with a significance value (p-value) of 0.000. This indicates a very strong positive correlation that is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), meaning that as the level of spirituality increases, the level of self-esteem also tends to increase. The high correlation value underscores the important role that spiritual well-being may play in shaping students' self-worth and psychological resilience during their transition into higher education.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between spirituality and self-esteem among freshmens in the Health Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. The results indicate a statistically significant and very strong positive correlation between students' spirituality levels and their self-esteem, contributing valuable insights into the psychosocial dynamics of young adults in health education settings.

Demographically, the majority of respondents were 18 years old (76.0%), placing them in late adolescence—a developmental stage marked by the emergence of critical thinking, identity formation, and increasing capacity for introspection (Saepulloh, 2021). These cognitive and emotional maturations serve as a foundation for both spiritual growth and self-esteem development. Similar findings from previous studies (Gerry et al., 2021; Andi Tia, 2024; Susilawati, 2024) support the notion that individuals at this age tend to refine their self-concept and begin to establish a consistent sense of identity, influenced by both internal values and external feedback.

Gender distribution was notably skewed toward female respondents (81.2%), which is consistent with trends observed in health-related academic fields (Susilawati, 2024; Nadila, 2023). This gender predominance may reflect sociocultural factors that associate caregiving and nurturing roles—core elements of healthcare professions—with femininity. The overwhelming majority of respondents (98.9%) identified as Muslim, reflecting the religious demographic composition of the region. Religion, as a key dimension of spirituality, offers not only personal belief systems but also social structures that reinforce moral guidance and emotional coping mechanisms. Akhmad (2022) highlights the role of Islamic teachings in enhancing resilience and spiritual stability among young people, supporting the relevance of religious context to the findings of this study.

In terms of academic background, students from the Public Health undergraduate program formed the largest proportion of the sample (32.1%). According to Rivcha (2024), students in health-related disciplines are regularly exposed to emotionally and ethically

challenging experiences, fostering the development of empathy, reflective thinking, and spiritual awareness. These experiences are likely to influence both their spiritual orientation and their self-evaluative perceptions.

The univariate analysis demonstrated that most students reported a high level of spirituality (59%), with the remainder (41%) reporting a moderate level. This aligns with Pranata (2020), who found that students often exhibit strong spiritual intelligence, particularly in dimensions such as critical existential thinking and connectedness with a higher power. Spirituality in this context not only encompasses religious affiliation but also internalized values and a sense of existential meaning. A robust spiritual orientation can serve as a psychological buffer, promoting emotional regulation, compassion, and adaptive coping strategies, especially in demanding academic and clinical environments.

Similarly, self-esteem levels were predominantly high (60.5%), with only 0.4% of respondents reporting low self-esteem. These findings are congruent with Muhayati (2022), who observed that adolescents with stable family and social support systems tend to report higher levels of self-esteem. For university students, particularly those transitioning from secondary education to a more autonomous academic setting, self-esteem plays a pivotal role in determining motivation, resilience, and overall well-being. The development of a stable sense of self is often intertwined with spiritual convictions, which provide a coherent framework for meaning-making and identity consolidation.

The key finding of this study lies in the bivariate analysis, which revealed a statistically significant and very strong positive correlation between spirituality and self-esteem ($r = 0.892$, $p < 0.05$). This supports the hypothesis that increased spirituality is associated with increased self-esteem. The correlation coefficient, which falls within the range of 0.80–1.00, suggests a highly consistent and robust relationship between these constructs. This result substantiates previous research by Sutejo (2020), who demonstrated that both spirituality and self-esteem positively influence academic resilience in nursing students. The current study thus reinforces the premise that spiritual beliefs enhance psychological well-being, particularly in domains such as self-worth, emotional security, and confidence.

Spirituality serves not only as a source of inner peace and moral guidance but also facilitates the development of self-reflection and purposeful living. For students undergoing significant life transitions, such as entering higher education, spiritual frameworks can offer grounding perspectives and coping mechanisms. This internal anchoring contributes to a more positive self-concept and promotes resilience against academic and personal stressors.

The implications of these findings are significant for educational practice and curriculum development. Higher education institutions, particularly those in health sciences, should consider integrating spiritual development programs—such as reflective writing, mindfulness, ethics-based discussions, and religious support services—into the student experience. These interventions may strengthen emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, all of which are essential for both academic success and professional competence. Future research may further examine the unique contributions of specific spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, or communal worship, to mental health outcomes among university students.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between spirituality and self-esteem among freshmen in the Health Study Program

at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. These findings suggest that higher levels of spirituality are associated with greater self-esteem, highlighting the potential importance of spiritual development in supporting students' psychological well-being.

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