

Daily Spiritual Experience of Filipino Catholic Youth

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The COVID-19 experience has caused us to reflect on our lived experiences as human persons with an embodied spirit. It led us to inquire to learn as many lessons as possible to provide care not only for our body but also for our spirit. This paper explores spirituality as a point of reference for holistic care and the formation of persons toward wellness and quality of life. It employs a descriptive analysis of the daily spiritual experience of Filipino Catholic youth. 2005 participants participated in the National Filipino Catholic Youth Survey. Findings show that the daily spiritual experience of Filipino Catholic youth is relatively above average. Moreover, this spiritual experience manifests highly in terms of feeling thankful for their blessings and least experienced through acceptance of others even when they do things that participants think are wrong. Further analyses show a difference in the daily experience of Filipino Catholic youth in terms of gender and occupation. The findings have implications for the provision of spiritual care and the formation of persons toward wellness and quality of life, especially in the pandemic context.

Key Words: COVID-19; pandemic; Filipino Catholic Youth; spirituality; well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our way of life: it has taken many lives literally and metaphorically. Any pandemic disorganizes the life of a wider society (Sulkowski & Ignatowski, 2020). It significantly impacts social life, including spiritual life and experiences. In a nutshell, the COVID-19 pandemic impact also intrudes into our spiritual domain. Arnado and colleagues (2022) described coronavirus that spread worldwide, representing the loss of lives in the biological and social senses. The loss of biological lives resulted in losing loved ones, fear of losing lives, and difficulty living the fullness of life. These loss of lives and difficulty living the fullness of life are factors for spiritual distress. This spiritual distress refers to the struggle that arises when a person's basic belief system is shaken by a major crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hall, 2020), including the factors above. In traumatic events such as a pandemic, people's faith can be shaken, and their worldview disrupted (e.g., if God is all-loving and powerful, why would God cause or allow the pandemic to occur?) (Zhang et al., 2021). Hall (2020) describes that people in spiritual distress often no longer believe the world is a safe place, and they might

lose hope and have difficulty finding meaning and purpose in what is happening to them. On this note, during a major crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, we must take care of our physical and spiritual well-being.

Since the beginning of recorded history, spirituality has been a foundation of all population groups (Roman et al., 2020). Spirituality refers to the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term "sacred" refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual (Hill et al., 2000, p.66). While religion refers to the "means and methods (rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people" (Hill et al., 2000, p.66). Aftab and Irshad (2021) noted that spirituality is the search beyond the self or individual, something bigger than oneself, just like the Ultimate Truth. Furthermore, spirituality gives meaning to life and enhances the sense of aliveness and interconnectedness (Aftab & Irshad, 2021). In the Filipino context, religion and spirituality are highly related (Yabut, 2013) since most spiritual experiences of people are connected to their religion in

the form of religious rituals and traditions.

The term 'spirituality' in this scale refers to aspects of personal life that include the transcendent, divine, or holy, "more than" what we can see or touch or hear (Underwood, 2011). Furthermore, it refers to the everyday experience of spirituality. The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) is a 16-item self-report measure designed to assess ordinary experiences of connection with the transcendent in daily life (Underwood, 2011). Fong et al. (2009) read DSES as an instrument to measure the experiential component of religiousness and spirituality, addressing ordinary daily experiences rather than particular beliefs. Underwood (2011) further noted that the scale effectively leads to the ability to usefully develop attitudes, behaviors, practices, and interventions that will improve us human beings. DSES asks how often an individual experiences the following: finding strength or comfort in your spirituality or religion, accepting others even when you think they are wrong, giving compassionate love, having a sense of being guided by God or divine grace, seeking help from God or a higher power, experiencing the joy that lifts you above your troubles, feeling a connection to all life, and feeling deep inner peace or harmony. It uses both theistic and non-theistic language.

Pargament (1997) argues that spiritual resources are often utilized in coping. Spiritual experience and practices are powerful coping mechanisms for dealing with life-changing and traumatic events. Thus, spirituality plays a vital role in many people's lives, with the Philippines being top 8 on the Global Spirituality Index (wayfairertravel.com, 2012). Furthermore, based on a 2009 global Gallup Poll (Crabtree, 2010), the Philippines is considered one of the most religious countries globally, with 96% of respondents answering 'yes' to the question: 'Is religion important in your daily life?' Thus, as Yabut (2018) claimed, Filipinos are known for having a deep sense of spirituality. Despite the growing research about spirituality, there is still a dearth describing the religiosity and spirituality of Filipinos in general.

This paper would like to describe the daily spiritual experiences of Filipino-Catholic Youth. Despite past claims that Filipinos are religious and spiritual, there still lies the challenge of having empirical evidence to validate the latter. This paper would like to showcase the spirituality of Filipino Catholic youth based on the CEAP national survey.

