



International Journal of Innovative Research in Science Engineering and Technology (IJIRSET)

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Scholarly Indexed, Open Access Journal)



Impact Factor: 8.524

Volume 14, Issue 1, January 2025

Spirituality, Mental Health, and Academic Self-Efficacy of Criminal Justice Students in the New Normal

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ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on student's academic lives, particularly affecting their self-efficacy as they transitioned from traditional in-person classes to online learning. This shift, coupled with challenges in mental health and spirituality, has influenced students' beliefs in their ability to succeed academically and cope with stress. This survey-correlational study aimed to assess the spirituality, mental health, and academic self-efficacy of Criminal Justice students during the 2022-2023 academic year. A total of 109 randomly selected students participated, with data collected through standardized questionnaires on spirituality (Howden used by Ursitti, 2011), mental health (Warwick-Edinburgh used by Trousselard et al., 2016), and academic self-efficacy (Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, 2021). The results indicated high levels of spirituality, mental health, and academic self-efficacy among the participants. The study also found significant differences in academic self-efficacy based on spirituality and mental health, with those exhibiting very high levels in both areas showing greater self-efficacy. Furthermore, positive, strong, and significant correlations were observed among spirituality, mental health, and academic self-efficacy.

KEYWORDS: Spirituality, Mental Health, Academic Self-Efficacy, Criminal Justice Education, New Normal

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted students' academic lives, particularly their self-efficacy, as the shift from traditional in-person classes to online learning presented new challenges. Academic self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their ability to perform specific academic tasks successfully, which is essential for academic achievement. Students with higher self-efficacy tend to view academic tasks as challenges to tackle, trust in their abilities, and persist in their efforts. On the other hand, students with lower self-efficacy may avoid difficult tasks, and their self-belief can diminish if faced with overwhelming situations. Research also highlights the role of spirituality and mental health in shaping academic self-efficacy. Spirituality, through dimensions such as spiritual attitude and capability, can positively influence students' ability to cope with stress and enhance their self-efficacy, especially when grounded in belief systems that provide a sense of meaning and purpose.

In addition to spirituality, mental health plays a critical role in students' academic self-efficacy. Poor mental health can undermine students' confidence in their academic abilities, leading to a cycle of lower self-efficacy, anxiety, depression, and academic disengagement. Studies show that students with mental health challenges are more likely to experience lower academic self-efficacy, which can further exacerbate stress and hinder their ability to cope with academic pressures. Low self-efficacy has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including difficulty managing stress, lower academic performance, and social isolation. As mental health issues can significantly affect students' academic experiences, addressing both mental health and self-efficacy is crucial for supporting students' overall well-being and academic success.

The goal of this study was to determine the spirituality, mental health, and academic self-efficacy of Criminal Justice students for the academic year 2022-2023. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of spirituality as an entire group and in terms of purpose and meaning in life, innerness or inner resources, transcendence, and unifying interconnectedness?
2. What is the level of mental health of the Criminal Justice students?

3. What is the level of academic self-efficacy as an entire group and in terms of focus on effort, progress, and learning and confidence in one's abilities?
4. Are there significant differences in the academic self-efficacy based on the spirituality and mental health of Criminal Justice students?
5. Are there significant relationships among the spirituality, mental health, and academic self-efficacy of Criminal Justice students?

II. RELATED LITERATURE

Spirituality is a deeply personal experience that is intertwined with various aspects of an individual's well-being, including physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions. Unlike religion, which often involves prescribed rules and rituals, spirituality is defined by personal beliefs and a quest for life's meaning. According to [1], spirituality is a driving force that compels individuals to seek wholeness and build meaningful relationships. Spiritual practices help individuals develop self-awareness and improve their ability to cope with challenges, which in turn boosts self-efficacy or the belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks. [2] highlight that spirituality, rooted in faith and the belief in the divine, nurtures self-efficacy by fostering inner strength and resilience. Studies have shown that spirituality promotes lower levels of anxiety and depression [3] while increasing an individual's sense of purpose and self-efficacy [4].

Mental health is a crucial aspect of overall well-being, encompassing the ability to manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in daily life. It is characterized by self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, and the ability to cope with stress. A lack of mental health, driven by negative psychological factors such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and poor self-efficacy, can lead to emotional and mental health issues [5]. Studies show that university students face increasing mental health challenges, with rising rates of anxiety and depression, which can impact their academic performance and overall life satisfaction [6]. Mental health problems, particularly during the transition to adulthood, are linked to lower academic self-efficacy, delayed academic success, and higher dropout rates [7], [8].

Academic self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to successfully perform academic tasks, plays a critical role in university students' academic success. It influences their motivation, effort, and perseverance when facing academic challenges. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach difficult tasks with confidence, persist through setbacks, and achieve higher academic performance. Studies consistently show that academic self-efficacy influences not only academic performance but also overall well-being and mental health. Students with high academic self-efficacy tend to view challenges as opportunities to learn and grow, which fosters resilience and reduces stress. In contrast, students with low self-efficacy may feel overwhelmed by academic tasks, leading to anxiety, avoidance, and poor performance [9]. Additionally, academic self-efficacy is linked to broader life skills, such as problem-solving, stress management, and career success, with students who possess high self-efficacy in academia often exhibiting higher self-confidence in professional settings [10]. Despite some conflicting findings, the majority of research supports the view that enhancing academic self-efficacy can significantly improve students' academic performance and overall satisfaction with their university experience [11].

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey-correlational design, involving 109 Criminal Justice Education students who were selected using stratified random sampling. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula. Data collection was carried out using several standardized questionnaires: spirituality [Howden, cited in 1], mental health [Warwick-Edinburgh cited in 12], and academic self-efficacy [13]. These instruments underwent validation and content review by an examination committee, with revisions made based on the feedback. Following validation, pilot testing was conducted to gather data for factor analysis, construct validation, and reliability testing, all of which were analyzed using SPSS software. The dependent variable was academic self-efficacy and the independent variables were spirituality and mental health. Data analysis included both descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (ANOVA, Pearson correlation coefficient), with a significance level set at 0.05.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Level of Spirituality

The level of spirituality as an entire group and in terms of purpose and meaning in life, innerness or inner resources, transcendence, and unifying interconnectedness are shown in Table 1. Data show that generally, the level of spirituality is high (M = 4.05, SD = .56). It also shows that the purpose and meaning in life (M = 4.14, SD = .65), innerness or inner resources (M = 4.04, SD = .61), transcendence (M = 4.06, SD = .63), and unifying interconnectedness (M = 3.96, SD = .64) are high.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Spirituality

Category	Mean	Description	SD
Spirituality	4.05	High	.56
Purpose and Meaning in Life	4.14	High	.65
Innerness or Inner Resources	4.04	High	.61
Transcendence	4.06	High	.63
Unifying Interconnectedness	3.96	High	.64

Note Interval. 4.21–5.00: Very High, 3.41–4.20: High, 2.61–3.40: Moderate, 1.81–2.60: Low, and 1.00–1.80: Very Low

The spirituality is high. This implies that Criminal Justice students often possess a deep sense of connection to God. This indicates that they are actively seeking and finding a strong sense of purpose, inner peace, or a profound understanding of life’s meaning by meditating and praying to God. This shows that they are not only motivated and engaged but also developing a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world of the Criminal Justice system. This journey often leads to enhanced well-being, personal growth, and a more purposeful approach to life. This is because they are often more motivated and engaged in their academic and extracurricular activities. They are likely to set and pursue goals with greater determination and enthusiasm.

The purpose and meaning of life is high. This implies that Criminal Justice students often feel that they are significant and valuable. They oftentimes think and explore what truly matters to them, what gives their life significance, and what makes their experiences meaningful. This quest involves reflecting on personal beliefs, passions, and what they find fulfilling. When they find what gives their life value, they often experience a heightened sense of purpose and meaning, which can lead to a more profound reason for living. It is because they identify and embrace the aspects of life that provide joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. This could also include relationships, achievements, creative pursuits, or contributing to a greater cause.

The innerness or inner resources is high. This implies that oftentimes Criminal Justice students have a deep understanding of oneself which is essential for striving for wholeness. This enables them to better identify their innate qualities, such as their talents, values, and passions. This allows them to recognize what makes them unique and what they are naturally inclined toward and helps them be more complete and authentic. This is because they have inner strength which helps them face challenges with courage and determination, trusting in their ability to handle various situations.

The transcendence is high. This implies that oftentimes Criminal Justice students are enhancing their capacity for surpassing physical and mental limitations by fostering mental flexibility, resilience, and a deeper sense of purpose. This strengthens the mind-body connection, improves focus and concentration, and motivates individuals to pursue goals beyond their usual constraints. This is because they are resilient physically, emotionally, and mentally. This resilience helps them handle stress and setbacks more effectively, enabling them to overcome physical, mental, and emotional barriers that might otherwise limit their progress.