2. METHODOLOGY

We utilized the National Filipino Catholic Youth Survey 2013 (NFCYS 2013). One of the aims of this survey is to describe the profile of the Filipino Catholic youth in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics and spirituality – specifically, their daily spiritual experience. The data generated from this survey will be invaluable input in designing programs for the youth by the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) and the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Youth (CBCP-ECY). In addition, specifically for this paper, we utilized descriptive statistics on the daily spiritual experience of the Filipino Catholic youth as a reference point for spiritual well-being in the new normal.

The survey is conducted nationwide with the respondents' consent. In the informed consent form that they signed before the survey, the following information was provided: (1) background of the study; (2) assurance of data privacy, including confidentiality and anonymity; (3) freedom to withdraw at any time or decline to respond to some questions. Data gathered were encoded into SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) software version 26.

More than 50% of respondents are female, with 1047 respondents. In terms of education, more than 40% are at the College level, with 374 respondents, and with 5.1% are working students. See table 1.

Table 1

Profile of the Respondents

Variable	<i>Frequencies</i>	%
Sex		
Male	958	47.0
Female	1047	51.3
Missing	34	1.7
Education		
Post-graduate	63	7.4
College	374	44.1
Some college	91	10.7
Vocational	70	8.2
High school	185	21.8
Some high school	41	4.8
Elementary	16	1.9

Some elementary	7	0.8
No formal schooling	2	0.2

Occupation

Full-time student	1087	57.8
Working student	95	5.1
Employed	323	17.2
Unemployed	375	19.9

Measures

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) is a six-item scale that specifically aims to measure a person's ordinary experiences of connection with the transcendent in daily life (Underwood, 2011). Sample items include "I experience a connection to all life" and "I feel deep inner peace or harmony." It was scored on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 6 = Many times a day). It has a Cronbach alpha of .89.

Data Analysis

Preliminary data screening and data cleaning were done for the data. Descriptive statistics were computed for the demographic variables and also for the DSES. T-test and one-way ANOVA were also performed to check the mean differences of the DSES with categorical variables like sex and occupation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We aim to describe the daily spiritual experience of the Filipino Catholic youth. Findings show an above-average score ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 0.69$) of Filipino Catholic Youth in their daily spiritual experiences. See Table 2. Further analyses of the items reveal that the highest-rated item is the one that refers to feeling thankful for their blessings ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 0.49$), followed by I feel God's love for me directly ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 0.86$) and I desire to be closer to God and in union with him ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 0.91$). Meanwhile, the item with the lowest rating is about their acceptance of

others even when they do things that participants think are wrong, with a mean score of ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.08$).

Results show that the daily spiritual experience of Filipino Catholic youth is above average. This supports the previous studies of Madrigal and associates (2020), Cornelio (2021), and Baring and associates (2016) on the high religiosity/spirituality of Filipino Catholics, especially the young.

The daily spiritual experience of Filipino Catholic youth is highly evident in "feeling thankful for their blessings". This is consistent with past research showing the significant relationship between spirituality and gratitude (Aftab and Irshad, 2021; Emmons & Kneezel, 2005; Gocen, 2016). This is also evident among local studies showing that Filipinos value gratitude in relation to spirituality (Perez, 2021; Perez et al. 2021; Yabut, 2018). According to Enriquez, gratitude and solidarity are related to the value of utang na loob among Filipinos (Pe-pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). The daily spiritual experience of Filipino Catholic youth is least experienced through acceptance of others even when they do things that participants think are wrong. However, despite having the lowest mean among the items off spirituality, the mean score is still relatively above the midpoint.

Filipino Catholic youth score relatively higher among the items with theistic language than those with non-theistic language. Possible reasons for this matter could be, that Filipino Catholic youth find it easy to experience spirituality by bringing God into their day-to-day experience. Their spirituality is anchored in their relation to God, which is considered a vertical relation (God-Man). Moreover, without God in the picture, they find it difficult to experience spirituality in a horizontal relation (Man-Others/World). Thus, anchoring our horizontal relation to our vertical relation could help the Filipino Catholic youth experience higher daily spiritual experience. In a nutshell, bringing God into all our relationships helps the youth to become spiritual. Take, for example, bringing God in the context of forgiveness, that is acceptance of others even when they do things that participants think are wrong. Jones (1995) described forgiveness as acceptance of others as

part of spiritual holiness, which “is to be a reflection of our gratitude for God’s forgiving love for us and friendship with us.” However, this needs further investigation.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	18.9	4.72
Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (1-6)	4.9	0.69
1. I experience a connection to all life.	4.38	1.37
2. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy, which lifts me out of my daily concerns.	4.64	1.21
3. I find strength in my religion or spirituality.	4.99	1.04
4. I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.	4.97	1.01

5. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.	4.70	1.08
6. I ask for God’s help in the midst of daily activities.	5.12	0.97
7. I feel God’s love for me directly.	5.30	0.86
8. I feel God’s love for me through others.	4.82	1.16
9. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.	5.22	0.90
10. I feel thankful for my blessings.	5.33	0.49
11. I feel a selfless caring for others.	4.68	1.08
12. I accept others even when they do things that I think are wrong.	4.32	1.08
13. I desire to be closer to God or in union with Him.	5.24	0.91

14. In general, how close do you feel to God? 3.15 4.78

Table 3
T-test Results for Gender and DSES

	M	SD
Gender		
Male	4.86	0.74
Female	4.94	0.64

Note: * $p < .05$

Results show that females ($M=4.94$, $SD=0.64$) have significantly higher spirituality compared to males ($M=4.86$, $SD=0.74$) at the $p < .05$ level [$t(1999) = -2.38$, $p = 0.02$]. In the literature, most agree that women tend to be more religious/spiritual than men (Hammermeister et al., 2005; Buchko, 2004; Bryant, 2007; Lippman & McIntosh, 2010; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Luqman et al., 2015; Agoncillo, 2015; Madrigal et al., 2020). However, the study of Baring and associates. (2018) on spirituality found that there is no significant difference in the mean spirituality score between males and females.

Table 4

ANOVA test Results for Occupation and Spirituality

	M	SD
Occupation		
Full-time Student	4.92	0.64
Working Student	4.91	0.7
Employed	4.99	0.68
Unemployed	4.82	0.75

Results reveal that occupation [$F(3, 1873) = 4.01$, $p = 0.01$] has a significant effect on spirituality among Filipino Catholic youth. To be more specific, a post hoc analysis using the Tukey post hoc test showed that those who are unemployed ($M=4.82$, $SD=0.75$) have significantly lower levels of spirituality compared to full-time and working students.

Based on a 2013 survey of the Gallup-Healthways Well-being Index finds that unemployment causes higher depression rates (Crabtree, 2014). Another Gallup survey noted that unemployment is bad for youth's health (McCarthy, 2016). Kleftras and Vasilou (2016) found a coherent result noting that unemployed individuals have significantly higher levels of depressive symptomatology. Furthermore, they concluded that the beneficial role of spirituality is difficult to emerge for unemployed people. Thus, consistent with the findings of this study, those unemployed have significantly lower levels of spirituality.

In our Catholic belief, God wants all human beings, who are embodied-spirit, to work and find the source of meaning and sustenance in that work. Thus, unemployment is not just an economic problem but also a spiritual crisis. Mañez (2017) affirms the need to interweave work/employment and spirituality. In a later study, Mañez (2016) noted that aside from employment, happiness at work could result in a higher experience of spirituality.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic impact intrudes on our spiritual well-being. It cost us, especially the youth, spiritual distress, and struggle. While others cope well in this struggle, many still are in distress. On this note, it is worth looking for a reference point that the youth could hold on to, especially in times of distress. The Daily Spiritual Experience of the Filipino Catholic youth could serve as a beacon of hope in the pandemic and guiding light in the new normal, where the youth could hold on. The findings of this paper claimed that the daily spiritual experience is experienced many times through feeling thankful for their blessings. It may be a cliché, but it may have truth in it that in the time of uncertainties, an attitude of gratitude is a way to fortitude. Filipino Catholic youth are fortified in their daily spiritual experience by counting and appreciating their blessings amidst life crises, just like the pandemic.

Another interesting result of the study is that females are more spiritual than males even though the Philippines is considered a patriarchal society, where men lead in almost everything. Gender has a significant relation to spirituality even though most of the studies on religiosity and spirituality in the Philippine context claim that there is no significant relation or difference.

Furthermore, it was found that unemployed Filipino Catholic youth have significantly lower levels of spirituality. This is good to emphasize that unemployment is not only an economic problem. It can also be a spiritual crisis.

Looking back, the lessons almost a decade ago could be a ground and a reference point to build new paths of learnings of daily spiritual experience for Filipino Catholic youth. These results can contribute to the role and experience of the youth in our country and the life of the Catholic Church. The results of this study affirm the high religiosity/spirituality of Filipino Catholic youth as claimed also by Cornelio (2016). This paper confirms that Filipino Catholic youth have a deep sense of spirituality despite struggles and distress.

We also acknowledge the limitations of the study, and thus we recommend that there is a need for further empirical research (scale validation) on the daily spiritual experience of the Filipino Catholic youth, given that the data we have was gathered back in 2013. Further researchers could investigate the relations of the following variables; gratitude, forgiveness, gender, unemployment, and spirituality. This insight offers certain implications for providing spiritual care and forming persons toward wellness and quality of life, especially in the pandemic context.

Filipino Catholic youth are spiritual in a theistic sense.

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