The unifying interconnectedness is high. This implies that oftentimes Criminal Justice students foster a sense of unity, empathy, and mutual support among members, enhancing overall well-being and fulfillment. The shared purpose and collaborative spirit promote effective cooperation and conflict resolution. These collective spiritual practices and

insights contribute to individual and group spiritual growth. It is because they have a shared sense of connection that creates a supportive and inclusive environment where members feel valued and understood.

B. Level of Mental Health

The level of mental health is shown in Table 2. The result shows that the level of mental health is high (M = 3.90, SD = .67).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Mental Health

Category	Mean	Description	SD
Mental Health	3.90	High	.67

Note Interval. 4.21–5.00: Very High, 3.41–4.20: High, 2.61–3.40: Moderate, 1.81–2.60: Low, and 1.00–1.80: Very Low

The mental health is high. This implies that oftentimes Criminal Justice students are experiencing a positive and stable mental state. In other words, they are experiencing positive emotions and a sense of contentment which enhances their interactions with others and their environment. This positive state of mind contributes to better relationships and more effective engagement with their classmates, friends, and the people around them. It is because they can effectively collaborate, support each other, and address challenges in ways that benefit the collective or group.

C. Level of Academic Self-Efficacy

The level of academic self-efficacy of Criminal Justice students as an entire group and in terms of focus on effort, progress, and learning and confidence in one’s abilities are shown in Table 3. The result shows that in its entirety the level of academic self-efficacy is high (M = 4.08, SD = .68). It also shows that the focus on effort, progress, and learning (M = 4.09, SD = .84) and confidence in one’s abilities (M = 4.06, SD = .73) are high.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Academic Self-Efficacy

Category	Mean	Description	SD
Academic Self-Efficacy	4.08	High	.53
Focus on Effort, Progress, and Learning	4.09	High	.60
Confidence in One’s Abilities	4.06	High	.58

Note Interval. 4.21–5.00: Very High, 3.41–4.20: High, 2.61–3.40: Moderate, 1.81–2.60: Low, and 1.00–1.80: Very Low

The academic self-efficacy is high. This implies that oftentimes Criminal Justice students have a strong belief in their ability to succeed in their academic tasks. This often leads students to concentrate more on their efforts and the progress they are making rather than just the end results. They are more likely to view challenges as opportunities to learn and grow, rather than as obstacles. They tend to persist because they are more resilient in the face of academic setbacks. Their confidence in their abilities drives them to continue working hard and to find solutions when they encounter problems. They are likely to put in more effort and stay engaged with their studies because they believe their efforts will lead to success.

The focus on effort, progress, and learning is high. This implies that oftentimes Criminal Justice students are deeply engaged in their studies and are dedicated to understanding the concepts of the lessons thoroughly. They prioritize learning and personal development over simply achieving high grades. They might be more organized, seek additional resources, and actively engage in their coursework to deepen their understanding of Criminal Justice topics.

The confidence in one’s abilities is high. This implies that the high confidence of Criminal Justice students is often translated into greater motivation. They are more likely to set ambitious goals and pursue them with determination, driven by their belief in their ability to succeed. They are likely to participate actively in class discussions, seek out additional learning opportunities, and take on leadership roles because their belief in their abilities drives their effort and perseverance.

D. Differences in Academic Self-Efficacy Based on Spirituality and Mental Health

The differences in academic self-efficacy based on spirituality and mental health are shown in Table 4. Data show that there is a significant difference in academic self-efficacy based on spirituality $F(25.503^*) = .000, p < .05$ in favor of the very high spirituality ($M = 4.55, SD = .67$). Moreover, there is also a significant difference in the academic self-efficacy based on the mental health $F(21.245^*) = .000, p < .05$ in favor of the very high mental health ($M = 4.64; SD = .68$). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there are no significant differences in academic self-efficacy based on spirituality and mental health is rejected.

Table 4: ANOVA on the Differences in the Academic Self-Efficacy Based on the Spirituality and Mental Health

Category	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Spirituality					
Between Groups	21.512	3	7.171	25.503*	.000
Within Groups	29.525	105	.281		
Total	52.037	108			
Mental Health					
Between Groups	19.278	3	6.426	21.245*	.000
Within Groups	31.759	105	.302		
Total	51.037	108			

* $p < .05$ – significant at 5% level

The academic self-efficacy of Criminal Justice students varies significantly based on their spirituality. This implies that spirituality plays an important role in shaping how Criminal Justice students perceive their ability to succeed academically. Those with strong spiritual beliefs might find a sense of purpose, motivation, or inner strength that boosts their confidence in their academic capabilities. On the other hand, those who have low spirituality might struggle more with self-belief and motivation.

Similarly, the academic self-efficacy of Criminal Justice students varies significantly based on their mental health. This implies that mental health significantly affects academic self-efficacy. Criminal Justice students with good mental health are more likely to feel confident in their abilities and manage academic challenges effectively. Conversely, those struggling with mental health issues might experience lower self-efficacy due to stress, anxiety, or depression impacting their perception of their academic abilities.

E. Relationships among Academic Self-Efficacy, Spirituality, and Mental Health

The relationships among academic self-efficacy, spirituality, and mental health are shown in Table 5. Data reveal that there is a positive, strong association, and significant relationship between academic self-efficacy $r = .715^*, p = .000 < .05$, and spirituality. There is also a positive, strong association, and significant relationship between academic self-efficacy $r = .677^*, p = .000 < .05$, and mental health. Furthermore, there is a positive, strong association, and significant relationship between spirituality $r = .656^*, p = .000 < .05$, and mental health. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there are no significant relationships among academic self-efficacy, spirituality, and mental health is rejected.

Table 5: Pearson r among the Academic Self-Efficacy, Spirituality, and Mental Health

Variables	r-value	Sig
Academic Self-Efficacy and Spirituality	.715*	.000
Academic Self-Efficacy and Mental Health	.677*	.000
Spirituality and Mental Health	.656*	.000

* $p < .05$ – significant at 5% level

The result shows that there is a positive, strong association, and significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and spirituality. This implies that spirituality can play a crucial role in enhancing students' confidence in their academic

abilities. Criminal Justice students with higher levels of spirituality tend to have greater confidence in their academic abilities. Their spiritual beliefs and practices might provide a sense of purpose, motivation, and resilience that translates into stronger academic self-efficacy. Possibly, their meditation, prayer, and strong faith give them a more positive self-view and approach their academic work with greater commitment and optimism. This intrinsic motivation can lead to higher self-efficacy as students feel more capable and driven.

There is also a positive, strong association, and significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and mental health. This implies that good mental health is crucial for fostering confidence in academic abilities. Criminal Justice students with better mental health are likely to have higher academic self-efficacy. Good mental health supports a positive self-view and confidence in one's academic abilities, contributing to a stronger belief in their capacity to succeed. It is because Criminal Justice students who are mentally healthy are generally better able to handle academic pressures, manage stress, and maintain motivation, which enhances their confidence in their academic abilities.

Moreover, there is a positive, strong association, and significant relationship between spirituality and mental health. This implies that spirituality can be a valuable factor in enhancing mental well-being. In other words, spirituality can play a significant role in enhancing emotional well-being. It often provides a sense of purpose, meaning, and connectedness, which can contribute to overall mental health and resilience. This is because spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, or collective involvement can offer effective coping mechanisms for managing stress and emotional difficulties. This can lead to improved mental health by helping Criminal Justice students navigate life's challenges more effectively.

V. CONCLUSIONS

When spirituality is deeply integrated into one's life, encompassing purpose, meaning, inner resources, transcendence, and interconnectedness, it fosters a fulfilling and balanced life experience. Individuals with this level of spirituality tend to demonstrate greater resilience, personal growth, and a profound sense of connection to themselves, others, and the broader society, contributing to a holistic sense of well-being. Criminal Justice students, in particular, may experience this fulfillment across emotional, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of their lives. Their well-developed inner strength and spiritual beliefs help them better cope with stress, adversity, and life's challenges. High levels of mental health reflect psychological balance, resilience, and positive functioning, supporting Criminal Justice students in thriving across various aspects of life. This mental health enables them to maintain a positive outlook, navigate difficult situations, and manage stress, ultimately enhancing their coping strategies, emotional regulation, and social interactions, leading to a more fulfilling life.

Criminal Justice students who exhibit strong academic self-efficacy—confidence in their ability to succeed—are more likely to engage deeply with their coursework, apply effective study strategies, and persist through challenges, leading to higher academic performance. Their motivation, rooted in their belief in their abilities and commitment to continuous learning, fuels their academic success. For students with high levels of spirituality, this sense of purpose and inner strength can further enhance their academic self-efficacy. Spiritual practices and beliefs can provide emotional support, foster a sense of community, and build resilience, all of which increase confidence in their academic abilities. On the other hand, students experiencing mental health challenges—such as anxiety, depression, or stress—may struggle with lower self-efficacy, making academic success more difficult.

The relationship between spirituality, mental health, and academic self-efficacy is clear: these factors are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Positive spirituality can improve mental health, which, in turn, enhances academic self-efficacy. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach to supporting students, addressing not only academic performance but also their mental and spiritual well-being, fostering both personal and academic growth.

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